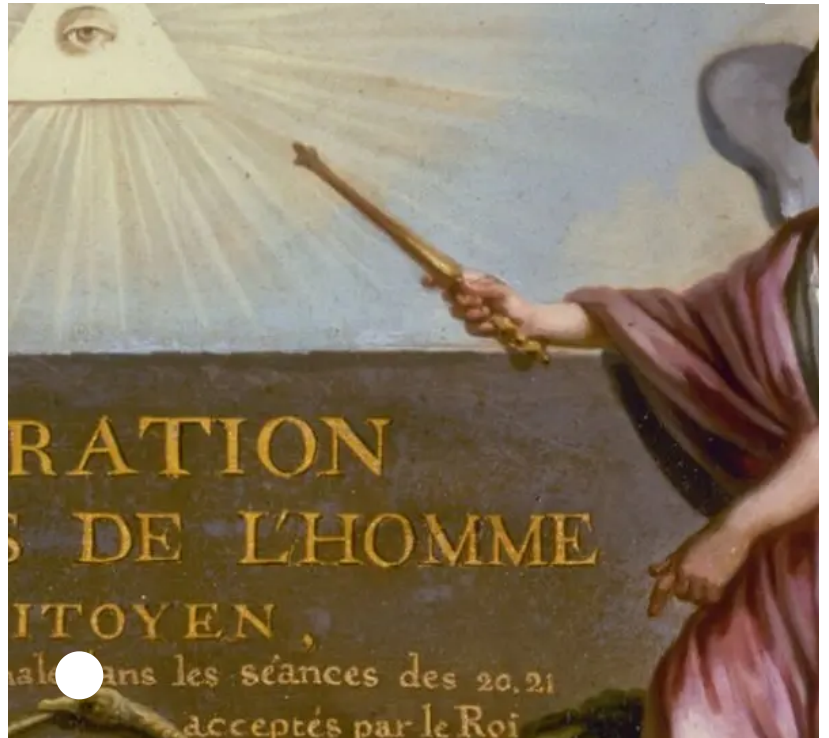


FOCUS ON : PARIS DURING THE REVOLUTION

The French Revolution



2

Musées

35

Oeuvres

MUSÉE
CARNAVALET
HISTOIRE
DE PARIS

Musée Carnavalet,
Histoire de Paris

PALAIS
GALLIERA

Palais Galliera,
musée de la Mode
de la Ville de Paris

SECTIONS

By the 1780s, the concept of absolute monarchy, long criticised by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, had run out of steam. Many French people, especially in the working-class areas of Paris, were jobless victims of famine and scarcity. No longer willing to tolerate the lack of equality, they revolted. The regime was unable to meet the people's expectations for reform and was, in addition, destabilised by the financial crisis and the national debt. The king had no choice but to convene the Estates General, which opened on 5 May 1789. This was their first meeting since 1614 and the representatives of the three Estates of the realm (the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners, or Third Estate)

National Assembly (Assemblée nationale). Since they claimed to represent the sovereignty of the people, this move by the deputies of 1789 was the first truly revolutionary act. Absolute monarchy was now a thing of the past.

A SOCIETY OF ORDERS



A faut esperer q'eu se jeu la Finira bentot [sic], Anonyme

Just before the Revolution, France had a population of some 28 millions, divided up into three "orders" or "estates" according to levels of prestige. Praying for the king, and fighting for him, were considered more honourable activities than merely working. This is why the clergy made up the First Estate, the nobility, whose duties were military, constituted the Second. But 98% of France's inhabitants – the bourgeoisie, the tradesmen and manual workers of the cities, and peasants – belonged to the Third Estate.

This anonymous image from 1789 shows an old peasant, representing the Third Estate, being ground down by a member of the clergy wearing a cross, and a nobleman wearing a sword. The cartoon symbolizes the tax burden which, under the Ancien Régime (the Old Regime), was almost entirely borne by the people. The image denounces a double inequality: the poorest were also the most heavily taxed. In the late 18th century the gap between rich and poor was widening and this caused many protests. As the cartoon's caption indicates, the common people were hoping that change was not far off.

This kind of portrayal of the three estates circulated widely at the time, in many different forms.



Saladier aux trois ordres inscrit inscrit "LA LOI / ET / LE ROY", Anonyme



Pichet aux trois ordres, Anonyme

THE TENNIS COURT OATH

On June 20th 1789, at Versailles, the deputies elected by the Third Estate, accompanied by a few representatives of the nobility and the clergy, assembled at the Jeu de Paume indoor tennis court: the king had forbidden them the use of the chamber where they usually met. Together the deputies swore an oath not to separate until they had drawn up a Constitution for the kingdom. Their aim was a transition from an absolute monarchy, in which all power was held by the king, to a constitutional one, in which royal power would be limited by the Constitution.

To celebrate the Tennis Court Oath, the National Assembly – the name adopted by the "Etats Généraux" after June 1789 – commissioned a painting from Jacques-Louis David. What we see here is a preliminary sketch.

In the centre, future Paris mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly is reading out the oath. The deputies are grouped together on the other side of an imaginary line, as if on a theatre stage: so as we look at the picture we have the impression of witnessing the event. This theatrical presentation is accentuated by the raised arms of the deputies as they swear the oath. Among them we recognise Robespierre, Mirabeau, Abbé Grégoire and Barnave. Seated to the right, Joseph Martin-Dauch, the only deputy who refused to take the oath, has his arms folded as a sign of protest. In the centre-foreground two representatives of the Catholic Church and a Protestant pastor illustrate the rapprochement between Christians of different confessions and the support given by part of the clergy to the plan for a constitutional monarchy.



Serment du Jeu de paume, le 20 juin 1789, David, Jacques-Louis

THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE, 1789

Assembly. The demonstration organised in support of disgraced liberals Necker and the Duke of Orléans, which had begun on 12 July, turned into a vast insurrection. All around Paris, the toll gates had been burning for two days. On the 14, in search of weapons to protect the population, the rioters invaded the Invalides and then moved on to the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) where the Provost of the Merchants of Paris, Jacques de Flesselles, who was suspected of hiding weapons, was shot. Still lacking munitions, the insurgents hurried to the Bastille, which held the largest stock of gunpowder in Paris. There, the governor de Launay, and his soldiers attempted resistance. When he surrendered he too was assassinated. The storming of the Bastille resulted in the deaths of about a hundred people, providing the Revolution with its first martyrs.

During the attack, a municipal government was set up and Jean-Sylvain Bailly became the first mayor of Paris. Louis XVI abandoned attempts to quell the revolt and came to Paris on 17 July, where he agreed to receive the patriotic cockade and recognised the new Commune as well as the National Guard, the volunteer militia created on 14 July.

THE DEMOLITION OF THE BASTILLE

For Parisians the fortress of the Bastille, which had been turned into a prison, had become the symbol of absolute royal power: you could be imprisoned without trial by an order from the king. The prison was virtually empty on 14 July 1789, when the rebels seized it in search of weapons and ammunition.

That evening building contractor Pierre-François Palloy sent his workmen to demolish this symbol of absolutism. He organised tours of the worksite and began making souvenirs out of fragments of the fortress. Among them were many models like the one shown here, carved out of blocks of stone from the former prison. Palloy sent these scale models out into France's 83 newly created départements. He also sent them to King Louis XVI and his ministers, and even to such foreign personages as *George Washington, first president of the United States*.



La Bastille (oeuvre exécutée dans un bloc de pierre provenant de la Bastille), Anonyme



Serment des Enfants., Lesueur, Jean-Baptiste



Prise de la Bastille par les gardes françaises et les bourgeois de Paris le 14 juillet 1789, Anonyme



Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen., Le Barbier, Jean-Jacques-François (dit l'Aîné)



separated by revolutionary symbols: the fasces, representing unity and strength; the pike, the weapon of choice of the representatives of the people; and the Phrygian cap, standing for the newfound liberty of the freed slave. There is also a laurel wreath symbolising glory and a serpent biting its tail, signifying eternity. The declaration is flanked by two allegorical figures: to the left, France breaking the chains of royal absolutism, and to the right, Fame holding the sceptre of Reason. At the very top, the radiant triangle of Equality contains the open eye of Providence in an evocation of God surveying humanity.

Inspired by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the text specifies the "natural, inalienable rights of man". This document was intended as the basis of a new world founded on individual liberty and universal equality before the law. It also stressed the fundamental notions of freedom of speech, assembly and religion. The Declaration of the Rights of Man was to have a profound influence throughout the world.

In the summer of 1789, to ensure the Revolution did not leave disorder and insecurity in its wake, men took up arms in the towns and villages, forming National Guards and organising gatherings that could attract hundreds of thousands of people. The induction of these newly 'federated' companies concluded with a huge national ceremony on

14 July 1790: the Fête de la Fédération. The ceremony commemorated the first anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille and was celebrated on the Champ-de-Mars under the leadership of La Fayette. Fifty thousand men from 83 départements (created on 15 January 1790) paraded before the royal family and more than 400,000 Parisians. The Fête de la Fédération also served to display the adhesion of the French people and their king to the constitutional project. The huge crowd swore an oath "to the Nation, to the Law, and to the King" in a state of enthusiasm impervious to the terrible weather. However, behind this facade of unanimity, there were serious tensions. The Revolution was far from over and, in some départements, civil war was breaking out.

THE "FÊTE DE LA FÉDÉRATION", 1790

THE "FÊTE DE LA FÉDÉRATION"

On July 14th 1790 a great national celebration was held on the Champ de Mars for the first anniversary of the storming of the



Vue de la fête donnée sur le plan de la Bastille, Anonyme 

FROM CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC, 1791-1792

mayor of Paris. Further back Queen Marie-Antoinette is presenting the five year old Dauphin, heir to the throne, to the crowd. In the left-hand part of the picture we see Mass being celebrated on the Altar of the Fatherland, symbol of the Nation.

While the people of France acclaimed the new ideas embodied in the Revolution, they remained very attached to their king. For several days Paris saw a succession of dances, celebrations and banquets, and the Revolution was thought to be over. But this apparent unanimity concealed major tensions, and riots and uprisings continued in a number of départements.

Refusing to accept the challenge to his power, Louis XVI attempted to escape during the night of 20 June 1791. He was caught at Varennes and taken back to the Tuileries where he received an icy reception. The idea of a Republic was beginning to take shape. The majority of the deputies had restrained the radicals, declared the king inviolable, and chosen the compromise of a constitutional monarchy. Indeed, on 14 September, the king swore an oath to the constitution. But as soon as the Constituent Assembly gave way to the Legislative Assembly, preparing for war became the top priority. The French Revolution was seen as a threat by the royal courts of Europe and was also targeted by émigrés who constituted the elite of the army of the Ancien Régime; the risk of invasion was high. Anticipating the danger, the French declared war on Austria on 20 April 1792. At the same time, the king was making less and less effort to hide his duplicity, and the most active of the deputies made preparations for insurrection. During the night of 9 August, a rebel Commune overthrew the municipality. On the 10, the fédérés and workers from poor districts attacked the Tuileries Palace.

The king's power was suspended, but the Republic was not proclaimed until 22 September. The French were spurred to action: two days before, at Valmy, an army of volunteers had managed to drive back the Prussians. A new assembly, the National Convention, was elected by universal male suffrage.

THE KING FLEES

After the image had been cut into the wood, it was coated with ink and printed as a poster on a sheet of paper. This technique is called wood engraving or woodblock printing.

Here Jean-Baptiste Letourmi depicts the arrest of the king and his family at Varennes. During the night of June 20th 1791, Louis XVI



Arrestation du roi et de sa famille à Varennes le 22 juin 1791, Letourmi, Jean-Baptiste



nobility. Along the way Louis was recognised by postmaster Jean-Baptiste Drouet, who set off after the coach and caught up with it in the small town of Varennes.

The royal family was brought back to Paris amid booing and catcalling. This episode was one of the Revolution's turning points: the king's flight was seen as treason and cost him the support of part of the population. The idea began to spread that the country no longer needed a king and could become a republic.



Arrestation du roi et de sa famille a Varenne le 22 juin 1791, Letourmi, Jean-Baptiste



THE "SANS-CULOTTES"



Portrait du chanteur Simon Chenard (1758-1832), en costume de sans-culotte, porte-drapeau lors de la fête en l'honneur de la liberté de la Savoie, le 14 octobre 1792, Boilly, Louis Léopold

As members of the urban underclass, the sans-culottes demanded an egalitarian republic based on the sovereignty of the people. They met and discussed in neighbourhood assemblies and radical political clubs. In favour of direct action, they took part in the storming of the Tuileries Palace on August 10th 1792, which led to the fall of the monarchy.

Here the "sans-culotte" is carrying a tricolour. A product of the revolution, this flag combined the red and blue of the city of Paris with the royal white. The three colours were initially brought together as a cockade, but in 1794 the governing National Convention enforced vertical stripes and the sequence of the colours. On the flag in the painting are the words "Liberty or death", which was at that time equally used as "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" that would become the motto of the French Republic.

After the storming of the Tuileries Palace on 10 August, the king was stripped of his powers on 21 September and imprisoned, along with his family, at the Temple Tower. From then on, he was nicknamed 'Louis Capet' by the revolutionaries, not just in reference to his ancestor, Hugues Capet, but above all as a reminder of his new status as an ordinary citizen.

After the discovery of the king's "armoire de fer", a secret cupboard full of documents proving his collusion with foreign sovereigns and that he had managed to corrupt many political figures, the Convention decided to put the king on trial.

After a long debate, the king was found guilty almost unanimously, though only a slight majority condemned him to death. He was guillotined on 21 January 1793 in the Place de la Révolution (today's Place de la Concorde). Marie-Antoinette met the same fate on 16 October closely followed by Madame Élisabeth, the king's sister. The Dauphin, who would have become Louis XVII, died at the Temple prison on 8 June 1795. Madame Royale, his sister, was exchanged for other prisoners in 1795. The execution of the king was considered a sacrilege by many French people and Europeans, and it brought matters to a head. Many French people, particularly in the West, refused to be enlisted in the Republican armies and took up arms against the Revolution.

THE FALL OF THE MONARCHY AND THE FATE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, 1792-1793

THE PRISON OF THE TEMPLE



Habit du dauphin Louis XVII, Anonyme ○



Portrait de Marie-Antoinette au Temple,
Anonyme



Révolution française : La famille royale dans le
jardin du Temple, en compagnie de Cléry.
4ème arrondissement, Anonyme ○

THE MEASUREMENT OF TIME : THE REPUBLICAIN CALENDAR AND DECIMAL TIME

The reform of the calendar was particularly revealing of revolutionary attitudes towards time and history. The National Convention's desire to overhaul the measurement of time is just one example of its attempts to adapt French people's habits to suit the new values of the Republic.

On 20 September 1793, the deputy Gilbert Romme delivered a report to the Convention concerning what was to become the Republican calendar, intended to replace its Gregorian predecessor. After a number of adjustments, an act passed on 4 Frimaire of the year II (24 November 1793) finalized its structure. The Republican calendar began on 1 Vendémiaire of the year I (22 September 1792), the day of the proclamation of the Republic. The calendar year was divided into twelve months of thirty days each, with six days added at the end of the year. Each month was divided into three sets of ten days. The names of the months and the days were thought up by the poet Fabre d'Églantine to describe the seasons and their corresponding agricultural activity. The revolutionary calendar survived until 1 January 1806. Even as the Empire took hold, many Republican symbols continued to be used in an attempt to unite the French people.

DECIMAL TIME



Pendule-squelette marquant les heures décimales et duodécimales, Bruel



Made around 1795, this is a rare kind of clock: it functions according to the decimal time established by the French Revolution. Under the Ancien Régime units of measurement differed widely from one part of France to another, which made everyday life complicated and hampered business. In 1790 the National Assembly asked experts from the Academy of Science to devise a single, simple system of weights and measures for the whole country. The results were the metre, kilogram and litre, all decimal-based. Henceforth everything, including time, was to be divisible by ten: weeks had ten days, days had ten hours, hours had a hundred minutes and minutes had a hundred seconds.

Most decimal clocks are of the skeleton type seen here, with mechanisms visible at the centre of the largest dial. This dial indicated decimal divisions – a day of ten hours – and the names of the months of the new republican calendar; the latter began on 1 Vendémiaire (September 22nd 1792), the day when the Republic was proclaimed. The decimal system was never really applied to timekeeping, but the republican calendar remained in force until 1 January 1806.

The history of the National Convention was marked by a struggle between two political groups: the Girondins, who opposed any extension of participation by the people and supported economic liberalism; and the Montagnards, who were closer to the sans-culottes and in favour of the extension of emergency measures. In the spring

of 1793, the Convention created a Committee of Public Safety, Surveillance Committees in the cities and towns, and a Committee of General Security in Paris. Ordinary law was ousted by emergency measures, which eroded democracy.

After the fall of the Girondins on 2 June 1793, the Montagnards voted a new, more social and democratic constitution known as the Constitution of Year I. Although it was never applied, it had an important effect on the following century.

THE CONVENTION 1792-
1794

national social action policy, passed the first law making school compulsory and they were the first in history to abolish slavery. But there was a great increase in political repression with the passing, on 10 June 1794, of the law of 22 Prairial. The arrest of Robespierre and his allies on 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor Year II) indicated an urge to temper the Revolution.

MAXIMILIEN DE ROBESPIERRE



Portrait de Maximilien De Robespierre (1758-1798), homme politique, David d'Angers (Pierre-Jean David, dit)



Originally a lawyer from Arras, Maximilien Robespierre was one of the Third Estate deputies elected in 1789. Known as "the Incorruptible", he earned fame at the beginning of the Revolution with his forceful personality and powerful oratory. Re-elected under the National Convention – the assembly that governed France from 1792 to 1795 – he sided with the far Left "Montagnards", who were close to the sans-culottes and receptive to popular demands.

Robespierre is depicted here not as a political man of action, but as a distinguished figure, elegantly dressed and with his hair scrupulously powdered.

As a member of the Committee for Public Safety, he played a significant part in the revolutionary government. Founded in the spring of 1793, this political organisation was intended to save a Republic then under threat not only from war outside France's borders, but also from uprisings within the country and conflicts among Republicans. Accused of tyranny, he was arrested on 9 Thermidor Year II (July 27th 1794) and guillotined the next day with a number of his followers.

THE GUILLOTINE



Modèle réduit de guillotine, avec son panier en osier, Berger, Alphonse Léon



The guillotine owes its name to Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a doctor elected as a Third Estate deputy in 1789. He was not, however, its inventor: the idea for the machine came from Doctor Antoine Louis, working from a principle in use in France and other countries since the Middle Ages. It was Guillotin, though, who suggested that all those condemned to death, whatever their social status and crimes, should be guillotined as a way of reducing their suffering.

The guillotine was used for the first time on April 25th 1792, and its use became more frequent after the execution of Louis XVI on January 21st 1793. In France the last guillotining took place in 1977, prior to abolition of the death penalty in 1981.



Sans-culottes en armes : sans-culotte, factionnaire, charretier, fort des halles, savetier, menuisier, fusil à baïonnette, pique, bonnet, costume, Lesueur, Jean-Baptiste



The Thermidorian regime in the National Convention began with the fall of Robespierre (27 July 1794). Many French people were now looking for a compromise. The Thermidorians wanted to bring the Revolution to an end by setting up a conservative Republic. The regime was established by the Constitution of Year III (22 August 1795).

It was called 'The Directory' (Directoire) because it had five Directors who exercised collective executive power. Although the deputies were no longer entrusted with total power, collegial administration was supposed to avoid authoritarian abuse. The universal suffrage elections were abolished and the regime established a bicameral system on the English model, by which only qualified property holders elected the two legislative chambers (the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of

The Directory was then replaced by the Consulat, an authoritarian regime run by three consuls, of whom only the first consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, appointed for life in 1802, held any real power. Two years later, the proclamation of the First Empire marked the end of the First French Republic (1792-1804).

"INCROYABLES" AND "MERVEILLEUSES" (DANDIES AND FINE LADIES)

Cette caricature de l'époque du
Directoire

[1] représente des jeunes bourgeois ou aristocrates qui affichent leur opposition à la Révolution en adoptant des tenues extravagantes. Le Directoire est ainsi une période faste pour la mode.

Les hommes, surnommés « Incroyables » ou plutôt « Inc'oyables » car ils refusent de prononcer la lettre « R » de la Révolution, portent des cravates volumineuses, des redingotes courtes ainsi que des bicornes et des souliers pointus qui rappellent ceux du Moyen Âge. Ils se distinguent aussi par leurs cheveux tressés ou abattus le long des tempes que l'on nomme « oreilles de chien ». La canne-gourdin fait également partie de leur panoplie; c'était une arme redoutable, utilisée dans les combats de rue entre royalistes et républicains.

Les femmes, appelées « Merveilleuses », portent des robes légères à la mode antique. Ces robes étant trop près du corps pour qu'on puisse y faire des poches, elles portent, à bout de bras ou attachés à la ceinture, de petits sacs appelés « réticules ». Elles exhibent d'autres précieux accessoires : perruques, éventails, béâcles[2] et arborent des chapeaux à longue visière.

Ces modes se font connaître plus largement grâce à la caricature, comme cette planche qui eut un énorme succès et fut plusieurs fois reproduites.



✕ ☰

Les Merveilleuses, Darcis, Louis ○



Les Croyables / Actifs du Palais ci-devant Royal., Tresca, Salvatore



Quatre couples en promenade., Lesueur, Jean-Baptiste

REVOLUTION AND WAR, 1792-1799

The Revolution was marked by a long period of war. Innumerable campaigns, involving unprecedented mobilisation, saved the French Republic from defeat. Certain victories even significantly extended its territories. After pushing back the Prussians at Valmy on 20 September 1792, the French went on the offensive, as much to 'liberate' neighbouring populations and increase the spread of 'civilisation' as to defend the Republic and garner public support. Victories at Jemmapes (6 November 1792) and Fleurus (26 June 1794) led to the annexation of what is now Belgium. Other territorial gains included Savoy, Nice, and the left bank of the Rhine, as well as several 'Sister Republics', including the Batavian Republic and the Italian republics.

From the beginning, the French Revolution was also marked by civil war. With the aim of restoring the monarchy, the authority of the church and French 'traditions', insurrectionary movements sprang up in various regions of France, but especially in the West, where the Vendée region became synonymous with the Counter-Revolution.

Under the Directory, war and an increasing need for authority provided an opportunity for many soldiers to rise rapidly through the ranks and assert themselves as political figures. Brilliant soldiers, like Kléber, Jourdan, Hoche and Marceau, rose rapidly up the military hierarchy. The most brilliant ascension, however, was that of Napoleon Bonaparte.

RECRUITING FOR THE ARMY



Au garde national. Enseigne de recrutement militaire., Anonyme 

garde françaises qui est la décoration des soldats vainqueurs de la Bastille.

Cette enseigne a été utilisée sous la Révolution pour enrôler des volontaires dans les armées. Le nombre de mobilisés pour les nombreuses campagnes militaires révolutionnaires est sans précédent. Le 11 juillet 1792, l'Assemblée proclame « la Patrie en danger » et demande à tous les volontaires d'affluer vers Paris. À défaut d'expérience et de discipline, les volontaires apportent leur ardeur patriotique à l'armée, mais celle-ci manque rapidement d'hommes et d'officiers. Le 5 septembre 1798, le service militaire est finalement rendu obligatoire par la loi Jourdan-Delbrel, dont le premier article stipule que « tout Français est soldat et se doit à la défense de la patrie ».



Joyeux départ des volontaires aux armées, Lesueur, Jean-Baptiste 



Le citoyen Nau-Deville, en uniforme de la garde nationale, faisant transporter un convoi d'armes et de munitions, Bellier, Jean-François 

GENERAL BONAPARTE



Portrait de Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821), général, Corbet, Charles-Louis



Directoire

et, /e lendemain, il est nommé consul provisoire et un mois plus tard Premier Consul.

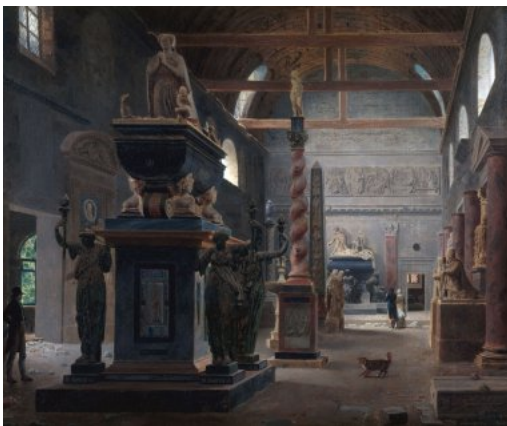
Bonaparte est représenté grandeur nature et portant son uniforme de général. Son allure est conforme aux descriptions de l'époque : visage mince, joues creusées, menton volontaire, cheveux longs noués dans la nuque avec des mèches lui tombant sur les tempes et le front. Le manteau drapé sur l'épaule appartient à la tradition du portrait d'apparat sculpté qui sert à souligner la grandeur des princes et des souverains dans les poses officielles ou héroïques. Ce buste a connu un succès immédiat et de nombreuses copies en marbre et en bronze en seront réalisées par la suite.

DESTRUCTIONS, OBLITERATIONS AND

From 1789 on, the most visible signs of despotism and social inequality came under attack. This intensified with the king's attempted escape (20 June 1791) and the abolition of the monarchy (10 August 1792).

In cities and in the country, statues of kings and saints, crosses, fleurs-de-lis and coats of arms were broken, defaced or hammered to pieces, creating in the process a new kind of public space. At the same time, in response to the needs of war, many Parisian churches became places of assembly, or were turned into hospitals, barracks or hay barns. The word 'vandalism' was used by Abbé Grégoire in 1794 to deplore such acts, but it obscures the fact that most of them were a concerted response to various laws and that excesses were generally condemned. Many of the objects taken were not destroyed but put on public display for the first time. It could be said that the Revolution invented the notion of 'national heritage', and was the creator of the first museums : the Muséum d'histoire naturelle, for example, in June 1793, the Muséum des Arts (the present Musée du Louvre) in November 1793, the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in October 1794, and the Musée des monuments français, created in 1795 by Alexandre Lenoir.

THE MUSÉE DES MONUMENTS FRANÇAIS



La Salle d'introduction du musée des Monuments français., Vauzelle, Jean Lubin

Cette toile représente une salle du Musée des monuments français créé par le peintre Alexandre Lenoir. Il s'agit d'un des premiers musées français qui naissent sous la Révolution. Il ouvre au public en octobre 1795 dans les bâtiments du couvent des Petits-Augustins. Au début de la Révolution, il avait été transformé en dépôt destiné à accueillir les biens confisqués au clergé, à la suite du décret du 2 novembre 1789. L'objectif de Lenoir est de mettre ces nouveaux trésors nationaux à l'abri du « vandalisme » révolutionnaire et de la destruction des bâtiments, dont les nouveaux propriétaires se servent comme matériaux de construction.

Destiné à l'enseignement des citoyens, le cœur du musée se compose de plusieurs salles où des œuvres sculptées médiévales et modernes sont présentées suivant un classement chronologique qui permet au public de se faire une idée de l'évolution de la sculpture et de l'architecture en France. Les collections du musée permettent ainsi d'esquisser une nouvelle histoire de la Nation française.

Chaque salle se distingue des autres par un décor et une atmosphère particulière. La salle dédiée au XVe siècle, représentée ici, reçoit par exemple une décoration luxueuse, dans le goût de l'époque. Près du tombeau, au centre de la pièce, on reconnaît Lenoir en train de commenter le monument à un visiteur.





Portrait d'Alexandre Lenoir (1762-1839),
fondateur du musée des monuments français,
Bouliard, Marie-Geneviève



Le Jardin du Musée des monuments français,
ancien couvent des Petits-Augustins, Robert,
Hubert

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ROYAL TOMBS AT SAINT-DENIS



La Violation des caveaux des rois dans la basilique de Saint-Denis, en
octobre 1793, Robert, Hubert

Ce tableau représente la destruction des caveaux des rois conservés dans la basilique de Saint-Denis, la principale nécropole des rois de France depuis plusieurs siècles. La destruction des tombeaux est décrétée par la Convention nationale pour célébrer le premier anniversaire de la chute de la monarchie du 10 août 1792. En détruisant les symboles visibles de l'Ancien Régime, les révolutionnaires cherchent alors à faire table rase du passé.

Cette peinture montre comment ils sortent les cercueils de la crypte à l'aide de longues échelles avant de détruire les tombeaux et de jeter les dépouilles des rois dans des fosses communes. A travers la galerie souterraine détruite, on aperçoit les murs et les vitraux de la nef gothique de l'église. Le peintre joue sur le contraste entre l'obscurité de la crypte et l'élan lumineux, visible de la voûte. Cette toile est caractéristique du style du peintre Hubert Robert qui était fasciné par le thème des ruines antiques et, plus tard, par celles de la Révolution, ce qui lui a d'ailleurs valu le surnom de « Robert des ruines ».



L'Eglise des Feuillants en démolition, Robert, Hubert



La Démolition de l'église Saint-Jean-en-Grève, en 1800, Robert, Hubert



Translation des restes de Louis XVI et de Marie-Antoinette à la basilique de Saint-Denis, le 21 janvier 1815, Dugourc, Jean-Démosthène

Collections