

MICHAEL BROERS

EUROPE UNDER NAPOLEON



L.B. TAURIS

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‘What emerges is a picture which escapes many of the usual clichés, and for which there is simply no parallel elsewhere, it being hard to imagine a more stimulating and useful introduction to the subject [and] Broers’s thesis being a powerful one.’

— *English Historical Review*

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LONDON · NEW YORK

New paperback edition published in 2014 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

First published in paperback in 1996 Arnold, a member of the Hodder Headline Group

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ISBN: 978 1 78453 061 7 (hb)

ISBN: 978 1 78453 061 7 (pb)

eISBN: 978 0 85773 568 3

ePDF: 978 0 85772 522 6

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

*à Richard Cobb,
Légion d'Honneur,
'His presence on the field made a
difference of 40,000 men.'*

*and to Sue Broers,
' . . . une nuit à Paris . . . '*

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The author is grateful to the authors of the following books for permission to base some of the maps drawn for this book on their work: Charles J. Esdaile, *The Wars of Napoleon* (Harlow, Longman, 1995) for maps 2(i) and 2(ii); and Alan Forrest, *Déserteurs et Insoumis* (Paris, Perrin, 1988) for maps 3(i) and 3(ii).

Preface to the First Edition

This book has known many incarnations, and it has taken a long time to write. The thanks I owe to others in this task may well become almost as long as the apologies and explanations I will incur for its errors and follies. Its faults are still to be exposed, but the debts are already with me.

In the north of England, I have had the good fortune to have access to two of the finest university libraries in Europe, the John Rylands in Manchester and the truly glorious Brotherton in Leeds. I cannot thank or praise their staffs, founders and benefactors enough. To Neil Plummer, of the Brotherton, my thanks and admiration. The staff of the British Library have been unfailing in their patience and reliability as the work has progressed.

Much of the work and, indeed, the writing of this work took place – appropriately enough – in Paris, and I owe a great deal to my many friends and colleagues there. To M. Michel Fleury and Madame Auffrey, of the Institut de la Francophonie, where these words are written, whose generosity and very practical support have been my mainstay. To the staff of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Nationales de Paris, in particular my old friends Claire and Philippe Béchu, Jacky Plaut, Pierre Portet and Gérard Hérmisse, who have provided both professional knowledge and deep comradeship for many years, for although archival sources may not dominate the pages of this book directly, they have exercised a powerful influence on it at every stage. To my oldest friends, Hélène and Jean-Michel Chevet, simply for listening and always being there. In each of these cases, it is impossible to separate the personal from the professional, and so it should be. For many years, M. and Madame Charles Bonis provided the best *état-majeur* imaginable.

Professors Jean Tulard and Louis Bergeron have encouraged me from the very outset in the study of the Napoleonic period, as have many closer at hand: Alan Forrest, Jim McMillan, Colin Lucas, Geoffrey Ellis and Clive Emsley. Among my own cohort, Charles Esdaile and Mike Heffernan have rendered invaluable professional assistance and, above all, the camaraderie so needed when so much work has been done in real isolation, away from Paris. In Leeds, where I teach, my head of

department, Bill Speck, has been a constant source of support, both in securing me leave at a crucial point in the work for this book, and as a friend in times of need.

Finally, I have four outstanding debts to acknowledge. The deepest of all to Christopher Wheeler, at Arnold, who had faith in the project. To Tim Blanning, who read every word, and without whom it would all have been for naught. To Sue, my wife, and the most loyal *bonapartiste* I have ever known! I hope she will endure the criticisms of *l'Empereur* in these pages with as much goodwill as she has the long, hard-fought campaign that produced them! This book is her Spanish Ulcer, the guerrilla behind every rock. Thanks to her, at no point in its writing did I ever identify with Napoleon, for no one could be better loved than I am.

Odd as it will seem to those who knew him, this book belongs, above all, to the late Richard Cobb, *mon maître*. It tries to see the Napoleonic era through the eyes of those on the ground, those who endured it, and in so doing, to be loyal to the truths he shared with me. If this book has kept within its gaze the soldiers, the peasants, the local officials, who bore the brunt of the lunacies of masters and ideas, it is thanks to his influence. I write these words in the city, indeed in the neighbourhood, he taught me to love. Richard would have been appalled to be compared to Napoleon, but his presence and his passing have left as indelible a mark as any man can make, within his own empire. I'm sorry he won't be here to curse me.

Paris 4e,
January 1996

Preface to the Second Edition

In a review article published in *The Historical Journal* in 2008, the American biographer of Napoleon, Steven Englund, spoke of ‘nothing less than a scholarly renaissance’ in the field of Napoleonic studies, and went further, adding that ‘Indeed, the word *naissance* applies even better,’ because so much of the new literature was mined from primary sources.¹ He spoke too soon, for the explosion in Napoleonic studies has, if anything, gained still more pace in the half decade between Englund’s vantage point and the republication of the present volume. At a conference held in Brussels and Lille in October 2011, under the auspices of the Centre for Napoleonic Studies at the latter university, I was struck not just by the number of young scholars present, drawn from all over Europe and from North America, but by the fact that many established experts in the Revolutionary period, and even the *ancien régime*, had transferred their interests to the study of the Napoleonic regimes, a sign that not only a new generation of researchers were at work in the field, but that senior historians of what might be described with some irony as the ‘annexed’ periods, now saw issues of interest and importance in a field once considered too dull, too sterile to merit serious consideration. The real triumph of the growing awareness of the importance of the Napoleonic era emerged for me as I surveyed my luncheon companions that Saturday in Brussels, in that we who had broken open the path had been followed by those who had made their mark elsewhere. More than the converted had been converted, as it were.

Things were changing when the first edition of this book was published in 1996, or could not have been written, but it rested mainly on a wealth of local and regional studies, mainly by European scholars. Even when Geoffrey Ellis brought out the second edition of his own erudite synthesis, *The Napoleonic Empire* in 2003 – itself an important work in ‘spreading the word’ to a student audience – he noted that, although there had been an explosion of work in the field, which now embraced Anglo-Saxon as well as European scholars, the basis of this new work was still regional and topical. We were still accumulating the building blocks we need to achieve a wider perspective. Ellis also noted two other trends that laid down markers for

the future, however: Those regional studies were dominated by an interest on the non-French parts of the Napoleonic hegemony and, perhaps the most crucial development of all, Ellis noted astutely, that 'scholars have begun to pay more attention to the institutional legacy, the real long-term impact, of Napoleonic rule in conquered Europe.'² Geoffrey Ellis put his finger on the pulse of the new Napoleonic history in these words, even if he might find issue with many of its findings and judgements, those at the heart of this book, certainly among them. The plethora of excellent specialised studies from all over the 'Grand Empire' of its 130 departments, matched by equally fine studies from many of the 'satellite states', allied polities have continued to impress. Most heartening is the emergence of interest in the period by scholars of states beyond the formal Napoleonic state system, but now acknowledged to have been very much in its orbit, perhaps the most emphatic sign of the pivotal position the Napoleonic period has assumed in modern European historiography. Only a handful of these works have found their way onto the much revised bibliography which accompanies this new edition, either because they are in languages other than English or French, or because they deal with a 'Europe beyond Napoleon' which this book could not embrace when it was written, for lack of space and of secondary material on which to build. For these very reasons, it seems only fair to acknowledge a handful of these scholars and their contributions, in these pages, although the seminal importance of the new studies of Britain and Russia is of such direct relevance that those with decided European dimensions have found their way onto it, when in English. The recent book by the Danish scholars, Ramus Glenthøj and Morten Nordhagen Ottosen is a model of methodology, in its approach to the chronology of Norwegian-Danish history in a complex period, but also a clear sign of the profound impact of the Napoleonic period on the long-term evolution of Scandinavia, a fact future studies must take into full account.³ The same holds true of the magnum opus of the German-American scholar, Karen Hagemann, whose 600-page study of Prussia after Jena has opened up new horizons, while building on a proud tradition of historiography.⁴ Ute Planert has given the field fundamental insights and information about the southern German states of the Confederation of the Rhine – surely one of the most vital components of the Napoleonic hegemony – in her profound study published in 2007, a work which combines the regional approach with a commitment to exploring the long-term influence of the Napoleonic period in some detail.⁵ The regional and topical trends discerned by Ellis find a model of both in the extensive study of popular disorder and resistance by the Dutch scholar, Johan Joor, in his 2000 study of the Netherlands under direct French rule.⁶ The recent study of the Kingdom of Westphalia by the young French scholar, Nicola-Peter Todorov, is an exemplary local study in itself, which demolishes many assumptions about the character of French rule in central Germany, pointing to a determination to undermine feudalism which an earlier historiography refused to countenance; but

it is also a sign of the growing cosmopolitanism of the 'new Napoleonists' that is to be rejoiced in.⁷ The Italian legal historian, Carolina Castellana, has opened up a study of legal reform in the Kingdom of Naples, deploying the few, but interesting surviving archival sources at her disposal, to reach beyond her subject – crucial in itself – to offer new insights into the nature of French imperialism, which should receive wider application.⁸ Her colleague, Costanza d'Elia, is currently engaged in a project of seminal importance, comparing the impact of the Napoleonic regime on feudalism in the Rhineland and the Kingdom of Naples. The wealth of recent research on the Republic/Kingdom of Italy emerges in the collected acts edited by Adele Robbiati Bianchi, of a conference of rare quality held in Milan in November 2002.⁹ Regional studies of the period are a flourishing element of the renaissance, all over Europe. They are the life blood of the new Napoleonic history, in all its diversity, and the flow is healthy.

When one stands back from the wealth of local and topical studies discerned by Ellis almost a decade ago, and assesses its continuing growth, the hope cherished by the Franco-Dutch scholar, Annie Jourdan, might now be achieved; that the great comparative projects pioneered by R.R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot in the 1960s – which did not find favour among their peers – might now be realised from a surer base of specific, regional research than Palmer or Godechot could draw upon. She has already taken an interesting step in this direction in her deeply interesting book published ten years ago, which questions, in its very title, the exceptionalism of the French Revolution.¹⁰ A way might be found into this, less through the 'North Atlantic' route, than by integrating work on Napoleonic Europe more closely with the growing body of scholarship on the relationship between the Latin American revolutions which spilled out from the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and their relationship with Napoleonic Europe, a path Hispanists are treading well, and from which others might learn. Among them are the constitutional historian, Marta Lorente, and the imperial scholar, José M. Portillo Valdés.¹¹

Many but, sadly, far from all of the scholars on this roll of honour have had distilled versions of their work published in English, thus reaching the wider readership they deserve. That it has become possible is a sign of the heightened interest in Napoleonic history among students and teachers in this country and elsewhere in the Anglophone world: There is a demand for the new Napoleonic history. The most common and effective vehicle for the dissemination of their work has been volumes of collected essays, some with their origins in international conferences, others simply the hard work of editors who have dedicated precious time to ensuring that new work, by non-Anglophone scholars, receives the audience it deserves. The present author has entered this part of the market, with his brothers-in-arms, Peter Hicks and Agustín Guimera, building on the proceedings of a conference held in Madrid in 2008, with the express aim of ensuring that the bicentenary of

the outbreak of the Spanish War of Independence contained examples of the new Napoleonic history, with its emphasis on institutions, resistance to them, and the importance of the period for the European *longue durée*. Three colleagues have done more to 'spread the word' through the collective volume of essays than any others, however, as will be clear from the new bibliography of this book: Philip Dwyer, in Australia, Alan Forrest, in the UK, and the German scholar, Karen Hagemann, based at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Their edited volumes, which have taken precious time from their own, individual research, have brought new names and new ideas, especially from the continent, to a wider world. Dwyer, himself, may have reservations about the wider importance of the period for European history, seeing as grandiose, many of this author's own the claims to its importance for the future of Europe,¹² but this has not prevented him from making a central contribution to its propagation.

In the same review, Dwyer makes the point that the Napoleonic renaissance has not generated new methodologies of its own, but has tended to adapt and absorb the approaches and preoccupations developed in other historical contexts for its own purposes. He is not entirely wrong in this, as the updated bibliography of this volume reveals. Nevertheless, it is about time this happened, and recent historiography has seen the 'new Napoleonic history' entering a new phase in its vibrant life. Themes such as war memory and a gendered approach to the experience of war, in particular, are notable in the most recent studies of the period, and they prove how important and welcome the arrival of such preoccupations are in Napoleonic studies. The wealth of contemporary memoirs of the wars has been exploited to the full by a new generation of scholars from many countries, now finding English-language publishers. The French historian Natalie Petiteau has been at the forefront of these advances, and her work on the French veterans of the wars has taken imaginative conceptual form, as well as reaching beyond published memoirs as a source.¹³ Alan Forrest has placed this genre in the *longue durée* of modern French political history, stressing its ideological uses.¹⁴ Sadly, these interests fall beyond the remit of a book of this kind, given its chronological limits, but they show in the most fundamental human terms, how powerful and lingering was the impact of the Napoleonic wars and the wider experience of empire.

Dwyer has raised a point that strikes at the heart of one of the pillars of the Napoleonic renaissance, that the shift of emphasis from the man, the wars and their transient position in European history is merited because of the central importance of the institutional and, indeed, intellectual foundations laid down under Napoleonic rule. This volume was among the first general surveys to argue this point, and if it has had a continuing relevance, it stems from the consensus it found – as quite distinct to have 'founded', which it most certainly did not – that the Napoleonic period was not the end of the French Revolution, whatever Napoleon and his may have wished,

but the beginning of a new phase in European history. When the dust of battle settled, things had changed; there was a concept of the state, of political culture, at work over most of the former Napoleonic hegemony, and it would not go away. Nor did the fierce popular resistance to it. If this central tenet of the Napoleonic renaissance is accepted – that the reforms of the period and the reactions to them had a lasting, fundamental influence on the collective European future – then the rise in its popularity becomes essential to explain, as well as readily explicable. It is arguable that its institutional influence has been so basic to most of the original states of the European Union, as well as to later arrivals from Iberia and eastern Europe, as to go unremarked, but it is there to be seen, particularly from a British vantage point where the ‘basics’ form the substance of ‘the other’. Prefects, codes, gendarmeries, public prosecutors and public trials by tribunals, to say nothing of councils of state, abound, and their similarities are more important than their differences, for the practicalities of government. Their differences are remarkably small, given the varied societies they administer and the vicissitudes of the most violent conflicts in history. The Napoleonic era played a central part in the creation of this heritage, and if the present volume has endured, it is because it attempts to speak to this. Popular hatred of this project and the changes it wrought in the daily lives of millions was also part of this process, and this book was among the first to try to give this aspect of the period a pivotal place in its history. To this end, it draws inspiration from one of the richest seams in modern historiography, the postcolonialist approach to the imperial experience, and its author makes no apology for so doing. Inserting the experience of Napoleonic imperialism into the wider context of modern imperialism, with the implications it holds for the emergence of a subaltern Europe in opposition to it, has proved ever more controversial, but it is still a debate central to the period. This approach to the period has been attacked, never more directly than by Steven Englund,¹⁵ yet it has also led to the examination of the Napoleonic Empire in the wider context of European imperialism in several significant studies of the subject in recent years, notably those by Fred Cooper and Jane Burbank, and by Timothy Parsons,¹⁶ as well in the context of numerous published conferences and collections of essays. It has also found a reception among political scientists and sociologists of modern Europe.¹⁷ This is not to say that this author’s particular views are supported by others, rather that the insertion of the Napoleonic imperial experience into wider contexts than had hitherto been considered has come to be regarded as fruitful, in itself. The ‘borrowing’ of a methodology has been returned in other forms, developing as it progresses, into something more original. The future of Napoleonic history no longer belongs solely to Napoleonists or, indeed, to Europeanists, nor should it. It has found yet another *longue durée* to inhabit, and is the richer for it.

Nevertheless, for all the efforts of those engaged in the new Napoleonic history, a number of excellent biographies of Napoleon have appeared in recent years,

and all are to be found in the revised bibliography. The trend should accelerate in the years ahead, and for good reason. The efforts of the Fondation Napoléon in Paris, under the directorship of Thierry Lentz, are in the process of publishing an entirely new version of Napoleon's correspondence, which will be three and half times larger than that produced under the auspices of Napoleon III, in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸ This will doubtless lead to a major revival of interest in the prince so many of us had resolutely and deliberately excluded from our versions of the 'Hamlet' of Napoleonic history. It will provide a fresh, often very different view of the man and the regime, from the sanitised version available until now, which historians have had to approach with care and a large degree of cynicism. Nevertheless, the wheel will never come full circle. The Napoleonic renaissance, of which this book is a part, will ensure that nothing will ever be the same again. It is for me to thank those who have continued the work I entered into here, two decades ago, for enriching the field, and to thank my editor at I.B.Tauris, Jo Godfrey, for seeing enough merit in this book, to republish it verbatim. It is an honour to be resurrected in this way, and to remain part of so flourishing a field.

Charlbury,
April 2014

Introduction

Napoleon: Power, Genius and History

Napoleon Bonaparte is synonymous with power, so much so that the myth he spun around himself in exile sought to soften, even to obscure, that uncomfortable truth.¹ Power terrifies, it is the essence of history, not of legend, of awe rather than affection. Napoleon's success as a myth-maker was limited, but in the light of his very public career, the real surprise is that his self-advertisement made any impact at all. His chief tactic was less to deny his identification with power, than to emphasize the military exploits he achieved through its use. An all-prescient commander in the field, a magnetic leader of men, proved more interesting – and more palatable – to posterity than the image of a skilled political manipulator or, even more, of a studied master of administration. With the hindsight granted him on St Helena, Napoleon chose to emphasize personal genius, not rational calculation, as the source of his success. He wanted to obscure the real nature of his talents, and in so doing he succeeded, in part, in diminishing the importance of many of his greatest achievements. This was how Napoleon obviously preferred it, and many of his most shameless hagiographers have followed his wishes – or fallen into his trap – dwelling for the most part on his personal life and military exploits.²

His myth is pervasive, and in need of close surveillance, for it resembles a living organism – weeds in a cabbage patch – more than a monument that can be bulldozed. Thus, there is a continuous need to keep writing about Napoleon and his age. The myth will choke the historical reality, if left unattended. Schoolboys come first to the myth and the glory; the truth – admiring or damning – often comes too late.

Invective is a useless deterrent: power can be achieved only by the great, by people marked by genius, and to fail to recognize the link between Napoleon and genius is as gross an error as to deny he was powerful. His greatest detractors – Chateaubriand, the influential French royalist and his contemporary, Tolstoy, the Russian great novelist, and Georges Lefebvre, the Marxist historian and his finest chronicler³ – never attempted to make him small, perhaps because they were touched

by genius themselves. It is a simple task to portray him as a butcher, a warmonger, a tyrant, for he was all these things, certainly by the standards of his own times, if less arguably in the context of a later age. It is when historians – self-styled intellectuals – deny him genius, creative power and acute intelligence, that they fail in their task. It is often difficult to know if intellectuals hate Napoleon because of what he did – and they have often embraced men of far fouler character – or because he hated them in his own times, while still being more intelligent.⁴

The clearest manifestation of this is a refusal to grant him his place as the last and the greatest of the enlightened absolutists, to proclaim emphatically that he deliberately distorted the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment. This is folly. Contemporaries, friend and foe alike, were agreed that Napoleon was remarkably in tune with his times, at least until the disasters of 1812, and his unwillingness to respond to the climate of opinion in the final phase of his rule was seen as out of character at the time.⁵ Thus, Napoleon regarded himself, as did those around him, as a man of the Enlightenment. More to the point, so did his civil servants. A mass of evidence shouts this at the observer from the actions, policies and discourse of the regime. Napoleon led his troops by personal magnitude, perhaps; he worked well with his bureaucrats because they shared a common ideology, a particular perception of the Enlightenment.

Georges Lefebvre interpreted the inner strength of the regime in terms of class: Napoleon's genius hinged on his ability to discern the central place of the bourgeoisie in society, and to base his rule on it. This is at once too sweeping and too narrow an evaluation of his sources of support, based on an inaccurate configuration of European society in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's classic Marxism has a great merit, for it places the regime and its leader in the wider context of their times, treating them as a natural product of those times and, above all, it acknowledges the lasting impact of Napoleonic rule on European history. The conclusions of the Marxist approach are, at the very least, debatable, but the instincts are true, especially in the hands of Lefebvre. In this interpretation, Napoleon was not a boorish, ham-fisted general; he was no mere military dictator,⁶ but the harbinger of change, the catalyst of the capitalist order of the nineteenth century. Lefebvre condemned Napoleon, but he acknowledged the need to understand him, because his political achievements were seminal. Lefebvre set Napoleon firmly in the wider context of his times, and in so doing wrote the finest single book on the period. Nevertheless, his antipathy to Napoleon narrowed his range of enquiry in crucial ways. It is a deadly error to dismiss the regime as a military dictatorship, unworthy of serious political analysis.

Antipathy is no barrier to great history, as Lefebvre proved. It also drives the only comprehensive study of Napoleon to rival Lefebvre's. The masterly life of Napoleon written by Jean Tulard⁷ appeared almost a generation after Lefebvre's book. Its

greatness lies in a sureness of touch, a refusal to be drawn into the powerful currents of Napoleonic hagiography so prevalent in French writing on the subject and, in common with Lefebvre, an approach determined to set the man in the context of his times, a goal pursued in his other general study of the period, *Le Grand Empire*.⁸ Tulard's life of Napoleon is subtitled 'The Myth of the Saviour'. This signals, on the one hand, its critical approach to the subject, a positive strength. Yet, it also hints at the Francocentric character of Tulard's interests, for the 'myth of the saviour', initiated by Napoleon, is a specifically French aspect of the Napoleonic heritage. The image of Napoleon as the founder of a potent myth in French political culture – that only a strong, autocratic hand could save the French from themselves – is an incisive, dynamic theme at the centre of Tulard's work, but it illuminates only the French aspects of that legacy.⁹ The recent volumes by Martin Lyons and, especially, by Geoffrey Ellis, set excellent standards for the historiography of the period, in any language. However, they too are decidedly Francocentric, each devoting no more than a chapter to the non-French bulk of the Empire.¹⁰ The work of Louis Bergeron is a model of scholarship, but limits itself to France, and particularly to the social and economic aspects of the period; within its confines, a classic, it lacks a European dimension.¹¹ The two finest studies of Napoleon remain those of Tulard and Lefebvre, and they are the work of his opponents, perhaps a lasting tribute to the abilities of all three men concerned.

However, there is a form of hagiography that is misleading and dangerous when it turns its attention to Napoleon's non-military achievements. Its error lies less in attributing to Napoleon the values of the Enlightenment, than in the assumption that his advancement of them was constructive, useful or, most glaring of all in its inaccuracy, popular.¹² The nature and application of many Napoleonic reforms reveal the innate tyranny of the regime, as much as the military conquests. The common people of Europe, in their millions, hated Napoleon exactly because he espoused the Enlightenment, just as they had detested the enlightened absolutists who preceded him. The nature of this hatred among contemporaries, and the nature of its origins, are incontestable, a view which often emerges more readily in the context of specific national histories, with a long chronological range, than those specifically on the Napoleonic era.¹³

This is the major problem besetting those who attempt to set Napoleon in a genuinely European, rather than a Francocentric context. Even when it is confronted, too often the popular resistance to Napoleon has been subsumed into another great myth, 'the rise of nationalism'.¹⁴ The popular risings against Napoleonic rule were born of hatred of enlightened reform, not of a growing belief in yet another failed, hate-filled idea conceived by nineteenth-century intellectuals.¹⁵

Napoleon is a European figure, as much as or even more than a part of French history, but it is only recently that attempts have been made to consider him in

a European, as opposed to a national context. Napoleon exercised hegemony in Europe, he was not the ruler of an exclusively French Empire. Having won these territories, he had to do something with them, and he had plans for them, but to admit this is to enter troubled waters. The Napoleonic regime had an ideology, even if it dispensed with politics, as the French revolutionaries had invented it.¹⁶ How could such a brutal, warlike regime have any hint of intellectual sophistication? Goethe, the German poet, has a strong claim to be regarded as the finest mind of the Napoleonic age. During his meeting with Napoleon at Erfurt in 1808, they discussed his novel, *Werther*, and some of Voltaire's most politicized writings, including his play, *Mahomet*. Goethe was impressed by Napoleon, intellectually, and by his literary tastes. Those tastes were of a man of the radical Enlightenment who, like Voltaire, despised the masses, but opposed the supposed obscurantism of the old order.¹⁷ It is difficult enough for many to admit that Napoleon read and appreciated his work, and much else besides. The life of Napoleon by Felix Markham has become a durable standard in the Anglophone world; it does not mention the meeting between Napoleon and Goethe.¹⁸ *Mahomet* praises the tolerance and culture of Islam, in the face of Catholic bigotry and backwardness. A few months after their conversation, Napoleon invaded Spain and abolished the Inquisition; the Spanish masses who rose against him did so partly in response to a folk memory derived from the *Reconquista*.¹⁹ The military conquests may, indeed, have been driven only by a mixture of blind ambition and paranoia, but an intensely ideological civilian administration followed in their wake, and this was the essence of Napoleonic rule. Napoleon did not invade Spain because he read Voltaire, but his reading of Voltaire influenced how he chose to deal with it, once there.

Ironically, those historians who have attempted to rectify the Francocentric nature of the literature and the eschewal of ideology, notably S.J. Woolf and Charles Esdaile,²⁰ find it harder to confront the black side of Napoleonic rule than historians who attack him in an essentially French context. Napoleon can be castigated within the parameters of French history as the man who destroyed the political liberties of the French Revolution, as the man who put the clock back to absolute monarchy and patriarchal social values, as a blatant elitist. This is less easy to do beyond the borders of the First Republic. When historians of Napoleon, the Emperor of the West, step beyond the study of military carnage, they face a dilemma: to paint too fervent a picture of military dictatorship or reaction is, in some way, to betray the Revolution and even the Enlightenment. It is not the same to attack the ruler who abolished feudalism in Naples and Spain, as to castigate the general who virtually abolished divorce and put women back in the house. To acknowledge the regional and cultural diversity of the Napoleonic Empire is essential to any understanding of it – and the more recent studies of the Empire in Europe are long overdue in these respects; they are the long-awaited voice of common sense.

However, liberal, progressive baggage is a heavy burden, when carried beyond the natural frontiers of 1792. 'Regionalism' can, in some instances, engender a relativism that seeks to avoid what must be faced: the elitist, arrogant and oppressive nature not just of Napoleonic rule, but of the Enlightenment itself. In the wake of postmodernism, there is a growing, if still halting, will to question the value of what is coming to be termed 'the Enlightenment project'.²¹ Perhaps Napoleonic rule is particularly in need of exploration in these terms, especially in its European context. It is uncomfortable to those of liberal, broadly progressive sensibilities, less painful to those inclined to shed them.

Nevertheless, historians have often found it easier to admit Napoleon as a powerful presence, than to recognize him as a genius. This is dangerous, for it denies the deep bond between genius and power, at the heart of greatness. Here, the inclination has been to concentrate on his shortcomings and the wrongheadedness of particular policies, rather than to look for a wider perspective. Another form of retreat – but one that has been the most fruitful for the historiography of the period – has been to pursue those aspects of it which have little to do with the ideology of the regime. The finest recent writings on Napoleonic France, in particular, are social and economic studies, many of them lasting contributions by gifted scholars.²² The diplomatic history of the period has also produced excellent writing, above all in the work of Schroeder, although it also displays the dangers of approaching Napoleon's career through only one channel, for the picture that emerges is of unthinking, military conquest:²³ it is correct only as far as it goes, as are all specialist studies. The feeling remains that they are a retreat, in the context of Napoleonic history.

If the essence of the era was, indeed, Napoleon, and if the essence of Napoleon was power, wielded effectively, then the politics and ideology of his regime must be confronted, and confronted in a European perspective. So, too, must the nature of Napoleon's genius. It was far more subtle than has often been allowed, even by himself, for it had less to do with military glory or intuitive intrigue, than with the creation of a state shaped according to his ideas. He could not, and did not, do this alone. He led Europe, and he drove it. This was not the work of a crazed warlord, nor of a romantic individualist, nor of a grey bureaucrat. To dwell more on the creation than the man is not to deny his genius, but to acknowledge it, in its true form. The assessment of Goethe seems the most realistic and far-sighted: Napoleon was a genius, and if he was a dark genius, it was because he incarnated a dark age. He is not to be belittled, but treated as all greatness should: with a mixture of caution, detachment and respect.

Napoleon's genius was for seeing where power lay, and drawing it to himself. Napoleon was both a brute and a methodical clerk, for both are essential to autocracy, but they were not his essence, nor that of his regime. He seized authority in difficult circumstances, when few wanted the challenge, transformed that authority

into power with consummate skill and wielded it for 15 years, in ever-changing circumstances, with a remarkable degree of competence in the face of widespread opposition and resentment. That anything durable should emerge from the maelstrom of his career is the genuinely astounding part of his story, if the least glamorous.

The Political Inheritance: France and Europe, 1789–99

Napoleon received a triple inheritance from the regimes of revolutionary France. He was heir to a series of fundamental institutional reforms, most of them dating from the early years of the Revolution, 1789–91, which gave him the foundations of a state apparatus more centralized, unchallenged and potentially powerful than that possessed by any other major pro-revolutionary European state. However, beside this, was the troubled political heritage of the Revolution: he led a country divided between the small, largely urban, determined section of the propertied classes (a minority even within their narrow ranks) and the vast, if unorganized mass of counter-revolutionary opposition – a seething, if ultimately impotent countryside, besieging an archipelago of pro-revolutionary urban islands. Added to this were the bitter divisions within the ranks of the revolutionaries themselves: the period 1792–94 had seen a series of bitter purges at the heart of the government, in Paris, but they also had wide repercussions throughout the provinces. Finally, he inherited a major European war, which was in its seventh year when he took power in 1799.

The inheritance of the 1790s was mixed, at best; on balance, the survival of the new order created after 1789 was hardly assured at the moment Napoleon ceased to be a general and became a political leader. Had the circumstances been favourable to those in power in the autumn of 1799, they would not have meddled with a political system of their own recent making, or turned for leadership to a soldier who was, by definition, from outside their own ranks.

The Political Legacy of the French Revolution: Conflict

The leadership of the French Revolution changed with bewildering rapidity and violence between 1789 and 1795, but common to each ruling clique was the desire to force clear choices on those they ruled. This manifested itself in their insistence on the swearing of public oaths to each new constitution by public officials, from the King downwards, which extended to the clergy in 1791, and to a demand for open, public votes among deputies on important issues: the execution of the king, the declaration of war, the expulsion or execution of other deputies. The desired end was to achieve ‘transparency’ among citizens – openness, honesty, commitment²⁴ – but the human result was to root the political history of the Revolution in a series of conflicts, with lasting consequences. Once people were forced to choose sides, it was

not easy to renounce the allegiances – or accusations – that went with them, at least not until after the fall of Robespierre in 1794. These conflicts and divisions formed the immediate political background to Napoleon's own regime, and he had to base all his political calculations on them. This is even reflected in the questionnaires used by the regime when vetting candidates for posts in the administration or the elected assemblies: 'What did he do before 1789?' 'What did he do, 1789–92?' 'What did he do during the Terror, 1792–94?' 'What has he done, since 1795?' It was something the regime had to care about.

In general terms, by 1799, the Revolution had bequeathed two kinds of division to France: rivalries within the ranks of the revolutionaries, themselves, and the greater, more menacing division between revolution and counter-revolution. The headings of the Napoleonic job-applications reflected, rather than defined, the chronological and the political character of the internal splits in the Revolution. The first years of the Revolution, 1789–91, were more notable for major institutional reforms than political violence. However, the debate over the new constitution, propagated in 1791, drove a fundamental wedge between the majority of legislators, who wanted an electorate based on a set of property qualifications, and a smaller group, determined to achieve universal manhood suffrage. The split between liberals and radicals, which would bedevil the politics of the early nineteenth century, was born. Its first, brutally clear manifestation, was at the massacre of the Champs de Mars in July 1791. A few months before the new constitution was to be proclaimed, Louis XVI attempted to flee Paris, declaring his own, counter-revolutionary opposition to the new political order over which he was to preside. This was the occasion for the radicals to reassert their own objections to the narrow franchise. The result was their suppression, while organizing a mass petition against the constitution, not by the forces of the King, but by the moderate revolutionaries of the majority in the National Assembly, which framed the constitution.

In the spring of 1792, France went to war with Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy. The subsequent military reversals led to panic at the heart of the new government, created by the 1791 constitution, and by the summer of 1792, the radicals – now generally called Jacobins, after the name of their largest political club – used the war emergency to seize power. On 10 August 1792, backed by the artisan classes of Paris, most of whom had been disenfranchised by the 1791 constitution, the radicals overthrew the constitution and the monarchy, declaring France a republic. A new National Convention was summoned, elected by universal manhood suffrage, to frame a new constitution, also based on a democratic suffrage.

This was only the beginning of further in-fighting, however. Divisions flared over how best to run the war and over what to do with Louis XVI. These issues were exacerbated by the growing influence of the Parisian populace on the central government, and by a seeming hesitancy among some Jacobin deputies – the Girondin

or Brissotin faction – about the merits of direct democracy for the new constitution. Two more radical factions, truer to the revolution of 10 August, won the support of Paris, one based in the Convention and the Jacobin Club – the Montagnards, centred on Robespierre – the other with its power base in the municipal administration of Paris, the Commune, led by Hébert. In the last days of May 1793, they united to purge the Convention of the Girondins, executing or imprisoning several deputies and driving many more into hiding.

The next phase of the Revolution, between 1792 and 1794, was called the Terror by contemporaries; it is not a fanciful or convenient label created by later historians. It produced a ruthless attempt to recentralize power in the national government, the Convention, and its chosen instrument to direct the war effort, the Committee of Public Safety, composed of 12 deputies. Montagnards and Hébertistes jostled for power on the Committee and in the other new bodies set up to ensure that ‘the government remained revolutionary until the peace’, in the words of the edict of the Convention. This rivalry, probably more to do with cynical power-mongering than ideology, ended with the victory of the Montagnards, in the purge of the Hébertistes in March 1794. This was a sign that the Montagnards, and Robespierre in particular, had outbid them for the support of Paris. The last round of internecine fighting during the Terror was a purge of a faction of the Montagnards themselves, when Robespierre had Danton, his last obvious rival, arrested and killed in April 1794.

Concurrent to the struggles at the heart of the government, in Paris, supporters of the Girondins raised a series of revolts, based mainly on the large cities of southern France, which the Jacobins – Montagnard, Hébertist and Dantonist alike – all opposed as treasonous, and labelled ‘Federalist’, seeing in them an attempt to split the unity of the country and the Revolution. Some were more determined than others; whereas the risings in Bordeaux and Marseille collapsed easily, those in Lyon and Toulon were ferocious, eventually moving beyond the parameters of an inter-revolutionary civil war, and joining the wider struggle of the counter-revolution.

The Montagnards were deposed in July 1794 – the coup of 9 Thermidor, according to the revolutionary calendar – by an amorphous group in the Convention. This led to the gradual dismantling of the institutions of the Terror, and the abandonment of the democratic constitution drawn up in 1793, which was to be implemented at the end of the war. The new regime, the Directory, was obviously suspicious of the remnants of Robespierre’s supporters; ‘Terrorism’ and ‘Jacobinism’ were to remain dread spectres for those who survived the turmoil of these years, well into the future. The Terror period became synonymous with ‘factionalism’, a form of politics to be avoided at all costs in the future. Yet, on the whole, its political ethos was one of reconciliation among revolutionaries, in recognition of the need to confront the greater – and ever-present – enemy of counter-revolution.

Counter-revolution was very different from the internal quarrels of the radical revolutionaries. It is a complex phenomenon. It embraced ideological opposition to the political principles of the Revolution itself – as exemplified by Louis XVI in 1791 – based on the belief that the whole reform project was a usurpation of legitimate royal power; large sectors of the nobility and clergy came to accept this view. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790, which nationalized Church property and subjected the Church to state control, alienated a narrow majority of the clergy, the non-jurors or *réfractaires*, who refused to take the oath to the constitution of 1791. Their ranks were swollen by other clergy, alienated by the growing anticlericalism of the revolutionaries, culminating in a series of ‘de-Christianization’ campaigns, in which Girondins and Hébertistes were often more prominent than Montagnards. Even after the purge of 9 Thermidor, the Directory remained suspicious of the Church, so close had its links become with counter-revolution. In times of military crisis, the overt anticlericalism of the Terror was quick to reassert itself, even among those who rejected Jacobinism in other respects.

The demands of war, especially the increasing recourse to mass conscription by all the revolutionary governments, turned vast parts of rural France into battlegrounds after 1792. It also expanded counter-revolution, a largely political or ideological set of opinions, into what has been termed ‘anti-revolution’, an opposition to what the Revolution was doing to the daily lives of ordinary people. The overlapping lines between counter- and anti-revolution are complex, for the popular resistance engendered by anti-revolution soon blended with many aspects of counter-revolution, particularly its religious aspects. The most spectacular revolts produced by the meeting of counter- with anti-revolution were in western France: the rising in the Vendée, in the spring of 1792, which achieved almost the status of full-scale war, and the more clandestine guerrilla war of the Chouan bands – named after sparrowhawks, whose calls the rebels used as signals – in the hilly region between Normandy and Brittany. However, they were only the tip of an iceberg. Rebellions on a smaller scale simmered throughout southern France – the Midi – after 1792, particularly in the Rhone valley, Provence and the Pyrenees. Most of western and southern France was never really at peace after 1792; local officials of the state and those who supported the Revolution always felt themselves embattled, and tended to be loyal to whoever was in power in Paris, as long as they supported the struggle against the ‘brigands’ of counter-revolution, as the rebels were termed in official parlance. They were seldom disappointed. Apart from a short-lived attempt to appease the Vendéans, shortly after Thermidor, successive regimes met the often barbaric resistance of the peasant rebels with official repression that was often as savage.

France was a seething mass of hatred and fear throughout the 1790s, but a revolution whose popular base seemed to be shrinking rather than expanding continued

to survive, if not exactly to prosper. It had particular reserves of strength, which even those at its helm were only beginning to understand.

The Institutional Reforms: From Citoyens to Administrés

Behind the political turmoil of the 1790s, successive revolutionary regimes laid the foundations of a powerful, centralized state. Broadly, the moderate regimes of 1789–91 created a unified economic, legal and administrative order within France, while the Terrorist regime of 1792–94 clawed back most of the political initiative for the central government that first reforms had devolved to local level. After 1795, the Directory began to use the powers created through these reforms in systematic ways, but never with the insight into their possibilities later grasped by Napoleon.

The institutional reforms of 1789–91 swept away the overlapping, complicated administrative and judicial units of the *ancien régime*. The great privileged corporations – the *parlements*, provincial estates where they still existed, the Farmers-General – were all abolished, thus clearing the way for a uniform system of administration and justice for the whole of France. The revolutionaries filled this gap quickly and with remarkable clarity of mind: France was divided into 83 fairly uniform departments. The new units rode roughshod over the traditional provincial boundaries, and did not even pay too close an attention to natural topography, the decision to name them after natural features – thus rejecting any *ancien régime* affiliations – notwithstanding. Together with clarity and logic went an arbitrary and artificial approach to local government, yet the departments proved the most durable creation of the Revolution.²⁵ Napoleon added new departments, as the Empire expanded, until they numbered 120. Within France, they still form the basis for local government, as they do elsewhere in Europe.

The department became the central unit of all administration; there was nothing above it, except the central government and, in theory, it controlled its sub-divisions, the districts, cantons and communes. During the 1790s, the departments were run, in theory, by elected councils of local taxpayers. Under the Terror, they were often bypassed by the central government, usually when a deputy of the National Convention – a representative on mission – was sent to a particular area to take temporary control of its affairs. In theory, the Directory sought to end this practice and return authority to the councils, but the trend of re-centralization had been established, and was never wholly reversed after 1793. The judicial hierarchy of courts was also given a uniform structure, which generally corresponded to the administrative units and, under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the Church followed a similar pattern. Work was begun to give France a single set of legal codes, but this was completed only under Napoleon.

Centralization was meant to be softened by the elective principle, but the political unrest of the period after 1792 made elections difficult to hold, or occasions for political confrontation when they were held. It was often next to impossible to govern much of France, but when and where Paris could exert its authority, there were no constituted, legal bodies at local level outside its control. This made the task of counter-revolutionaries very difficult, and proved a decisive advantage to the revolutionaries at every stage. When a decision was taken in Paris, it was binding on the whole nation, something impossible under the old order. Successive governments ordered mass conscription – the *levées en masse* – over the whole country; no longer were certain provinces or classes exempt from their obligations. In principle, taxation followed the same uniform rules, but neither conscription nor taxation were applied regularly or according to systematic rules, by the governments of the 1790s. It was a question of potential, rather than achievement, in both cases.

There had been a shift in attitudes within the revolutionary governments, difficult to assess, but deeply important nonetheless. Those in authority began to regard those they governed less as fellow-citizens than as ‘the ruled’ – *les administrés*, ‘the administered’, as they chose to term them. This meant the tacit abandonment of the concept of equality and openness in government, and it happened fairly quickly. As early as 1790, this attitude was apparent in the debates on the first institutional reforms.²⁶ It was shared by deputies and local officials alike, and its common factor was contempt for the popular classes, especially the peasantry. In troubled areas, local officials soon came to see themselves as alienated and embattled; in more tranquil places, they spoke of their *administrés* with condescension.²⁷ This outlook, rather than the more egalitarian ideals of 1789, was probably prevalent in government by 1799.

Outside the institutions of government, the reforms of the 1790s left a more confused heritage, which the Directory was only beginning to remedy by 1799. Freedom of trade and profession was one of the few original principles of 1789 which was not reneged on or watered down during the revolutionary decade. Its thorough application broke down the corporatism of the *ancien régime*, in ways crucial for the emergence of the new state, but it also led to confusion in the workplace. Most affected were the skilled crafts – whose life was regulated by the guilds until their abolition in 1789 – and the liberal professions. Formal qualifications were no longer required to exercise any profession. The practical disadvantages of this were soon obvious to all, but this chaos was not easy to redress. The wider ramifications of the nationalization of Church property led to the collapse of university education in France; consequently, the law and medical schools closed their doors, along with all the other faculties. Those who received any professional training got it from private colleges, set up by barristers or surgeons trained before 1789.²⁸

The only profession that rapidly re-acquired its traditional ethos was the army. It was also becoming the surest, fastest road to worldly success as the utopian dreams of 1789 dissolved into nightmare or farce. The Terrorist regime made great efforts to politicize the troops along 'correct' lines and the first levies of 1792 were volunteers, usually town-dwellers, who were probably already imbued with revolutionary ideals. However, in the course of the 1790s, the basic composition of the armies changed; they were now full of conscripts, usually peasants, and their officers were not long in reasserting more traditional patterns of discipline and hierarchy. After Thermidor, the government virtually abandoned feeding soldiers political propaganda: the biggest single influence on them were their officers, and although they too had benefited from the 'career open to talent' – and with it the rejection of noble privilege as a criterion for promotion – they had not abandoned traditional notions of status and authority conferred by rank, however that rank was earned. The Terrorist government had raised the esteem of the common soldier to that of a citizen doing a valued, heroic task of public service, but as egalitarian ideology receded after 1794, this new-found sense of esteem was gradually converted, among the troops, into a sense of the privilege due to a caste apart from other citizens.²⁹

The Revolution gave Napoleon the foundations of a strong, uniform state, and the guiding principle that this was how a well-run, rational state should be organized. He accepted this part of his legacy with glee. It had proved crucial in the struggle for survival against the counter-revolution and, above all, against the far greater threat posed by the international war, which began in 1792.

The War with Europe, 1792–99

The war which began in the spring of 1792, initially between France and the Habsburg Monarchy, supported by Prussia, would last until 1815, almost without interruption. Its immediate origins stemmed from a remarkable mixture of cynicism, reckless optimism and revolutionary zeal, heightened by inexperience. This peculiar mixture did not last long, but by the time more established patterns of military and diplomatic behaviour had reasserted themselves, France had been branded a subversive state by the other major powers: a threat to their very existence, not just a normal military threat to their material interests.

The aims of the revolutionaries in 1789 were, at heart, to renew and strengthen France, and to a certain extent they achieved this, if not as easily or in the manner they hoped at the outset. France's traditional rival in western Europe, the Habsburgs, saw only the weakness inflicted on the French state by the Revolution, which was exactly what they wanted: this was why they – and the British – stood aside from the first phase of the Revolution. A France racked by internal strife and a politically emasculated monarchy, unable to control its own army or foreign policy, was to be

welcomed. For the Austrians, who ruled what is now Belgium, it meant peace and stability on an often troubled border; for the Prussians, it offered the chance to grab territory in the Rhineland without the threat of French interference.

In 1791 the new constitution in France brought the Brissotin faction to office, in uneasy partnership with more moderate revolutionaries, with Louis XVI – who had already signalled his hostility to the new regime at Varennes – at their head. By 1792, the Brissotins were convinced of the inherent weakness of any state that had not followed the French path of reform, a judgement that included Prussia, the Habsburg Monarchy and Britain. Should regenerated France decide to liberate the rest of a degenerate Europe, not only would she be guaranteed the support of those to be liberated but, perhaps more to the point, her traditional rivals would be unable to oppose her.

Even the idealistic revolutionaries had baser reasons to want war by 1791–92, however. They had become enamoured of the logic of the ‘doctrine of natural frontiers’, as applied to France, at least, which entailed advancing the border eastwards, ideally to the Rhine, but at least as far as the Scheldt in Belgium. Neither Britain nor the Habsburgs could tolerate such ambitions, on purely strategic grounds: it meant the loss of Belgium by the Habsburgs, and French domination of the Channel. Both Louis and the Brissotins hoped that war would bring the political crisis to a head, Louis in the hope that a shuddering military defeat by the Habsburgs would undo the revolutionaries once and for all, while the Brissotins hoped it would unite the country behind them and flush out all the counter-revolutionaries as traitors.

They were all wrong. France proved stronger than anyone had foreseen, causing Prussia to abandon the war by 1793, and Britain to join it early in 1793. However, the Habsburgs also proved impossible to crush; they were a far cry from the dilapidated, ramshackle state the revolutionaries imagined. Thus, two long wars of attrition for the domination of western Europe and of the Atlantic entered their final phase: France and the Habsburgs contested for the mastery of western Europe; Britain and France re-entered their long-standing contest for overseas empire and naval supremacy. These older patterns were not clear during the Terror, 1792–94, nor did the ideological element ever leave the minds of the contestants. However, after 1794, the alliance patterns established in the mid-eighteenth century re-emerged: Britain and the Habsburgs confronted France, who trailed Spain with her, in a mutual effort to save their empires from British ambition. Prussia considered an alliance with France, but settled for neutrality; the Hohenzollerns had clearly ceased to regard the French Republic as a major threat, at a very early stage of the Revolution.³⁰

The war dragged on, but it looked increasingly familiar to eighteenth-century diplomatic eyes. The French soon abandoned any pretence of being liberators in the border areas they seized in the course of the fighting. The Low Countries, the Rhineland and northern Italy were plundered and ravaged by French troops who