

heroic Napoleon displaying humanism, charity, and nobility. The painting (figure 10.2) records Napoleon, after the battle of Jaffa, entering the mosque courtyard (with its horseshoe arches and pointed arcades) of a pest house (plague hospital) at the Palestinian city of Jaffa in the Holy Land on March 11, 1799. Within lay victims of the bubonic plague, which had recently broken out among Arab defenders of the city and spread to the French. When the plague struck, Napoleon at first had his chief medical officer Desgenettes (just behind and to the right of Napoleon, who stands at the center of the painting) deny the presence of the sickness. Here Napoleon tries to stop the panic and inspire his troops by showing that he is not afraid of contamination and that the victims will be well cared for. At this moment the apparently immune and clearly fearless Napoleon reaches out and even touches the dreaded buboes (an inflamed swelling of the lymphatic glands that usually preceded death) of a French victim, perhaps conveying a sense that his touch might miraculously heal the stricken man. Just behind Napoleon, to the left, a more cautious officer holds a handkerchief to his face to ward off the stench of disease and death. In the foreground lay the dead and the agonized dying. At the left, an Arab physician in white robes attends the sick and an assistant carries bread for distribution to the needy. To the right, a blind man, leaning against a column, tries to approach Napoleon, and on the extreme bottom right a doctor, while caring for a soldier, succumbs himself. In the background are the white cubic houses and rising minarets of Jaffa. High in the center from the top of a Franciscan monastery flies triumphantly the French tricolor.

The surrounding facts differ from the historical image presented by this painting. During the battle of Jaffa, Napoleon



FIGURE 10.1 (© Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

had agreed to protect the lives of enemy soldiers if they capitulated. But upon laying down their arms, Napoleon ordered the 3,000 prisoners massacred and plundered the town. By May 1799, French forces had retreated back to Egypt.

**CONSIDER:** The message the artist intended to convey to viewers; how high quality art might be used for propaganda purposes.



## Secondary Sources

### Napoleon: The Authoritarian Statesman

Tim Blanning

As with most charismatic figures, it has been difficult to evaluate Napoleon objectively. Even before his death, a number of myths were developing about him. Since then much of the de-

bate among scholars has dealt with whether Napoleon should be considered a defender or a destroyer of the revolution, and whether his rise to power reversed the revolutionary tide or consolidated it. In the following selection, Tim Blanning focuses on the consequences for France of Napoleon's rule and argues that he used statesman-like qualities to help create order.

**CONSIDER:** What Blanning considers Napoleon's accomplishments within France; why Blanning calls Napoleon "statesman-like"; whether the primary and visual sources support this interpretation.



FIGURE 10.2 (© Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

It can safely be said that France had never been better governed, if quality is assessed in terms of effective obedience to orders issued by the centre. Almost everyone could be pleased by the dramatic improvement in public order which followed Bonaparte's seizure of power. The Vendée was pacified at long last by a judicious mixture of stick and carrot, the sectarian tit-for-tat killings in the Rhône valley were halted and everywhere banditry was suppressed. The prefects and their subordinates passed the acid test – the ability to enforce conscription – with flying colours, at least during the early years of the regime. Together with the repair of existing roads and the construction of new highways, physical communication enjoyed much-needed and long-overdue improvement. The other great failure of the successive revolutionary regimes, public finance, was also rectified. Building on preparatory work by the Directory and enjoying the benefit of a sustained recovery in the economy, Bonaparte established the Bank of France, stabilized the currency, improved revenue collection and brought the national debt under control. . . .

In restoring order to a revolution-torn country and continent, Bonaparte was at his most statesman-like in

his search for reconciliation. Proscribing only irreconcilable royalists and Jacobins, he encouraged the rest of the émigrés to return home and rally to the regime. This policy was an undoubted success, as the appearance of aristocratic names among the list of prefects shows. His greatest eirenic triumph, however, was making peace with the Catholic Church by the Concordat of 1802. At a stroke, he took from the counter-revolutionaries their most potent appeal. It was some measure of the catastrophe which had befallen the papacy since 1789 that Pius VII was prepared to accept the terms offered, including recognition of the expropriation of ecclesiastical property and the subordination of Church to state. Although Bonaparte's vaulting ambition eventually led to a new schism, in the short and medium term the Concordat greatly facilitated his hold not only on France but on all Catholic Europe.

His other great positive achievement at home was the promulgation of six legal codes, the Civil Code of 1804 being both the first and the most important. It was renamed the Napoleonic Code in 1806, a not unreasonable personification as it was he who took the chair at most of the sessions of the drafting committee and who gave the

final document his own unmistakable stamp. As it was imported into many other parts of Europe, it became the most important single legal document of modern European history. It has often been criticized on the grounds that Bonaparte's personal conservatism was reflected in the provisions dealing with property, women, the family and landed inheritance. No doubt these limitations would fall foul of some cosmic court of human rights, but compared with the chaos of the 400-odd legal codes of old regime France, the Napoleonic Code was a model of rationality and equity and was recognized as such by grateful recipients.

## Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution

### Martyn Lyons

*In recent years, some historians have taken a fresh look at Napoleon and the significance of his régime. In addition to examining his words and deeds, they stress the historical context of his rise to power and the break from the Old Régime of the Bourbon monarchy. In the following selection, Martyn Lyons argues that Napoleon was not an enlightened despot but rather the founder of the modern state, and that his régime was the fulfilment of the "bourgeois" Revolution of 1789–1799.*

**CONSIDER:** *What Lyons means by founder of the modern state; how he disagrees with Bergeron and others who argue that Napoleon was an enlightened despot; in what ways Napoleon's régime was a fulfilment of the "bourgeois" Revolution of 1789–1799.*

Throughout this evolution, two main themes stand out. Napoleon was, as he is often described, the founder of the modern state. His régime was also the fulfilment of the bourgeois Revolution of 1789–99.

The new state, which emerged from the Revolution and was shaped by Napoleon, was a secular state, without a trace of the divine sanction which had been one of the ideological props of the old régime monarchy. It was a state based on a conscripted army and staffed by a professional bureaucracy. Administration was "rationalised," in the sense that corruption and favouritism were officially outlawed. The affairs of all citizens were dealt with in principle on a basis of equality and according to fixed regulations, instead of being at the mercy of a monarch's whim. Above all, the modern state was a well-informed state, which used its own machinery to collect data on the lives and activities of its subjects. As it knew them better, it policed them more closely and it taxed them more efficiently. . . .

In Napoleon's hands, however, the state had become the instrument of dictatorship. Although lip service was still paid to the principle of popular sovereignty, Napoleon negated its democratic essence by claiming that he alone embodied the indivisible rights of the people. He manipulated a series of plebiscites to consolidate his personal authority. Bonapartism was not, then, a military dictatorship, for its power was characteristically derived from repeated consultations with the popular will, in 1800, 1802, 1804 and 1815. It was, however, a régime which brought parliamentary life to an end and expressed utter contempt for the liberal intellectuals who defended the representative style of democracy. The imperial years of Bonapartism were anti-parliamentary and anti-liberal. In addition, the information media were strictly controlled by Napoleon's popular dictatorship. . . .

To compare Napoleon with the Bourbons is to sin by anachronism. Turning Napoleon into the last of the Enlightened Absolutists of the late eighteenth century means ignoring the momentous events that separate them. The French Revolution was a decisive historical rupture which places Louis XVI and Napoleon Bonaparte in totally different spheres. The historical role of the Enlightened Absolutists had been to rationalise the confused and creaking old régime state structure. Their aim was to squeeze more resources from it, without disturbing its fundamental framework which was based on inequality and privilege. They had no intention of undermining the society of orders itself. On the contrary, they stood at its pinnacle, and its existence justified their authority.

When Bonaparte came to power, the society of orders had been completely transformed by the French Revolution. Legal privilege and tax exemptions had been destroyed—a fact which Napoleon emphatically confirmed. Bonaparte's task was not to extract more resources from a traditional social structure; that traditional social structure, along with noble privilege, the guilds, the Parlements and provincial autonomies, had been swept away by the Revolution. The role of the Enlightened Absolutists was to rationalise the Old Régime, but Napoleon's was to rationalise the new one. His task was not to safeguard the social prestige of the aristocracy (to which the monarchies were dedicated, and to whom in 1789 Louis XVI had linked his own fate). Napoleon's role was rather to build the institutions which would realise new forms of equality of opportunity. . . .

Its social basis is what distinguishes the Napoleonic régime from the Bourbon monarchy, and makes it the heir of the Revolution. The social foundations of the Napoleonic régime, as this book has argued, lay in the bourgeois and peasant revolution of 1789.

The Consulate and Empire rested on the support of the *notables*, whom the régime itself helped to define