

Sèvres Porcelain and the Articulation of Imperial Identity in Napoleonic France

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From its inception in 1756, the Sèvres porcelain manufactory made elaborate, highly decorated dinner services for the exclusive use of the royal court. The objects used by the king were seen as extensions of his body and the act of decorating them became a means of royal veneration. While the French Revolution saw the decline of the manufacture, Napoléon recognized the enormous political value of Sèvres porcelain. Imperial power, however, was predicated not on the divinity of the Emperor, but on the clear demonstration of the material and cultural benefits brought about by his administration. This shift in the nature of executive power prompted a change in the design and decoration of Sèvres porcelain. Rococo decoration found in ancien régime porcelain was abandoned in favour of a highly didactic imagery that charted the triumphs and benefits of Napoleon's regime. This article sets out to examine this new repertoire of subjects and forms with specific reference to the Service de l'Empereur. Commissioned to be used at the wedding of Napoléon and his second wife Marie-Louise of Austria (daughter of the recently defeated Emperor of Austria), the service charts some of the events connected with French Imperial expansion, not least of which was the marriage itself.

Keywords: France—Napoléon—national identity—porcelain—sculpture—Sèvres

Introduction

This article examines some of the ways in which French Imperial ambition was articulated in the design of French Sèvres porcelain of the early nineteenth century and takes as a case study the *Service de l'Empereur*, a 178-piece dinner service made for the wedding breakfast to celebrate the marriage of Napoléon to the Habsburg archduchess Marie-Louise in 1810.¹ Commissioned in 1808, the Service is significant because, as its designers noted, it was the first to be produced by the Sèvres factory to take a set of specific and explicit examples of the political and cultural life of the Empire as its theme, and served as a model for several other Imperial services. Overseen by Dominique Vivant-Denon, the director of the Musée

Napoléon (the forerunner to the Musée du Louvre) working in close conjunction with Napoléon, the *Service de l'Empereur* depicts a series of locations, incidents and artefacts connected with French Imperial expansion, specifically Napoléon's campaigns in Italy, Germany and Egypt from around 1796–1808.

The politically tendentious theme of the Service and the way in which it was used at the Imperial court constitutes a departure in the design of Sèvres porcelain. Since its inception in 1756, Sèvres porcelain was seen as a demonstration of royal and aristocratic prestige. Large porcelain dinner services—sometimes consisting of several hundred components, including tableware and sculpted centrepieces or *surtouts*—were variously commissioned by the French royal household for private and state dinners or used as diplomatic

gifts to foreign dignitaries. Commissioned by Louis XVI for his personal use, the 400-piece *Service Louis XVI* of 1783 was one of the most ambitious projects undertaken at Sèvres, its cost so large that its delivery had to be spread out over an anticipated period of more than a decade.² The Service was decorated with a range of motifs including scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and one of Louis' favourite books, François Fénelon's account of the education of a young prince, *Les aventures de Télémaque*. Commissions were also received from other members of the royal household and foreign heads of state. They include the 38-piece *Service arabe* based on what was assumed to be 'Etruscan' pottery—a generic term for a wide range of pre-classical, classical and Hellenistic artefacts—depicting motifs taken from Roman wall paintings commissioned by the Comte d'Angiviller for Marie-Antoinette's dairy at the château of Rambouillet in 1785, and, the largest of the Sèvres' commissions, the 900-piece *Cameo Service* made in 1786 for the Empress Catherine II of Russia, decorated with simulated classical engravings and themes from classical history.³

The elaborate design of Sèvres porcelain, its opulent use of decoration, colour and gilding, the high technical standards of its production and its use of subjects from classical literature had both a political and an economic significance. Sèvres porcelain showed France as a cultured nation with a highly accomplished workforce and its elaborate decoration functioned as a statement about the power, wealth and aesthetic discrimination of the court.⁴ The objects used by the king, as Leora Auslander has noted, were understood as metaphorical extensions of the king's body and their decoration became an act of royal veneration.⁵ Furthermore, the various members of the royal household, the court and other dignitaries who commissioned elaborate services were said to have made a significant contribution to the French economy.⁶ For the marquise de Pompadour, the commission of very large quantities of porcelain from the Sèvres factory was, as Mimi Hellman has observed, seen as an act of patriotism.⁷ Such commissions were also said to encourage the development of the arts and brought foreign currency into the French economy. This imperative to generate foreign income was driven in part by the mercantilist belief that the amount of wealth in circulation was static and that the production and consumption of luxury goods in France bolstered its economy in direct proportion to

the extent in which it enfeebled those of its European competitors. The motive explains, in part, the interventionist approach of the French government in the royal manufactures, particularly the comte d'Angiviller's close interest in the work of the Sèvres factory. As the *directeur général des bâtiments du roi*, d'Angiviller closely supervised both the financial operations of the factory and the work of its director, Jacques Lagrenée le Jeune.⁸ Catherine II was also keenly aware of the economic and political resonance of her commission. In a period when relations between France and Russia were strained, the commission of so expensive a service was an international financial transaction and, as Rosalind Savill has observed, a significant diplomatic gesture to the cultural standing of France.⁹

The significance of decorative form at the Sèvres factory can be measured in a number of ways. It is evident in the way in which pre-classical, classical and Hellenistic pottery, known generically as Etruscan art, provided one style in a much larger repertoire of decorative forms for Sèvres' artists to use. The acquisition of Dominique Vivant-Denon's large collection of Etruscan pottery by the comte d'Angiviller for use as a study collection at Sèvres in 1783 was seen to provide the factory's artists with what the comte described as 'charming ideas for decoration'.¹⁰ The function of decorative form was further evident in the way in which a very wide range of paintings, drawings and engravings of allegorical and religious subjects, landscapes, animals and flowers were bought for the artists at Sèvres to adapt as decorative motifs. Many of these motifs were used with little systematic discrimination. As Geoffrey de Bellaigue has observed, virtually all the images found in Louis XVI's service recur in other contemporary services, a number of them in Catherine's *Cameo Service*.¹¹ Landscape imagery was common in porcelain decoration both at Sèvres and in other factories, notably in the work of Sèvres' main competitor, the Meissen factory in Saxony. In both instances, however, the scenes used to decorate porcelain were generally based on idealized pastoral views or Chinese-inspired motifs taken from engravings, rather than depictions of specific locations. The landscape decorations produced for the porcelain service made for the princess, d'Austuries at Sèvres in 1774, for example, were adapted from seventeenth-century Dutch and French landscape engravings with the addition of anonymous figures.¹²

Described as *cartels historiés*, the landscapes had no purpose other than to ‘enliven’ the artefact.¹³ When, in a few instances, specific locations were used to decorate Meissen porcelain, they were typically picturesque adaptations of views from the Italian grand tour and, again, seem to have had no overtly didactic or political purpose.¹⁴

A more discriminating use of decoration is evident in the service of goblets and broth basins made to commemorate the birth of Marie-Antoinette’s son (the *dauphin* and future Louis XVII) in 1786. In this instance, the painter Jean-Jacques Bachelier was commissioned to decorate the service using the allegorical form of a dolphin, signifying its royal namesake.¹⁵ While the use of an allegorical referent is not uncommon in porcelain decoration during the *ancien régime*, the search for narrative meaning through a systematic scrutiny of the images depicted in *grands services* made during this period is of limited value for the purposes of this article. The porcelain objects made at Sèvres may have been of unparalleled luxury and decorative excess may have been a material embodiment of royal power, but as Tamara Préaud has perceptively noted, the adoption of forms and decoration in *ancien régime* porcelain ‘seems not to respond to any logic’.¹⁶ The point is consistent with Geoffrey de la Bellaigue’s contention that during the *ancien régime*, the decoration of Sèvres porcelain seems to have been informed by ‘no limiting criteria’.¹⁷

In some respects, there are clear similarities between the design, production and use of Sèvres porcelain services during the *ancien régime* and Empire. The eleven services commissioned by Napoléon, like those commissioned by Louis XVI and his court, were elaborate, technically sophisticated, expensive and seen as demonstrations of Consular and Imperial power. The Sèvres factory languished during the French Revolution and Lucien Bonaparte’s attempt to revive it in May 1800 was prompted by a renewed awareness both of its economic potential and its value as a tool of propaganda.¹⁸ There are also similarities in patterns of patronage during the *ancien régime* and Empire. Some services, such as the *Service de la grande duchesse de Toscane* of 1810, were commissioned for members of the Emperor’s family; others, such as the *Service Olympique* of 1807, the *Service Encyclopédique* of 1810 and the *Service à Camées* of 1811 were respectively made as gifts for Alexander of Russia, Maximilian I, King of Bavaria and Cardinal Fesch,

the grand almoner of the Empire, respectively. There are, however, significant differences between the design and decoration of services made during the *ancien régime* and those made during the Empire. In contrast to the absence of a formative logic often found in Sèvres porcelain of the *ancien régime*, a scrutiny of the forms, artefacts and images that make up the *Service de l’Empereur* reveals much about the political events of the Consulate and Empire.

The Etruscan-inspired forms used in the design of the *Service de l’Empereur*, for example, were exact copies of originals in the factory’s collection and were informed by an acute historical consciousness about the standing of France in relation to the classical world, a consciousness largely absent from discussions about decorative form during the *ancien régime*. The *surtout* for the *Service de l’Empereur* was modelled on specific sculptures taken as war booty during Napoléon’s campaigns abroad and was designed to be set out in a specific combination with the Service’s other components. The scenes used to decorate the Service show, furthermore, not idealized pastoral scenes or images taken from classical mythology, but a set of specific locations and events from the Empire’s recent history. The conventions were repeated in other Napoleonic services. The *Service Egyptienne* of 1811, now in the Wellington Museum, Apsley House, London, also charts Napoleon’s military adventures in Egypt. It comprised a seventeen-piece *surtout* modelled on ancient Egyptian monuments and was designed to be displayed with plates decorated with landscapes taken from the Denon’s drawings made during the Egyptian campaign.¹⁹

This use of politically engaged imagery in the *Service de l’Empereur* (and a number of other services) is significant in the wider context of changes in the arts after the ascension to power of Napoléon following the *coup d’état* of 18 Brumaire in 1799. Since the formation of the French Academy in 1648, representations of idealized scenes from classical history or mythology took precedence over portrait, landscape and quotidian imagery known as ‘genre painting’ on the basis that they required erudition on the artist’s part and offered moral instruction for the informed viewer. As Colin Bailey has stated, the practice of a minor genre was no bar to professional success and recognition in the eighteenth century. Many artists and critics, however, instinctively used an academic pecking order as a critical template to

pass comment on the arts.²⁰ While genre painters such Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze enjoyed considerable acclaim at the Paris Salon, and in Chardin's case, royal patronage, critical recognition of their work came with a caveat. Chardin's status as a genre rather than history painter afforded him only conditional membership of the Académie.²¹ Greuze's track record as a genre painter was sufficient to render his attempts at history painting critically suspect. The work he submitted for admission to the Académie Royale may have been based on a subject from Roman history—Septimus Severus reproaching Caracalla—but the small scale of the picture, its meticulous finish, his depiction of characters with 'the traits of simple people' and the work's middle-class moralizing sentiments gave it the look of a genre painting.²² Greuze was admitted to the Académie, but only in the capacity of a 'peintre de genre'.²³

History painting maintained its high status even after the Revolution. For some left-leaning art critics, the process of political levelling brought about after 1789 implied a parallel process of levelling in the arts, and there was the confident expectation that genre paintings showing the actions of ordinary citizens might rival those showing figures from antiquity, thereby eliminating traditional hierarchies. Nonetheless, the idealized heroic male figure stirred into action in defence of *la patrie* remained a benchmark for many ambitious history painters and prompted Jacques-Louis David, the prime exponent of this sort of politically motivated history painting, to censure those of his students who forsook aesthetic dignity for anecdotal 'melodrama'.²⁴ In 1804, one such student, Antoine-Jean Gros, was taken to task by a correspondent for *Journal des monuments et des arts* because his painting of Napoléon visiting the plague-stricken at Jaffa—an event from the Egyptian campaign of 1798—was thought to lack decorum. The painting was widely feted at the Salon of 1804 and shared a prominent position in the exhibition's main gallery with another highly politically charged work—Philippe-Auguste Hennequin's painting of the defeat of counter-revolutionary forces of Brittany at the Battle of Quiberon in 1794.²⁵ Subjects feting Napoléon's exploits abroad may have represented heroic action, but their reference to a recent event rather than an idealized allegorical representation of an analogous event from the classical past of was suf-

ficient in some circles to raise doubts about a picture's 'true and lasting merit'.²⁶

After 1799, tensions between the aesthetic standards promulgated by some sections of the fourth class of the Institut de France (as the Academy of painting and sculpture had now become), and the ideological requirements of the Napoleonic state, increased. Many artists—Gros among them—were aware of Napoléon's inclinations in the arts and attempted to anticipate his taste.²⁷ As Richard Wrigley has observed, questions were raised about the utility of allegory in such a political climate.²⁸ If Napoléon was the 'new Augustus', and if, as some art critics maintained, the military and cultural achievements of the Empire had surpassed those of antiquity, should 'national' events not be celebrated using a modern Napoleonic rather than a classical Augustan visual vocabulary? In practice, as Philip Dwyer has noted, Napoléon had used a wide combination of artistic styles to promote his image. The repertoire regularly drew on incarnations of the Emperor as Augustus, Charlemagne, Mars, Christ and the common soldier.²⁹ These incarnations featured not only in contemporary art but also popular literature and journalism, printed faïences made for a mass market and, not least, Sèvres porcelain.³⁰ During the early years of the Empire, as Thomas Crow has observed, the political and cultural climate was ripe for utilitarian approach to imagery in the arts in which the cultural agencies of the state—of which the Sèvres manufacture was one—were required to embrace a more politically useful repertoire of subjects.³¹ This requirement was keenly felt at Sèvres. Writing on the specifications for the Sèvres vase commissioned to celebrate the German campaigns of 1805, Pierre Daru, Napoléon's intendant general, instructed Aléxandre Brongniart that the quality of the preparatory drawings mattered much less than the accuracy of the events they portrayed.³² Consonant with changes in the sphere of the fine arts, there occurs in the design and iconography of the *Service de l'Empereur*, a parallel change from implicit political symbolism based on allegory and opulent decoration to a more explicit iconography. Here, the constituent components of the *Service de l'Empereur* made a direct reference to an object, a location or an event of contemporary cultural or political significance. How then did the *Service de l'Empereur* articulate such Imperial aspirations?

Historical consciousness and the ‘style étrusque’

In the same way that royal power was embodied within the decorative form of *ancien régime* porcelain, so Imperial power was articulated, at least in part, in the forms taken from Etruscan pottery. Many of the artefacts in the *Service de l'Empereur* were based not on stylistic adaptations of the sort found in Marie-Antoinette's *Service arabesque*, but precise copies of Etruscan wares (more specifically, Hellenistic pottery) found in archaeological sites in southern Italy.³³ It is significant that, during the Consulate and Empire, studies on Etruscan art were informed by a scholarly approach to the subject rather than an enthusiasm for its stylistic qualities. The Service's Etruscan sugar bowl, for example, was based on a form taken from Pierre-François d'Hancarville's seminal archaeological study of *Antiquités Étrusques, Grecques et Romaines, tirées du Cabinet de M. William Hamilton*; the ‘vase à glace forme antique’ and the ‘compotiers à formes étrusques’, in turn, were based on originals from the study collection at the Sèvres factory.³⁴ While the formal similarities between the Hellenistic originals and the modern copies have been documented in detail, the historical and political significance of the influence of Etruscan art on the design the *Service de l'Empereur* has been largely overlooked.

During the Revolution, the Consulate and the Empire, Etruscan art carried a potent political charge and was seen as a way of introducing both an aesthetic and an ethical reform into the design of Sèvres porcelain. Writing to the minister of the interior in 1800, Aléxandre Brongniart spoke of an attempt to purge the factory of an outdated rococo aesthetic and to replace it with ‘renewed’ forms made after precise copies of Hellenistic originals.³⁵ Described as ‘gothic’—a pejorative term denoting the elaborate shape and extravagant decoration of Sèvres porcelain made during the *ancien régime*—the style was closely associated with the ‘corrupt’ tastes, and by extension the corrupt politics of the monarchy.³⁶

Research on Etruscan pottery undertaken by Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison, a popular author on art and antiquity and curator of a substantial collection of Etruscan pottery at the Imperial Library's *Cabinet des médailles*, provides an indication of some of the ethical, aesthetic and political imperatives upon which the ‘style étrusque’ could draw.

Writing in the *Introduction à la connaissance des vases peints* of 1811, Millin noted how vessels filled with olive oil were traditionally awarded to victorious athletes and war heroes.³⁷ Achilles placed such vases around the funeral pyre of Patroclus and archaeological evidence indicated that many of those found in southern Italian tombs often had a ritual or votive function.³⁸ Other vases, Millin observed, were used as wedding gifts or given when young men reached their majority, and many were decorated with allegorical accounts of ethical conduct taken from classical myth.³⁹ In this context, Etruscan vases had clear militaristic associations or offered a narrative tailored to the individual for whom they were dedicated, functions that, as I will go on to show, were consonant with the way in which Napoléon used Sèvres porcelain as a means of recalling important events from his own career.⁴⁰

Even the act of pillaging Etruscan artefacts was seen to have an historical resonance asserting France's new-found cultural and historical pre-eminence. A victorious Napoléon brought Etruscan vases to France after his campaigns in Italy and Germany, Millin noted, in exactly the same way Flaminius brought Greek vases to Rome after his defeat of Phillip of Macedon.⁴¹ In both ancient Rome and modern France, the possession of the artefacts was a demonstration of both military and cultural prowess. Thus, the recreation of precise Etruscan forms was a fitting embodiment of Imperial France's claims of military, political and cultural pre-eminence and an indication of what many apologists for Napoléon's acquisitions policies saw as a shift in the course of modern history marked by the nation's rise following Napoléon's *coup*.

The connotations bound up with the shape of Etruscan ceramics and the exact copies they inspired tapped into an historical narrative about the achievements of the modern world when compared to those of antiquity and the place of Imperial France in this continuum. The German archaeologist and art historian Johann-Joachim Winckelmann—a critical touchstone whenever Enlightenment Europe wanted to assess its achievements against those of antiquity—maintained that the political liberties enjoyed by the Greeks partly explained the unsurpassed standards they attained in the arts. For Winckelmann, the art of classical Greece was seen as a model to be emulated but the prospect of surpassing it was unthinkable, a point vigorously taken up by some critics, most

conspicuously Antoine Quatremère de Quincy.⁴² From a Republican or Imperial perspective, however, the formula was different. As Alex Potts has demonstrated, many art critics of the 1790s calculated that if political liberty presaged cultural rebirth in the past, then the return of liberty to the modern world after 1789 meant that France might pick up the cultural baton where antiquity left off.⁴³ On the basis that France was now the custodian of liberty in the modern world, its cultural achievements might, some argued, even surpass those of the ancients. Both as liberty's custodian and through evidence of its military prowess, France had the right to take the best art the continent had to offer and give it what the correspondent of the *Moniteur Universelle* termed an 'inviolable sanctuary'.⁴⁴

To show examples of Etruscan pottery in Paris, then, was to wrest such artefacts from the possession of tyrants, to set the values enshrined within them free from the twists and turns of history that put them in the possession of those not qualified to own them, and to exhibit them in their proper, secure home. For Denon, the display of the work in this context evidenced not just the return of liberty but the advent of a moment in which a new regime took over the reigns of history. Clearly, this was no simple act of cultural pilfering. As Denon pointed out in his commentary on the political role of the Musée Napoléon, 'today we are able to say to the arts that they are under the protection of the most powerful of nations and that the sanctuary where they are held is a Temple of Janus whose doors are closed for ever'.⁴⁵

The *surtout* for the *Service de l'Empereur*

France's relation to antiquity and its assertion of cultural primacy over its neighbours were articulated not only in the forms the *Service de l'Empereur* but also in the twenty-five porcelain models of classical sculptures that formed the table setting or *surtout*. Selected by Denon, the components of the *surtout* were based on Roman sculptures and other artefacts taken mainly during the military campaigns in Italy and Germany and put on show in the Musée Napoléon.⁴⁶ The only original part of the *surtout* was the centrepiece around which the remaining pieces were arranged, an allegorical sculpture of a chariot pulled by two horses led by a figure of Victory carrying the Genius of the Arts

(clearly, Napoléon) by the sculptor Antoine Moutoni [1]. Again, the design of Imperial *surtouts* stands in marked contrast to that of those made before the Revolution. During the *ancien régime*, *surtouts* were commonly used as table decorations but it was rare for them to be designed as a specific part of a particular service. During the Empire, however, *surtouts* were increasingly used as an integral component of a service, thematically linked to its constituent parts.⁴⁷

Alexandre Brongniart, appointed director at Sèvres in 1800, explained Moutoni's central component of the *surtout*. Napoléon appears as a source of inspiration for the arts, and was appropriately located in the centre of the *surtout*, amidst what Brongniart described as 'a group all the more suitable in that it is through victory that the most beautiful works of art are in the Musée Napoléon'.⁴⁸ The theme of Moutoni's centrepiece—which was determined by Denon's instructions to the sculptor—derived from a number of sources, all of which were highly charged with allegorical associations fetting Napoléon as a source of inspiration and protector of the arts. The equestrian references, for example, had a well-established genealogy in the context of public projects. Moutoni's work related to the project for the Arc de Carrousel in which a statue of the Emperor was to be shown alongside the plundered horses from St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, to Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret's decoration for the Sèvres vase celebrating the victory



Fig 1. Antoine Moutoni. *Victory Carrying the Genius of the Arts*, 1809, biscuit-fired hard past porcelain, 76 cm × 105 cm, Institut de France, Paris. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

at the battle of Austerlitz of 1808 [2] and, not least, to the mosaic, *Le Génie de l'Empereur maîtrisant la Victoire ramène la Paix et l'Abondance* made by Francesco Belloni for the niche in the Museum's gallery containing the plundered *Vénus de Médicis*, 'a personal gift to the nation' from Napoléon⁴⁹ [3]. There were other allegorical connections in the *surtout*. According to Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart père's table plan of 1808 showing the layout of the *surtout*, the porcelain model made after the Roman statue of Augustus from the Museo Pio-Clementino was set on the right-hand side of Moutoni's sculpture in the place occupied by Napoléon [4]. The location was apposite. Augustus was Rome's first Emperor, who took over from a chaotic republic, and there are numerous instances after the foundation of the Empire when Napoléon was cast in the role of the 'new Augustus' or when Augustus was spoken about in such a way that it was virtually impossible to miss the connection between his place in Roman history and Napoléon's place in the history of France.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, allegory was just one of the signifying structures used to articulate Imperial ambition. As we

have already seen, the limitations of allegory as a tool of communication were keenly felt by some officials, artists and critics, especially when works of art were commissioned to commemorate a contemporary political event or military victory. In this instance, the arts were expected to set tradition aside and bend to the political demands of the moment.⁵¹ When we turn to the numerous accounts of the sculpture on show at the Musée Napoléon, while it is evident that some were read in allegorical terms, others were seen as repositories of historical and archaeological data or rare and important models for French sculptors to emulate. The sculpture of Didius Julianus—and, by extension, Henri-Joseph Ruthxiel's porcelain model made for the *surtout*—had very limited allegorical potential [5]. The sculpture was of an obscure and unsuccessful Emperor who ruled for 66 days when the Empire was in decline at the end of the second century AD. The original sculpture was, however, the only known representation of Didius and may have been chosen by Denon for its rarity. Charles-Pierre Landon mentions the sculpture in his popular illustrated history of art, *Les annales du Musée* of 1811,



Fig 2. Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret, Design for *The Austerlitz vase*, 1808, watercolour on paper 62 x 83 cms. (Photo courtesy of Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres/Bridgeman Art Library.)

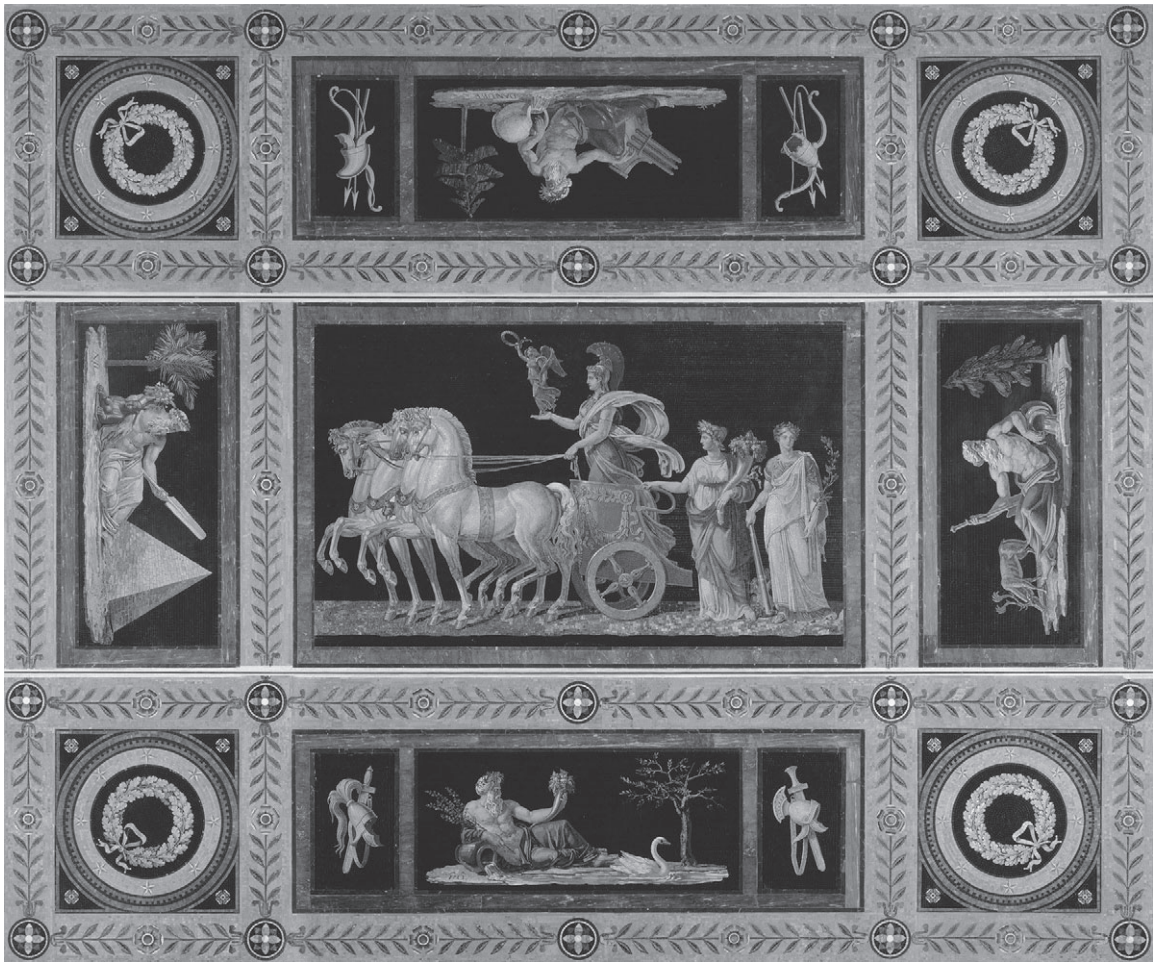


Fig 3. Francesco Belloni, *Le Génie de l'Empereur maîtrisant la Victoire ramène la Paix et l'Abondance*, mosaic, 146 cm × 178 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

and commends it for its rarity, its quality of workmanship and its excellent likeness.⁵² And while Denon does not comment directly on the Didius, like Landon, he was often interested in the capacity of Antique sculpture to provide hitherto unknown information about the appearance of figures of historical importance.⁵³ Later in the same address, he went on to describe the significance of the Roman statue of Melpomene. The original measured over four metres high and, as Denon explained, it was the first colossal example of Antique sculpture to be included in the Musée Napoléon. The sculpture's 'monumentality, the gravity of its character and the simplicity of its style' constituted an ideal model for

French sculpture, he noted, especially those designed for open public spaces.⁵⁴

The *Minerva* and the *Vénus Genitrix* on show in the Musée and also represented in the *surtout* were seen not so much as a models for emulation as of repositories of historical data that pointed to significant moments either in Roman history or the provenance of the sculpture concerned. The entry in the catalogue of the Musée Napoléon of 1814 noted how the *Minerva* was discovered in a country house in Velletri thought to be the home of the young Octavian, and how it was a prime example of Roman sculpture in its classical phase.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it was one of the last classical sculptures to be rediscovered

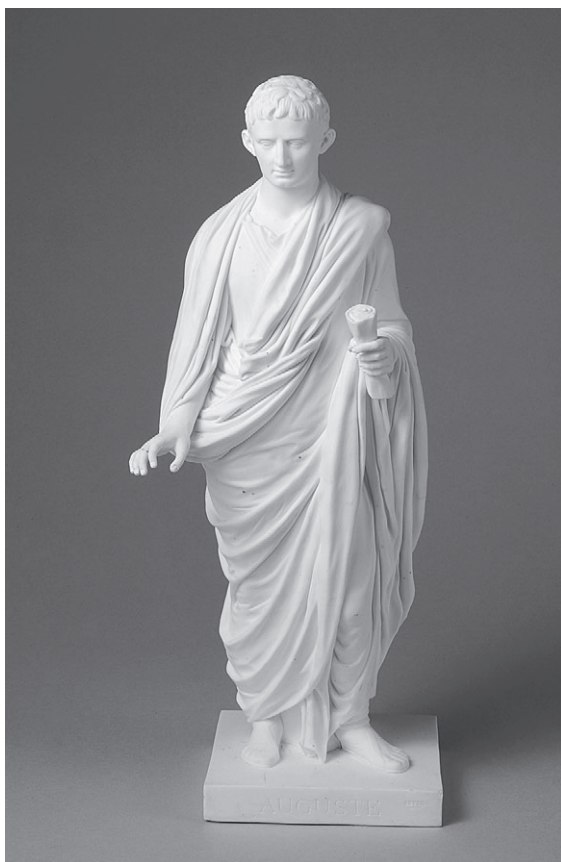


Fig 4. Jean-Nicolas-Alexandre Brachard, *Augustus*, 1808, biscuit-fired hard paste porcelain, 37 cm, Musée national de céramique, Sèvres. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

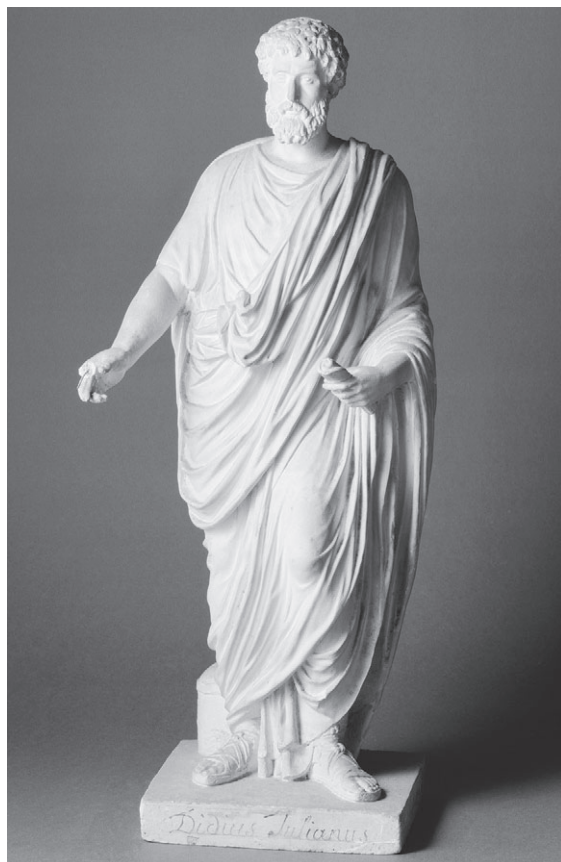


Fig 5. Henri-Joseph Rutxhiel, *Didius Julianus*, 1808, biscuit-fired hard paste porcelain, 43 cm. Musée national de la céramique, Sèvres. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

in the modern era, having only recently been excavated in the summer of 1797.⁵⁶ The *Vénus Genitrix* was also said to be an archetypal figure of the goddess, one that had served as a model for countless representations across the centuries, and, as such, constituted a good specimen for the Musée Napoléon. The catalogue further notes that the *Vénus* was a votive figure associated with the virtues of family life and motherhood, and records that the work was used as a part of a Roman ritual in which jewellery was hung around the sculpture's pierced ears.

Other components of the *surtout* were modelled on classical examples of the decorative arts. The decoration of utilitarian objects in classical culture was thought by Denon to have developed after the fine arts and it was considered appropriate to include

them in the collection and represent them as part of the Service. Three examples were included: Charles Godin and A.-M. Liancé jeune's model of the throne of Bacchus (displayed in the vestibule of the Musée Napoléon), and a tripod and a candelabrum, both by Jean-Charles-Nicholas Brachard ainé. Again, exegesis came in a variety of forms. Louis Petit-Radel, writing on the candelabrum, noted that the oak leaf decoration on its central baluster was significant because, according to Pausanias, acorns were the food of primitive Greeks and thus took on a symbolic significance during antiquity⁵⁷ [6]. Its baluster-like form, he went on, derived from the pomegranate flower, which was dedicated to the 'god of light'.⁵⁸ The original in the Musée, moreover, was the largest example of a baluster in existence and, like the statue



Fig 6. Jean-Charles-Nicholas Brachard aîné, *Candelabra*, 1809, biscuit-fired hard paste porcelain, 43 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

of Melpomene, became an important point of reference for subsequent examples of the form. The tripod came in for a similar process of interpretation. Like Etruscan vases, tripods were found around Patroclus' funerary pyre.⁵⁹ Apollo made pronouncements from a tripod through the Delphic oracle and the example was again considered to be a prime specimen with a provenance that could be traced back to its discovery in 1562 at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.⁶⁰

The signifying potential of the *surtout*—and the works on which it was modelled—relied, it seems, on a combination of narrative functions. Like the Musée Napoléon itself, the *surtout* contained examples of the works that were informed by allegory, but it also included works that had an importance because of their rarity. Some works were based on sculptures that were important because they were found at an historically significant location or discovered at a sig-

nificant moment in the modern period, while others had an anthropological significance, were considered objects of historical curiosity or served as iconographic exempla for future ages.

The interpretation of these and other works selected for reproduction for the *Service de l'Empereur* was indicative of a wider change in methods of classifying antique artefacts during the Consulate and Empire, a change prompted both by advances in scholarship and the persistent need on the part of the state to make comparisons between the achievement of modern France and those of antiquity. But historicism came at a price. As archaeological approaches to the study of ancient Greece and Rome became more sophisticated, so Winckelmann's view that many well-known antiquities were Greek originals was called into question.⁶¹ Seminal works that were once thought to be Greek were found now to be Roman, thereby calling into question the convention that the flowering of Antique culture took place in Greece rather than Rome. As Alex Potts has shown, there were various responses to this new formulation, one of which was to conclude that the high point of classical antiquity endured for far longer than Winckelmann had maintained and continued well into the early years of the Roman Empire.⁶² Trumpeted by Denon, Millin and Ennio Visconti, the curator responsible for the display of classical sculpture in the Musée, this formula had an obvious appeal for a regime keen to find points of reference between its own achievements and those of the Roman Empire. Improvements in scholarship, however, brought difficulties. The curators at the Musée Napoléon often raised difficult questions about the best way to organize and catalogue its contents.⁶³ A chronological display was initially considered to complement the exhibition of paintings in the *Grande Galerie* of the Musée, but while it may have been logical to place a sculpture of a first Century Augustus before that of a second Century Didius, it was often difficult to date sculptures of deities, examples of which may have been produced over several centuries.

Despite its various meanings, the design of the *surtout* functioned as a reminder that the collection on which it was based was an embodiment of a new cultural order brought about by French prowess on the battlefield, an order that restored cultural artefacts to those best qualified by their political credentials and their place in history to keep them. Evidence that the

Service de l'Empereur called on other narratives that underline the Empire's achievements recurs in the selection of scenes and events used to decorate the painted reserves of its 26 side plates.

Genre and the decoration of the *assiettes plates*

The decorations used in the tableware for the *Service de l'Empereur* do not present a systematic account of significant moments in the Empire's history. The service contains a wide range of subjects, some suggested by Denon, others specified by Napoléon. Some of the sites depicted are of historical importance; others show Imperial palaces and incidents inspired by the personal memories of the Emperor. Despite the lack of a coherent narrative sequence linking the subjects, the political resonance of the decorations is pronounced.

A number of the scenes included in the *Service* reproduce specific subjects used in paintings commissioned in 1808 from a stock of over 200 preparatory sketches made by Denon during Napoléon's various campaigns.⁶⁴ Antoine Taunay's painting *L'entrée de S. M. l'Empereur des français dans la ville de Munich à*

l'instant où les Bavaois viennent devant elle of 1806 [7] was based on several preparatory sketches given to the artist by Denon.⁶⁵ The picture shows French Imperial troops marching into the Karlstor, one of Munich's main gates, with Napoléon on horseback in the centre-foreground surrounded by members of the local Bavarian guard who had fought in the French campaign against Austria.⁶⁶ Described by Denon as 'moyens tableaux historiques'—a neologism in critical terminology—such works were, in David's terms, 'anecdotal', and hard to locate within the traditional academic systems for classifying the fine arts. As we have seen, they could not be classified as conventional history paintings, the highest of the genres, because they depicted scenes from modern life rather than idealized themes from classical history. At the same time, the paintings often depicted a moment or an event of national or political importance and showed figures (typically the Emperor or his generals), making the works equally hard to classify under the category of anecdotal genre painting.⁶⁷ The designers of the *Service*, however, went one step further.

The decoration shows a view of the Karlstor almost identical to the original Taunay exhibited at the Salon of 1808 but without the original's principal



Fig 7. Antoine Taunay, *L'entrée de S. M. l'Empereur des français dans la ville de Munich à l'instant où les Bavaois viennent devant elle*, 1806, oil on canvas, 182 cm × 221 cm, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

subject, the military procession and the moment when the Bavarian guard met the Emperor and his retinue [8]. Here, the decorated reserve shows the scene in a state of quiet repose with civilians, a couple of French soldiers in green livery and passing local traffic in the middle distance. Seen out of context, the decoration might be taken for a topographical landscape similar to those that featured at the Salons of 1808 and 1810. In this case, however, the decoration transcends the category of topographical painting on a number of levels. It takes Taunay's painting as its referent and consequently evokes the event depicted in the original. Even if we set this referent aside, the picture still shows a clearly recognizable location, the capital of the largest state in French-dominated Germany and one that was the centre of the military campaigns of 1805. The resonance of the image is further enhanced by the highly charged political context in which the decoration was used. Many of the dele-

gates or their spouses at Napoléon's wedding were closely connected with the German campaigns—either as victors (Napoléon, Murat, Jérôme, Eugène Beauharnais) or as relatives of the vanquished (Marie-Louise, Augusta, Catherine Queen of Westphalia and Karl-Friedrich Duke of Baden)—and would have had first hand knowledge of the city and its recent history. Despite the absence of the principal players found in Taunay's original painting, it is highly likely that the decoration would have been immediately legible as a politically charged image, albeit one that makes its case in an understated manner.

Another instance in which a scene used in the Service was based on an official commission for painting is found in Nicholas-Antoine Lebel's decoration of the city of Dresden [9]. Denon's correspondence records the commission of a small panel '*L'Entrée de l'Empereur à Dresde*' for the Palais de Trianon although, in this instance, the commission was never



Fig 8. Louis Bouquet, *View of Munich*, 1808, 23.7 cm diameter, glazed hard paste porcelain, Musée Napoléon, Fontainebleau. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)



Fig 9. Nicholas-Antoine Lebel, *View of Dresden*, 23.7 cm diameter, glazed hard paste porcelain, Musée Napoléon, Fontainebleau. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

completed.⁶⁸ Lebel's decoration, preparatory sketches for which were again provided by Denon, shows a ceremonial route into the city, the Augustusbrücke and the Elector's palace seen from the south side of the river Elbe. Like the view of the Karlstor, Lebel's decoration shows the location but without Napoléon and the retinue that entered the city in 1806. Again, this only marginally diminishes the political significance of the original. Dresden, like Munich, was highly significant in the Empire's history. It was the seat of government of the Elector of Saxony, nephew of Frederick the Great, who had fought against France alongside Prussia. Following his defeat by Napoléon at the battle of Jéna in 1806, the Elector, like his counterpart in Bavaria, was elevated to the status of king by Napoléon, forced to become a member of Confederation of the Rhine and to pay France substantial reparation of

25,000,000 Francs, part payment for which included the donation of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and 'painting's equivalent of the Medici Venus', according to Denon, Correggio's *La nuit*.⁶⁹ At first sight, then, the decoration functions at the level of a topographical representation but, set in the context of the Empire's recent history it, again, resonates at a pitch well above that of descriptive landscape painting.

In some of the decorations for the Service, Imperial power is given a more explicit expression. Jean-François Robert's painted reserve showing Napoléon at the fountain of Moses, a scene from the Egyptian campaign of 1798, is a direct transcription of Jean-Simon Berthélemy's painting commissioned for the Galerie de Diane at the Tuileries Palace, shown at the Salon of 1808.⁷⁰ Politically motivated genre paintings such as this were very common both at the Salons of

1808 and particularly in 1810. In 1808, some 60 pictures of military campaigns were commissioned by the Imperial household, some for use at the Sèvres manufactory, others at the tapestry factory at Gobelins, and Denon records an unprecedented display of unsolicited patriotism on the part of exhibitors.⁷¹ In 1810, there were well over 100 examples of paintings, sculptures and engravings documenting imperial adventures in Egypt, Spain and Germany and numerous medals and engravings were commissioned.⁷² Another of the subjects personally specified by Napoléon, Jacques Cotot's decoration of the translation of the sword of Frederick the Great, shows the military procession that bore the sword, and the banners captured in the campaigns against Prussia and the Austrians, to the Hotel des

Invalides in Paris in 1807 [10]. The speech given by Louis, Marquis de Fontanes, the president of the ministry of justice, who oversaw the ceremony, is an example of a diplomatic tactic commonly used by Napoléon whereby the ignominy of his enemies' defeat was ameliorated by celebrating their military and cultural virtues.⁷³ In the carefully crafted address, Frederick was feted by the marquis as the last of Europe's philosopher kings and a military commander admired by the whole of Europe.

But there were flaws in Frederick's administration and a warp in the course of Prussian history that required correction. Alongside the inability of his heirs to defend their nation, Frederick was singled out as an absolutist monarch and an atheist. From the



Fig 10. Jean-François Swebach, *The Sword of Frederick the Great Arriving at the Hôpital des invalides*, 1808, 23.7 cm diameter, glazed hard paste porcelain, Musée national de Malmaison. (Photo courtesy of Réunion des musées nationaux, France.)

vantage point of 1810, absolutism and atheism were seen as two conspicuous political evils that had haunted France over the last generation. The first of these was exorcised by the Revolution (this was the point when Liberty dawned and afforded France all the cultural dividends that went with it). But Liberty needed order and regulation to give it substance and this, according to contemporary historiography, came first in the form of Napoléon's *coup d'état* of 1799—the point at which the Revolution was 'terminated'—and subsequently with the foundation of the Empire in 1804, the point at which the political structure of France was given its definitive shape.

Frederick the Great, then, might well be a seminal figure in the course of modern history and admired for his enlightened views. Nonetheless, some of the ingredients necessary for the full flowering of modern culture (the like of which was unfolding in Imperial France) were missing in eighteenth-century Prussia and, according to the marquis, there was a consequent inevitability about Frederick's demise. This demise, he explains, was part of an inevitable historical trajectory whereby the military pre-eminence of one nation is naturally ceded to another. France's connection to Frederick's dynasty was, the marquis went on, like that between Philip V of Macedon and Flaminius whose respective fall and rise marked the demise of Greece and the ascendancy of Rome. This historical schema is familiar. It was identical to the one cited by Millin de Grandmaison to justify Flaminius' conduct in taking Etruscan vases from Greece to Rome and, again, points to the idea not just of historical change in France but the advent of a modern regime whose cultural and political importance was matched only by that of antiquity.

In the case of modern France, however, there is the additional assertion, common in Napoleonic historiography, that this historical trajectory has finally come to an end. After the Revolutionary conflicts and battles of the recent past, the Empire now existed in a state of temporal and political repose. In Denon's words, the museum's doors were 'closed forever' and everything—Etruscan vases, classical sculptures, modern paintings and Frederick's sword, to mention just a fraction of the plundered artefacts brought to the capital—was now in its proper and final place. Writing in 1808, Napoléon spoke of the historical stasis brought about by the foundation of the Empire and maintained that 'the nation might breathe a sigh at arriving at the present' because history had run its course and the

political and cultural order of Europe had found its final shape.⁷⁴

The point is amply made by the Empire's historiographers, working under the direction of Napoléon. Several major accounts of French history were commissioned during the Empire. Some consisted of modern addenda to well-known accounts of the history of France published during the *ancien régime*, such as Paul-François Velley's *Histoire de France depuis l'établissement de la monarchie*; others, such as Antoine Serieys' *Tables chronologiques de l'histoire ancienne et moderne*, were new publications.⁷⁵ A common theme in many of the works that received official approval was the representation of the Empire as a logical conclusion to the trajectory of French history. Above all, it was the point at which the shortcomings of other, more recent administrations—the absolute and constitutional monarchy, the Jacobin republic and the Directory—were finally remedied. It is perhaps in this context that we might look again and find a connection with some of the less overtly politically motivated decorations, such as the views of Munich and Dresden. The images are arguably not so much decorative landscapes—the *cartels historiés* found during the *ancien régime*—but vistas that were politically neutered by the tranquillity effected by a Napoleonic peace.⁷⁶ In the same way that images of battles demonstrate the expansion of the Empire, so the views of Munich and Dresden demonstrate the dividends of French hegemony in Europe, political stability and social order.

Space and the representation of Imperial power

The artefacts and images that make up the *Service de l'Empereur* can, to summarize, be read as various expressions of Imperial power: its Etruscan forms were bound up with a new consciousness about modern France's place in history, its *surtout* demonstrated the centripetal lure France had over the world's best art, and its decorated reserves depicted the sites of Napoléon's various military exploits. Another expression of Imperial power, however, takes shape in the context in which the Service was set out and used at the Tuileries palace.

Aléxandre Cassanova's painting of the wedding in the Musée national du Château de Versailles shows Napoléon and Marie-Louise at the centre of a semi-circular table at the Salle de spectacles at the Tuileries

palace, flanked by their guests, members of Napoléon's extended family and the various vanquished Habsburgs with whom they had made tactical marriages [11]. A commemorative publication by Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, the *Descriptions des cérémonies et des fêtes qui ont lieu pour le mariage de S. M. l'Empereur Napoléon avec S. A. I. Madame l'Archiduchesse Marie-Louise d'Autriche* of 1810 illustrates the event and lists the various places occupied by the guests [12].⁷⁷ Radiating outwards from the centre of the table, sat Napoléon's mother Letizia Bonaparte and his three brothers, Joseph, Louis and Jérôme, respectively kings of Spain (brought into the Empire following a French-inspired *coup* against the Habsburg administration in 1808), Holland (integrated into the Empire in 1806 following the dissolution of the French-backed Batavian Republic) and Westphalia (established in 1807 from conquered regions of Habsburg Prussia). Joseph's marriage to Julie Clary, the daughter of a silk merchant, and Louis' marriage to Hortense de Beauharnais, Josephine's daughter from her first mar-

riage, were of no tactical significance. Jérôme Bonaparte, however, married Catherine (now Queen of Westphalia), the daughter of the Elector of Wurttemberg, Napoléon's ally in the campaign against Austria, and newly appointed king for his services to the Empire. The party also included Prince Camille Borghese, husband of Napoléon's sister, Pauline, and governor of the Piedmont region of northern Italy, taken into the Empire in 1806, and Joachim Murat, a professional soldier who was appointed king of Naples in 1808 following its inclusion into the Empire in the same year. Eugène Beauharnais, Josephine's son by her first marriage, was the viceroy of Italy and married Augusta, daughter of Max-Joseph, another of Napoléon's allies against Austria, who was elevated to king of Bavaria in 1805. Karl-Friedrich, appointed Duke of Baden following its inclusion into the Empire in 1806, married Stéphanie Beauharnais, Napoléon's daughter from his first marriage, and now duchess of Baden. Not least, Marie-Louise was the daughter of Francis II, the recently defeated Austrian Emperor,



Fig 11. Alexandre Cassanova, *Marriage of Napoléon and Marie-Louise*, 2nd April 1810, oil on canvas, 236 cm × 149 cm. (Musée national du Château de Versailles. Photo courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library, London.)

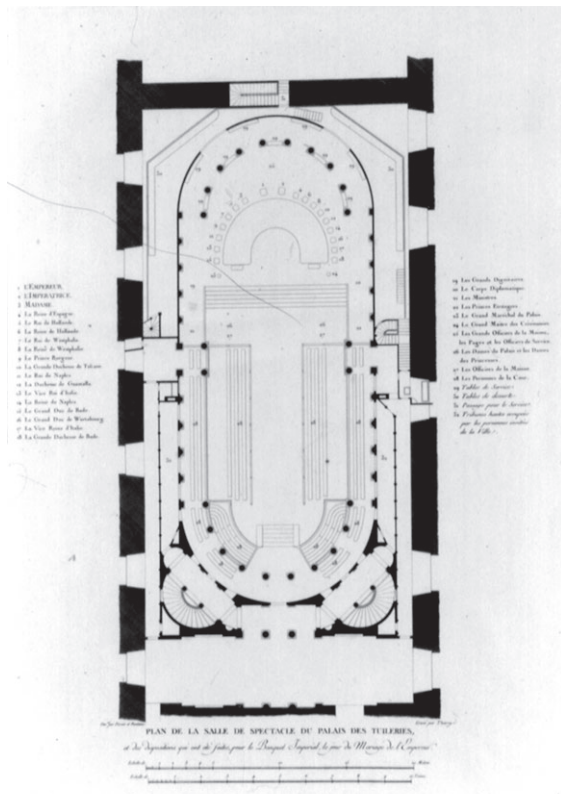


Fig 12. Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine, *Plan de la Salle de Spectacle du Palais des Tuileries*, 1810, engraving, 28 cm × 44 cm within C. Percier and P.-F.-L. Fontaine *Descriptions des cérémonies et des fêtes qui ont lieu pour le mariage de S. M. L'Empereur Napoléon avec S. A. I. Madame l'Archiduchesse Marie-Louise d'Autriche*, Paris, P. Didot, 1810. (Photo courtesy of the British Library, London.)

who was forced to concede the title of Holy Roman Emperor as part of the terms of the treaty of Schönbrunn of 1808. Napoléon's marriage to Marie-Louise not only enabled him further to assimilate the defeated Habsburgs into his extended family but also to lay a credible claim to be Charlemagne's heir, a guise familiar in his iconographical repertoire.⁷⁸

In some respects, the wedding breakfast rehearsed conventions familiar to the court life of the *ancien régime*. Both Louis XV and Louis XVI dined in public as part of the celebrations connected with diplomatic events, coronations, royal births and weddings.⁷⁹ One such dinner, held to celebrate the Dauphin's marriage to Marie-Antoinette, at the opera at Versailles in 1770, had much in common with Napoléon and Marie-Louise's wedding breakfast. A table forming three sides of a square was located in the semicircular space

with the Dauphin and Marie-Antoinette at its centre flanked by members of the royal family with the serried ranks of the court looking down from the auditorium.⁸⁰ The event was governed by a strict etiquette with various officers of the court charged with serving food, water, wine and preparing table linen and cutlery for the king, queen, *dauphin* and *dauphine* and then for guests of diminishing status.⁸¹ A set of similar protocols informed imperial celebrations. These were set out in detail in the eighteen articles of the second chapter of *Etiquette du Palais impériale* of 1804.⁸²

There were, however, a number of essential differences between the exercise of political power during the *ancien régime* and the Empire, differences that aspects of the layout and the iconography of the *Service de l'Empereur*. Before the French Revolution, political rights were ceded to institutions and individual subjects by the king, whose office was sanctioned by God and whose authority resided in his physical person, aspects which were venerated through the objects he used.⁸³ For all Napoléon's pretensions, ultimate political authority was embodied not in the person of the Emperor but in the form of a legislative code that guaranteed rights to the citizen, the *Code Napoléon*. Those rights, furthermore, were maintained through a legislative structure rather than royal patronage, and it is significant that while Napoléon appointed kings and viceroys as executives of parts of the expanding Empire, their authority invariably came not from God but from their status as custodians of a legislative code. If, as Leora Auslander has argued, the court and its artefacts were a representation of the state to its subjects, then a change in regime from a monarchy to an Empire might well require a different visual vocabulary to articulate the change.⁸⁴ In order to assess the extent to which this new political system demanded a new form of visibility to give it expression, and the part played by the *Service de l'Empereur* in its articulation, we need to look briefly at the relationships between politics, space and representation in Republican and Imperial France.

Michel Foucault's analysis of revolutionary spatiality is instructive. Writing in the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault spoke of an ideological process in Revolutionary France whereby 'the majestic violence of light, which is itself supreme, brings to an end the bounded dark kingdom of privileged knowledge and establishes the unimpeded empire of the gaze'.⁸⁵ Here, Foucault points to a change in the nature of

power and space and their representation. Royal power, he implies, is mysterious and divinely sanctioned, its operation not immediately visible. It was, as Leora Auslander indicates, coterminous with the royal body.⁸⁶ After 1789, however, power is replaced by the visible exercise of authority whereby its functions are known, illuminated and subject to verification through vision, through what Foucault termed ‘an unimpeded gaze’. The distinctions between royal, republican and imperial space would certainly have been recognized by many French citizens. The ability to eradicate the old class boundaries of the *ancien régime* and to see things that were once hidden was part of the patrimony of the French Revolution. Throughout the 1790s, revolutionary festivals were held in spaces in which all impediments to vision were removed. Numerous editions of popular prints of 1790 show members of ‘all classes’, spades in hand, levelling the site of the Champ de Mars in Paris in preparation for the celebration of the French Revolution’s first anniversary, the *Fête de la Fédération*.⁸⁷ Anything that impeded the uninterrupted vision of political liberty was, as Mona Ozouf has observed, construed as a counter-revolutionary act.⁸⁸

In bringing the Revolution to an end in 1799, Napoléon imposed an administrative order on a decade of unbridled freedom and the political instabilities it brought about. The decade after 1789 had seen a succession of failed attempts institutionalize liberty, first in the form of a constitutional monarchy of 1789–90, and then in the radical left’s campaign of terror of 1793–4 that saw the dispatch of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, the decimation of the aristocracy and the exile or execution of many political moderates. The formation of a Directory following Robespierre’s execution in 1794 was marked by further instability on a number of fronts. At home, political agitation from the Jacobin left continued. There were also various British-inspired counter-revolutionary plots from the monarchist right, especially in the pro-Catholic Vendée to the west of France. When the widely feted Napoléon Bonaparte returned to France fresh from his victories in Egypt in 1798, he was able to capitalize on this instability, ‘terminate’ the revolution and impose a centralized administration on the nation. The light of the Revolution remained. The visibility of the benefits of his administration was palpable in all aspects of the arts, but the liberal traditions of the revolution were now regulated and directed.

After 1799, Consular and Imperial power was increasingly seen in terms of a centre with a set of carefully maintained administrative links radiating outwards to the edges of the state. At the centre of Imperial power was Napoléon; at his literal and metaphorical side were the senior executives recorded in Percier and Fontaine’s *Fêtes*. Thereafter the administrative links continued with a succession of executives—cabinet ministers, prefects, sub-prefects and mayors—each reporting only to their immediate superior. Napoléon’s interior minister, Jean-Antoine Chaptal, explained this administrative structure in an address to the *Corps législatif* in 1803. ‘The prefect reported only to the minister’, he explained ... ‘the prefect discussed nothing about the acts he was charged with implementing: he applied them in the manner of a chain and ensured and surveyed their execution, he transmitted the law and the decrees of government throughout the whole social order with the speed of an electrical fluid’.⁸⁹

The system Chaptal describes bears a strong resemblance to a system of panoptic regulation characteristic of the nineteenth century as described by Foucault. Writing on processes of social surveillance, Foucault spoke of ‘the utopia of the perfectly governed city’ whereby social order is maintained through a hierarchical succession of administrators. In this system, ‘all events are recorded’ through the process of ‘an uninterrupted work of writing [that] links the centre to periphery, in which power is exercised without division according to a continuous hierarchical figure’.⁹⁰ Here, he notes, power has a ‘capillary function’, it flows from one part of the social order to another. The function is similar to Chaptal’s ‘electrical fluid’; it moves quickly and there is no part of the social order that its legislative authority cannot reach. Evidence of this capillary process takes a number of forms, not least in a painting of Napoléon in his study by Etienne Garnier of 1808 [13]. Painted according to Denon’s instructions, the work shows the Emperor with his personal secretary in one of a suite of offices in the Tuileries palace. From this centralized position, a daily review of the fiscal, military and economic state of the Empire was compiled from reports sent by a chain of executives that oversaw its 130 Departments.⁹¹ The composition contains other signs of the extension of the Imperial gaze: a globe on the Emperor’s left, a map of Europe spread out across a table, a plan of the Louvre the centre of Imperial authority and the radial point from which the Empire was administered, Napoléon’s office at the Tuileries



Fig 13. Charles-François Landon, *Napoléon in his Study*, (after Etienne Garnier) engraving 10.2 cm × 13 cm. From C.-F. Landon, *Annales du musée et de l'école moderne des beaux-arts*, vol. 1, Paris, 1808. (Photo courtesy of the British Library, London.)

palace. Not least, the whole operation is sanctioned by the semicircular arrangement of the busts of the ‘great men of antiquity’ who look down on the scene.

The idea of a fixed point from which the Empire might be seen also provides a means for interpreting the semicircular shape of the table on which the *Service de l'Empereur* was set out, the panoptic seating plan, the layout of the Service and many aspects of its iconography. This was only the second time ‘a horseshoe-shaped’ table (Percier’s plan indicates that it was semicircular) had been used for a state event of this kind; the first was for the wedding of Jérôme Bonaparte to Catherine of Württemberg in 1804.⁹² The delegates that sat around the table in 1810 functioned as lieutenants—literally placeholders—for Napoléon. They were the first of a set of mediating points in the radial function of Imperial power. In this respect, the delegates do for the political geography of Europe what the similarly arranged ‘great men of antiquity’ shown in Granier’s painting did for French history. They can see the Emperor, thereby witnessing and affirming the radial point from which his power emerges, and they also help it function by symbolically

mediating that power throughout the rest of Europe. In each instance, the person of Napoléon is expressed as the centre and origin of political power that radiates outwards around the table and then through the offices of a chain of more junior executives.

So powerful and so all encompassing was this locus of authority that it appeared to go on forever. It was for this reason, according to Percier and Fontaine’s *Fêtes*, that only the ‘limitless horizon’ was visible when celebrating citizens looked through the capital’s newly constructed triumphal arches.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although many aspects of the *Service de l'Empereur* draw upon stylistic and cultural conventions of the *ancien régime*, some aspects of its design are highly distinctive and an analysis of these distinctive features in the context of imperial politics and culture casts an informative light both of the iconography of the Service and the ways in which it was used. The various components of the Service—the models of plundered sculptures, and the depictions of locations and Napoleonic battles that played so formative a part in the consolidation of the Empire—function, it seems, as a set of points of reference or markers that record the political and cultural formation of Imperial France. Here, the Service works as a demonstration of two complementary forces, one centrifugal, the other centripetal. The centrifugal force of Imperial expansion was sustained by the political will France claimed to impose on its European neighbours in the late 1790s and early 1800s, a right that originated in a perception of its unique place in modern history, one that was compared, often favourably, to the place Greece and Rome occupied in the ancient world. In this respect, Etruscan art emerges not simply as a stylistic source for Sèvres’ designers, as an historically resonant form for the articulation of its Imperial ambitions. Used to celebrate military victories and the virtues of Greek and Roman heroes, the Etruscan style became an appropriate medium to celebrate French military triumphs. The second complementary force was centripetal in function and found form in the creation of a political and cultural centre in Paris. From this administrative hub, power was dispensed outwards to the component parts of the Empire through the succession of officers mentioned above. Evidence of the power and authority of the Empire could also be found in the spectacular examples of the painting and

sculpture displayed in the Musée Napoleon, much of it, as we have seen, acquired as the dividends of imperial expansion. The Empire, then, exercised a lure over the best examples of European art, some of which feature as models in the *Service de l'Empereur*. Furthermore, illustrations of various battles and the political and cultural dividends they brought were taken as subjects for the painted reserves of the side plates for the Service. Not least, the centre of Imperial power and its periphery not only determine the forms and subjects of the Service but may also have shaped the way in which it was set out. In the same way that the senior executives of the Empire sit in a half circle on either side of Napoleon, so the Service they used presents a panoptic array of the Empire they oversaw.

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Notes

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- 1 I am indebted to some of the research undertaken by T. Préaud, in her essay 'Denon et la Manufacture impériale de Sèvres', *Dominique Vivant-Denon, l'Oeil de Napoléon*, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1999, pp. 294–316. The full composition of the *Service de l'Empereur* is listed in S. Grandjean, *Les grands services de Sèvres*, Éditions des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1951, pp. 40–2.
- 2 G. de Bellaigue, *Sèvres Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen: The Louis XVI Service*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 20.
- 3 R. Savill, "'Cameo Fever': Six Pieces from the Sèvres Porcelain Dinners Service Made for Catherine of Russia', *Apollo*, vol. 116, 1982, p. 306.
- 4 K. Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in 18th Century France*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 28.
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- 33 Etruscan forms and Etruscan-inspired decorations were used in P.-N. Bergeret's *Vase genre étrusque* (Musée national du Château de Malmaison) celebrating the campaign in Germany in 1805. See D. Ledoux-Lebard, 'La campagne de 1805 vue par la manufacture impériale de Sèvres', *La revue du Louvre et des musées de France*, no. 3, vol 12 pp 71–72 1978. The twelve fruit bowls from the Service, originally catalogued as 'compotiers forme étrusque', were based on a copy of an original Etruscan vessel from the Sèvres factory's study collection acquired by Denon. Madeleine Massoul lists two Attic-style black figure cups which may have served as models, both of which were in Denon's original collection, the *Coupe à pied bas*, III H f nos 2 and 4, (plate 17, nos 2 and 4) p. 35, and the *Coup à deux anses et à pied bas*, III L 9 10. See M. Massoul, *Corpus Vasonum Antiquorum*, Honoré Champion, Paris, 1939, p. 44. See also T. Préaud, op. cit., p. 298, and Musée national de céramique, *Les grands service de Sèvres*, Éditions des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1951, p. 41. The form of the four sugar bowls was an exact copy taken from an engraving of a vase from Pierre d'Hancarville's *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of the Rt. Honourable William Hamilton*, first published in France in 1766. See T. Préaud, op. cit., p. 298. Another major work of reference of classical antiquities in the early-nineteenth century, L'Abbé de Saint-Non's *Voyage pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicile* of 1781 provided the model for a small cream jug. J.-C.-R. Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicile*, Paris, clousier 1781–6, vol. 2, p. 48.
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- 44 *Moniteur Universelle*, 3 October 1796, unpaginated.
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