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Civilization and its Discontents: Quatremère de Quincy and Directorial Political Culture

The word “civilization” was a corner stone of Directorial political culture, but, during most of the eighteenth century, it was an equivocal word. First used as a term of jurisprudence, by the second half of the century “civilization” more often referred to a state of development, and the advance of the arts and sciences, manners, industry, and comfort. Within this general range, “civilization” could be singular or plural, cyclical or progressive, and the result of religion or the decline of religion.¹ Between 1789 and 1792, the revolutionaries employed the word inconsistently and infrequently.² But, in the first half of 1793, several conventionnels, including Condorcet, used the word in a strikingly uniform way when they argued that the Republic must educate citizens and deliver the world from “slavery” and “superstition.”³ During the Year II, “civilization” was marginalized and even criticized. For instance, Montagnard deputies and their sympathizers condemned “civilized

¹ Starobinski, “The Word Civilization”; Binoche, “Introduction. Civilisation: le mot, le schème et le maître-mot”; Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, 174-5, 219; Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, vol. 1, 1-12, 108-12, and vol. 2, 72-153.

² Mavidal and Émile Laurent, eds., *Archives Parlementaires de la Révolution Française* [hereafter *AP*], vols. 8-55, show few uses of the word between 1789 and 1791 but an increase in 1792. During these years, deputies used the word variously to describe development stages, ethnographic cultures, industry, commerce, and enlightenment, and the process that improved peoples everywhere and enabled liberty to flourish.

³ *AP*, vol. 58, 600; vol. 59, 484-97; vol. 64, 245. Condorcet evoked the concept without using the word in his earlier “Report on Education” (April 1792) – *AP*, vol. 42, 192-5, 227-45.

nations” for their ignorance of public morality, and claimed that England’s “civilization” merely masked its “savage origins.”⁴

If the positive connotations of “civilization” returned after the fall of Robespierre in July 1794, the word only became central to the revolutionary lexicon under the Directory.⁵ This occurred when republican elites distinguished their new Republic from “The Terror” through presenting the regime as both the protector of “civilization” and the power capable of “republicanizing minds” and regenerating “the people.” Three assumptions underpinned the meaning of “civilization” in Directorial political culture: perfectibility; secularity; and the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing character of progress in art, the sciences, and morality. The newly coherent concept that emerged therefore refined certain earlier uses of the word, namely progress in international affairs (through the equitable European system of nations) and progress among peoples (through law, the circulation of ideas, commerce, instruction, reason, and the waning of revealed religion). But the concept was also distinctive in ways that reflected how the sciences of man then crystallized into a discipline: it was uncompromisingly singular, general, and irreversible, denoting an idealized future that would transcend national frontiers.⁶ This idealism proved consequential for the Revolutionary Wars as a legitimization for coercion

⁴ Robespierre, *Rapport*, 4-5; Barère, *Rapport*, 17.

⁵ See, for example, Lagrange et al, *Programme général des cours des Ecoles Normales*, 31-2, 34. “Civilization” finally entered the dictionary of the French academy in 1798 - *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (Paris, 1798), 248.

⁶ Chappey: “Raison et citoyenneté”; “Révolution, régénération, civilisation”; “The new élites”; *Sauvagerie et civilisation*.

and colonization. If all peoples shared one trajectory and were equally perfectible, advanced nations must civilize their populaces and foreigners alike.⁷

“Civilization” thus became an unequivocal concept. But there was nevertheless scope for political writers to adapt this concept to unusual ends that were at odds with those of the regime. This article uses Antoine Quatremère de Quincy’s *Letters on the plan to abduct the monuments of Italy* to illuminate how a text about European “civilization” that, at first glance, appears moderate, even apolitical, actually addressed deeper ideological fissures to subtly attack the Republic.⁸ The article shows that Quatremère used the word “civilization” in a highly contrived manner to signal acceptance of a republicanized concept, only to then identify discontent. This discontent, he implicitly argued, stemmed from the fact that “civilization” required the community of nations to collectively respect norms that conflicted with individual powers’ selfish impulses. In the *Letters*, he therefore mobilized the language of republican elites to form opportunistic alliances and accuse the Directory of pursuing a policy of appropriating cultural property from Italy that would destroy the “civilization” it claimed to protect. In keeping with the wider strategy of the royalist Clichy Club ahead of the legislative elections of 1797, he hoped that the *Letters* would fragment support for the Republic.⁹ Like his fellow Clichyans, Quatremère also

⁷ Spector, “Science des mœurs et théorie de la civilisation,” 139; Starobinski, “The Word Civilization,” 18.

⁸ Quatremère [published as A.Q.], *Lettres sur le plan d’enlever les monuments de l’Italie* (Paris, 1796) – hereafter referred to as the *Letters*, with all references to Quatremère, “Letters on the plan to abduct the monuments of Italy.”

⁹ On the Clichy Club, see: Challamel, *Clubs contre-révolutionnaires*, 483-85; Fryer, *Republic or restoration in France?*, 207-34; Larue, *Histoire du dix-huit fructidor*, vol. 2, 251-92; Meynier, *Les coups d’état du Directoire*, vol. 1, 5-20. The Club met on the rue de Clichy; it was formed in 1794 as an informal gathering of mostly moderate royalists. During the first Directory, the Club provided a forum for debating

exploited a narrow window of opportunity provided by the judiciary's reluctance to punish seditious writers deemed "enemies of the *patrie*."¹⁰

The article also has two general aims beyond explaining Quatremère's strategic use of "civilization." The first is to contribute toward the historiography that has transformed our understanding of Thermidor to Brumaire over the last twenty years. The article profits from scholarship that enlarges the cast of actors and corpus of sources, that identifies a distinctive political culture based on republican attempts to distance the new republic from the Year II, and rejects the simplistic idea that political conflict came down to "Jacobins" versus "Ultras." In particular, the article emulates research that integrates the history of ideas with the study of political power and investigates how racial and cultural hierarchies shaped both domestic policy and diplomacy.¹¹ Following the example of such scholarship, the article seeks to shed further light on Directorial political culture.

The second aim is to advance our understanding of Quatremère, who remains an obscure figure to historians despite his formidable standing among contemporaries as "the French Winckelmann." Born in 1755 into a devout Parisian merchant family, his youthful Italian voyages and first writings earned him a reputation as a "missionary of antiquity."

conservative policies and coordinating initiatives in the councils and press. Members included former and current deputies and journalists. Some members wanted an entente with moderate republicans, but an increasingly numerous and vocal body wanted to restore the Bourbons by electoral means or force. The Fructidor Coup led to the Club's dissolution.

¹⁰ Chavanette, "La presse libre: une épine dans le pied du Directoire," 102-4. Ironically, Quatremère later opposed the same liberty of press that he exploited in 1796 – *Quelques considérations pratiques et de circonstance sur la liberté de la presse* (Paris, [Oct] 1814).

¹¹ See, in particular: Serna, *La république des girouettes*, Part 3; Belissa and Bosc, *Le Directoire*; Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen*; Mason, "The Culture of Reaction"; Martin, "Les enjeux diplomatiques dans le Magasin encyclopédique"; and multiple works by Chappey.

However, during the Revolution he became a conservative publicist who served as an elected representative, tried to safeguard art institutions and heritage, and transformed St Geneviève into the Pantheon. He lived precariously after the second revolution of August 1792: placed under house arrest in 1793, imprisoned in 1794, sentenced to death for his role in the Vendémiaire uprising in 1795, proscribed after Fructidor coup in 1797, he eventually found solace in Holstein among conservative Christian intellectuals. The Brumaire coup enabled his return to France and election to the National Institute, but he mostly avoided politics until the Restoration when his loyalty to the Bourbons and the ultra-royalist faction earned him honors and positions. Ironically, during the second half of his life, his prolific output of architectural dictionaries, treatises on art theory, archaeological reconstructions, and biographies of artists made him appear such an esoteric writer that when he died in 1849, aged ninety-three, his deeds during the Revolution were little known.¹²

A fuller understanding of Quatremère requires us to recover these deeds, above all through reassessing polemical writings such as the *Letters*. Although Quatremère's most translated and reprinted text, the *Letters* are also his most misunderstood. Some interpretations use the *Letters* to articulate modern theories and anxieties about decontextualizing artworks and displacing antiquities.¹³ Others situate the *Letters* in the context of the history of heritage and show how Quatremère catalyzed protection

¹² The fullest accounts of his life remain Schneider, *Quatremère de Quincy et son intervention dans les arts*, and *L'esthétique classique chez Quatremère de Quincy*.

¹³ See, for instance, Alloa, "La mobilisation de l'aura."

measures.¹⁴ Finally, some interpretations situate the *Letters* in the history of cultural property seizures during the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Wars.¹⁵

This article, by contrast, seeks to restore the context of political action to the *Letters* by situating them in a moment when the quarrel over plundering Italy brought to the surface ideological divisions. To this end, the article first identifies the origins and the nature of these divisions; it then reconstructs the genesis of the *Letters* before explaining their organizational structure, arguments, and sources, and revealing their partially veiled polemic. The final section shows that, despite Quatremère’s ruses, francophone contemporaries understood how his work defended the Papacy as the custodian of “civilization” and attacked the Directorial Republic for imperiling Europe.

The Ideological Context

The revolutionary seizures of cultural property started in the Low Countries and Rhineland in 1794, but these “confiscations” went largely unopposed in France. By contrast, General Bonaparte’s victories in Italy in 1796 led to the quarrel in which Quatremère played a

¹⁴ In this vein, the *Letters* were the “Magna Carta” of heritage protection in Italy and “foundation text of European heritage consciousness” – Pinelli, “Storia dell’arte e cultura della tutela,” 23; Poulot, “The cosmopolitanism of masterpieces,” 13. Other scholars identify how the *Letters* influenced court cases and regulations – see, for example: Merryman, “The Marquis de Somerueles,” 324-5; Emiliani, *Leggi, bandi e provvedimenti*, 17; Griener, “Fea and the defence of the museum of Rome,” 102-4.

¹⁵ Pommier: “La Révolution et le destin des ouvrages de l’art,” 7-83, and *L’art de la liberté*, esp. 415-49. For Pommier, Quatremère’s commitment to the spiritual and spatial context of artwork opposed the doctrine of the “patrimony of liberty.”

leading role.¹⁶ Although ostensibly about cultural property, the quarrel brought to the surface a deeper ideological fissure about “civilization” and its relationship to Christianity, the Papacy, and the French Republican state.

This fissure reflected both long-term and more recent divisions. The long-term division concerned underlying attitudes toward Rome. French visitors had long considered Rome “the city worthiest of curiosity in the world,” but their opinions became ambivalent during the eighteenth century.¹⁷ We can identify the emergence of rival discourses during the century, which, as we will see, protagonists in the quarrel of 1796 subsequently adapted.

Some French writers were hostile toward modern Rome. They contrasted Rome’s historic grandeur to its modern decay, and compared present-day Romans unfavorably to their ancient predecessors: the city’s current inhabitants were “foreigners” in their own city, they complained, who lacked ancient Roman blood and virtue.¹⁸ Inspired by Montesquieu’s argument that Christianity’s rise had ended ancient Rome’s glory, critical French writers blamed Rome’s modern decline on Papal incompetence or tyranny. Even the literary historian Pierre-Louis Ginguené, who considered Italy “the mother of Letters and Arts for all Europe,” denounced the Papacy’s temporal power.¹⁹ Several critiques of the Papacy and Catholicism were widely repeated: the Catholic Church oppressed men of

¹⁶ Gilks, “Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property,” 117-30. Exemplary research over the last twenty years on the Revolutionary-Napoleonic seizure of cultural property includes: Savoy, *Patrimoine annexé*; Lacour, *République naturaliste*; Donato, *L’archivio del mondo*.

¹⁷ Jaucourt, “Rome,” 347.

¹⁸ Gaspard Monge, letter dated 30 July 1796 – Bibliothèque de l’Institut, ms 2191, feuillet 8C; Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains*, ch. 18; Boyer d’Argens, *Lettres juives*, vol. 1, letter 11, 89-95.

¹⁹ Grossi, *Pierre-Louis Ginguené*, 141, 185.

letters; native artists languished without state patronage; Rome was pestilent because the Pontine Marshes remained undrained; and, through failing to improve once fertile land, the Papacy ensured Romans' dependency on tourism and the court.

Critical French writers also blamed Christians for destroying and neglecting vestiges of ancient "pagan" Rome. Just as French visitors complained that the Papacy could not prevent the new Rome selling off ancient Rome "bit by bit," they blamed Christians over the centuries for altering ancient manuscripts and recycling ancient marble. In their eyes, modern Romans were "barbarians, unworthy of possessing such beautiful monuments."²⁰ Such attitudes went hand in hand with disbelief in both Biblical chronology and the Eusebian teleology, according to which the Popes were the legatees of pagan monuments because the Roman Empire was the precursor of the reign of God.²¹

Such criticism of modern Rome was, however, not universally accepted. Some French writers, above all antiquarians and long-term residents in the city, together formed an alternative discourse – one that praised the Papacy's custodianship of antiquities.²² For instance, Jean-Jacques Barthélemy warned the Comte de Caylus that antiquarian research was futile without visiting Rome because the "pile of statues, busts, inscriptions and bas-reliefs gathered in [the Capitoline] through the care of the last popes" meant that "one will never surpass the Romans except in Rome."²³ Several decades later, Lalande's guidebook

²⁰ Montesquieu, *Voyages de Montesquieu*, vol. 1 262; Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres juives*, vol. 1 letter 25; vol. 2 letter 57; Latapie, *Éphémérides romaines*.

²¹ Buffon, *Les époques de la nature*; Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English nation*, 82-3; Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres juives*, vol. 1, letter 20; vol. 2 letters 45 and 74.

²² Andrieux, *Les Français à Rome*, 131; Montègre, *La Rome des Français*, 108, 110-11, 118; Cagliano, "La Rome de Caylus."

²³ Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie*, 29-30.

underscored the cosmopolitanism of Papal Rome. Lalande listed savants who had made Rome their home and noted how, throughout the centuries, the city brought together “erudition, languages, antiquities, monuments and medals.”²⁴ For some enlightened visitors, moreover, Rome’s antiquities could not be displaced without losing their provenance: the Abbé Chaupy, for instance, insisted on making site visits to understand topographical contexts.²⁵ This positive discourse about Papal Rome became more fulsome after 1775 with enthusiasm for the new pontiff, Pius VI, and his Vatican temple to pagan gods, the Museo Pio-Clementino.²⁶

The fissure underlying the quarrel of 1796 was also exacerbated by a more immediate factor, namely division over how the post-Thermidorian Republic presented itself as the guardian of “civilization.” For the republican elites who supported the regime, the Republic needed to distance itself from “the Terror” by forming a narrative, through show trials of “terrorists” and other means, that repudiated the recent past while reclaiming the enlightenment and 1789.²⁷ In the Year II, they claimed, an animalistic populace had corrupted politics and dispersed “the greatest men of art and science” while terrorists had planned “to annihilate the sciences and arts.”²⁸ As the Abbé Henri Grégoire, an architect

²⁴ Lalande, *Voyage en Italie*, vol. 5, 88-90. Quatremère’s first library included this work – Archives Nationales: F17 2780/2; F17 1195. (Subsequent references to his first library refer to the inventory listed in these two documents).

²⁵ Montègre, *La Rome des Français*, 462.

²⁶ See, for example, Quatremère, ‘Appienne (la Voie)’, *EMA*, vol. 1 (1788), pp. 63-64; ‘Belveder’, *EMA*, vol. 1, pp. 263-4. On the wider context, see J. Collins, *Papacy and politics in eighteenth-century Rome: Pius VI and the arts* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. ch 4.

²⁷ Baczkó, “Le tournant culturel de l’an III,” 17-37; Jones, “9 Thermidor: Cinderella among Revolutionary Journées,” 9-31; Chavanette, *Quatre-vingt-quinze*, 119-53.

²⁸ Chappey and Vincent, “A Republican Ecology?,” 116; Daunou, *Moniteur universel*, April 12, 1796; Fourcroy, cited in Launay, *Monge*, 129.

of the Republic's civilizing mission, reminded his fellow deputies, "talent was never more atrociously treated than under Robespierre."²⁹ Public order and reinforcing executive power naturally thus preoccupied the Directory because republican elites believed that the Republic's survival required restricting the franchise and eligibility for office and eradicating "barbarism," "passion", "vandalism," uprisings, and Catholic influence.³⁰

Controlling the populace also required embedding republican values through festivals, songs, the revolutionary calendar, and republican catechism.³¹ But, in the long-term, preventing another Year II required the "reasonable elite," "the best educated and most interested in the maintenance of the laws," to study, understand, and improve the populace at home and abroad.³² This civilizing process, republican elites argued, required applying reason rather than obeying the general will.³³ Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (published posthumously in 1795) provided an important foundation for such thinking, laying out the challenge to advance knowledge of humanity, nature, society, and local circumstances to liberate and perfect humankind. Since "happiness" first required "the perfection of the arts and sciences," the Directory was preoccupied with elite education, the National Institute, museums, and preserving evidence of the past.³⁴

²⁹ Grégoire, *Rapport sur les encouragements*, 4.

³⁰ Serna, *La République des girouettes*, 430, 417; Brown, *Ending the French Revolution*.

³¹ Schröder, "La République contestée," 144-50; Buttier, "L'Ecole sous le Directoire," 199, 209.

³² Fourcroy, *Rapport et décret de la Convention nationale*; Boissy d'Anglas, *Projet de constitution*, 27. On the wider context, see Chappey, "Raison et citoyenneté," and Gainot, "La République comme association de citoyens solidaires."

³³ Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 36; Higgonnet, *Goodness beyond virtue*, 65.

³⁴ *Décade philosophique*, Dec 1, 1795, 446; Daunou in *Moniteur universel*, April 12, 1796; Grégoire, *Second rapport sur le vandalisme*, 1-12.

The regime's civilizing mission was, however, immediately contested. Some clandestine radicals violently opposed the domestic implications of the hierarchical Constitution of 1795.³⁵ By contrast, other republicans were skeptical about "the Great Nation" imposing this civilizing mission abroad through occupying foreign territories and creating dependent states.³⁶ French hegemony, these republicans warned, would fuel resentment and undermine the cosmopolitan ideal of peaceful cooperation – inspired by Condorcet's description of the "Tenth Epoch," they favored using French political and military power to foster international peace, equality, and mutual progress.³⁷ For such republican intellectuals, moreover, ruling diverse peoples brought their theory of "general civilization" into conflict with practical realities, since if all humankind was perfectible then one could hardly deem occupied peoples too backward to enjoy liberty.³⁸

Alongside these critics, a heterogeneous league of conservative republicans and royalists attacked the Directory's civilizing mission more directly. For instance, Pierre-Louis Rœderer – an occasional supporter of the Directory now turned opponent – criticized how the regime exploited the arts and sciences.³⁹ More reactionary critics, such as Adrien de Lezay-Marnésia, attacked the pretense of a Thermidorean rupture at the heart of the regime, noting how Robespierre's co-rulers remained in power by transforming themselves

³⁵ Serna, *Antonelle*, 304-15.

³⁶ On the wider subject, see, inter alia: Jainchill, *Reimagining politics after the Terror*, ch. 4; Béliissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen*; Kolla, *Sovereignty, international law, and the French Revolution*, ch. 5.

³⁷ Miranda, *Opinion du général Miranda*, 13-19; Martin, "Les enjeux diplomatiques dans le Magasin encyclopédique."

³⁸ Lilti, "Et la civilisation deviendra Générale": L'Europe de Volney."

³⁹ On Rœderer's politics, see Chappey, "Pierre-Louis Rœderer et la presse," and Rademacher, "Elites et republicanisme."

into anti-Jacobins and then, after Vendémiaire, becoming “more terrorist than the Mountain.”⁴⁰

The Quarrel of 1796

These attitudes to Rome and the Directory’s attempt to fashion a new republican identity had special purchase during Bonaparte’s invasion of northern Italy. For the Executive Directors and their supporters, the civilizing mission at home and abroad necessitated seizing cultural property. Seizures, they argued, would civilize France’s populace, “repair...vandalism,” and refute accusations that the French were “barbarians” by showing that they valued artworks.⁴¹ Other justifications combined tropes about Italy’s inability to preserve Europe’s heritage with boasts about how French science and museums would respectively restore and display hitherto neglected artworks.⁴² Those who were directly involved selecting artefacts understood that the seizures were part of a larger process. As Gaspard Monge explained to his wife, his task as an expert sent to gather cultural property was a small contribution toward liberating Italians from the “imprudent charlatan” Pius VI.⁴³

These justifications for seizing cultural property were, however, soon contested. Beginning in May, several royalist and republican publicists in Paris expressed fears for

⁴⁰ Lezay-Marnésia, *De la faiblesse d'un gouvernement* – cited in Serna, *La République des girouettes*, 426.

⁴¹ Debidour, ed., *Recueil*, vol. 2, 333, 516; *Décade philosophique*, May 29, 1796.

⁴² *Moniteur universel*, Oct. 3, 1796.

⁴³ Launay, *Monge*, 143-4, 147, 155, 161.

the arts if Bonaparte reached Rome.⁴⁴ Some warned about the unintended consequences of spoliation, with one writer suggesting that abusing “the right of fortunate brigands” would incite retaliation.⁴⁵

Lying low after Vendémiaire, Quatremère remained silent until late June when he learned Bonaparte had entered the northern Papal legations and was poised to demand artifacts from Rome.⁴⁶ He then published two anonymous pieces in the conservative *Courrier universel*, both written in the spirit of the Abbé de Boulogne’s *Annales Catholiques*.⁴⁷ Spoliation, he warned, would harm Italian artists without benefiting anyone else.⁴⁸ Importing masterpieces to France, he predicted, would not perfect her populace of unredeemable “vandals,” yet the resulting glut of artworks would disincentivize state commissions when artists already suffered from the destruction of Church patronage, that “most beautiful of paths...to genius.” Since “sacrilegious attacks” threatened to consecrate religious paintings in the Louvre to “the cherished demon of atheism,” Quatremère urged

⁴⁴ Lacretelle, *Nouvelles politiques*, June 13, 1796; Røederer, *Journal de Paris*, 31 May 31, 1796 and June 25, 1796.

⁴⁵ Gallais, *Courrier des journaux*, May 13, June 2 and June 5, 1796.

⁴⁶ Dávila, ed., *Archivo del Miranda*, vol. 13, 150-2, 206-12, indicates that Quatremère’s correspondence to Miranda contained no mention of seizures before drafting the *Letters* in July. On French-Papal relations, see: Latreille, *L’Église catholique*, vol. 1, 225-6; Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution*, 452-53.

⁴⁷ Quatremère, *Courrier universel*, June 28, 1796, 2-3. The letter anticipated the *Letters* in important respects and resembled closely his known writings in its language, style, and arguments. Consistent with his circumstances, it also betrays partial ignorance of current affairs.

⁴⁸ Quatremère, *Courrier universel*, June 28, 1796. He warned that Italian artists would lose models and patronage because nobles would sell their collections and cease commissioning artwork – this argument adapted Winckelmann’s observation concerning ancient Roman plunder in *History of the art of antiquity*, 324, 332-33.

the Republic to preserve “masterpieces scattered over France” instead of despoiling Italy.⁴⁹ Gathering “the spoils of Europe in vast museums,” he fulminated, was “no less funereal than the very furor of vandalism” and could never replace the authentic culture rooted in religious ethics that the Revolution had destroyed.⁵⁰

Quatremère’s support for “monarchy and superstition” was not lost on contemporary readers.⁵¹ They understood that he used these contributions to the quarrel to celebrate Catholicism as the source of artistic inspiration, condemn the Revolution for irreligion, and dismiss the idea of “perfectibility” that was central to the Directorial concept of “civilization.” His partisan intervention nevertheless encouraged publicists to sustain the quarrel, not least because he asked republicans who were already doubtful about expansionist wars to explain whether plunder contradicted “the rights of man that civilized nations have adopted.”⁵² Once details of the Bologna armistice reached Paris in early July, writers associated with the faction of ancient frontiers were therefore primed to remonstrate against the articles allowing French representatives to choose five-hundred manuscripts and one-hundred paintings, busts or statues. Seizing the “most precious heritage from [Italians’] ancestors,” they repeated, would deprive Italy of revenue, force Italians into Austria’s arms, and, through undermining war conventions, leave the Republic exposed to retaliation.⁵³ Rœderer now played an important role bolstering opposition to seizures. He warned that displaced antiquities would lose much of their allure: the Apollo Belvedere

⁴⁹ Quatremère, *Courrier universel*, June 28, 1796.

⁵⁰ Quatremère, *Courrier universel*, July 4, 1796.

⁵¹ *Journal de patriotes de 1789*, July 4, 1796.

⁵² Quatremère, *Courrier universel*, June 28, 1796.

⁵³ Lacretelle, *Nouvelles politiques*, July 5, 1796; and July 7, 1796; *Journal de Paris*, July 15, 1796.

was a god in Rome, he observed, but in Paris would become mere physical matter.⁵⁴ Over the next weeks, Rœderer also made the quarrel widely known through publishing diverse short reflections in his *Journal de Paris*, including one letter from an artist that proposed asking the Pope for casts rather than original antiquities.⁵⁵

In turn, the Directory's supporters and spokesmen, official newspaper, and senior figures from the National Institute and Museum Commission in turn responded to these critiques, reiterating and extending France's civilizing mission in doing so.⁵⁶ As the leading military power, they argued, France had a historic duty to protect the corpus of "statues that [modern Romans'] ancestors tore from subjugated Greece" – this duty was urgent given the continuous piecemeal exodus of masterpieces from Rome. And, as the leading artistic and scientific power, they added, France was dutybound to punish Pius VI, the enemy of art and science, and to perfect French museums, arts, and manufacturing. Other nations, Joachim Lebreton insisted, "await their improvement from us."⁵⁷

The Genesis of the *Letters*

⁵⁴ Rœderer, *Journal de Paris*, July 7, 1796.

⁵⁵ Moreau, *Journal de Paris*, July 9, 1796. Quatremère incorporated this argument in his *Letters*, 119-20.

⁵⁶ G.B., *Miroir*, July, 14, 1796.

⁵⁷ *Rédacteur*, July 13, 1796; Lebreton, *Décade Philosophique*, July 18, 1796, and *Rédacteur*, July 19, 1796.

The *Letters on the plan to abduct the monuments of Italy* belong to this point in the quarrel.⁵⁸ Quatremère started writing during the first half of July when, he later recalled, the French advance meant that the Papacy confronted “the irreligious spirit” and “revolt and rapine.”⁵⁹ He wrote hastily from his hiding place, finishing in the second half of July. Unable to consult his library, he nevertheless read contributions to the quarrel in newspapers.⁶⁰ An undated note clarifies his motive. The architect Jacques-Guillaume Legrand wrote to General Francisco Miranda – whom Quatremère had befriended in prison two years earlier – once Miranda returned to Paris in mid-July. “Our friend,” Legrand stated, was preoccupied “with a small work that he would immediately like to publish anonymously.” This work showed that “it would be in the interests of the arts to insist that we do not export from Italy different masterpieces” and instead rendered “the justice to the pontifical government it merits for the zeal and care it has constantly demonstrated toward research into the arts and their conservation.” “[Our friend] would like to know promptly,” Legrand concluded, “what you think of [his work] and...know about our intentions regarding Italy. I heard the intention was to suppress the Pope.” Besides seeking information and logistical support, Quatremère wanted reassurance his work would “not cause an inconvenience preventing it having the effect he desires.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ This section revises Pommier, “La Révolution et le destin des ouvrages de l’art,” 8-18. Pommier takes clues in the text at face value and suggests that the *Letters* were part of a real correspondence to General Francisco Miranda, written over an extended period between spring and July.

⁵⁹ Quatremère, *Canova*, 74-5, 279, and “Foreword,” in Quatremère, *Letters*, 175.

⁶⁰ Quatremère, *Letters*, 122-23, n. 30 and 40 - Quatremère’s circumstances meant that he made mistakes.

⁶¹ Vicente Dávila, ed., *Archivo del General Miranda*, vol. 13, 129, 153.

Miranda must have encouraged Quatremère because his work promised to discredit a foreign policy he also opposed, albeit for different reasons. Changes between the “small work” mentioned by Legrand and the published *Letters* imply that Miranda and other friends convinced Quatremère to effectively jettison anonymity and to use his last letter and a follow-on petition to demand the Directory consult experts before seizing artworks.⁶² Quatremère might also, at this stage, have reworked his draft into one side of a pseudo-epistolary exchange, using Miranda as his imaginary anonymous interlocutor, and toned-down language that risked causing “inconvenience” in order to help validate his work to readers ill-disposed to his counter-revolutionary agenda.⁶³ Finally, in order to present himself as an impartial “friend of the arts,” Quatremère created the illusion that most of his exchange predated Bonaparte’s victories and was therefore a prescient philosophical reflection rather than a reactive polemic.⁶⁴ Quatremère made these revisions and shared his opinions with Roman representatives in Paris just before the *Letters* were printed in late July.⁶⁵

⁶² The title page toyed with anonymity by providing his initials (“A.Q.”), but it also named him among the work’s distributors. Contemporary newspapers, such as *Feuille de jour*, July 31, 1796, immediately identified him as the author.

⁶³ Quatremère, *Letters*, 94, cited Miranda, *Opinion du général Miranda*, 13, in lieu of actual correspondence.

⁶⁴ In his final letter, Quatremère named an article in *Rédacteur* (dated 13 July) and claimed that that he finished writing when others started “late in the day.” But other clues (*Letters*, 94, 100, 104, 108, 115-16) and evidence cited above show he only started writing *after* the Bologna armistice.

⁶⁵ It is possible to date the competition and publication of the text with some precision. Quatremère alluded to Lebrun’s *Journal de Paris* article of July 21 (*Letters*, 105, 115). On July 25, Angelo Petracchi and Serafino Casella’s letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs summarized arguments Quatremère published several days later in the *Letters* – Montaignon and Guiffrey, eds., *Correspondance des directeurs*, vol. 16, 430-1. The *Letters* appeared in print before July 31, when they were reported in *Feuille de jour*. Crapelet printed two runs; each had 74 numbered pages, but the second run included an unnumbered page listing an

A philosophical history of Europe

Quatremère gave his “small work” an epistolary form, but we should approach the *Letters* as a tract with an “order of ideas.”⁶⁶ His central thesis was that “displacing the monuments of Italy” and “dismantling its schools and museums” would destroy “civilization.”⁶⁷ To substantiate his warning, he followed the example of members of the Section of History in the Class of Moral and Political Sciences in the National Institute by combining historical analysis and prophecy, sketching Europe’s past and imagining two possible futures resulting from present-day choices.⁶⁸

Characteristic of how the *Letters* were simultaneously republican and conservative, Quatremère’s history reconciled philosophical histories with Eusebius’s thesis of the continuity between ancient and modern Rome. To ensure his work appealed to republican readers, he eschewed any mention of theology, theocracy or religious inspiration. He instead outlined a stadial, secular history that assumed humankind was improvable and that

error on page 41 and, unlike the first run, its title page spelled “Quatremère” with an accent grave. Quatremère later claimed he sent Bonaparte a copy – Quatremère, *Canova*, 280, and *Letters*, 176.

⁶⁶ Quatremère, *Letters*, 105. Contemporaries described the work as a “brochure” (i.e. pages sold stitched together but not bound) and Quatremère later called it “a tract [*un écrit*] in letter form” – Quatremère, *Canova*, 279. The interpretation offered in this article revises influential assumptions that the *Letters* were half of a real correspondence in which Quatremère offered several “impassioned,” “slightly confused” “rubrics” or “repetitions” – Pommier, “La Révolution et le destin des ouvrages de l’art,” 31; and Gob, *Des musées au-dessus de tout soupçon*, 113-19.

⁶⁷ Quatremère, *Letters*, 94-5, 105.

⁶⁸ Cook, “‘The Great Society of the Human Species’: Volney and the Global Politics of Revolutionary France,” 322. On the subjectivity of temporal awareness and the wider subject of assumptions about the connections between the past, the present, and the future, see Hartog, *Régimes d’historicité*.

“civilization” was singular and general, a state and a process, “the means instrumental to happiness and pleasure, to the advancement of instruction and reason and finally to the improvement of mankind.” In keeping with Directorial political culture, “civilization” thus functioned in the *Letters* as a master-word, justifying every end and purpose.⁶⁹ (This contrasted his writings in the *Courrier universel* that avoided the word “civilization” and opposed the concept).⁷⁰ However, Quatremère’s history of the progress of “civilization” in the *Letters* also subtly subverted Directorial norms: against the discourse of Italian decline used to justify the seizures, he reworked the Eusebian teleology joining ancient and modern Rome in order to depict the Papacy as the custodian of “civilization” and the power that combined ancient genius with enlightened morals.

Quatremère’s history consisted of three narratives, which together culminated in “civilization.” In order of general causation, these were narratives of “science” (scholarship and knowledge), “art,” and “universal morality.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Quatremère, *Letters*, 94-5. Quatremère used the word “civilization” three times in the *Letters* (94, 96, 117) but its conceptual centrality to the work is best illustrated by his frequent use of cognate and related terms (such as “civilized Europe,” “perfection,” “lights,” “instruction,” “humanity,” “commerce,” and “universal brotherhood”) and opposite terms (such as “barbarians,” “barbary,” “night,” and “ignorance.”)

⁷⁰ In his wider oeuvre, Quatremère used the word sparingly and differently to how he used it in the *Letters*. For instance, in the *Letters*, he implied the ancients never achieved “civilization” despite their genius. But elsewhere he implied there were different types of “civilization” among the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and modern Europeans – Quatremère: *Encyclopédie méthodique: architecture*, vol. 1, 109, 425, 501, and vol. 2, 172, 174, 238; *Recueil de dissertations archéologiques*, 17.

⁷¹ Quatremère, *Letters*, 106, 108, 174-76. He implied in the *Letters* that science usually fertilized the arts, while the progress of the arts and sciences improved morality and politics. However, he suggested that this hierarchy of causality was not universal: in early modern Italy, for instance, politics shaped enlightened patronage for art; and antiquity showed wisdom and artistic genius did not always entail morality.

According to his first narrative, science suffered during the Middle Ages and only survived thanks to ancient remains and monastic institutions in Italy. However, from the sixteenth century onwards, knowledge advanced through excavations, restorations, and museums. Unperturbed by inter-state rivalries, scholars in the “general republic of the arts and sciences” pursued the truth. These scholars were initially over-reliant on textual authorities, but the Papacy’s miraculous rediscovery of antiquities during the eighteenth century enabled the triumph of observation-based science.⁷² For Quatremère, if Europe’s powers respected the status quo, then this new science would benefit everyone: hastened by the scholarly “division of labor,” a hitherto unknown “light” would “connect our knowledge with that of the past, revitalize...lost notions and bring ever new illumination to philosophy and the arts.” But, he warned, plundering Rome would undermine science and unleash “ignorance and barbarity” once again.⁷³

The second narrative concerned fine art and beauty. The Greeks perfected art, Quatremère insisted. But, during the Middle Ages, the widespread “lethargy of the mind and taste brought in its wake the neglect of all spirited and tasteful works.” Papal patronage alone ensured that taste survived, and helped Italy become Europe’s “seminary of the arts.” Raphael would have revolutionized the arts, Quatremère continued, but his legacy was ruined by Pope Leo X’s death and the sack of Rome, which dispersed his students and paintings.⁷⁴ Art’s decline was exacerbated, Quatremère lamented, by the subsequent

⁷² Quatremère, *Letters*, 94, 97, 101-2.

⁷³ Quatremère, *Letters*, 98-9, 101-3, 114, 117. Quatremère named Adam Smith as the source for this reference to the “division of labor.” His first library included Jean-Antoine Roucher’s 1790-1 translation of *An Inquiry into the causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Roederer, Quatremère’s ally in the quarrel, was Smith’s most important interpreter in France – Whatmore, “Adam Smith’s role in the French Revolution,” 67.

⁷⁴ Quatremère, *Letters*, 97, 110-13, 117, 119, 120.

culture of collecting, because unmediated access to Old Master paintings hindered aspiring artists. Despite this pessimistic prognosis, he nevertheless concluded that art's future depended on the choices of European powers: while the new science would foster "a taste for the beautiful, simple, and true," harming science and preventing students profiting from Rome would cause art to regress further.⁷⁵

The third narrative described how "universal morality" and instruction had finally replaced the right of conquest. According to Quatremère, the ancients' immorality meant that they never achieved "civilization." The ancient Romans, he warned, were especially unworthy of imitation since they enslaved the vanquished, exterminated liberty, and left Europe a legacy of retribution and violence that lasted until the recent "happy revolution" in international relations and the rights of man.⁷⁶ In this modern and enlightened age, Quatremère argued, plundering artwork had finally become unacceptable behavior. The spread of learning, he added, had already diminished differences in Europe to the extent that no nation could still call another "barbaric," and future learning promised to perfect humanity.⁷⁷ Yet, he warned, dismembering "the museum of Rome" would undo this progress and replace peace with perpetual war.⁷⁸

Quatremère's overall history partly copied several canonical writings by Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Condorcet. Following their example, his *Letters* attached moral values to periods, approached Europe as a community of nations, considered "commerce"

⁷⁵ Quatremère, *Letters*, 97-99, 105-7, 109-110, 113-15, 119.

⁷⁶ Quatremère, *Letters*, 94-97, 116-17.

⁷⁷ Quatremère, *Letters*, 112, 119, 104-5, 96, 116, 94-5. Quatremère's argument here copied Vattel, *Le droit des gens*, bk. 3, §168. His first and second libraries contained this work – *Bibliothèque de M. Quatremère de Quincy*, 137.

⁷⁸ Quatremère, *Letters*, 99, 102, 111-12, 118, 104.

the principal engine of progress, and described an enlightened age that started sometime between the treaties of Westphalia and Utrecht. As a pastiche of Condorcet's *Sketch*, in particular, the *Letters* bound all peoples, arts, and sciences into a shared trajectory of perfectibility.⁷⁹ Yet Quatremère also broke conspicuously with these philosophes: whereas they described the Papacy as a tyrannical obstacle to humankind, he treated Popes since Pope Nicolas V as agents of the revival of the arts and sciences. His idiosyncratic philosophical history thus adopted Condorcet's notion of "civilization" only to make the temporal contribution of Catholicism integral to it.

Civilization as a Cooperation Problem

For Quatremère, this history of Europe culminated in a present-day dilemma: according to the cooperation problem running through the *Letters*, each power could either cooperate to sustain "civilization" or defect in the false hope of gaining short-term advantages.⁸⁰ His first letter outlined the broad consequences of cooperating and defecting, and then the next five letters addressed their specific implications.

The second and third letters concerned the knowledge scholars gained from antiquities. Quatremère argued in his second letter that cooperating required rediscovering and restoring neglected antiquities throughout former Roman colonies, on the one hand,

⁷⁹ Condorcet, "The Sketch," esp. 142-43. Quatremère aped this idea in the *Letters* despite warning elsewhere that science stifled the arts.

⁸⁰ Quatremère did not use the terms cooperate and defect, but they draw attention to the game theoretic quality of the *Letters*. Quatremère's cooperation problem featured numerous players, but, unlike the prisoner's dilemma, no repeat games and no benefits for defectors.

and ensuring that tourist spending continued to finance excavation in Rome, on the other.⁸¹ Plundering Rome, he warned, would break this virtuous cycle: just as Italians would not make insecure investments, the power that expropriated antiquities would not fund excavations with revenue gained from foreigners visiting its museum.⁸² Quatremère's third letter argued that Rome was the ideal location for scholarship: Rome's antiquities, he argued, shed light on one-another, and its museums facilitated first-hand observations that helped scholars elsewhere form general theories. "Dismembering the museum of Rome," he concluded, would be a "crime against public instruction" because "to divide is to destroy."⁸³ Quatremère therefore shared the encyclopedism of contemporaries such as Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison and Grégoire. But, unlike them, he insisted that Rome, rather than Paris, should host the materials of knowledge.

Quatremère's next three letters addressed artistic practice. His fourth and much of his fifth letters considered how dispersing antiquities would affect the plastic arts. Artists and connoisseurs learned to understand beauty, he argued, through studying masterpieces alongside their "family" of inferior pieces. Living in Rome, he observed, enabled one to compare, classify, and judge artefacts under favorable light and within their natural landscape while imbibing a spiritual atmosphere conducive to beauty. But, he warned, defecting would destroy the understanding of beauty through undermining these opportunities.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Quatremère's first point here followed Smith, *An Inquiry into the causes of the Wealth of Nations*, bk 4: 1.11 – a "country that has no mines of its own must...draw its gold and silver from foreign countries."

⁸² Quatremère, *Letters*, 97-100. He thus repeated his argument from *Courrier universel*, June 28, 1796, but applied it to antiquities rather than patronage for new artworks.

⁸³ Quatremère, *Letters*, 100-104.

⁸⁴ Quatremère, *Letters*, 104-11.

The end of Quatremère's fifth letter and his sixth letter concerned Italy's Renaissance and Baroque schools of painting. Europe's powers would bring about an artistic golden age, he suggested, if they sustained science and contributed their Raphael paintings to Rome, where artists could study the master's oeuvre in one place. Above all, the powers must respect schools spread over the peninsula – these schools, he reasoned, formed unique natural and cultural environments in which students needed to immerse themselves and inspect both masterpieces and the imperfect and unfinished efforts that revealed Old Masters' techniques. If Quatremère agreed with Lebrun that students should “contemplate a beautiful sequence of paintings from the same school,” he tacitly criticized Lebrun's support for the seizures by insisting that respecting the status quo in Italy would serve students' education more effectively than galleries of seized art in Paris.⁸⁵

As the *Journal littéraire* recognized in its review of the *Letters*, Quatremère's work spelled out a choice for Europe's powers: they could either be “the true friend of the arts” or “a modern-day Verres,” taking after the example of the rapacious first-century BCE proconsul of Sicily condemned by Cicero.⁸⁶ Quatremère predicted that countries with “sane politics” who loved the arts would cooperate to perfect scholarship, preserve peace, increase commerce, and create an artistic golden age. But ignorant or selfish powers would plunder Rome, only to find the resulting disaster hurt their own interests. Their artists and savants would find Rome depleted; perpetual war would impoverish their former export markets; and, eventually, they would suffer the right of conquest that they had rekindled.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Lebrun, *Réflexions sur le Muséum national*; Quatremère, *Letters*, 111-15.

⁸⁶ *Journal littéraire*, Sept 1, 1796.

⁸⁷ Quatremère, *Letters*, 102-3, 94, 111-3, 109, 95, 118-20, 98. This followed Vattel, *Le droit de gens*, bk. 1, 186-7.

Several books in Quatremère's library informed how he construed this cooperation problem. From Montesquieu, for instance, he borrowed the idea that opposed parties must "co-operate for the general good" and "union of harmony."⁸⁸ He also applied Emmerich de Vattel's principle of reciprocity to Europe's shared heritage, showing that mutual assistance was the basis for international happiness while nations endangered humankind through pursuing selfish interests.⁸⁹ However, Condorcet's *Sketch* was Quatremère's clearest source: like Condorcet, he depicted humankind standing between a cataclysm and greatness, and reasoned that individuals and states, not fortune or divine will, shaped humanity's collective future.⁹⁰

A Veiled Polemic

Quatremère feigned impartial detachment throughout most of the *Letters* so that they appeared moderate and reasonable. To make his work outwardly satisfy the norms of Directorial political culture, he therefore cast aside the counter-revolutionary language of his *Courrier universel* writings. He instead concealed his politics with classical erudition, mimicked his enemies' lexicon, cited approved modern writers (such as Buffon, Winckelmann, and Smith), and, as we have seen, selectively imitated Condorcet, bête noire

⁸⁸ Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains*, ch. 9. Quatremère's first library included the 1748 Paris edition of this work besides the 1769 London edition of Montesquieu's complete writings.

⁸⁹ Vattel, *Le droit des gens*, bk 2, 223.

⁹⁰ Quatremère, *Letters*, 7, 95; Condorcet, "The Sketch," 94-5, 98-99.

of royalist intellectuals.⁹¹ He even played to anti-clerical readers, mocking relics and praising the Holbachian materialist Charles-François Dupuis.⁹² Just as disingenuously, he also condemned slavery, which, the following year, he and other Clichyans in the Council of Five Hundred tried to reimpose in the colonies.⁹³

Despite this strategy of partial dissimulation, Quatremère clearly attacked the Directory's attempt to fashion the Republic as a civilizing force. In large part, he attacked the regime implicitly through eulogizing the Pope at precisely the moment when republicans blamed the Papacy for destabilizing Europe, spreading superstition, impoverishing Italy, failing to protect Europe's heritage, and the Revolution's misfortunes. The Papacy, *not* the French Republic, he insisted, should be entrusted with protecting "civilization". Outrageously given the circumstances, Quatremère even suggested that France should resume paying annates to support the current Pope's "learned conquests" and enrich the capital of the true "republic".⁹⁴ After all, the Papacy, he argued, had ensured "the unbroken cultivation of the arts," created "sumptuous museums," generously hosted scholars and artists from all nations, and acted as the spiritual *civitas maxima* whose

⁹¹ Maistre, *Considerations on France*, 29; Bonald, *Observations sur un ouvrage postume de M. Condorcet*, in *Œuvres de M. Bonald*, vol. 14, 468.

⁹² Quatremère, *Letters*, 112, 103, called Dupuis a man of "vaster intellect" and "profound theories." At this moment, Dupuis had outraged non-constitutional Catholics with his *Origine de tous les cultes, ou la religion universelle* (1795). *Annales Catholiques*, vol. 1 (1796), 482-3, claimed "blind hatred of the [Christian religion]" drove Dupuis to write the century's most audacious rallying cry to incredulity.

⁹³ Quatremère, *Letters*, 96; Quatremère, *Rapport fait...au nom d'une commission spéciale sur la responsabilité des ministres et celle des agents du Directoire dans les colonies*. (New York, 2003), pp. 183-6. On the context of slavery policy, see Gainot, "The Constitutionalization of General Freedom under the Directory."

⁹⁴ Quatremère, *Letters*, 108, 97-8, 101-2, 97-8, 101-2, 119.

neutrality placed Rome outside the right of conquest. For all that was opportunistic in the *Letters*, Quatremère repeated throughout his life his belief in the inviolability of Papal property and Catholicism's power to inspire and art and learning.⁹⁵

Alongside this general defense of the Papacy, his *Letters* also defended the Papacy's specific right to retain antiquities. Given widespread disbelief in teleologies that cast the Papacy as the successor of pagan Emperors, Quatremère prudently identified other continuities in Roman history and devised other justifications for respecting Papal ownership. Since "nature" had placed these antiquities in the "museum of Rome," he proposed, only here could students draw objects surrounded by unmovable monuments and geographical, social, and spiritual conditions that had taken root over centuries.⁹⁶ In sum, even if antiquities originated from ancient Greece and elsewhere, they had *become* part of Rome by dint of their extended stay and usefulness in the city. For Quatremère, then, it was futile to create a universal museum elsewhere at the expense of this "*mappa mundi* in relief."⁹⁷ Contrary to a common misconception among modern scholars, Quatremère did not argue that these antiquities belonged to their so-called original context. Indeed, antiquities in Rome were invaluable, in his eyes, because their re-contextualization in the city transformed them from idols of pagan worship into objects of beauty and knowledge.

For Quatremère, then, both the Papacy's past and present record, on the one hand, and the utility and beauty of antiquities in Rome, on the other, justified why antiquities

⁹⁵ See, for example, Quatremère, "Rome," *Encyclopédie méthodique: architecture*, vol. 3, 300, and *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture*, 217. Curiously, however, Quatremère's praise for the Papacy adapted what he had previously written about Prince Biscari, Royal Intendant of Antiquities in Catania – Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique: architecture*, vol. 1, 556-57.

⁹⁶ Quatremère, *Letters*, 101, 105-7.

⁹⁷ Quatremère, *Letters*, 108.

should remain in the city. But, beyond these reasons, he also insisted that the Papacy had a twofold legal claim to this property. He drew the first claim from the idea of *jus commune*: Rome, he asserted, safeguarded what served public instruction and therefore belonged to the community.⁹⁸ He borrowed the second claim from political economists. To disarm republicans who favored expropriating the expropriator, he argued that Rome's antiquities were a mined resource that required labor and investment to wrest them from the earth. Implicitly, this meant that *modern* Rome's claim was legitimate, even if ancient Rome had possessed Greek sculptures through the right of the strongest or *faustrecht*, which, according to the 1790 Committee on Feudal Rights, was an illegitimate means of acquiring property.⁹⁹

Quatremère attacked the Directory implicitly through this outspoken praise of the Papacy, but he also used the *Letters* to attack the regime for imperiling the "civilization" that it claimed to advance and for exporting a revolution that had overturned "every cause of social harmony."¹⁰⁰ In the first six letters, he tacitly contrasted the advance of art, science, and morality during the Old Regime to the harm caused under the Republic. For instance, he implied that the Crown had nourished geniuses (such as Buffon) whereas the Republic murdered savants (such as Bailly and Rabault de Saint-Étienne). In the same vein, he reminded readers how the Crown had restored Gallo-Roman monuments that the Republic then abandoned. Finally, to provide a tacit warning against the Republic hoarding

⁹⁸ Quatremère, *Letters*, 94-5, 98, 112, 119. Quatremère wavered on the extent of this community: he claimed that the "common inheritance" of "the arts and sciences belong to all of Europe," but later called antiquities "the most national...of...properties."

⁹⁹ Quatremère, *Letters*, 98, 112. On the Feudal Committee and wider context of debate over property, see Blaufarb, *The Great Demarcation*, esp. 48-81.

¹⁰⁰ Quatremère, *Letters*, 103.

displaced artefacts, the *Letters* juxtaposed the example of the useful Museum of Natural History (founded under Louis XIII) and harmful and arbitrary forms of Baroque collecting.¹⁰¹

His seventh letter dispelled any lingering ambiguity, naming and attacking the French Republic explicitly for the first time in the text.¹⁰² Treating masterpieces in monetary terms, he mused in this final letter, was an abomination of his times that raised a pertinent if perverse question: What “would [they] fetch if...put up for sale” by France, and “used as securities, so that bank notes can be issued on the surety of antique statues?” Edmund Burke had judged selling Church land to secure bank notes an “outrage upon credit, property, and liberty.” Following Burke’s example, Quatremère now warned that Papal cultural property might serve an equally futile end. For both thinkers, property rights belonged not only to individuals but also to corporate bodies and institutions such as the Church. Stripping those rights was tyrannical and harmful.¹⁰³

The Reception of the *Letters*

The immediate reception of the *Letters* demonstrates that Quatremère’s contemporaries generally understood his polemic. Unsurprisingly, conservative Parisian newspapers praised his “politically and morally just” work, and identified its underlying argument that

¹⁰¹ Quatremère, *Letters*, 100-101, 114-15, 118-20. Quatremère’s distinction between useful collections and vain collections was already well established – Poulot, *Musée, Nation, Patrimoine*, 83, 280.

¹⁰² Quatremère, *Letters*, 116, 118, 120.

¹⁰³ Quatremère, *Letters*, 117; Pocock, “The political economy of Burke’s analysis of the French Revolution.”

Papal Rome was the cultural fortress that protected masterpieces against the “barbarism” spread by the Ideologues.¹⁰⁴ In the same vein, the *Annales catholiques* repeated Quatremère’s defense of Pius VI (that “protector of the arts, benefactor of humanity..., respected by...Europe”) and his regret that “one abducts...the resources of [the Pope] and the wealth of his people.”¹⁰⁵ Francophone royalists abroad understood the *Letters* equally well. For example, Jacques Mallet du Pan betrayed his incisive reading when he lamented that Italy, after drawing Europe from “barbarism,” had fallen “prey to a troop of philosophy-banditti and sacrilegious spoilers” who violated Rome’s “national property,” “fruit of the genius, sacrifices, and labors of a country.” Similarly, Louis XVI’s former Navy Minister recognized how Quatremère punctured the Directory’s claim to be “the restorer of the arts and sciences” and showed the tragic consequences of its spoliation of sacred property, originally commissioned and excavated through the “constant zeal of...the Popes”.¹⁰⁶

Royalists thus universally understood and admired Quatremère’s polemic. Readers who favored preserving the Republic had a more complex response to the *Letters*, but, eventually, they also grasped what Quatremère was doing. The initial reaction of the Executive Directors, their spokesmen and official newspapers, and influential readers who were critical of the regime but loyal to the Republic, was to ignore Quatremère’s text.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Nouvelles politiques*, Aug 12, 1796; *Feuille de jour*, July 31, 1796; *Journal littéraire*, Sept 1, 1796.

¹⁰⁵ *Annales catholiques*, vol. 3, no. 26, 1797, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Mallet du Pan, *The British Mercury*, Jan 15, 1799, 89; Bertrand de Moleville, *Histoire de la Révolution de France*, vol. 4, 254-58.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Millin remained conspicuously silent. Millin opposed expansionist wars and agreed with many of Quatremère’s assumptions, but he favored measured seizures – see Martin, “Les enjeux

However, in mid-August, the regime was compelled to react because artists and savants signed his petition to the Directors. Although the petition's demand was an anodyne request for a commission of experts to reconsider seizing cultural property, its publication in the *Journal de Paris* and the petitioners' fame, status, and diverse politics threatened to legitimize Quatremère's earlier interventions and broaden opposition to the victories in Italy that provided the state with a lifeline.¹⁰⁸

The presiding Executive Director, Louis Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux, and his allies therefore turned on Quatremère by trying to discredit the *Letters* without naming them or their author. One approach was to dismiss the idea that most petitioners had ever supported Quatremère and to imply that the likes of Jacques-Louis David had simply misunderstood the *Letters*.¹⁰⁹ Another approach was to publicize the reactionary implications of Quatremère's interventions. For instance, Charles-Joseph Trouvé, the General Secretary of the Directory, warned that heeding the petition's demand would benefit the counter-revolution: if the Directors caved in and returned confiscated art, Trouvé mused that they would next send Italy what "we already possess" – an obvious reference to Quatremère's plea to return Raphael's paintings. But critics would still, Trouvé lamented, demand the return of "weapons, money and towns...and that, most importantly,

diplomatiques dans le Magasin encyclopédique." Strikingly, Millin refrained from mentioning the *Letters* in the *Magasin encyclopédique*, even though his journal reported on the experts sent to Italy to gather cultural property. The journal later supported seizures to stimulate education and publicize treasures previously "buried" in religious sanctuaries or Princely cabinets – *Magasin encyclopédique*, vol. 1, 407, and vol. 9, 539.

¹⁰⁸ Archives Nationales, F17 1279, dossier 1; *Journal de Paris*, Aug 17, 1796. Some signatories issued clarifications after they belatedly grasped the petition's political implications. Gilks, "Art and politics," 58-77, examines the petition's meaning and context and the artists' motives.

¹⁰⁹ Barras, *Mémoires de Barras*, 396-97; *Décade philosophique*, Sept 16, 1796.

the Republican government be destroyed.”¹¹⁰ The third approach was a counter-petition, most probably also penned by Trouvé.¹¹¹ Drawing from earlier critiques of Papal Rome, the petition argued that the city’s masterpieces were a poverty trap for ordinary Romans because they discouraged manufacturing and investment in agriculture. Seizing this “servile and precarious resource” was therefore a duty because sustaining the status quo “would entrench the worthlessness and pride of that indolent and superstitious city and ensure that it is forever dependent on a corrupt and corrupting government.”¹¹²

This state-backed criticism paved the way for others to attack Quatremère’s text more explicitly as “seventy-four pages of nonsense,” “pretexts, assumptions and sophistry” that betrayed the author’s “tender interest for the enemies of France.”¹¹³ Despite Quatremère’s efforts to make the *Letters* appear part of the “center,” the regime and its supporters identified his ploy and took action to make it appear extreme.

Quatremère’s francophone contemporaries from right across the political spectrum were thus able to discern his polemic against the Directory and in favor of the Papacy. Why, then, are the *Letters* now so misunderstood?

Part of the explanation lies in how foreign readers during the late 1790s and early 1800s ignored Quatremère’s politics and interpreted the *Letters* through the prism of their own local concerns. In Germany, for instance, the text was read as a philosophical

¹¹⁰ Trouvé, *Moniteur universel*, Aug 22 and Aug 25, 1796.

¹¹¹ *Moniteur universel*, Oct 3, 1796, translated in Quatremère, *Letters*, 171-73.

¹¹² *Moniteur universel*, Oct 3, 1796, translated in Quatremère, *Letters*, 171-73. On the source of this argument, see Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, 239.

¹¹³ Quatremère Disjonval, *Lettre du citoyen Quatremère-Disjonval*, 45-9; Monge cited in Dhombres, “Gaspard Monge, membre de l’institut et commissaire des sciences et des arts en Italie,” 122-23; Pommereul, *Campagne du général Buonaparte*, 367.

reflection on displacing artwork from its organic habitat.¹¹⁴ Readers in Italy, by contrast, considered the text an exhortation for stronger export restrictions, and a reformulation of the venerable Roman Catholic vision of classical culture.¹¹⁵ Such idiosyncratic responses conditioned modern scholars' rediscovery of the *Letters*.

However, the greater part of the explanation for why the *Letters* are now so misunderstood lies with Quatremère. During the Consulate and Empire, Quatremère wanted the *Letters* forgotten because his lip-service to perfecting humankind and his implicit criticism of General Bonaparte belonged to a bygone moment.¹¹⁶ In 1815, he finally allowed them to be republished in a second edition. But, at that moment, the work's new function as a manifesto for returning artefacts from Paris to Rome obscured his original motives.¹¹⁷ The third edition of 1836 caused even greater obfuscation. Changes and corrections erased traces of his original circumstances, and the octogenarian

¹¹⁴ The German translator excluded the explicitly polemical seventh letter, thereby reinforcing the tendency to ignore the *Letters*' circumstances: "Ueber den nachtheiligen Einfluss der Versetzung der Monumente aus Italien auf Kunste und Wissenschaften," *Minerva*, Oct 1796, 87-120, and Nov 1796, 271-307. The *Letters* were reviewed in *Allgemeiner litterarischer Anzeiger oder Annalen der gesammten Litteratur*, Dec 1796, no. 5, 577.

¹¹⁵ Fea, *Discorso intorno alle belle arti*, xv; *Chirografo della Santità di Nostro signore Papa Pio VII. in data del primo ottobre 1802, sulle antichità, e belle arti in Roma*, 6-14; Fea, *Relazione di un viaggio ad Ostia*, 80; Quatremère, *Canova*, 196. On the context of this reception, see: Boyer, *Autour de Canova et de Napoleon*, 229; Steindl, "Leopoldo Cicognaras *Storia della Scultura*," 326; Griener, "Fea and the defence of the museum of Rome," 102-5, 109. Griener shows Fea printed unauthorized facsimiles of the *Letters* after 1803.

¹¹⁶ Jacobi, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Friedrich Jacobi*, 230. Quatremère's friend Jacobi wrote to Goethe in 1802 explaining how the *Letters* "are completely out of print, and, as is self-evident, must not be reissued."

¹¹⁷ Antoine Quatremère, *Lettres sur le projet d'enlever les monumens de l'Italie* (Rome, 1815); *L'ami de la religion*, Nov 1815, no. 105.

Quatremère – or his publisher – embellished the foreword with falsities. The most important untruth concerned the name and origins of his work: although earlier editions neglected to mention Miranda (who, as we have seen, only played an indirect role in the *Letters*' genesis), this foreword claimed that the deceased General had proposed the original “epistolary commerce.”¹¹⁸ In the context of the July monarchy, making this hero of Latin American independence integral to the text surely helped make it appear less retrograde. The *Letters on the plan to abduct the monuments of Italy* henceforth became the “Letters to Miranda.”

Conclusion

This article has shown how a particular concept of “civilization” helped republican elites distinguish the post-Thermidorian republic from “the Terror” and rationalize military conquests and confiscations of cultural property. Quatremère’s decision to mobilize this concept was therefore far from incidental: doing so enabled him to write a text that appeared, at first glance, reasonable and moderate compared to his other writings. Yet, as the article has demonstrated, the *Letters* turned the concept against the Directory, arguing that seizing Italy’s cultural heritage would damage the very same “civilization” the regime claimed as its own. Through illustrating how this concept provided an opportunity to denounce individuals, the article’s findings substantiate Jean Starobinski’s insight that this word with “sacred authority” was a focal point for political conflict.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Antoine Quatremère, *Lettres sur l'enlèvement des ouvrages*, v, xii-xvi – translated in *Letters*, 175-76.

¹¹⁹ Starobinski, “The Word Civilization,” 17.

Studying Quatremère's use of the concept also complements our understanding of Directorial political culture. The article has revealed an overlooked example of how realignments and unusual alliances characterized this politically fluid moment, and how one of the regime's detractors could briefly occupy the stage. Since the *Letters* were simultaneously conservative and republican, the article reiterates that such terms must be understood relative to their context rather than as fixed analytical concepts. Yet this political fluidity, and the relative and provisional press liberty that made possible the quarrel over plundering Italy, should not imply that the Directory was a successful experiment in democratic political culture. On the contrary, the use of artistic and cultural matters as subtle fronts for criticizing the regime without transgressing the boundaries of acceptability instead confirms that the politics of the "extreme center" stymied pluralism and the emergence of genuine legitimate opposition and instead encouraged "transformism."¹²⁰

The article has also shed light on Quatremère's political biography and documented one instance when how he "served the counter-revolution with distinction."¹²¹ More surprisingly, the article has illustrated how, despite his reputation for probity, Quatremère was a skilled publicist who mastered the language of his opponents. If Quatremère was never the turncoat depicted by his Restoration critics, he nevertheless displayed the hallmarks of the "weathervanes" of his generation. Like many of them, in 1796 he devised his position in the private sphere and then made that position appear moderate in the public domain.¹²²

¹²⁰ Serna, *La république des girouettes*, 416.

¹²¹ Barras, *Mémoires de Barras*, vol. 2, 179.

¹²² Serna, *La république des girouettes*.

Finally, the article has also reinterpreted Quatremère's *Letters*, showing that he wrote this pseudo-epistolary tract hastily when the Papacy faced an existential threat. The article established how Quatremère rebutted justifications for seizures: he celebrated Rome's antiquities and cosmopolitanism; he credited successive Popes with the revival of the arts and sciences; he sketched a philosophical history of Europe and a co-operation problem with "civilization" at stake; and he argued for respecting the mutually favorable status quo for art, scholarship, and international affairs.

Yet, as the article emphasized, Quatremère's action cannot be grasped from the *Letters* alone. It is only through situating his work in the context of his biography and other writings, on the one hand, and the quarrel over seizures and their ideological roots, on the other, that we can identify the subtle polemic that went to the heart of how the Directorial regime fashioned itself. This polemic was partly made through his outspoken eulogies of Christianity and Pope Pius VI, since praising these springs of the arts and sciences inevitably pointed to the Directory's hostility toward revealed religion, refusal to pay the constitutional clergy, and desire to abolish the Papacy. But Quatremère delivered this polemic most cogently through warning that the Republic threatened to replace the federation of European nations, that enabled knowledge to circulate irrespective of state frontiers, with a retrograde universal empire, which would result in "barbarism." In this last respect, the *Letters* were an appeal to republicans such as Roederer, Miranda, and David, and others who favored liberty of press and the anti-annexationist faction seeking a return to France's ancient frontiers. One might even extrapolate that the *Letters* were an attempt to pressure "false friends" by casting doubt on the sincerity of their support for the "republic of the arts and sciences." Quatremère was thus among those conservative

agitators who exploited the provisional freedom of the press to pen a work intended to spread mistrust and skepticism, widen division, and fragment public opinion.

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