ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY CONSPIRACY THEORY IN THE AGE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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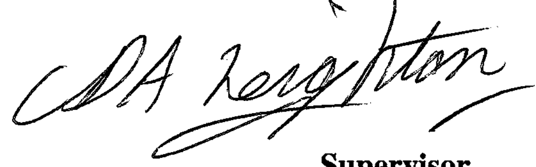

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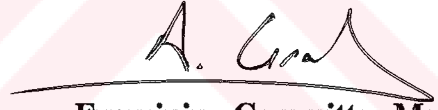

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ABSTRACT

The thesis deals with those conspiracy theories about the origins of the French Revolution, which were influential in Britain in the period of the French Revolutionary Wars at the end of the eighteenth century. It focuses on the most important writers of such material: Edmund Burke, the British parliamentarian; Augustin Barruel, a French Jesuit writer; and John Robison, a professor of natural science at the University of Edinburgh. The thesis provides a context, chiefly historical, for the reading of their works and seeks to offer reasons for their effectiveness in influencing public opinion in the period. For these purposes, as well as the works themselves, attention is given to conspiracy theory in general, parts of the history of Freemasonry and contemporary thought which gave support to conspiratorial explanations of the Revolution.

Keywords: French Revolution, Conspiracy Theory, Freemasonry, Illuminati, Edmund Burke, Abbé Barruel, Professor Robison.

ÖZET

Bu tezde Fransız İhtilali'nin kaynağı olarak görülen ve İngiltere'de onsekizinci yüzyılın sonlarında Fransız Devrimci Savaşları döneminde etkili olan komplo teorileri incelenmektedir. Tezde bu çerçevede etkili olan en önemli yazarlar üzerinde durulmaktadır: İngiliz Parlamenter Edmund Burke, Fransız cizvit yazar Augustin Barruel ve Edinburgh Üniversitesi'nde doğa bilimi Profesörü olan John Robison. Bu tez esas olarak tarihsel bir çerçevede bu yazarların eserlerinin bir analizini ve aynı yazarların onsekizinci yüzyılda kamuoyunun fikrine tesir etmede etkili olmalarının nedenlerini sunmaktadır. Bu amaçla ve mevcut eserlerin doğrultusunda İhtilal'in komplolarla açıklaması düşüncesini savunmak amacıyla tezde genel olarak komplo teorilerine Masonluk tarihinin bir parçası olarak önemli bir yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fransiz Ihtilali, Komplo Teorileri, Masonluk, Illuminati, Edmund Burke, Abbe Barruel, Professor Robison.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis deal with a topic in the British history of the wars against France — the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars — of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Britain the French Revolution, at first, created or at least revealed a substantial ideological divide. A lot of attention has been directed by historians to those who gave a positive response to the events in France, even as Britain moved on towards war with the Revolutionary regime. Among this literature one thinks first of Edward Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*. Much less attention has been devoted to those on the other side. Edmund Burke, of course, has always attracted interest from both historians and political thinkers. However, Burke has to be set in the context of the times, if he is to be well understood. Anyway, though Burke was a historical figure of much importance, a historian will probably be interested in the Counter-Revolutionary movement and its thought as a whole. That movement made the war possible by mobilizing popular opinion and helped sustain it. Its thought was important in producing propaganda or, to put it more neutrally, patriotic wartime writings. Though, as Linda Colley reminds us in *Britons*, people had a great variety of reasons for supporting the war effort, anti-Revolutionary writings played their part. This anti-Revolutionary thought, it should be added, remained influential in the politically conservative or reactionary period after 1815.

This thesis looks at one strand in this thought — anti-Revolutionary conspiracy theory. This is found, famously, in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. This study discusses Burke's work, in the earlier part of chapter three. However, it also examines writings that were probably better suited to have an effect on the popular mind, those of the French Jesuit, Augustin Barruel, and the Scottish professor of natural science, John Robison. This shows something of the atmosphere in which Burke's views were received; but they are historically important in their own right too. They are discussed at length in chapter four. The reason why this thesis covers mostly Barruel and Robison is that almost all who have adverted to the conspiracy theories of the French Revolutionary era have made reference to its origins in conspiracy theory explanations of these two intellectuals mentioning their works. A conspiracy as a result of the Illuminati and *philosophes* became one of the dominant contexts of the period and spread widely by the works of Barruel and Robison.

Throughout all the thesis the normality and acceptability of conspiracy theorizing is discussed through the works of Burke, Barruel and Robison. It is not wrong to say that the way to look at the political thought of a certain age should be studied by taking the features of that age into consideration. The purpose of this study is not to judge whether these works were accurate in what they said about then recent historical events. This thesis looks at the conspiracy theory of 1790s, which form the modern attitude of looking at world's politics through a conspiratorial eye to see new perspectives, which can be changed and expanded with exploration of new documents.

In general, it can be said that they are useful primary sources, but they have to be used very critically and with a lot of care. Nor is it the purpose of the

study to examine how effective they actually were as propaganda. However, it does try to explain some factors, which made them effective. Firstly, this involves pointing to the perennial appeal of conspiracy theory. This is attempted in chapter one. It also involves explaining something about Freemasons and the related Illuminati — those accused of the conspiracy — in the period. This is done in chapter two. An effort is made throughout the thesis, not just to describe the anti-Revolutionary conspiracy theories, but also to give them a context in which they can be read and understood as something not merely bizarre.

CHAPTER I

ABOUT CONSPIRACY THEORIES

"The way to Hell is paved with good intentions"

-Old English Proverb-

In this chapter, I shall speak of the notion of conspiracy theory and of the concern of past and present historians with it, with particular reference to the 1790s, as offering, in its thought about the French Revolution, very clear examples of it. Before writing about the history of 1790s, it is wise to know about some crucial topics: conspiracy theory in general, Freemasonry, the Illuminati and, at the most general level, the state of mind of the people of that age.

Conspiracy theory is the belief that historical or current events are the result of manipulations by one or more secretive powers or conspiracies. A conspiracy theory offers explanation of some particular event, such as an assasination or a revolution. Because conspiracy theories rely on allegations of covert action, they are frequently difficult to support with evidence. For this reason, the expression *conspiracy theory* is often used pejoratively to refer to allegations that the speaker considers unproven, unlikely, or false. Conspiracy theories are often considered as unproven theories that are generally accepted as false, impossible to prove true or to falsify and paranoid or baseless. Meanwhile historians generally use the term 'conspiracy' to refer to conspiracies that are considered to be real, proven or

"at least seriously plausible and with some element of support." The subjects exercised in conspiracy theories are very varied. A few may be listed: assassinations; secret societies and fraternities (which are the chief concern of this thesis); intelligence agencies such as the CIA, the KGB and Mossad; diseases and epidemics (it is claimed that HIV was created by a conspiratorial group or by a secret agency as a tool of genocide and population control); manifestations of anti-Semitism; religious prophecies, particularly relating to Christian apocalyptic; and space machines and UFOs.

The subject matter of this chapter is the conspiracy theories related to secret societies, Freemasonry and the Illuminati, as engineers of the French Revolution. Secret societies and fraternal organizations have always aroused curiosity, worry and opposition from those outside those societies. A secret society is a club or an organization, the members of which do not disclose their membership and promise to hold the society secret. However, the term is also used in conspiracy theory to refer to fraternal organizations, such as the Freemasons and Illuminati, who do not or did not necessarily conceal membership, but are or were thought to hold secret beliefs and have political agendas.[1] Conspiracy theory about Freemasonry and the Illuminati goes back to the late eighteenth century. The Masons were accused of plotting the American and French Revolutions, the downfall of religion and of "dominating republican politics."[2] The accusations were not without some foundation. Georges Lefebvre notes that the Freemasons had a role in organizing the

[1] Nesta H. Webster, *World Revolution* (London: Constable, 1921), 14.

[2] Ibid., 16.

Revolution in France, but that it is unclear how important their role was.[3] Apart from Freemasonry's effect on the Revolution in France, the Bavarian Illuminati — a German secret society related to Masonry — also figures in conspiracy theories of that time.

The present story of conspiracy theorizing starts in the 1790s. Some historians conceive 1790s as a period that the Revolution was "the child of the conspiracy of a few."[4] This conspiracy thesis has been taken up by many writers since that time. A modern historian of the French Revolution, George Rudé, in his work called *The French Revolution* states that conspiracy thesis was taken up by Abbé Barruel in mid 1790s, by Hippolyte Taine in 1840s and with different points of emphasis by Augustin Cochin in the 1910s and by J. L. Talmon in the early 1950s.[5] The French Revolution had an impact, which is hard to conceive today. Suddenly, all over Europe, the whole fabric of society seemed threatened and existing ideas seemed inadequate to explain what had happened. In England the results included official repression and a sudden growth of interest in biblical apocalyptic. Another result was the appearance in 1797 of books entitled *Memoires pour Servir a l'Histoire du Jacobinisme* by Abbé Barruel, a French priest, and *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all Religions and Governments*, by John Robison, a Scottish mathematician. Both these books offered a simple explanation for the French Revolution: the French monarchy fell as a result of a conspiracy hatched by the

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[3] Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (New York: New York University Press, 1973), 45.

[4] Georges Rudé, *The French Revolution* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 10-12.

[5] Ibid., 12.

Freemasons and similar secret societies. Both Barruel and Robison focused on one particular name — that of the Illuminati. Robert Goldberg summarizes the basic motives of the books by Barruel and Robison:

> Writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, these monarchists had created a counter-history in defense of the aristocracy. Winning the hearts and minds of present and future readers would assuage some of the pain of recent defeat and mobilize defenses. The Revolution, they argued, was not rooted in poverty and despotism. Rather than a rising of the masses, it was the work of Adam Weishaupt's Illuminati, a secret society that plotted to destroy all civil and religious authority and abolish marriage, the family, and private property. It was the Illuminati who schemed to turn contented peasants from Religion to Atheism, from decency to dissoluteness, from loyalty to rebellion.[6]

This group was a secret society founded in Bavaria in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, a university professor. Its aim was to spread the eighteenth-century Enlightenment doctrines of human equality and rationality, and it attracted a fairly wide following, until the Bavarian authorities suppressed it in 1785. However, according to Barruel and Robison, the Illuminati had not ceased to exist in 1785, but had merely gone underground. The leaders of the French Revolution were Freemasons and Illuminati, or their agents and dupes, carrying out a secret plot to overthrow Europe's monarchies and the Christian religion.

What was the truth behind these ideas? Modern Freemasonry had originated in England in the early 18th century, and from there had spread to

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[6] Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67.

mainland Europe. In both England and France its oaths and regulations enjoined loyalty to church and state, and its membership included members of the royal families of Britain and France, as well as Protestant and Catholic clergy. It is interesting to note that early English and French Masonry seems to have been influenced by the Jacobites, supporters of the exiled Catholic Stuart claimants to the British throne. It is possible to find evidence of political activity by eighteenth-century lodges, but this was localized and is certainly not evidence of a radical conspiracy.

The French Revolution was born in an atmosphere of conspiratorial fears. There were plots by the ministers, by the queen, by the aristocracy, by the clergy: Everywhere there were secret managers behind the scenes "pulling the strings of the great events of the Revolution." The entire Revolution was seen by some as the "planned consequence of a huge Masonic conspiracy." The paranoid style was a mode of expression common to the age.[7] Everywhere people sensed designs within designs, cabals within cabals: "there were court conspiracies, backstairs conspiracies, ministerial conspiracies, fictional conspiracies, aristocratic conspiracies and by the last half of the eighteenth century even conspiracies of gigantic secret societies that cut across national boundaries and spanned the Atlantic."[8] Pretense and hypocrisy were everywhere and nothing seemed as it really was. For the one thing about conspiratorial interpretations of events that is impressive is their "ubiquitousness." They can be found everywhere in the thought of people on both sides of the

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[7] Gordon Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 39, No. 2. (July, 1982), 401-441.

[8] Lefebvre, *Great Fear*, 64.

Atlantic.[9] The late eighteenth century was an age of plot and deceit, of contradiction and paradox. At that time it was quite possible for all manner of people — not just British opposition groups, but reasonable people, indeed the most enlightened minds of the day — to believe in malevolent conspiracies.[10] The era of the French Revolution was a period of political paranoia in which "visions of conspiracy" were dominant.[11] Some have suggested that fear of conspiracy characterizes periods when traditional, social and moral values are undergoing change. This suggestion is obviously true and valid when it is applied to the era of the French Revolution.

When we come to our present century, we may note some scholars who have written about Freemasonry and conspiracy theory: Bernard Bailyn, Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Pipes, among many others. One of their contributions to historical study was the development of conspiracy theory as a subject for professional historical study. Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and *Origins of American Politics* suggested that the seemingly paranoid ranting of various revolutionary and anti-revolutionary writers be taken seriously, on their own terms, as though they actually meant what they said.

We may comment on the state of mind of those inclined to a conspiratorial way of thinking. We are familiar enough with it: in our own day conspiracy theory has even become a form of mass entertainment, used in countless popular books, films, and television shows. At this point the method that Hofstadter

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[9] Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," 420.

[10] Ibid., 421.

[11] Lance Banning, "Republican Ideology and the Triumph of the Constitution, 1789 to 1793", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 31 (1974), 171.

uses in explaining the minds of these people perhaps becomes useful. The use of psychological history becomes a tool for some scholars. Historical writing has been always concerned with psychological matters such as the inner motives, the emotions and the sensibilities of past individuals and societies. Hofstadter describes the "paranoid style" as a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself.[12] Hofstadter is thus relevant to the study of French Revolution and its conspiracy theories. No one can deny the prevalence of conspiratorial fears in the era of the Revolution. Indeed historians take such fears for granted and have become preoccupied with explaining why they existed.[13] J. M. Roberts points out that the scale and the complexity of the Revolution required conspiratorial interpretations of an unprecedented sort and the emergence of the organized secret societies, the Illuminati and Freemasonry, encouraged this.[14] These secret societies became the secret place for the desires and ambitions of individuals. Roberts then suggests these secret societies were based on the self-interest of their members; but they had public consequences.[15]

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[12] Richard Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics", *Harper's Magazine*, (November, 1964): 77-86. In this famous essay, Hofstadter traced the American tradition of conspiracy theorizing all the way back to the founding of the country. He found the paranoid style in the anti-Masonic movements of the 18th and 19th centuries; within the nativist, anti-Catholic, and anti-Mormon movements of the nineteenth century; in the last century's populist fears of an "international banking conspiracy"; and in the anti-communist paranoia that fueled the Cold War.

[13] Ibid., 80.

[14] J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, 2nd ed. (London: Paladin, 1972), 160-167.

[15] Ibid., 67.

Daniel Pipes takes another path in examining conspiracy theories and the paranoid style in relation to Freemasons and the French Revolution. Daniel Pipes divides conspiracy theories into two categories, "petty" and "world." The former have always been with us: he takes the assassination plots as an example. However, "world conspiracies" are a recent invention, "emerging from the distinctive history of Europe and dating back two and a half centuries, to the Enlightenment."[16] Pipes recognizes two main forms of world conspiracism: anti-Semitism and the fear of secret societies. With the Enlightenment, these developed into two full-fledged and overlapping demon theories. He suggests that with the Enlightenment anti-Semitism, Freemasonry and fear of secret societies developed the paranoid style of thinking. He observes the sudden increase in conspiracism that arrived with the Enlightenment, noting in particular the importance of the French Revolution in this change. Men such as the Abbe Barruel and John Robison blamed Masonic societies for the revolution — arguing not, as a reasonable historian might, that they sometimes served as covers for revolutionary organizing, but that they actually plotted the Revolution, as part of a grand scheme to impose atheism and anarchy upon the world.[17]

The link between Freemasonry and conspiracy was built long ago in the eighteenth century by many scholars like John Robison, Abbé Barruel, Edmund Burke, and Leopold Alois Hoffmann, to take an example from mainland Europe.[18] Belonging to what came to be known as the Counter Enlightenment, Hoffmann's

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[16] Ibid., 22.

[17] Ibid., 13.

[18] Ingrid Fuggs, "Leopold Alois Hoffman" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1963), 20-63.

"grand scenario" accused the *philosophes* of providing the "intellectual ammunition" for the war against the old regime, and the Illuminati Order as the guiding force behind the conspiracy, as well as "the organizational cement holding everything in place." It is, perhaps, not surprising to find a Scot, such as Robison, adopting a similar view. At that time, especially among Scottish social scientists, such as Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and John Millar, there was a tendency to explain events in terms of "conscious action by individuals." Equally, the Scottish moral philosophers had realized more clearly than the most eighteenth century thinkers that men pursuing their own particular aims were led by an "invisible hand" into promoting an end that was no part of their intentions.[19] However, the French Revolution, more than any other single event, changed the consciousness of Europe. For the most sensitive intellectuals, especially Scottish moralists, the Revolution became the cataclysm that shattered once and for all the traditional moral affinity between cause and effect, motives, morals and behavior.[20] It is clear that in the era of the French Revolution, the themes of appearance versus reality and disguise versus sincerity were on men's minds whether these contradictions were true or not. P. K. Elkin describes the age, as one which believed that "the world we see is not the world that really exists."[21]

Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* is very important for the study of conspiracy theory and its link to revolution, especially by virtue of its concern with American history. Bailyn declares that no one can deny the "prevalence of conspiratorial fears" in the period. The fourth

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[19] Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style", 424.

[20] Ibid., 418.

[21] P. K. Elkin, *The Augustan Defense of Satire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 18-22.

chapter of Bailyn's work is entitled "The Logic of Rebellion" and analyses how the fear of conspiracy against constituted authority was to be observed widely in politics and how conspiracy formed the main "driving force of the propaganda writings of the Revolutions." Bailyn examines the "deep and widespread roots of conspiracy in the political environment" by analyzing events during the pre-Revolutionary period, showing evidence from pamphlet literature. The chapter concludes with a "Note on Conspiracy." He shows the adoption in America of a wide range of ideological positions, which led to a confrontation with the imperial authority of England, made much worse by the fear on the part of the revolutionaries of various conspiracies.[22] Bailyn says of the time of the Revolution: "People had a sense that they lived in a conspiratorial world in which what the highest officials professed was not what they in fact intended and that their words masked a malevolent design."[23]

Behind this American phenomenon lay a British background. In the years between the Restoration and the era of George III, the modern English notion of conspiracy theory was formed. Basic to this notion was the belief that intent was revealed only by events.[24] The same notion of conspiracy lay behind Edmund Burke's celebrated *Thoughts on the Course of the Present Discontents* (1770), which more than any other work in the pre-Revolutionary period pinpointed the nature of

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[22] Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in the Eighteenth century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27-42.

[23] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967), 98.

[24] James Wallace Bryan, *The Development of the English Law of Conspiracy*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Vol. 27 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1909) 77-81.

the deceit in the early years of George III. Edmund Burke said no observable causes could explain the "present discontents" of the British nation — "no great party agitations, no famine, no war, no foreign threat, and no oppression." The effects, the national discontents, were out of all proportion to the apparent causes. They could be accounted for only by hidden causes — the existence of a "double cabinet", thought Burke, operating behind the government's back, against the will of the people.[25] Again, the period was one of hidden designs and dark plots. And the belief in plots was not, it has been argued, necessarily a symptom of disturbed minds, but a rational attempt to explain human phenomena in terms of human intentions and to maintain moral coherence in the affairs of men.[26] Christians had long cast Satan or the Antichrist as dark and "implacable plotters against humanity's hopes, and diabolical imagery easily crept into Revolutionary sermons, newspaper essays, and particularly into more visual forms of politics such as cartoons, transparencies, and parades."[27] In other words, conspiracy theories personalize history and serve as substitutes for explanations that might make the objectionable actions or persons or developments easier to understand, if not actually sympathize with. The persons were engaged in a quest for power. "The theory of politics that emerges from the political literature of the pre-Revolutionary years," Bailyn writes, "rests on the belief that what lay behind every political scene, the ultimate explanation of every political controversy, was the disposition of power."[28] This power was imagined as almost a living organism,

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[25] Ian Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late 18th British Politics and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 27-54.

[26] Ibid., 33.

[27] Bailyn, *Ideological Origins,* 97-102.

[28] Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style", 413-441.

Bailyn argues, a growing thing with an "endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries." Gordon Wood points out that, in the 18th century, it was a tendency of Enlightenment thought to humanize historical events, a moving of history from the unknowable realm of Providence into the more accessible regions of human agency. Unfortunately, the habit of conspiracy theory long lived in the eighteenth century, and has helped arrest the development of popular historical thought somewhere near the point it had reached two or three hundred years ago.[29] In other words it may be argued that conspiracy theory has tended to prevent analytical or historical or sociological thinking that might have forced people to face certain fundamental conflicts within their society.

Besides many other major issues of the period, eighteenth century Europe was era of an intellectual movement, which was given the name "Enlightenment". It is, of course, very difficult to define; but it is directly related to the subject matter of this chapter. Most of the scholars agree on the idea that many of the roots of Enlightenment can be found in the seventeenth century, in particular, the discoveries of Isaac Newton relying on scientific observation and the use of human reason as opposed to divine intervention. Seventeenth century philosophers also had contributions to the Enlightenment such as Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes. They had attacked the underpinnings of traditional intellectual inquiry and emphasized the human reason in order to develop an understanding of the world. These men were followed by John Locke who had been considered as playing the major role in developing the system of thinking of the eighteenth century intellectual movement. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he said that human reason was capable of all understanding and rejected the concept of innate ideas or ideas held by

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[29] Ibid., 418.

birth by giving importance to experience. Another work of Locke was *Two Treatises on Government* in which he declared that men are naturally free, equal and independent and he opposed the divine right of government and divine origin of government.

Intellectuals during the Enlightenment developed a critical eye on nearly all received traditions in Europe. Political traditions, social and economic structures, attitudes toward the past, ideas about human nature, science, morals, and institutions of Christianity were discussed critically. Besides the discussion, supporters of Enlightenment thought tried to pull down the old structure, institutions and old knowledge of human nature and demolished the natural order of things. However, there were an obvious opposition to this way of thinking which came from a more traditionalist side that supported the counter-enlightenment ideology based on the continuity of old structure, institutions and old knowledge of human nature. The traditional definition of the Enlightenment is simply associated with the word " Age of Reason". It was a way of looking at the world that emphasized reason and natural law at the cost of exposed truth and tradition and it held out the chance of unlimited progress of mankind. A long time has passed since the traditional definition of the Enlightenment, but it is still arguable whether this term is suited for the inner concepts of the "Enlightenment".

However, at this stage the crucial question should not be related with the suitable definition of "Enlightenment". It is clear that what was called "Enlightenment" argued that man should not take for granted what he has always been told; question previously accepted traditions such as political and religious doctrines. The aim was to create an idea of rationalism and emphasis on science. It included thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Edward Gibbon,

Immanuel Kant, David Hume and Adam Smith although they bore many contradictions within themselves in terms of methods and ideology. The repeated attacks on the power of the Catholic Church by the leading men of the Enlightenment forced men on the other side to defend what they believed. At some points, the eighteenth century was a period in which faith was constantly on the defense against the uprising of reason.

Many conservatives of the eighteenth century saw the Enlightenment as an evil, which led to conspiracies and revolutions. In addition, as everything brings its opposition with itself or in other words every concept has its opposite, the Enlightenment produced the Counter-Enlightenment. This can be considered as the forerunner of another intellectual movement, which was Romanticism. This is a positive term, perhaps to be preferred for discussion to "Counter-Enlightenment," which seems to be defined only in relation to its opposite. If we want a dichotomy, to explain arguments, we might well speak of two movements, the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement. Their bases were clearly irreconcilable but both of them had contributions to the eighteenth-century thought, society, history, government and political life and consequently European social and political thinking, which produced the conspiracy theories of the eighteenth century.

If it is difficult to determine the contours of the Enlightenment mind, it is more difficult to determine its influences. However, it is clear that the conspiratorial mind and its paranoid style of expression was stimulated by the Enlightenment and had an important place in the Counter-Enlightenment and the Romantic movements. Here it was used in support of much older notions. The supporters of the Counter-Enlightenment and Romantic Movement tended to have a "theory of order," which consisted of five elements: absolute monarchy, divine ordination, indefeasible

hereditary succession, non-resistance and passive obedience. These five elements of their theory of order had nothing to do with either the French Revolution or the Enlightenment.[30]

Criticizing Hofstadter's "paranoid style" thesis and psychological interpretations of the origins of the American Revolution, Wood argued that conspiracy theories in the eighteenth century were not to be profitably investigated as a psychological problem, but as a by-product of Enlightenment rationalism. It grew out of the contradiction between an increasingly complex and unpredictable political, social, and economic world and a new conviction that everything that happened in the world could and should be rationally and naturally explained. "The belief in plots was not a symptom of disturbed minds," Wood wrote, "but a rational attempt to explain human phenomena in terms of human intentions and to maintain moral coherence in the affairs of men." Conspiracy theory thus represented an enlightened stage in Western man's long struggle to comprehend his social reality. Wood's interpretation was applied very specifically to conspiracy theory among eighteenth century politicians and intellectuals, but perhaps unintentionally it was part of a trend toward defending the reasonableness of conspiratorial fears held by many different groups in many different times. The Anti-masons of the mid-19th century have received especially extensive and respectful treatment despite being heir to such notions as the Illuminati conspiracy, and despite counting among their leaders persons who believed that "if the government of France was revolutionized in three

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[30] J.C.D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and society in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 136-144.

days," "governments" might be "changed to something completely different in a day by the Mystic Power of Masonic Stratagem."[31]

In the light of this, we might go a step further and consider the intellectual credibility of the Counter-Enlightenment. Besides the high trends of Enlightenment among the scholars and intellectuals almost in every area of social science during the eighteenth and the beginnings of nineteenth century, it was not hard to find individuals who did not share the horizons and ideological basis of the Enlightenment. They argued that Enlightenment principles of order and progress, belief in controlling nature and history, trust in commonsense and universal human nature were arguable and could be misleading. Some modern intellectuals, such as Michel Foucault, share the same argument. Moreover, some of the historians of today believe that the development of Romanticism and other movements that followed it sprang from the inadequacy of the Enlightenment. Despite the Enlightenment's claims on the future, it did not deal well with changing times. It may be said that Counter-Enlightenment ideology opened the doors to Romanticism, which then existed side by side with changing Enlightenment traditions. Taking a further step, the Enlightenment, we may point out, had phases such as the early Enlightenment and later Enlightenment. We may be able thus to speak of a bridge between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a "Romantic Enlightenment." Modern intellectual study needs to be aware of the fact that both the definition of the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment is intensely complicated and confusing, because the two phenomena are inter-related. There was clearly a shared Enlightenment and Counter–Enlightenment attitude toward human thinking and

[31] Quoted from William Preston by Colin Dyer in his *William Preston and his Work* (Shepperton: Lewis Masonic Publishers, 1987), 97.

activity and much common ground in the political and social thought of the eighteenth century. Ultimately, the impact of the Enlightenment on the eighteenth century can be seen best in the resistance of some important intellectuals to its elements, such as emphasis on reason and rationality, the relationship of the individual and the collective, and belief in human progress, seen as a result of scientific and technological advancement. Figures such as John Robison, Abbé Barruel, Edmund Burke, and Leopold Alois Hoffmann discussed here offer a significant expression of the Counter Enlightenment. Like other expressions of the Counter-Enlightenment, their concern with conspiracy must be taken seriously and attended to, as Bernard Bailyn, Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Pipes and many others have insisted.

We should also note the continuation of the kind of conspiracy theory, which existed in the 1790s, into subsequent periods. Between 1789 and 1848 there was almost everywhere in Europe a great general acceleration of social and political change, a spread of certain common institutions in the place of particular and local ones, and a generalizing of certain ideas which may loosely be called liberal. Educated and conservative men raised in the tradition of Christianity, with its stress on individual responsibility and the independence of the will, found conspiracy theories plausible as an explanation of such change: it must have come about, they thought, because somebody planned it so.[32] Of course, sometimes it did. "In sheer numbers, there have probably never been so many secret sects and societies in Europe as between 1750 and 1789."[33] "Some came from continental Freemasonry… some were independent or in opposition to Freemasonry. Some were lodges that

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[32] Roberts, *Secret Societies*, 10.

[33] Ibid., 90.

were unwittingly overtaken by political partisans. Regardless of their roots, many adopted the ritual and organization of Freemasonry."[34]

Basically, conspiracy theories offer an explanation of disturbing events — usually an explanation that contradicts the version of events told by authority figures. Conspiracy theories also tend to satisfy a human craving for boldly drawn melodrama: "the villains in conspiracy theories are usually larger than life, ingenious in their depravity and all-powerful".[35] Another reason people find conspiracy theories so seductive is that they seem to clarify messy historical and social forces. "Cause and effect in the real world is usually annoyingly ambiguous."[36] Conspiracy theories can act like modern myths, in the sense that they attempt to explain complex, chaotic events in human terms. Obviously, the danger is that conspiracy theories tend to oversimplify reality, and justify this oversimplification by claiming to have analyzed "all the facts." "People have tendencies towards unknown and not easily explained happenings; so conspiracy theories serve for revealing these complex matters."[37]

There was clearly a popularity of conspiracy theory as a mode of explanation of the "unbelievable events" of the eighteenth century. Anti-revolutionary historians of the time were attracted very much by the "conspirators" of the Revolution and they produced evidences to support their ideas. The scientific

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[34] Ibid., 93.

[35] Harun Yahya, *Yeni Masonik Düzen* (İstanbul: Vural Yayıncılık, 1996), 56, 59 and 77.

[36] Quoted from William Preston by Colin Dyer in *William Preston,* 101.

[37] Jane Parish, " The Age of Anxiety" in *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and Human Sciences*, Jane Parish and Martin Parker, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 16.

and rational thought of the Enlightenment had also given its reaction to these Counter-Enlightenment attitudes toward the happenings in France. Enlightenment intellectuals did not undermine the foundations upon which conspiracy theories were constructed. However it is not wrong to say that the voice of the Counter-Enlightenment was much louder in relation to conspiracies in France.

It is not a straightforward matter to offer a definition of conspiracy theory. When it is done, we are left to wonder about the degree of truth contained in it and this raises many problems of historical analysis of events. Even if we reject the truth of the conspiracy theories as we have them, we are bound to accept that some degree of rational thinking is involved in them and this at least deserves some analysis. However, in considering conspiracy theories we are necessarily, by the meaning of the term, speaking of obsession, paranoia and enthusiasm. All of these manifestations of rationality or irrationality should be related to the particular circumstances of the times, as considering both cause and effect. In short, conspiracy theory is a difficult topic to tackle, whatever, period it occurs in. Nevertheless, it is worth tackling as an aid to historical understanding.

CHAPTER II

THE ROOTS OF SUBVERSION: THE ILLUMINATI AND FREEMASONRY

"All association is always dangerous to the state, especially when it takes on a secret and false appearance."
R. Koselleck

This chapter is designed to introduce the reader to the two major secret societies of eighteenth century Europe, which were seen by the conservative political writers of the time as the major roots of subversion and the sources of the conspiracy — the French Revolution. The idea of subversion implies a threat to the established order — in the eighteenth century, to the king, to the church or the ruling aristocracy. This period saw an immense growth of voluntary association and informal sociability, found in salons, scientific societies, coffee houses, literary and philosophical societies and Masonic lodges. In England, all were clearly visible in the early 1700s, in France by the 1730s.[1] These societies were directly related to the late eighteenth-century political transformation that challenged the established ideals and the institutions of mainland Europe. American revolutionaries, French *philosophes*, Dutch patriots, Italian reformers, English radicals, Freemasons and marginal pamphleteers were all on stage.[2] Their views possessed implications so

[1] Margaret Jacob, "The Mental Landscape of the Public Sphere: A European Perspective", *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol.28, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994), 95.

[2] Ibid., 96.

dangerous and subversive for the established order and the opponents of the Enlightenment, that a fear, expressed in a great number of books and pamphlets, was engendered among conservatives that the secret societies and their front organizations were engaged in a conspiracy, which brought about the French Revolution. So great was the evil that conservatives saw, that it could only be explained by conspiracy theories.

This Counter-Enlightenment attitude has been regarded as not ill founded by modern writers. For example, under the influence of some important philosophers who opposes to the Enlightenment and the metaphysical foundations of modernity, such as Heidegger, Reinhard Koselleck found in the secret societies and secret clubs operating in eighteenth-century Germany and England not advancement of the public interest, but a misguided utopianism, one that sought to replace the state with society. Koselleck also related Freemasonry in general and the German lodges in particular to the late eighteenth-century Illuminati. In Koselleck's narrative, "the righteously enlightened become tyrannous ushers escorting in the tortured modern age."[3] For him all association is always dangerous to the state, especially when it takes on a secret and false appearance.[4] In the 1960s, François Furet attacked the secret societies and Masonic lodges of the eighteenth century, as containing within them the seeds of Jacobinism and orthodoxy. [5]

[3] Reinhard Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 165-66.

[4] Ibid., 170.

[5] François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. E. Forster (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 14.

But before looking closely at the Order of Illuminati and Freemasonry in the eighteenth century, it is important to look at causes and origins, at how intellectual, social and political elements all contributed to the French Revolution from the point of view of the modern historians of the French Revolution. Modern historians such as William Doyle, Keith Baker, R.R Palmer, Simon Schama and George Rude usually divide the origins of the French Revolution into three: intellectual, social and political. The causes of the French Revolution are complicated, so complicated that a debate still continues among historians regarding origins, causes and results. In general, the causes of the Revolution must be located in the social structure of French society during the *ancien regime*. As it had been for centuries, French society was divided into three Estates or Orders. The First Estate consisted of the clergy and the Second Estate is the nobility. Together, these two Estates accounted for approximately 500,000 individuals. At the bottom of this hierarchy was the Third Estate, which basically meant everybody else, or about 25 million people. Most of the modern historians state that this social structure was based on custom and tradition, but more important, it was also accepted as basing on inequalities, which were sanctioned by the force of law.

Eighteenth century France was, in theory, an absolute monarchy. Royal absolutism was produced as a result of the Hundred Years War By the early eighteenth century, French kings had nearly succeeded in getting all power from the nobility. France had no Parliament. France did have an Estates General, which was a semi-representative institution in that it was composed of representatives from each of the Three Estates. The last time the Estates General had been convened was in 1614. Historians today agree that the Estates General was hardly a representative body. The way the French administered the country was through a full bureaucracy

of officials. By 1750, the bureaucracy had overgrow itself - it was large, corrupt and inefficient. Too many officials had bought and sold their offices over the years. France had no single, unified system of law. Each region determined its own laws based on the rule of the local Parliament.

There were thirteen distinct regions in France before 1789 and each was under the jurisdiction of a Parliament. Each Parliament contained between 50 and 130 members. They were the local judges and legal elites. They tried cases for theft, murder, forgery, sedition and libel. They also served as public censors and sometimes were responsible for fixing the price of bread. They were hated by almost everyone, including the king. Of course, the king also had his royal lackeys, the *intendents.* The *intendents* were even more hated than the Parliament. Created to help curb the power of the nobility, the *intendents* became known for their habit of arbitrary taxation and arrest of the peasantry. Such a situation made for the inefficient operation of France. By 1789, France was bankrupt. The country could no longer pay its debts, debts that were all the result of war. By 1789, France was still paying off debts incurred by the wars of Louis XIV, that is, wars of the late 17th and early 18th century. Furthermore, a number of social groups and institutions did not pay taxes of any kind. Many universities were exempt from taxation, as were the thirteen Parliaments, cities like Paris, the Church and the clergy, the aristocracy and numerous members of the bourgeoisie. And of course, it was simply planned to continue to tax the peasants - peasants who, having nothing to contribute were, over the course of the century, forced to contribute even more.[6]

William Doyle in his *Origins of the French Revolution* stresses the political reasons why the *ancien régime* collapsed: he dates its inevitable breakdown

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[6] Leonard W. Cowie, *The French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 32-45.

from 20 August 1786 when the King's Minister, Calonne, began a program of radical reform which was meant to avoid the financial collapse threatening the state but which led to a political collapse, the end of the *ancien régime*, in August 1788.

> The reason why France faced financial collapse in 1786 was because too much had been spent on war: four major wars since 1720 made financial difficulties quite normal in eighteenth century France but the heavy borrowing by Necker to finance the War of American Independence created a crisis in 1786. Calonne could find no way out of the problem by any of the means available to him and resolved to totally reform the state. His "Summary of a Plan for the Improvement of the Finances" was approved by Louis after considerable delay and the political steps taken that could have transformed France but instead led to Revolution.[7]

Doyle argues that the system of government in France was based on an absolute monarchy in which the king bore final responsibility for all that happened but that by the time of Louis XVI the courtiers of Versailles in practice ran the system: such men did not question or reform the system that maintained them in power but settled for the intrigue of political life at Versailles. Local government was in the hands of capable *intendants* but their power was limited by the central ministers, operational difficulties, other local officials and the estates where they existed. [8]

Opposition to the King was never focused in one place because there was no parliament and the provincial assemblies were not strong enough to oppose or advice the king: the Estates General could perform that role if it met - which it had

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[7]William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 43-52.

[8] Ibid., 53.

not done since 1614. The most effective opponents of the King were, in fact, parts of the machinery of the state - such as the Church and parliaments. Their opposition to the King was often spectacular but they could easily be over-ruled by ministers.[9]

When we come to the economic reasons again, all of the French economy, except overseas trade, was having problems in the 1780s though he economic crisis of 1789 began with an accident of nature, the failure of the harvest in 1788, and the bad winter of 1788/9. It resulted in public disorder in the provinces during the spring of 1789 and in Paris led to the riots of April 1789. The Estates General met at a time when law and order appeared to be collapsing and the chaos worried the rich. The riots and disorders abated in the first few weeks of the meeting of the Estates General but when nothing appeared to come from the Estates General despite the great hopes they resumed and they took a new turn with attacks on the privileged orders who seemed to be obstructing the work of national regeneration that was expected from the Estates General. It was this stalemate that led the Third Estate to call for the verification of credentials on 10 June - their first revolutionary action and the date when Doyle feels the French Revolution began. He argues that the Revolution now makes the revolutionaries for it is not until they survive the attempts to defeat them (with the support of the people of Paris on July 14th and of the peasants) that they develop a program for change seen in the Night of 4th August and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. [10]

William Doyle, in his book *The Origins Of The French Revolution,* considers that the French Revolution was the period of transformation of the political institutions in France with some social consequences and in this he differs from the

[9] Ibid., 66-72.

[10] Ibid., 82-102.

broadly orthodox view which considers the Revolution to have made a major political, economic and social transformation of France. Doyle states:

> The ragged, inconsequential, coincidental, and sometimes haphazard way, in which the principles of 1789 were formulated, is a typical reflection of how the Revolution itself originated. It was neither inevitable nor predictable. What was inevitable was the breakdown of the old order. [11]

The other origins of the French Revolution taken into consideration by modern historian is the intellectual origins. French cultural life dominated Europe in the eighteenth century but the greatest impact on the European mind was made by the *philosophes*. They were propagandists and publicists and their main message was the insistence that human reason was the best guide in organizing society and government. This was a potentially revolutionary concept breaking with the basis of the *ancien régime*. Some of the *philosophes* would have considered themselves revolutionary. Since the *philosophes* had somewhat coherent policy of reform and appealed to a specific group it can be argued that they played a indirect role in the coming of the Revolution: indirectly they must have had some influence in questioning the basis of the *ancien régime* and when the Revolution had begun the ideas of the *philosophes* were used to justify the attacks on the divine right monarchy. The Enlightenment clearly, therefore, had some influence but Doyle suggests that by 1780 the Government was being criticized as despotic not only because of the ideas of the *philosophes* but also because of its own failures. Doyle argues that the breakdown of the *ancien régime* occurred in the political climate of the Enlightenment and stresses the importance of the educated reader in eighteenth century France. However he argues that the public was far from won over by the

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[11]Ibid., 210.

most sustained assault to which it had been subjected over the century, that of the Enlightenment. [12]He argues that the Enlightenment had no revolutionary ideology but that it encouraged the need for reforms and when the *ancien régime* collapsed it became the source of ideas that would send France into really new, uncharted in fact, revolutionary directions.[13]

By 1780 there was a body of opinion calling for a form of representational institution, which increased as a result of the example of America, which showed that a new start could be made with "a nation establishing itself on the principle that the people were the ultimate sovereign power. It stood as the first example of a people explicitly dedicating itself to the pursuit of political and religious liberty, political equality, and elective, representative government."[14] R. R. Palmer in his *The Age of Democratic Revolution: The Challenge* takes the example of America as follows:

> The effects of the American Revolution, as a revolution, were imponderable but very great. It inspired the sense of a new era. It added a new content to the conception of progress. It gave a whole new dimension to ideas of liberty and equality made familiar by the Enlightenment. It got people into the habit of thinking more concretely about political questions, and made them more readily critical of their own governments and society. It dethroned England, and set up America, as a model for those seeking a better world. It brought written constitutions, declarations of rights, and constituent conventions into the realm of the possible. The

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[12] Ibid., 83.

[13] Ibid., 84.

[14] Ibid., 78-95.

apparition on the other side of the Atlantic of certain ideas already familiar in Europe made such ideas seem more truly universal, and confirmed the habit of thinking in terms of humanity at large.[15]

Moreover related to the ideological or intellectual origins of the Revolution, Doyle and Rude suggest that the oldest theory of the origins of the French Revolution is that it was some sort of intellectual conspiracy. Keith Baker also argues that the oldest theory of the origins of the Revolution was in some sense the result of the Enlightenment. Doyle argues " bewildered contemporaries, alarmed at the unprecedented course of events and unable to conceive of complex explanations, found comfort in the idea that the Revolution resulted from a philosophic or Masonic plot, planned in secret societies and lodges. [16]

The Order of Illuminati

The years 1796 and 1798 were important for presentations of evidence about a conspiracy in Europe because the Bavarian Illuminati was founded in 1796 and it appeared public in 1798. It was mostly agreed that conspiracy had rooted itself in an organizational structure with the founding of the Order of the Illuminati by Adam Weishaupt on May 1, 1776, in Ingolstadt, Bavaria. Adam Weishaupt was a Jesuit-trained professor of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt. He first started planning a group to challenge assertive Catholic activity in 1775. On May 1, 1776, Weishaupt created an organization that he called the "Club of the Perfectible," whose

[15] R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: The Challenge: A Political History of Europe and America., 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 282.

[16] Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 25.

name was later changed to the "Order of the Bees," until it was changed again to the name by which it is remembered today, namely, the "Order of the Illuminati." It is hardly profitable to trace the origins of the Order further back. Some of historians, however, such as Nesta Webster, have claimed that Weishaupt had received instruction in Ancient Egyptian occultism from a mysterious man called Kohlmer in 1771.[17] Contemporaries, such as the Abbé Barruel, pushed its origins back much further, to the Knights Templar in the fourteenth century.[18] Spreading through mainland Europe, the Enlightenment rationalist ideas of the Illuminati were brought into Masonic lodges where they played a role in a factional fight against occultist philosophy. Shortly, the Order of Illuminati became a secret society called the "Ancient and Illuminated Seers of Bavaria." The Illuminati were suppressed in a series of edicts between 1784 and 1787, and Weishaupt himself was banished in 1785.[19]

The first aim of the Order of Illuminati was said to create an "illuminated state of mind." It is interesting that the concept of "illumination" has an equivalent in Freemasonry: Freemasons also seek for "more light." Both of these secret societies emphasize illumination. It is also interesting that the Enlightenment writers made so much use of the image of light. Indeed, both the thought of the Illuminati and Freemasonry enclose the basic principles and ideas of the Enlightenment. One can readily understand the direct relationship between the Enlightenment and these secret societies in terms of ideologies and, even without much historical background,

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[17] Webster, *Secret Societies,* 46.

[18] Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (London: T. Burton and Co., 1797), 3: 76.

[19] Webster, *Secret Societies,* 77.

understand why the conservatives of the eighteenth century were strongly against these secret societies. For them, the Enlightenment was evil and subversive. In addition, the conservatives had, on all sides, evidence to reinforce their beliefs. The era of the French Revolution and its political, social, and psychological effects were the prime evidences for the conservatives. There was clearly a shattering of society with all its institutions and this was the result of that "evil light." Some writers held that the conspirators among the Illuminati came from the higher ranks of society and their ultimate goal was the destruction of all existing religious and political institutions and all forms of religion and governments.[20]

The Order of Illuminati was a rather insignificant secret society cause it was composed largely of Weishaupt's students and former students in its early years. While Weishaupt founded the Illuminati Order, it was the Hanoverian nobleman and novelist, Adolph, Freiherr von Knigge, who took it out of the provincial confines of Bavaria and introduced it to many Freemasons, and wrote the texts for the higher degrees of the order. Weishaupt considered his society to be a "secret school of wisdom," where members should work collectively towards individual self-improvement and moral betterment.[21] They read and discussed works such as Plutarch's *Lives*, Wieland's *Agathon*, Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, and Helvetius' *Of the Spirit*. In the higher degrees, elements of Hermeticism, the

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[20] Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 505-17. See also Roberts, *Secret Societies*. Chap.5 deals with the Illuminati.

[21] Michael Jones, *Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control* (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 32.

mystery cults of the ancient world, and ideas of the Rosicrucians were added.[22] Interest in Renaissance occultism, reflecting perhaps its seventeenth-century origins, remained common among Freemasons in the period.

The formation and the features of the Bavarian Illuminati implied a threat for the Bavarian patriotic government. It was seen as evil, meriting repression on the part of the established order. Some historians regard the Illuminati and the secret societies as fulfilling the role of the witches and heretics (Jesuits, Calvinists, Socinians, etc., according to place and time) of the early modern period. The idea that the *philoosphes* during the Enlightenment period were the begetters of these secret societies, and that they, in turn, produced a conspiracy to overthrow religion and government seems to display a similarity of mentalities.[23] In order to understand the reactions to and fear of the Illuminati, the example might be given of the attempt to discover the secret papers of the Illuminati. In 1785 the Elector of Bavaria, Carl Theodore, discovered secret papers of the Illuminati, which revealed the "evil plan" of the Order and he published and distributed the papers to all endangered heads of state. There was thus primary source documentation and as a result vague and uncertain fears were held to have a firm foundation.

The reactions to the Illuminati cannot be fully understood without considering Leopold Alois Hoffmann, who may be taken as the representative of conservatives in the German-speaking world. Hoffmann founded the anti-Illuminati *Weiner Zeitschrift* in 1791, to which Johann Georg, Ritter von Zimmermann (1728-95), a Swiss doctor and author, contributed anti-Masonic pieces. He created the conservative secret society "The Association" as a response to the great Jacobin

[22] Ibid., 64.

[23] Ibid., 72.

conspiracy.[24] It is important to understand what Hoffmann thought about the Illuminati and the secret societies: The Illuminati had their origin in Germany and Hoffmann's consequent interest both reveal something of the history of German conservative thought, which provided a credible source for the use of other European conservatives. It was in December 1791 that Hoffmann launched the *Wiener Zeitschrift* and it was to gain him, within a very short time, a great deal of notoriety in the German-speaking world.

Like so many of his contemporaries, he believed that the old order in Europe was in great danger, and he offered a startling explanation for this — a vast conspiracy engineered by the *philosophes* and secret societies. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the apostles of the false Enlightenment had poisoned the minds of the public with irreligious and subversive ideas in order to undermine the foundations of society. Hoffmann's argument accused the *philosophes* of providing the intellectual bombing for the war against the old regime, and the Order of Illuminati of being the guiding force behind the conspiracy as well as the organizational cement holding everything in place. Hoffmann spoke not only of the political power and influence of secret societies, but also linked the Illuminati with literary trends. Trends in writing, reading and publishing bothered him greatly. Hoffmann was a zealous critic of the pre-Romantic movement. He found many manifestations of this literary fashion not only lacking in reason, but also potentially devastating to the reading public. Hoffmann tied the Illuminati to the anti-philanthropic movement. The anti-philanthropic movement was called for movements, which were against public or society's benefit. He also cited the published documents to prove their ambitions in education. The Order wanted to

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[24] Fuggs, "Leopold Alois Hoffman," 78.

creep into schools and indoctrinate the pupils, and in this way influence the attitudes of the common people. Hoffmann blamed the Illuminati and their principles, but also faulty education for the problems then affecting Germany's youth. Instead of learning science and manners at school, boys and youths behaved with "impudence, obtrusiveness, wild conduct, and insolence."[25] At home, they acted towards their unknowing parents in a crude and bold fashion. In Hoffmann's mind, this was just another sign of the corrosion of traditional norms and values. Hoffmann took his argument further and claimed that the new fashion in literary works, especially the novel was used as an instrument for the Order of Illuminati to convey their immoral and subversive ideology.[26] In politics, of course, the *Wiener Zeitschrift* regarded the French Revolution as threatening to destroy the established government of the whole German-speaking world. Hoffmann was right in that respect. French armies overran Germany and destroyed, at least temporarily, the old regime, especially in the western territories. Before that Hoffmann had already sent the French Catholic priest Barruel a manuscript, which laid out the Illuminati conspiracy theory. The manuscripts that were sent to Barruel were intended to show that Hoffmann was not exaggerating what he said about the Illuminati and their direct links to the French Revolution.

The teachings of the Illuminati today seem to be no more than another version of Enlightenment rationalism and a reflection of the anti-clericalist atmosphere of late eighteenth-century Bavaria. It was a somewhat naïve and utopian

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[25] Leopold Alois Hoffmann, *Aktenmaßige Darstellung der Deutschen Union, und ihrer Verbindung mit dem Illumineten-Freimaurer und Rosenkreutzer-Orden*, (Vienna: Rehm, 1796), 120-149.

[26] Ibid., 18.

movement, which aspired ultimately to bring the human race under the rule of reason. Its rationalism appears to have acquired a fairly wide influence in Masonic lodges.[27] Michael Jones analyses the importance of the Illuminati as follows:

> The significance of the Illuminati lay not in its political effectiveness. (it existed a little more than eight years); but rather in its method of internal organization. In borrowing freely from both the Jesuits and the Freemasons, Weishaupt created an extremely subtle system of control based on manipulation of the passions. Borrowing the idea of examination of conscience from the Jesuits and sacramental confession from the Catholic Church to which the Jesuits belonged, Weishaupt created a system of "Seelenspionage" that would allow him to control his adepts without their knowing that they were being controlled.[28]

Freemasonry had arrived in the German-speaking world in 1737 when the first German lodge, "Absalom," was opened at a public house, known as the "Englische Taverne," in Hamburg. Then, in the same year, the lodge "Aux trois aigles blancs" was opened in Berlin, followed by "Aux trois globes" in 1740 and "Aux trois canons" in Vienna in 1742. Weishaupt, who had been fascinated by Freemasonry, joined the lodge of the Strict Observance "Zur Behutsamkeit" in Munich in 1777. In 1780, while attending meetings at the Frankfurt lodge, Weishaupt met Adolph, Freiherr von Knigge. Knigge, who became a member of the Illuminati on July 5, 1778, gave Weishaupt's essentially Catholic and Bavarian organization access to the Protestant principalities in northern Germany, and as a result of that and von Knigge's passion and organizational abilities, membership of the Illuminati

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[27] Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style, " 77.

[28] Jones, *Libido Dominandi*, 34.

grew. Shortly after von Knigge's entry into the Illuminati, the membership jumped to 500 throughout Germany. Perhaps because he was an aristocrat himself, von Knigge added to Weishaupt's following of university students by attracting aristocrats and influential bureaucrats and thinkers from across Germany, exploiting existing Masonic lodges as a "pool of recruits."[29] A crucial event in this regard was the Wilhelmsbad Konvent, a Masonic convention held near Hanau from July 16 to September 1, 1782, which was to have far-reaching consequences not only for lodges of the strict observance but for all of Europe as well. Upon returning from the Wilhelmsbad Congress, Henry de Virieu told a friend who asked him about secret information he might have brought back that "The whole business is more serious than you think. The plot has been so carefully been hatched that it's practically impossible for the Church and the Monarch to escape."[30]

Wilhelmsbad may or may not have been the place where plans for the French Revolution were produced, but it was certainly an "evil success" for the Order of the Illuminati, which began to gain significant numbers of Masons for its own organization. As a result of his efforts at Wilhelmsbad, von Knigge was able to persuade a number of prominent Masons to become members of the Illuminati. That number included Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick and Prince Karl von Hessen-Kassel. Someone else who joined the Illuminati after meeting von Knigge in Wilhelmsbad was the publisher, Johann Joachim Christoph Bode, who brought the Illuminati to Weimar, where he founded a lodge which would include Goethe, Karl August, the

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[29] Ibid., 35.

[30] Ibid., 38.

prince of Weimar, and just about all of the leading lights of the German Enlightenment.[31]

On July 1, 1784, the Illuminati issued an official expulsion order against von Knigge, which praised, nonetheless, his service in increasing the size of the organization. The expulsion of von Knigge, whose organizational and recruiting abilities had brought the Illuminati to a membership of around 2,000, came at an especially bad time. One week before his official expulsion, on June 22, the Bavarian government issued its first edict forbidding membership of secret societies. Other edicts were to follow on March 2 and on August 16, 1785. On January 2, 1785, the Prince Bishop of Eichstaett demanded that the Elector of Bavaria, Karl Theodore, remove all Illuminati from the University of Ingolstadt.[32] In spite of the secrecy of the Illuminati, Weishaupt was a prime suspect because of the radical Enlightenment books he had ordered for the university library. Weishaupt was removed from his chair of canon law on February 11, 1784. Over the next year, the opposition to secret societies increased. Weishaupt fled from Ingolstadt to the neighboring Protestant free city of Regensburg on February 2, 1785. When the Bavarian government demanded his extradition, and even went so far as to put a reward out for his capture, Weishaupt decided that he had to move again, and in 1787 he fled to the Protestant duchy of Gotha, where he and his family found protection under fellow Illuminatus, Duke Ernst II, who offered him a position on his court council.[33]

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[31] Ibid., 40.

[32] Richard van Duelman, *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1975), 25.

[33] Ibid., 28.

In his 1782 speech, "Anrede an die neuaufzunehmenden Illuminatus dirigentes," Weishaupt provided his enemies with clear evidence that this secret society was intent on toppling both throne and altar throughout Europe. Leopold Alois Hoffman argued that he could trace the "entire French revolution and its most significant events" back to the maxims of the "Anrede."[34] Weishaupt's intentions were clearly revolutionary; but the shocking thing about the Illuminati was the mechanism whereby he put those intentions into practice by controlling the "secret society's members' minds". When his secret society became public, Weishaupt would describe himself as simply an educator and try to play down his system of control as little more than what any father would try to do in raising his children. However, the published documents contradicted his protestations of innocence.[35] Even some Freemasons of the eighteenth century argued that what Weishaupt proposed not only violated the concept of brotherhood on which the Masonic lodges were based, but also that his system was based on the an antithesis of Enlightenment values. However, it was based on the practices of the Jesuits, or, as Barruel would put it, the Illuminati were a cross between the Jesuits and the Freemasons, in which all of the controls placed on spiritual direction by the Church were lifted and the goal was not to get souls into heaven, but to create a paradise on earth.[36] This is precisely what the conservative reaction saw in the Illuminati, and it was exactly this that scared them. For instance, the Elector Karl Theodore of Bavaria criticized Weishaupt as a "villain, perpetrator of incest, child murderer, seducer of the people,

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[34] Manfred Agethen, *Geheimbund und Utopie: Illuminaten, Freimaurer und deutsche Spätaufklärung* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1984), 106.

[35]Jones, Libido Dominandi, 42.

[36] Ibid., 43.

and leader of a conspiracy which endangered both religion and the state."[37] If the thought that fear of the Illuminati was related to older fears is considered, it is clearly fear of the Jesuits, as expressed chiefly in the eighteenth century by Jansenists, that should be considered first.

In 1787, the same year that Weishaupt fled to Gotha, Bode, who had now become the leader of the Illuminati in exile, traveled to Paris, where he met with members of the Masonic lodge "Les Amis Reunis" and held long discussions, during which, according to his own account in his travel diary, he tried to interest them in the techniques and doctrines of Illuminati. The fact that the French Revolution broke out two years after his arrival led many to believe that he had succeeded in successfully transplanting the Bavarian Illuminati to French soil and that the French was the first of many revolutions that would follow until neither a throne nor an altar would be left standing in Europe. Leopold Alois Hoffmann wrote:

> The French did not invent the project of world revolution. This honor belongs to the Germans. To the French belongs only the honor of making a beginning.... the Comites politiques came into existence following on the heels of Illuminism, which came into being in Germany and became that much more dangerous because it was never extinguished there but merely went underground and then gave birth to the Jacobin clubs.[38]

Bode died in 1793, and by 1795 it seems that all activity associated with the Illuminati as a coherent organization ceased, even though Weishaupt would continue to work in Gotha and write books until 1830.

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[37] Ibid., 45.

[38] Quoted from Hoffman in Fuggs, "Leopold Alois Hoffman", 92.

Freemasonry

In view of the myth making about the origins of the Freemasonry and for the purpose of this thesis it is best to begin the history of Freemasonry in 1717. If the reader wishes to go further back to the origins of Freemasonry, he may safely consult David Stevenson's book on early modern Masonry in Scotland.[39] For the purpose of this thesis it is necessary to point out that my treatment of Freemasonry is much shorter than my treatment of the Illuminati, since, in the conspiracy theories with which I am concerned, Freemasonry played a subordinate role, as the disseminator rather than originator of the conspiracy.

Ulrich im Hof accounts Freemasons of the eighteenth century as the "occupiers of the leading place among the protagonists of the Enlightenment."[40] Freemasonry was among the organizations that fostered the spread of the Enlightenment ideology, since it provided support for the aims and the constitutional and organizational frameworks of the revolutionary area. By the middle of the eighteenth century Freemasons were everywhere in government, army and other influential parts of European society. The origin of the modern Freemasonry dates back to the "tradition of the freemasons who worked as builders of cathedrals and later formed guilds to support themselves financially.[41]" At the very beginning of the eighteenth century these guilds began to admit noble patrons, surveyors and scientists to their ranks and began to shape a set of customs, symbols and rituals. On

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[39] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[40] Ulrich im Hof, *The Enlightenment*, trans. William Yuill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 139.

[41] Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, 28.

24 June 1717, on St.John's Day, the lodges came together and the Grand Lodge of England was established. The Grand Lodge of England soon adopted Anderson's Constitution, which gave the organization its rules and declared aims. There was a very close relationship among the members of the lodges. Such solidarity did much to advance the organization's spread.

> If one of the brethren is arrested for debt, then his debts are paid... a brother who is sick and who has not the means to provide his own needs receives from the lodge ... the lodge's physician, surgeon and apothecary are prepared to minister him free of charge...[42]

Freemasonry began to spread to the whole Europe very quickly. Im Hof states that after only eight years, in 1725, there were nearly fifty-two lodges in Great Britain. By 1730, Freemasonry had diffused its organizational structure and aims to France, Spain, and their colonies. Later Freemasonry spread to Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and central Germany, Austria and east to Prague, Dresden, Warsaw and St. Petersburg.[43] By the middle of the eighteenth century there were Freemasons all over Europe, even in the remotest provinces.

This rapid growth of Freemasonry across Europe persuaded the Catholic Church to issue a bull against it. *In eminenti* prohibited membership in Masonic lodges. The bull was renewed in 1751 and it indicated the clear opposition of the church. However it was not very effective. The lodges that were closed and banned found a way to exist by taking different names and finding different places to meet.

The opening stages of the French Revolution were accompanied by new and subversive ideas related to the social order, the crown and religion, and French

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[42] Quoted from a Masonic manifesto in im Hof, *The Enlightenment,* 141.

[43] Ibid., 142.

and other Freemasons were inclined to relate them to the Masonic ideals of human brotherhood. However, as the Revolution progressed, its victims included prominent Masons. Still, identification between Freemasonry and the Revolution had been established. The attack on the crown, the church and the aristocracy and threat the Revolution posed to other states led to Masonic activity in Europe being seen as subversive, secret in its means and evil in its aims.[44] The conservatives of the 1790s including Burke, Barruel, John Bowles, Hoffmann, and Robison devoted a great deal of their attention to the familiar Freemasons, whatever they thought of the role of the German Illuminati. They frequently claimed that Freemasonry resurrected old papal claims and combined them with new charges of anti-Christian subversion. Weishaupt and his Illuminati, the Freemasons and other secret societies were bent on despotic world domination through a secret conspiracy, using front groups to spread their influence.[45]

One of the most debatable parts of all Masonic history lies in the story of the part played by Freemasons and other secret societies in the creation of the French Revolution. It is not easy to state how great a role Freemasonry actually did play, but it certainly did enough to cause the organization and its thinking to be regarded as an important factor in creating the evil of the Revolution and as meriting fierce opposition. The Freemasons, inspired by the Enlightenment, it was held, conspired against God and Christianity without distinction of denomination. Their motivation was revealed in their long history of hatred of the established monarchy, religion and the deep-rooted institutions of Europe. Masonry was also criticized as a fraternity of the privileged, closing business opportunities and nearly monopolizing political

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[44] Nesta Webster, *World Revolution* (London: Constable & Co. 1921), 81.

[45] Ibid. 83.

offices. Certain elements of truth and reality there may have been in these views of Masonry. What must be emphasized here, however, the apocalyptic and absolute framework, in which this anti-Masonry was commonly expressed.[46]

In France, Barruel supported his anti-Masonic ideas with Burke's assertion that the Revolution contained conspiracy, disorder and violence within its nature. Thus Masonry and Jacobinism became inter-changeable. He described the situation simply, as follows:

> At early periods of the French Revolution, there appeared a sect calling itself Jacobin, and teaching that all men are equal and free! In the name of their equality and disorganizing liberty, they trampled under foot the altar and the throne; they stimulated all nations to rebellion, and aimed at plunging them ultimately into the horrors of anarchy.[47]

Society had been poisoned by secrecy and the rituals of these secret sects, the Illuminati and Freemasons. He accused the higher ranks of society, though, of selfishness, of having failed in their duty to give example. However at the heart of the matter was the conspiracy initiated by the Illuminati, who

> …. Combining their conspiracy against king with that of the Sophisters of Impiety, coalesce with that ancient sect whose tenets constituted the whole secret of the occult lodges of Freemasonry, which long since, imposing on the credulity of its most distinguished adepts, only initiated the chosen of the elect into the secret of their unrelenting hatred for Christ and kings.[48]

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[46] Hofstadter, "Paranoid Style," 79.

[47] Barruel, *Memoirs,* 2: 379.

[48] Ibid., 2: 406.

There were some opposed to the claims of such conservatives as Barruel, though they did not gain as much support. For instance, in his book *On the Influence Attributed to Philosophers, Freemasons, and to the Illuminati on the Revolution of France*, Jean Mounier tried to undermine the notion of a Europe-wide conspiracy, for example, with reference to the death of Gustavus III of Sweden.

> Among the noble conspirators who prepared the death of Gustavus, I do not know a single one who has been desirous of playing a part in the Revolution of France, although this would have been extremely easy for them; as the French demagogues were then calling to their ranks all the madmen of Europe. But the Swedish conspirators had not the same systems; and their guilty measures were not destined to effect the establishment of a democracy.[49]

Mounier insisted that neither the philosophes, nor the Freemasons, nor the Illuminati had any major part in creating the Revolution. However, though they have an appearance of credibility to the modern historian, which is lacking in such writers as Barruel, such protests fail to provide reliable evidence for the modern historian. As Nesta Webster points out:

> When we come to examine Mounier's attitude more closely, however, certain considerations present themselves, too lengthy to enter into here, which detract somewhat from the value of his testimony. Of these the most important is the fact that Mounier wrote his book in Germany, where he was living under the protection of the Duke of Weimar, who

[49] Jean Joseph Mounier, On *the Influence Attributed to Philosophers, Free-Masons, and to the Illuminati on the Revolution of France* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1999), 69.

had placed him at the head of a school in that city where Boettiger himself was director of the college and, according to the editor of Mounier's work, it was from Bode, who was also at Weimar and whom Boettiger declared to be the head of the Illuminati, that Mounier collected his information! And this is the sort of evidence seriously quoted for that of innumerable other contemporaries who testified to the influence of Illuminism on the French Revolution.[50]

Crane Brinton suggests that many Freemasons were among the founders of the first Jacobin clubs in many parts of France. Many Masonic customs were used, such as the word "brother," used among Masons in addressing each other, and secret votes with blackballs. Brinton writes that:

> Masons undoubtedly worked through the press and the literary societies to prepare for the revolution, to draw up the cahiers, to get people aware that political change was possible and desirable. But an organized plot in the melodramatic sense is still dubious. Too many non-Masons were obviously active in the early societies.[51]

The French Revolution is an especially appropriate time to consider the conspiratorial theory of history presented in Nesta Webster's classic, *The French Revolution*. Webster can be considered as a writer of conspiracy theory rather than as an historian of the French Revolution. Webster accounts the history of the French Revolution from the approach of conspiracy theories and her account can be considered as a work that shows how widespread conspiracy theory has become.

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[50] Webster, *World Revolution*, 81.

[51] Crane Brinton, *The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 15 -16.

Webster presents not one conspiracy, but several, insisting that plots by the Freemasons and Illuminati, mixed with those by the Duc d'Orleans and foreign powers combined to produce the tragedy of the French Revolution.[52] Webster suggests that:

> The lodges of the German Freemasons and Illuminati were thus the source whence emanated all those anarchic schemes which culminated in the Terror, and it was at a great meeting of the Freemasons in Frankfurt-am-Main, three years before the French Revolution began, that the deaths of Louis XVI and Gustavus III of Sweden were first planned.[53]

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[52] Michael L Kennedy, "The Foundation of the Jacobin Clubs and the Development of the Jacobin Club Network, 1789-1791," *Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 51 (December, 1979), 703.

[53] Nesta Webster, *The French Revolution* (London: Constable & Co., 1921), 21.

CHAPTER III

EDMUND BURKE AND CONSPIRACY THEORY IN BRITAIN

All that is necessary for evil to triumph
is for good men to do nothing.

Edmund Burke

In the third chapter of this thesis, I seek to introduce some leading figures in eighteenth-century conservative political thought, in order to add to an understanding of the politics of the time, with reference to the ideas put forward in the previous chapters on conspiracy theory. First of all, some important features of the period's political culture should be mentioned. The first is the period's lack of separation of religion, politics and history in the eighteenth-century. This lack was shared by both sorts of political intellectual: conservative and radical in the era of the Revolution. Belief in conspiracy was virtually universal among political actors and those who spoke of them and those conspiracies related to both politics and religion as they were treated historically. It had indeed been a persistent characteristic of the eighteenth century. Thus, it should be taken into serious consideration in an historical approach to the events of the century.[1] Roland Stromberg wrote that the French Revolution was a great theater, whose actors tell us something profoundly important

[1] Clarke Garrett, "The myth of the Counter-revolution in 1789," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring, 1994), 784-800.

about the whole age.[2] François Furet argued that the idea of plot in revolutionary ideology was truly a central and polymorphous notion, which served as a reference point for organizing and interpreting action. It was the notion that mobilized men's convictions and beliefs, and made it possible at every point to elaborate an interpretation or justification of what had happened.[3] Lynn Hunt has articulated much the same position: "the obsession with conspiracy became the central organizing principle of French revolutionary rhetoric. The narrative of Revolution was dominated by plots."[4] Most probably we may take the history of the period as a comment on Burke's statement at the head of this chapter. What Burke feared did not happen. Good men, meaning those Burke might have commended, did their best and the eighteenth century was marked with a measure of success for them.

The great number of political writers in Europe in the age of the Revolution, from Joseph de Maistre in France to John Bowles, Edmund Burke and John Whitaker in England, to the Austrian, Leopold Hoffmann, and many others, declared that they opposed the principles of the Revolution or, at least, to what was drawn from these principles. Their fundamental assertions went deep and formed the basis of their anti-revolutionary arguments. The Revolution was harmful and destructive. It was caused by *philosophes*' influence, which had contaminated eighteenth-century thought. These corrupting ideas were introduced among the French people who had been sound and upright until then, by clubs called "Societes

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[2] Roland Stromberg, "The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on some recent research," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 21, No.3 (May, 1988), 321-339.

[3] Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 53.

[4] Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California, 1984), 39.

de Penesee" and secret groups of conspiring intellectuals, the Freemasons and, indeed, the *philosophes* themselves, who formed a subversive faction. For the above intellectuals the Revolutionary spirit was characterized by a process of abstraction, which led to regarding man apart from his environment and isolated from his past. It set out to make law for man without regard of old traditions and history or the local conditions of European states.[5]

They had also argued that the philosophical clubs and those secret groups that made themselves felt in Europe around 1750 and played an active part after 1789 were all to be considered as Revolutionary. Furthermore, the part that they played in preparing the Revolution was made manifest by certain available works and documents. The conspiracy attributed by some intellectuals of the time to Freemasonry should not be dismissed lightly as a myth. The propaganda of the *philosophes* perhaps more than any other factor accounted for the fulfillment of the preliminary condition of the French Revolution, namely discontent with the existing state of things. They weakened the traditional religion and taught disrespect for all institutions which had been the ally of the monarchy for many centuries. They wished to enjoy real advantages here on earth and without delay. They taught a secular code of ethics, independent of religious belief. [6]

It is natural to start with Edmund Burke, since he became the spokesman of European conservatism by virtue of his original and penetrating thought about the politics of the eighteenth century. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published in 1790. The *Reflections* appeared at a moment of impending political

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[5] Henri Peyre, "The Influence of Eighteenth Century Ideas on the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.10, No.1 (January, 1949), 63-87.

[6] Ibid., 64-68.

crisis and elicited various responses. Why is the *Reflections* important even to political thought today? First of all, Burke's works present a classic of conservative, natural law, counter-Revolutionary thought. It may be thought of as the political testament of Europe's aristocratic culture. Moreover, Burke's work is "a classic of conspiracy theory".[7] This Burke produced as he fought against British sympathy for the young French Revolution.

The Reflections has left a complex and extensive legacy within conservative thought. Most notable here is the appreciation of Burke's admiration for a hierarchical, organically complex society, based on a fund of moral feeling supported by tradition, custom and prejudice. His greatest legacy for conservative thinkers has been the argument for the political wisdom inherent in historically proven institutions and customs. *The Reflections* puts the rhetoric of feeling at the service of a conservative form of social cohesion and national identity. It was not only later that the value of the *Reflections* was appreciated. The work enjoyed immediate success. Seven thousand copies were sold out in the first week alone, a total of 19,000 in the year following in England and other 13,000 in France, with about 30,000 copies being sold in Britain over the next few years.[8]

Burke supports the idea that "religion is the basis of civil society" and must be maintained if any government is to exit in safety.[9] Burke insists, "church and state are ideas inseparable ... and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without

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[7] Bernard Schilling, "The English Case Against Voltaire: 1789-1800," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol.4, No.2 (April, 1943), 198.

[8] *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, World's Classics Series, ed. L. G. Mitchell (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), viii.

[9] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Parsons, 1793), 72.

mentioning the other."[10] According to Burke these "philosophical fanatics" had long entertained "the utter abolition, under any of its forms, of the Christian religion."[11] These enemies of Christianity prosecuted their design with fanatical zeal.[12] They obtained command over public opinion by a flood of impious and subversive literature, which they dispersed "with incredible assiduity and expense."[13] Afraid that revolution would lead to bloodshed, Burke argued that reason could not be applied to politics without taking human nature into account, and that traditional monarchy was necessary for a stable society. Burke stated that if the French should perfectly succeed, as they were likely enough to do, and establish "a democracy, or a mob of democracies, they would establish a very bad government - a very bad species of tyranny."[14]

The conservative ideology of the period took tradition as one of the crucial prerequisites, providing order in society. Burke believed that "now" and "past" should not have a dividing point. "Now" and "past" should form a continuity. The idea that people are the products of historical tradition is one of the basic principles that all conservatives of the period agreed upon. By its history, traditions and prejudices are societies to be made to act consciously. The French Revolution, in contrast, was a complete break with the past, because the Enlightenment, which had led to the Revolution, had rejected the tradition that had been preserved by prejudice

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[10] Ibid., 80.

[11] Ibid.,120.

[12] Ibid., 89-90.

[13] Ibid., 23-24.

[14] Quoted from Burke in Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London: Longman, 1959), 130.

— and in this way the Enlightenment destroyed the sentiment of the societies. Burke emphasizes the importance of prejudice as a means of securing property, citizenship, national independence and the social order. He further argues that by the help of the prejudices, the consciousness of citizenship arouses. Prejudice secured manners. Under the control of good manners, "vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness." Again he declared: "There ought to be a system of manners in every nation, which is well formed."[15] Burke's definition of the word prejudice is not to racial or gender-based prejudice, as the word would often imply today, but to a tool used to great effect for decision-making. A prejudice is a notion held without direct contemplation of its truth, an idea borrowed from "the general bank and capital of nations and of ages."[16] Its use displays a respect for the wisdom of others. Burke stresses that the French revolutionists have "avoided this treasure and instead, have fallen into an inferior mode of discernment based on transient and unreliable thinking."[17] The English, on the other hand, have stuck to established norms, even in times of change, knowing, "that we have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality; not many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law on our pert loquacity."[18] He argued that "the status quo has been held because nothing better has come along;

[15] Burke, *Reflections*, 73.

[16] Burke, *Reflections,* 84.

[17] Ibid., 82.

[18] Ibid., 83.

it provides a better guarantee of truth than any individual philosopher can give: that of countless generations of wise thinkers."[19]

He also emphasized history and the society's experience in political life. Burke held that in such a period of danger as then existed, his conservative politics would protect culture, family, religion and government — all of which together formed Britain. He emphasized, as an antithesis, the dangers of mob rule, pointing to France and expressing the fear that the Revolution was destroying French society. To combat such a development, he appealed to the English virtues of continuity, tradition, and respect for rank and property. He opposed the Revolution to the end of his life, opposing recognition of the French government and demanding war. Burke still remains as the leading figure in history of the conservatism of the 1790s and beyond, for his defense of the validity of status and hierarchy. A powerful and well-expressed statement of political conservatism, Burke's book defended a British tradition of liberty and order against the threat of uncontrollable change. For Burke, the French method of tearing up the constitution and starting again from scratch on the basis of a theory of the rights of man was pure folly.[20]

The *Reflections* was widely taken to contain fundamental elements of all political and social wisdom and Burke became the chief British anti-radical and counter-revolutionary writer of the age. His name and the *Reflections* came to stand for the conservative reaction to the Revolution as fully as Tom Paine and *the Rights of Man* came to stand for its defense. What prompted him to write *Reflections* was the publication of Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country.* The

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[19] Ibid., 84.

[20] Frederick Dreyer, "The Genesis of Burke's Reflections," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 50, No.3 (September, 1978), 468.

Discourse had first been delivered as an address to a meeting of the Revolution Society in November 1789. The purpose of the society was to commemorate the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The meeting turned into a celebration of the French Revolution. The address was published and was read by Burke in January 1790. The importance of Price as an element in Burke's motives and calculations is something that historians have often discounted.[21] Modern historians argue that the *Reflections* tends to be seen rather as a comparatively spontaneous comment on the principles and practices of the Revolution. They think that Price figures as a "representative victim" whom Burke had selected to stand in for all radicals and all revolutionaries. However, the *Reflections* is pre-eminently concerned with Britain and Burke was deeply concerned about the radicalism and conspiratorial activities of religious Dissenters such as Price. Though the *Reflections* only briefly alludes to the possibility that the Revolution Society was merely the instrument to further the plans of unknown and hidden interests, Burke clearly stated his desire to do his best to expose these radicals to the hatred, ridicule and contempt of the whole world as "calumniators, hypocrites, formers of subversion and approvers of murder."[22] He published his book *Reflections* on the Revolution in France as a warning to English reformers, such as the Foxites and surviving Wilkesites, who believed that the French were having their own Glorious Revolution. Clubs had been set up to celebrate Britain's centenary of the Glorious Revolution and these clubs began to celebrate the French developments and to aid and encourage their revolution. The

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[21] Ibid., 470.

[22] Quoted from Burke in Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), 45.

Reflections was written in answer to these clubs and specifically to speeches and sermons by Priestly and Price, both of whom were radical, democratic, Unitarian ministers, who were the counterparts of the French *philosophes*. The French Revolution, Burke warned, was not what it seemed to the more moderate among the English reformers. Such reformers would perceive this from paying attention to his own notion of organic reform and organic growth, that is, natural evolution. That was what was manifested in the Glorious Revolution. That was not rapid, uncontrolled change, as was now evidenced in France. The French course could only lead to disaster, particularly since the demolition of the *ancien régime* was in the hands of amateurs who had little or no political expertise. He asserted that events in France would lead to conflict and bloodshed in France and war abroad, ending in the establishment of a military dictatorship. Burke increasingly gained support, as he was proved right in his prophecies. British opinion turned against the Revolution as it became increasingly violent and war loomed, though radicals remained to be suppressed by Pitt. For most, the word revolution came to mean bloodshed, mobs and violent change and Burke provided them with an intellectual foundation for their dislike.

Burke developed other emphases in later writings. For example, in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, he accused the Jacobins of destroying the society by corrupting the family and its structures it formed. If the family and its structural role were damaged, all the roles played by individuals in a society degenerated. Such ideas were, like Burke's first thrust against the Revolution, widely taken up Leopold Alois Hoffman, for example, made the point that the civil contract in marriage introduced by Jacobins led to a rise in divorces. [23] Conspiracy theories of the

[23] Hoffman, *Illumineten-Freimeurer*, 18.

Revolution were popular to a large extent because their propagators held them along with a sophisticated understanding of society, which took account of a large number of social institutions. The conspiracy affected everyone.

The Burkean conspiracy theory of the French Revolution found widespread acceptance and it is of importance to enquire into the reasons for this. Initially, it may be remarked that conspiracy theories rest on more than the credible (to some, in any case) assertion of the existence of a conspiracy. The conspiracy spoken of must be carried out in support of a reprehensible cause. In the case of the Burkean conspiracy, this reprehensible cause was the implementation of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Burke put forward very persuasive arguments, of an original kind, against many of the basic notions of the Enlightenment. Yet they would not have been welcomed and adopted, if many in Britain had not already been hostile to those notions. Remembering this, it is not irrelevant to draw attention to much lesser writers of the period, who reflect less original conservatism than that of Burke. Their conservatism too aided the acceptance of conspiracy theory.

It also supported a basic distaste for what was happening in France. John Whitaker (1735-1808), an Oxford educated clergyman from Manchester, best remembered as an antiquarian and historian, expressed his view of French events in his not very original work, *The Real Origin of Government*:

> The world has never yet beheld such a monstrous transformation, as has been now been produced in France; a nation, the most polished and the most courteous in all Europe, turned suddenly by the Circean cup of

Liberty into a herd of wild beasts, running mad after they know not what, and tearing one another in pieces they know not why. [24]

This reaction was founded on more than what Whitaker read in the newspapers. It was founded on convictions about politics, the state and history. They were able to merge with the more sophisticated views of Burke; but they were closer to old-fashioned Toryism — a strong monarchy, divinely ordained, and passive obedience. Burke was certainly zealous in defending the Christian religion; but Whitaker was more forceful, turning his whole argument against the Revolution to a defense of the notion of the sacred origin of government.

> When man was created, could a God of any goodness, could a God of any wisdom have left him without a regimen or rule for his political direction to ramble unrestrained over the face of the Earth, to act uncontrolled by any authority over him, and at last, in the perceptions of his own wants, in the feeling of his own miseries, to conceive, to determine upon, and to fabricate a form of government for himself.[25]

Again, the forceful emphasis on a traditional English royalism, in which context Whitaker is mentioned by John Barrell, [26] should be noted. Here Whitaker showed an obligation to the most extreme theorists of royal government, Sir Robert Filmer, who authored *Patriarcha or The Natural Power of Kings*, which defended monarchical power by asserting that it was an extension of the God-given power of

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[24] John Whitaker, *The Real Origin of Government* (London: John Stockdale, 1795), 52.

[25] Ibid., 4.

[26]John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78.

the father in the family. Filmer's views served as a foil to John Locke's views in his *Two Treatises on Civil Government.* Whitaker stood with Filmer.

> All government appointed must be exhibited in a reality, and substantiated into a form. Such a regimen GOD established upon the earth, in the personal rule of Adam over Eve, in the personal authority of Adam primarily, and of Eve secondarily, over the children of both. MONARCHY therefore is the primary, the natural, the divine form of government for MEN. [27]

On this very traditional foundation, Whitaker assaulted the French Revolution as democratic. This was not a novelty. There had been democratic revolutions before.

> The first that made its appearance in the world, was at Athens. The keen genius of Attica, wanting to try an experiment upon the universal polity of Man, to substitute a creature of its own reason for the fabrication of GOD's wisdom, and to violate the primogenial law of nature in favor of a fantastical theory; took advantage of the death of a self-devoted monarch, and, in a pretended fear of never having so good a monarch again, most ungratefully deprived his family of the crown, by venturing upon the bold innovation of erecting a republic.[28]

A republic was synonymous with democracy.

> A republic indeed bears generally three signatures of its own illegitimacy, upon its forehead. A King possesses a crown as an inheritance, it is a family – estate to him, he is to transmit it to his son, and he can have no

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[27] Whitaker, *Government*, 4.

[28] Ibid., 27-28.

> interest superior to what he has in his kingdom. But a republic opens the gate to general avarice, by calling up men into government from the lower ranks of life, by presenting temptations to their selfishness superior to their stake in the society, and so inviting an universal scramble of peculation.[29]

Burke had used the pride of Britain in her constitution and national customs. Whitaker was even more forceful in asserting British virtues, which would protect the nation from the fate of France. Still, this never degenerated into xenophobia. The fault lay not with France.

> France, while it continued a Kingdom, was always the first of the nations of Europe in arts and arms.... France once was the great medium through which all the refinements of the continent were transmitted to us. To her we owe our learning, our civility, even our Christianity. She stood therefore as the conveyer of all good to us. [30]

They evil lay in the ideas of the Enlightenment, by no means peculiar to France. The Revolution was one throughout the world — a common conservative view crucial to the belief that it was the result of conspiracy.

> That very spirit of liberty, thus encouraged by France, has in the visible dispensations of GOD proved her punishment. The republican genius of America, came into France, with her returning soldiery; all sick with the contagion of sickness through the latter. [31]

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[29] Ibid., 35.

[30] Ibid., 43.

[31] Ibid., 44.

British conservative thought in the 1790s had deep roots and we see them clearly in the work of Whitaker. All conservative writers reflect them. However, some show more interest in the newer Burkean notions and, in particular, in conspiracy theory than Whitaker does. We see this, for example in John Bowles (1751-1819), a very active political pamphleteer and contributor to the *Anti-Jacobin Review,* set up in 1798 to advance the Loyalist cause. He was anxious, for example to repeat Burke's prophecies.

> Anarchy, moreover, the evils of which are too great to be lasting, cannot fail to terminate in a despotism, far more severe and galling than would be endured, if it were not an exchange for much greater evil. For nothing less than such despotism can control the furious spirit of anarchy. So that one of the effects of anarchy is to render the mind of slavish, and to eradicate even a wish for liberty, of which neighboring country now exhibits a most awful proof.[32]

Bowles also showed many of the fears of conspiracy theorists. In his pamphlet, *A Letter to the Right Honorable Charles James Fox*, Bowles showed his hatred for the radical societies.[33] Such societies were conspiratorial. The same theme re-emerged in his pamphlet of 1793, *A Short Answer to ...the Friends of the Liberty of the Press.* The conspiracy involved the propagation of the radicals' concept of freedom, a "licentious freedom" that leads to destruction of the constitution, law, and true freedom of the press. The same pamphlet reflects the concern of conspiracy theorists

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[32] John Bowles, *Thoughts on the Late General Election, as Demonstrative of the Progress of Jacobinism* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1802), 31.

[33] John Bowles, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox...* (London: Whieldon and Butterworth, 1791).

with the conspirators' use of the press to disseminate their ideas.[34] However, now it was the French state itself which led the conspiracy. The view reflected common allied war propaganda. This was reflected in his pamphlet of 1794, *Farther Reflections Submitted to the Consideration of the Combined Powers*.[35] The view was shared by more important figures than Bowles. William Pitt, the prime minister, spoke of

> .... a system, the principles of which, if not opposed, threaten the most fatal consequences to the tranquility of this country, the security of its allies, the good order of every European Government, and the happiness of the whole of the human race.[36]

Since France had become itself the leader of the conspiracy against throne and altar, it could not be treated in the way traditional enemies were treated. The war was to be pursued as a crusadeto the death. In his *Objections to the Continuance of the War Examined and Refuted*,[37] he stated clearly that a Revolutionary movement could not be considered a legitimate government with which peace could be made.

The period saw many defenders, like Whitaker and Bowles, of the *status quo*, writing about contemporary affairs. Each had his or her own emphasis. Some spoke mostly of conspiracy. Figures like Lewis Hughes spoke of how individual *philosophes*, notably Voltaire, had actually plotted to undermine the Christian

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[34] This was published in London by J. Downes. See especially p. 14.

[35] This was published in London by J. Debrett and T.N. Longman.

[36] Quoted in Glyn Williams and John Ramsden, *Ruling Britannia: a political history of Britain, 1688-1988* (London: Longman, 1990), 152.

[37] A second edition was published in London by J. Debrett and T.N. Longman in 1794.

religion and how his writings undermined religious belief in France, holding this to be a direct cause of the French Revolution.[38] However, there were many other, less immediately obvious manifestations in a belief in the conspiracy against throne and altar. There were other emphases. John Reeves, an active promoter of popular Loyalism, wrote *Thoughts on the English Government*, advocating particularly reverence for the monarch.[39] Reeves very much shared the fear of conspiratorial societies, which possessed many.[40] He had consequently launched, in November 1792, the loyalist Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. Eventually, about 2,000 groups sprang up across the country. They published pamphlets, held demonstrations in which Paine was burnt in effigy, attacked landlords who allowed radical clubs to meet on their premises, and organized prosecutions for sedition, sometimes even packing juries to guarantee convictions. Hannah More's writings stressed manners, morals and religion.[41] In the 1780s, More had widened her circle to include religious and philanthropic figures, including John Newton, Beilby Porteus and William Wilberforce. She played an important role in the conservative reaction to the French Revolution. In 1793, she published *Village Politics*, a short popular tract designed to counter the arguments of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man.* Later in the year she wrote an attack on the anti-

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[38] Lewis Hughes, *Historical View of the Rise, Progress and Tendency of the Principles of Jacobinism* (London: J. Wright, 1799), 44.

[39] John Reeves, *Thoughts on the English Government* (London: J. Owen, 1795), 12.

[40] William Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of Infidel Societies* (London: J. Hatchard, 1800), 8.

[41] Hannah More, *On Carrying Religion into the Common Business of Life...* (London: J. Marshall, 1796).

clericalism of the French Revolution, designed to raise funds for the French clergy, then taking shelter in Britain.[42] William Wilberforce worked with Hannah More in the Association for the Better Observance of Sunday. Its goal was to provide all children with regular education in reading, personal hygiene and religion. The conspiracy of the Revolutionaries was to be combated by preserving the people from being contaminated with their ideas. He also directly attacked the revolutionary ideas of the French Jacobins.[43] A positive promotion of Christianity in the face of attack was also evident in his work calling on the upper classes to regain true Christian values in their lives. The book sold widely for over forty years.[44] Some, unlike Wilberforce, suggested that any religion would do. Even in its most degraded state, it was argued that religion gives stability to any society.[45] Reflecting a more immediately practical approach was shown by the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor. It was set up in 1796 to spread morality among the laboring classes and reduce the temptation of radical ideas.

After 1795, Burke's claim about a conspiracy of *philosophes* had been widely accepted and became the familiar explanation of the origin of the Revolution.

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[42] Hannah More, *Considerations of Religion and Public Education, with Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont delivered in the National Convention of France* (Dublin: Christopher Jackson, 1793).

[43] Leonard W. Cowie, *William Wilberforce, 1759-1833, a Bibliography* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 38.

[44] William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity* (London: T. Cadell. & W. Davies, 1797).

[45] Peter Roberts, *Christianity Vindicated...* (London: J. W. Myers, 1800), 78.

As Bishop Beilby Porteus put it: the *philosophes* had "waged open war with the gospel for near half a century: they have established a regular system and school of infidelity whose ground object is the extirpation of Christianity from the earth..."[46] Acceptance of this notion took, as we have seen, many forms in the literature and society of the period. It also created fertile ground for acceptance of more specific accusations about Freemasons and the Illuminati.

Here the inspiration was continental. It owed much to Leopold Hoffman, editor of the *Wiener Zeitschrift*. He left his chair of language and German literature at the University of Vienna and began to issue his journal, exposing the conspiracy, which originated with the Illuminati. With the help of a friend, Dr. Zimmerman, a physician who was a former radical converted by the developments of the French Revolution. Hoffman tried to find facts revealing the Illuminati to be the secret cause of the political explosion in France. Hoffman argued that Freemasonry had come to be dominated by Illuminati, that it might be forced to serve the ends of its conqueror.[47] Journalists partial to the interests of the *Aufklärung* had been used in the same way. The German Union was only one of the enterprises fostered by the Illuminati to further their designs. The dogmas of the order had been spread secretly in France also by means of the clubs of that country, and the effectiveness of their propaganda was being vividly demonstrated in the horrors of the Revolution. Unless German princes should promptly adopt rigorous measures against the various agents and enterprises of the order in their territories, they might confidently expect similar results to follow.[48]

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[46] Quoted from Porteus in Schilling, "The English Case Against Voltaire", 200.

[47] Hoffman, *Illumineten-Freimeurer,* 48.

[48] Ibid., 62.

The anti-Revolutionary intellectual traffic between Britain and the European mainland was not all one way, however. At a much higher level of thought than Hoffman, there was Joseph de Maistre, who owed much to Burke, though he gave his thought a distinctly Catholic dress. Society, he held, is an organic growth formed over centuries of practice in ways peculiar to each nation. His themes included reverence for established institutions, distrust of innovation, and defense of aristocracy and established church. In continental Europe too we should distinguish between the less specific accusations of conspiracy made by Burke, and taken up by such men as de Maistre, and the more specific accusations of such as Hoffman. However, neither is well understood without reference to the other.

CHAPTER IV

THE ABBÉ BARRUEL AND PROFESSOR ROBISON

Even paranoids may have true enemies.

Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*

To begin the fourth chapter of the thesis, I shall speak of émigré French priest Abbé Augustin Barruel (1741-1820) and his particular conspiracy theory. His highly influential work, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1791) offers the clearest exemplification of what is written in previous chapters about the conspiracy of the Freemasonry and Illuminati, as it was perceived by the adherents of the counter-Revolution. With it should be considered the almost equally influential work of the Scottish academic, John Robison, which is the subject of the final chapter of this chapter. However, Barruel's work deserves attention not only because it provides this exemplification. It is a long work and all of it is worth reading, for it breathes the true atmosphere of the politics, the public opinion and attitudes of the last years of the eighteenth century. Although the *Memoirs* is a long work, its thesis can be stated very briefly: the Encyclopaedists, the Freemasons, and the Bavarian Illuminati worked together, quite consciously and in a well co-ordinated fashion, and had produced the Jacobins — and the Jacobins in turn produced the Revolution, which was now threatening to destroy Europe's Christian civilization. There was enough truth in this to make it credible. However chief interest of this conspiracy theory of Barruel for us is as an important source for the understanding of the mind of the counter-

Revolutionaries and the ideological origins of the politics of the nineteenth-century European right.

The Abbé Barruel was born in France, at Vivaris, in 1741, into a noble family. He was educated by the Jesuits and decided that he himself would enter the Society of Jesus. When the Jesuits were suppressed, he lived in Moravia and Bohemia for some years and travelled in Italy as a tutor for a young nobleman. In 1773 he returned to France and continued to work as a tutor. In 1777 he began to work as an editor for the *Année littréraire* in Paris. In addition to the *Memoirs*, he wrote several other books, most notably, his *History of the Clergy during the French Revolution.* There was also a lengthy anti-*philosophe* novel entitled *Les Helviennes, ou letters provinciales philosophiques*. In fictional form, the same points were made. Those influenced by Enlightenment ideas were "troublesome, seditious, and always ready to revolt and rebel."[1] The proponents of Enlightenment ideas depicted here were decidedly conspiratorial, engaged with secret societies and working through the unfortunate people they deceived. Barruel was highly respected among his fellow Jesuits, and, at the time of the French Revolution, was responsible for collecting information for them.

His *Memoirs*, it might be said, did not come from an amateur. If there was a great international conspiracy to overthrow throne and altar, it was his duty to know about it. Barruel had the happiness to live apparently to see the conspiracy eventually

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[1] Amos Hoffman, "Opinion, Illusion, and the Illusion of Opinion: Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy" *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn, 1993), 28.

confounded by the immense war effort of the Christian powers of Europe and the Bourbon dynasty restored. He died in 1820.[2]

Barruel's concern with the Enlightenment's Revolutionary conspiracy did not begin at the time of the Revolution. It went back a long way, at least to his association with the *Année littréraire*. Founded in 1754 by Elie-Catherine Fréron and continued by his son Stanislas and others until 1790, the journal was one of the most respected European periodicals of the eighteenth century.[3] It gained its reputation chiefly because of its effective stance against works of the *philosophes* taken by its able editors. In addition to Fréron, there was the Abbé Thomas-Marie Royou. He was, much later, after the outbreak of the Revolution, to publish the more political journal, *L'Ami du roi*, intended as a successor to the *Année littréraire*. Already in the early 1770s, before Barruel joined it, the *Année littréraire* was indicting the *philosophes*, the Freemasons, and the Protestants for secretly plotting the destruction of both religion

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[2] There is no full biography of Barruel. However, Amos Hofman's articles about Barruel give relatively satisfactory biography of him. Amos Hofman, "The Origins of the Theory of the Philosophe Conspiracy," *French History*, Vol.2, No.2, 154. For additional biographical material about Barruel, see Michel Riquet, "Un Jesuit Franc-Maçon, historien du jacobinisme," *Archivum Historicum Societatis lesu*, Vol., 43 (1974), 157-161.

[3] Elie Fréron was known as a very effective critic of the *philosophes*, since he was in general a good literary critic. He was born in 1718 and received a traditional Jesuit education. Throughout his life he remained firmly attached to the Jesuits. In addition to the *Année littréraire*, he was associated, as an assistant editor, with the conservative journal *Observations sur quelques écrits modernes*. He died in 1776.

and the monarchy. This appears to be where and when the idea of such a conspiracy chrystalised.[4] However, cleary anti-protestantism separeted Barruel from Burke.

Originally in separate volumes, *Memoirs* consists of four parts. The volumes, originally published in French in 1796, show the conspiracy in its entirety, from its origin among the *philosophes* of the early to mid-eighteenth century, those "sophisters of impiety," particularly members of the French Academy, to its organizational maturity in the Illuminati, and Revolutionary success on the way to achieving their ultimate goal — an international orthodoxy.[5] What was depicted was a conspiracy, which was anti-Christian, anti-monarchical and destructive of the whole social fabric. To illustrate the violent philosophical campaign against Christianity, Barruel focuses on the works of Voltaire. In speaking of the campaign against monarchy, he examines the works of Montesquieu and Rousseau. The conspiracy's spread came with the secret societies, which had supporters throughout all of Europe and had seized the control of many institutions in order to diffuse their seditious opinions against throne and altar. When the French regime was at its weakest moment, the conspirators had seized control.

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[4] Timothy Tackett, "Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105 (June, 2000): 691-714. Amos Hofman, "The Origins of the Theory of the Philosophe Conspiracy," *French History,* Vol. 2 (1988): 152–72. See also Roberts, *Secret Societies*, 140–41; Darrin M. McMahon, "The Counter-Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France," *Past and Present*, Vol. 159 (May, 1998): 77 –112.

[5] Hofman, "Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy," 34.

The first volume of Barruel's work was intended to catch the reader's attention with a general picture of the conspiracy. The main actors in it were presented. The mission and private means of each of the chiefs of the conspiracy were adverted to. The conspiracy's object was set out. Its means and methods adopted were exposed. These included violence as well as the deceit of veiling themselves as promoters of tolerance. The organization of the conspiracy, its extent and progress throughout Europe was revealed.[6] This first part contained, more particularly, the anti-Christian nature of the conspiracy. The designs of the *philosophes* were not directed against Catholicism alone. They were enemies to the God of Christianity and opposed every religion — Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, or Anglican. Diderot, as well as Voltaire, was singled out. At the publishing of the *Encyclopedié*, beginning in 1751, the conspirators hoped that this would become the standard reference work on virtually all subjects for all learned and literate persons. God and religion were to be taken out of thought on all topics. Barruel demonstrates at length how the *Encyclopedié* was used as a carrier of propaganda and indoctrination to further the subversive strategy.[7] To the list of the chief actors, Barruel added Frederick the Great and D'Alembert. All of these had, in the 1750s, entered into a regular plot to destroy Christianity. Their policy was to "strike, but conceal the hand" and their motto, composed by Voltaire, was "ecrasez l'infame," which meant: "Crush Christ, crush the religion of Christ, crush every religion that adores Christ."[8] It is not a surprise that Barruel saw the late eighteenth-century attack on the Jesuits, leading to their suppression by the pope, as an important part of this conspiracy. This was just the

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[6] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 1: x-xi.

[7] Ibid., 1: v.

[8] Hofman, "Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy", 28.

beginning. The conspirators sought the destruction of all other religious orders, which were to be deprived of all their material possessions and discredited by ridicule and misrepresentation.

The second volume dealt with the political, anti-monarchical aspects of the conspiracy, showing "sophisters of impiety coalescing with those of rebellion against all kings."[9] Many years before the French Revolution, men who named themselves as *philosophes* conspired against the God of the Christian Gospel. However, that involved the overthrow of the Christian state, of all Christian thrones. Thus, it was the school of the sophisters of impiety, which formed the sophisters of rebellion. And these groups formed the Illuminati by coalescence with an ancient sect— here the Knights Templar entered the picture — whose tenets constituted the whole secret of the occultist lodges of the Freemasons. From the members of these lodges only an elect group reached the secret, which consisted of an unrelenting hatred for Christ and kings. In the end a grand coalition was formed: there were the practice of impiety, the practice of rebellion, and the practice of anarchy, which, through the medium of the Illuminati, together created Jacobinism. Here was the culmination of Barruel's argument, as the title of the whole work indicates. In the *Memoirs* each of these three conspiracies is treated separately; their authors unmasked and their objects and means are made clear. Then their coalition and progress are shown.[10] This Barruel set out as his method of presentation. Yet the three were not truly separate. It was from the sophisters of impiety and the sophisters of rebellion and promoters of anarchy arose. And the ancient sect, with its hatred of Christianity, had been there long before all the others. The root of all was hostility to Christianity. Though the conspiracy threatened

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[9] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 2: iv-v.

[10] Ibid., 1: xiv, xv.

all kings, all established governments, all society and all property; it did so by an attack on Christianity.[11] Barruel might be seen as giving a warning to those who shared in any trend towards religious indifference. It was necessary to look after the society's religious roots, if the whole society was not to come down.

When the formation of the conspiracy had had been described, the thrird volume took the story somewhat further, into the history of the Revolution itself. There were tentacles of the Illuminati not only in the Jacobins and the organizqations they created or dominated, such as the Committee of Public Safety, but in other political and religious groupings.[12] This detailed account made the more general parts of Barruel's work more convincing. But Barruel did not stop at this in his efforts to convince. In the style of a controversial historian, he set out a selection of primary sources. Barruel's *Memoirs* can be looked on as an informative study of the Illuminati, though it is clearly very difficult to use as a source because of its hostility to them and the use of what is recorded to give an argument. Here in this part of the four-volume work Barruel presents in great quantity documents seized from the Order. The rapidly growing influence of the Order in, and outside of, Bavaria is carefully traced for the periods both before and after the French Revolution. Barruel recounts the story of the pan-European Masonic conference at Wilhelmsbad in the summer of 1782, already referred to, at which Weishaupt's representatives recruited the leadership of masonry from France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Freemasonry was the instrument by which the Illuminati created the Jacobins. Masonic principles and teaching, in themselves, Barruel believed, introduced the spirit of revolt against both ecclesiastical and civil authority. He sketched eighteenth-century Masonic history. Freemasonry, the

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[11] Ibid., 2: iv-x.

[12] Hofman, "Philosophe Conspiracy," 154.

tendencies of which were profoundly irreligious and anarchical, had come into Northern Germany from England and France early in the century, and had spread south into the Catholic parts of the country. The Masonic lodges everywhere became the meeting places to which every type of impiety, immorality, particularly revolt, found its way. Here all the anti-religious and anti-social elements of French society met on common ground. Freemasonry was therefiore the ideal tool for the Illuminati. The leaders of the Illuminist French Grand Orient ran the Jacobin clubs and were responsible for planning and orchestrating all the major events of the French Revolution. There is much evidence in Barruel's work that would help to clarify facts about these secret societies, if it could be safely used.[13] In the final part of *Memoirs*, Barruel reviewed the tragic success of the Illuminati's first experiment in subversive destruction, the French Revolution.[14]

Barruel stressed the length, the extent and vast consequences of the conspiracy he was talking about. His conspiracy was a very complicated one indeed. Something as big as the French Revolution needed a big explanation, if it was to compete with and challenge even more complex explanations of what had happened in France, explanations which did not involve conspiracy. Still, complex as Barruel's story was, it always had to be about conspiracy and other causations needed to be excluded. It always had to be about small numbers of wicked men, who arranged everything that happened. The conspiracy could not just be a part of or a trigger for something wider. He could not admit widespread, real, spontaneous support for change in France. This would have defeated his political purpose. The point was

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[13] Vernon L. Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918), chapter.3, 142-228.

[14] Ibid., 168.

driven home again and again in Barruel's work He urged the reader to remember that when the Bavarian government raided the home of one of the Illuminati, the statement in the plans they confiscated declared, "this revolution will be the work of the Secret Societies, and that is one of our great mysteries."[15] There was a danger that in the complexity of the conspiracy it would no longer be clearly perceived as conspiracy. So the vastly extended, complex conspiracy had to be reduced to some simplicity. It coalesced into a continuing organizational structure, with the founding of the Order of the Illuminati in Bavaria. And this structure remained in control of all that happened. The Order of Illuminati was a conspiracy like no other,

> which, when compared with those of the clubs of Voltaire and D'Alambert, or with the secret committees of D'Orleans, make these latter appear like the faint imitations of puerility, and show the sophister and the brigand as mere novices in the arts of revolution. [16]

This had to be the case because of the scope of what the Order was trying to do. Barruel borrowed the words of Weishaupt to state this.

> Princes and nations shall disappear from off the face of the earth! Yes, a time shall come when man shall acknowledge no other law but the great book of nature; this revelation shall be the work of Secret Societies and that is one of our grand mysteries. ...[17]

Even within the Illuminati there was a smaller group, its leadersip, making dupes of the members. Weishaupt's plan was to enlist supporters into a secret organization, and to bring them little by little to share his ideals by means of a series

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[15] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 4: 54.

[16] Ibid., 4: 23.

[17] Ibid., 4: 25.

of successive initiations into the inner circles and secrets of the organization.[18] Barruel describes the methods of training in the Order. Here Barruel tells of his own experiences when he himself was invited to join. He claimed first-hand experience. In the early stages of the training, that is when novices were in the outer circles of the organization, some kind of religion and even Christianity was professed; but as the member became more deeply involved, new principles and ideas were introduced and he was gradually admitted into the innermost secrets, which included the denial of God and the abolition of all civil authority. Only the members of the occult degrees knew the real aim of the organization, which was the destruction of the monarchy and Christianity, particularly Catholicism. These subversive aims of the sect were disguised by means of a secret language, ritual and symbol, which could be interpreted by those admitted to the highest degrees of the Order. Consequently, the mass of "blind believers in the lower degrees are not aware of the real purpose and they are duped to support revolutionary principles."[19] Barruel quoted Weishaupt, taking pleasure in the deceitful nature of his Order. "A famous Protestant divine who is now of the Order is persuaded that the religion contained in it is the true sense of Christianity. O Man, Man! To what may'st thou not be persuaded!"[20] Only at the highest level were "the real purpose" disclosed: abolition of all ordered government, private property, inheritance, patriotism, all religion, the family (i.e., marriage, morality and the proper education of children) and, finally, the establishment of the Order's worldwide rule. To preserve this deceit, the members had to bind themselves by dreadful oaths to devote themselves to the purposes of the organization and to

[18] Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 178.

[19] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 2: 304.

[20] Quoted from Barruel in Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 200.

preserve unbreakable secrecy.[21] The Order exacted from its members a total consecration of themselves, of all their faculties and powers, for the work of the society. They had to place at its service their liberty, their honor, their property, and to forswear their allegiance to their country and their Church. They had, at the same time, to bind themselves to inviolable secrecy and to complete and blind obedience to the superiors of the society, whom they did not know, and to whom was committed the right of life and death over all the members, as well as the right to oblige the latter to the most unjust and immoral acts.[22]

Everything was thus directed by very few. Barruel firmly based his understanding of the course of history on the role of individuals. For him, there was a human hand in all the devastating events he had seen. By these leaders of the Illuminati

> ...everything was foreseen, premeditated, combined and resolved upon...all had been prepared by men, who alone held the clue to these conspiracies conceived in the meetings of secret societies...The grand cause of the Revolution is all to be found in one chain of plots.[23]

Further, the conspiracy was still going on as a deceiving conspiracy. As with Burke, Barruel wanted to show that the Revolution was not what it seemed to be to its sympathizers and supporters. The conspirators were committed to campaign of worldwide revolution to destroy the existing order. They hoped that the continuing organizational structure they established would eventually succeed in imposing on the world a solution to the chaos they had caused — a totalitarian world government or

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[21] Quoted from Barruel in ibid., 182. .

[22] Quoted from Barruel in ibid., 186.

[23] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 1: viii-ix.

new world order.[24] There was to be a “new empire,“ to which all existing governments would become subordinate and which would take as its first task the destruction of “ALL RELIGION (Christianity most of all)“ by the most repressive means. “Every person shall be made a spy on another and on all around.“[25]

Having introduced the topic of Barruel’s view of causation, we should here note another point about Barruel as an historian. Like the eighteenth-century historian in general, he was a moralist. Since he believed in the power of individuals to shape events on a vast scale, it was clearly appropriate to speak of the morality (or immorality) of those individuals. Depictions of the leaders of the conspiracy gave him plenty of chances to do this. Following an official report of the Bavarian government issued in 1786, Barruel spoke of Weishaupt’s personal history. Early training by both Jewish teachers and the Jesuits inspired him with an intense dislike, even hatred for Christianity and the Society of Jesus. When he broke with the Jesuits he immersed himself in the subversive and anti-Christian teachings of the French philosophers and other writers who appealed to his instinctive sense of superiority.[26] The outcome of this formation was:

> ...an odious phenomenon in nature, an Atheist void of remorse, a profound hypocrite, destitute of those superior talents which lead to the vindication of truth, he is possessed of all that energy and ardor in vice which generates conspirators for impiety and anarchy.[27]

[24] Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 170.

[25] Quoted from Barruel in ibid., 201.

[26] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 3: 35.

[27] Ibid., 3: 27.

Barruel's work shows firm belief in another force at work in shaping history. He believed in the importance of ideas and he was very much concerned with their development and spread. Of course, it was mostly objectionable ideas which were of concern. All parts of society were susceptible to the poison of Enlightenment ideas. The French Academy had been corrupted. The *philosophes* were in control of admission to the Academy and only a proved infidel could enter. The Academy then infected other men of letters, who assisted in the perversion of public opinion by impious literature. Referring to the other end of the social scale, Barruel observed that the "common people who were easily led astray by words and impressed by the title of the *philosophe*s. The vulgar were unable to distinguish the impiety inherent in philosophical doctrines: they were simple-minded dupes of the conspirators."[28] Barruel was indicating a truth, when, throughout the *Memoirs*, the Order was shown to have been interested in gaining the interest of book dealers, publishers, printers and heretical writers. Weishaupt did seek to strengthen the Illuminati so as to create a book production and distribution network free of the control of the church, thus providing an unheard of degree of liberty in literary circles.[29] Barruel argued that private reading clubs, like the salons and lodges of the Freemasons, became the central points for the subversive and impious activists of the Enlightenment.[30] Again, all was directed by the few in a conspiratorial way.

> These writings are precisely the same productions, issued from the same workshops, composed by the same adepts, exalted, recommended, reviewed by the same chiefs, diffused with the same profusion, hawked

[28] Ibid., 1: 38-39.

[29] Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 192.

[30] Hofman, "Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy," 32.

> about in the towns and in the country by the same agents of Holbach's Club distributed by the same school-masters, so as to spread the poison all the way into cottages, and form the highest social classes to the most indigent.[31]

The British had been well prepared for the reception of the work of Barruel, when it appeared in translation in 1797. They had reflected and elaborated on Burke. Burke, too, was building on an old British habit of explanation of events by conspiracy. The British were used to the claims that Enlightenment influenced religious dissenters, like the Socinians, were plotting against church and state. Even before that, there was a long tradition of seeing Catholic conspiracy. They therefore found in Barruel's *Memoirs* a reasonable and fascinating explanation for the "unbelievable subversion" they saw abroad and at home.[32] An entire edition was sold before the fourth volume reached the press.[33] The *Gentleman's Magazine* greeted Barruel as a great public benefactor. Every friend of religion, government and social order must feel indebted to him, it said, for his unveiling of "a system of iniquity… the most dangerous, the world ever saw."[34] Burke himself wrote a personal letter to Barruel, commenting on the *Memoirs*, in which a "wonderful narrative is supported by

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[31] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 2:156.

[32] Hofman, "Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy", 39.

[33] Robert Clifford, *Application of Barruel's Memoirs of Jacobinism to the Secret Societies of Ireland and Britain* ... (London, E. Booker: 1798), ii. Clifford was Barruel's English translator.

[34] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 69 (1799), 145

documents and proofs of the most juridical regularity and exactness … the tendency of the whole admirable in every point of view."[35]

It can be said that Barruel's *Memoirs* did not change or add new arguments to the case against the *philosophes*. This is true; but he did spread the anti-Enlightenment and anti-Revolutionary message in a very effective way. His conspiracy theory attracted readers in a way that good intellectual argument could not. For those who were already hostile to the Enlightenment and the Revolution, their commitment was strengthened by this shocking exposure of wickedness. Further, Barruel and the kind of thought he represented remained influential into the period after 1815, when Europe was in an age of restoration. People believed that a real restoration of the past was possible, because the Revolution had had no deep roots in the thinking, the society or the politics of the time. It could be swept away. It had been just the work of a few men with evil minds. Finally, we may say that Barruel did his work well. It is the victory, in our present-day world, of Enlightenment values, which Barruel hated so much, not the unacceptability of Barruel as a historian, which makes his work so dated. He over-interpreted his evidence a great deal; but he was careful about that evidence and he disclosed so much that was true. And when he did this, he captured a lot of the political atmosphere of his age. It is probably chiefly that which makes his *Memoirs* still interesting.

John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy*

Of almost equal significance to Barruel in the history of conspiracy theory in the period is John Robison (1739-1805), a noted mathematician, the professor of

[35] Quoted from Burke in Clifford, *Barruel's Memoirs*, iii.

natural philosophy (or, we might say now, of the physical sciences) in the University of Edinburgh, Secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the author of *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe carried on in the Secret Meetings of the freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies, collected from Good Authorities* (1798). He was the son of a Glasgow merchant, born in Stirlingshire 1739 and educated at Glasgow University, from which he graduated master in 1756. In 1770 he went to Russia as a secretary to Admiral Knowles, who had the task of re-organizing the imperial navy, abroad, both in England, as a tutor, and in Russia, as the British ambassador's secretary. He became the professor of mathematics at Cronstadt, but returned to Scotland, as a professor of the University of Edinburgh in 1774. He was elected general secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, an office he continued in almost until his death. In addition to his book on the Illuminati, Robison edited and published, in 1803, the lectures of Joseph Black, the distinguished professor of chemistry at Edinburgh, but also wrote a good deal of original material. His most notable work, though it was unfinished and dealt only with dynamics and astronomy, was his *Elements of Mechanical Philosophy,* published in 1804. He also contributed a great deal to the third edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He was, in brief, a highly respected Scottish academic and was justly so regarded.[36]

In a way, the *Proofs* did their job, simply by their publication under Robison's name. Robison was a distinguished, independent witness coming forward in support of the tale told by Barruel. However, Robison, though he covered much the same ground as Barruel, was better at delivering the message than Barruel was, in many respects. For one thing, he had been active as a Freemason and did write with

[36] Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 144.

authority on this topic. So, he was likely to be believed when he reported what he had discovered.

> I have found that the covert of a Mason Lodge had been employed in every country for venting and propagating sentiments in religion and politics that could not have circulated in public without exposing the author to great danger. I found, that this impunity had gradually encouraged men of licentious principles to become more bold, and to teach doctrines subversive of all our notions of morality — of all our confidence in the moral government of the universe — of all our hopes of improvement in a future state of existence — and of all satisfaction and contentment with our present life, so long as we live in a state of civil subordination. I have been able to trace these attempts, made, through a course of fifty years, under the specious pretext of enlightening the world by the torch of philosophy, and of dispelling the clouds of civil and religious superstition, which keep the nations of Europe in darkness and slavery.

In fact, Freemasonry came rather better out of Robison's account than out Barruel's. For Robison, Freemasonry was substantially innocent, until it was corrupted by the Illuminati.

> I have observed these doctrines gradually diffusing and mixing with all the different systems of Free Masonry; till, at last, AN ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN FORMED for the express purpose of ROOTING OUT ALL THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS, AND OVERTURNING ALL THE EXISTING GOVERNMENTS OF EUROPE. I have seen this Association exerting itself zealously and systematically, till it has become

almost irresistible: And I have seen that the most active leaders in the French Revolution were members of this Association, and conducted their first movements according to its principles, and by means of its instructions and assistance, *formally requested and obtained*: And, lastly, I have seen that this Association still exists, still works in secret, and that not only several appearances among ourselves show that its emissaries are endeavouring to propagate their detestable doctrines, but that the Association has Lodges in Britain corresponding with the mother Lodge at Munich ever since 1784... The Association of which I have been speaking is the order of ILLUMINATI... so deep root that it still subsists without being detected, and has spread into all the countries of Europe.[37]

Robison claimed much first hand knowledge of this organization too. Swiftly disillusioned about the Illuminati, he had pretended to go along with their conspiracy, only to observe more and obtain proof of their criminal intentions.[38]

Another strength of Robison's work was its strictly orderly and fairly simple narrative form. Barruel's plot was very complicated. He wrote about several conspiracies and then tied them all together. Robison almost eliminated the Masonic plot, except in so far as Freemasonry was seized by the Illuminati. He therefore disputed Barruel's claim that "irreligion and unqualified Liberty and Equality are the genuine and original Secrets of Free Masonry, and the ultimatum of a regular progress

[37] John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Freemasons, Illuminati and Reading Societies* (New York: George Forman, 1798), 10-11 and 15.

[38] Robison, *Proofs*, 4-8.

through all its degrees."[39] He asserted that this is not the secret of Masonry as he has learned it from other sources. There was some disagreement too over the exposition of certain Masonic degrees and Robison was not willing to admit that his sources were unreliable.[40] Barruel spent much time exposing and explaining the wickedness of the conspiracy. Few of Barruel's or Robison's readers really needed this. They were already fully convinced of the wickedness of what they saw in France. Robison begins with an historical introduction, speaking of Freemasonry's arrival in France from England and its ideological evolution, culminating in the creation of Jacobinism. Here, in this introductory section, we can already observe the effort to document the story convincingly. He found particularly useful the report on the Illuminati prepared by the Bavarian authorities and Hoffman's *Wiener Zeitschrift.* However, also important were *Religions Begebenheiten* and the *Magazin des Literatur et Kunst* and a work entitled, *Mémoires posthumes du general François comte de Custine,* In the second chapter, the scene of the action is Germany and the Illuminati emerge, through the influence of the Lodge of Lyons, the mother lodge of a segment of Masonry known as the Grand Orient de la France.[41] Here Weishaupt, his purposes and his organization are exposed in some detail.[42] The third chapter takes the story of the Illuminati beyond its suppression in Bavaria. Here we find the theme familiar from Barruel and many other Counter-Enlightenment writers: the concern about publishing. We hear that when the Order went underground it re-emerged as a network of reading societies throughout Germany. The goal of this literary network was to monopolize the writing,

[39] *Ibid.*, 356.

[40] Stauffer, *Bavarian Illuminati*, 224.

[41] Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," 421.

[42] Robison, *Proofs,* 57-157.

publication, reviewing and distribution of all literature, more effectively to subvert and control the minds of the people.[43] In the fourth chapter, the action moves back to France and shows the Illuminati, their doctrines and their methods at work in the apparent anarchy of the French Revolution. This section was crucial. After all, the point was to show the origins of the Revolution. The role of Mirabeau, who had been won over to the Illuminati was stressed. It was he who suggested that Bode visit Paris and its most useful Masonic lodges. The discussion of the role played by the Duc d'Orleans, the Grand Master of the Grand Orient de la France, who had been won for the Illuminati by Mirabeau, enables Robison to point out the moral horror of conspiracy, cleverly deceiving to make use of the duke and his fortune to destroy the monarchy — and him too.[44]

It was only in the final part of his book that Robison offered much reflection. Here he discusses morality and religion, politics and the nature of civilized society, the structure of the British government, the role of women and how the Illuminati planned to use them, the dangers of secret societies, human nature, education, and finally, why he was compelled to write his book. The most important lesson he wanted to teach was "vigilance and strictness: impunity had gradually encouraged men of licentious principles to become more bold, and to teach doctrines subversive of all our notions of morality."[45] Destruction had come to France and all Europe because the measures against the Illuminati undertaken in Germany in the 1780s had not been nearly severe enough.

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[43] Ibid., 160-202.

[44] Ibid., 234-280.

[45] Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," 428.

> Thus I think it clearly appears, that the suppression of the Illuminati in Bavaria and the Union in Brandenburgh were insufficient... The habit of plotting had formed itself into a regular system. Societies now acted everywhere in secret, in correspondence with similar societies in distant places. And thus a mode of cooperation was furnished to the discontented, the restless, and the unprincipled in all places, without even the trouble of formal initiations, and without any external appearances by which the existence and occupations of the members could be distinguished.[46]

Not very surprisingly, Robison's work was rather more in tune with its British readership than Barruel's was. An example can be given. An explanation of the French Revolution exclusively in terms of conspiracy would have left a British readership less than wholly convinced. A century of rivalry with France, which had been the enemy to Britain's 'Protestant freedom,' had inclined a great deal of British popular opinion to welcome change in France, when it was getting under way in 1789. There was a lot wrong with the French *ancien régime* and that was at least part of the cause of the Revolution surely. Robison therefore added strength to his case when he pointed, though hardly at much length, to numerous "cooperating causes," which had served to advance the conspiracy. He spoke about the luxuries enjoyed by the French elite provoking the desires of the rest of the population. He spoke about the weakness and corruption of the French Catholic Church, reduced to a source of establishments for the younger sons of insolent and useless nobility. Men of letters might otherwise have had the hope of advancement in the church; but they were embittered and turned to attack it. It deserved attack, since the higher orders of the clergy had scandalously

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[46] Robison, *Proofs*, 355.

departed from the purity and simplicity of manners they should have practiced. In this way, the faith of the nation had been shaken. There were genuine political grievances too. The misconduct of administration and the abuse of the public finances became ever more obvious and allowed reasonable criticism of the government.[47] Such things attracted men to the Masonic lodges. Under the pressure imposed upon private and public discussion by the state and by the church, men of letters and others came together in the lodges, eager to take advantage of the opportunity their secret assemblies gave to discuss their concerns about politics and religion.[48] Among Robison's "cooperating causes" there was also the popular intellectual climate of the times. The interest of the period in mysticism, theosophy, cabalism and genuine science was appealed to, in order to attract people, among whom might be spread the doctrines of atheism, materialism, and discontent with civil subordination.[49]

Barruel's work had prepared the way for Robison's and no doubt helped to give it a market. The first printing of the *Proofs* was sold out in a few days and several editions followed. Both works were also quickly published in the United States and in many places in Europe where they had an immediate and widespread impact. Though there were differences between the two works, both authors tried to smooth them away. Barruel acknowledged the problem.

> Without knowing it, we have fought for the same cause with the same arms, and pursued the same course; but the public are on the eve of

[47] Ibid., 60.

[48] Ibid., 40.

[49] Ibid., 43.

seeing our respective quotations, and will observe a remarkable difference between them.[50]

That difference Barruel tries to explain by saying that Robison had adopted the method of combining and condensing his quotations from his sources. Besides, he thinks his zealous confederate "in some passages . . . has even adopted as truth certain assertions which the correspondence of the Illuminées evidently demonstrate to have been invented by them against their adversaries…"[51] However, there was really no conflict. "It will be perceived," Barruel stated, "that we are not to be put in competition with each other… as to the substance we agree.[52] Their readership agreed and the two works were taken as complementary and mutually confirmatory.

[50] Barruel, *Memoirs*, 3: xiv.

[51] Ibid., 3: xv.

[52] Ibid., 3: xviii.

CONCLUSION

We are not now able to treat the texts of the late eighteenth-century conspiracy theorists, even Burke, with the respect that they gained from contemporaries. We may be aware that it is true that, while the *philosophes* cannot be said to have caused the Revolution in France, which spread to much of mainland Europe, yet the Revolution's development would not have been what it was without the Enlightenment. Political events were not, we know, perfectly and efficiently controlled by Masonic and similar secret lodges. Still, Freemasonry did play a part in the story of the Revolution. In short, we know that Burke, Barruel and Robison got a lot wrong and very grossly over-interpreted their evidence.

It is still important to ask, though, why they got things wrong. This helps us both to understand their texts better and also understand better the period in which they lived and worked. It may even help us to have an understanding of those conspiracy theories, which are still with us. It would be quite wrong, as is sometimes done, to say that these authors wrote as they did simply because the scale and suddenness of what was happening put a true understanding of events beyond their grasp. This is a true explanation; but it is not all of the truth. More must be said about the thought world in which they lived. We need to understand the moral horror at the beliefs which were being openly proclaimed by the proponents of the Revolution. It is hoped that the quotations from the primary sources which have been given in this thesis help in this way. We need to understand what makes conspiracy theories always, at least in the modern historical period, so attractive and their particular

prevalence in the eighteenth century. It is hoped that the first chapter of the thesis helped with this. We need to understand the reasons conspiracy theory took the forms it actually did, by looking at the particular historical circumstances, the history of the period's secret societies. This was done in the second chapter. We need to understand how the authors thought about interpreting events or, more abstractly, historical causation. We also need to see how their views were supported by other kinds of thought in the period. These things were talked about in the third and fourth chapters.

It is hoped that by trying to understand these things, the conspiracy theorists of the 1790s look less like men made irrational by fanaticism, or more kindly, by shocking events on a vast scale. They look simply like men of their own age, which we can now understand a bit better.

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