



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

A Revolutionary Narrative of European History

Bonneville's 'History of Modern Europe' (1789-1792)

Lok, M.

Published in:
History

DOI:
[10.1111/1468-229X.12615](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12615)

[Link to publication](#)

License
CC BY-NC

Citation for published version (APA):

Lok, M. (2018). A Revolutionary Narrative of European History: Bonneville's 'History of Modern Europe' (1789-1792). *History*, 103(356), 434-450. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12615>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

A Revolutionary Narrative of European History: Bonneville's *History of Modern Europe* (1789–1792)

MATTHIJS LOK

University of Amsterdam

L'Europe est le théâtre sur lequel on a toujours vu le vrai caractère de l'homme se déployer avec de plus grands avantages.

Nicholas de Bonneville (1789)

It is generally accepted that 'Europe' is a historical continent shaped by its past. But the idea of Europe as a historical continent and the whole concept of European history have their own history too.¹ In this essay, I will describe the '(re-) invention of European history' in a specific historical moment: the French revolution of 1789–92. Most research on the European ideals of the French revolutionaries deals with the attempts to attain 'eternal peace' in Europe by institutional design through the establishment of a (con)federation of revolutionary sister republics.² So far the expression of revolutionary (as well as counterrevolutionary) ideas of Europe in historiography has received far less attention.³ History writings, however, are crucial sources for the study of the history of European ideas and identities.⁴ The imagining of Europe's past, present

¹ Although many histories of the idea of Europe have appeared, so far a comprehensive 'history of the idea of European history' is missing: J. van der Dussen and K. Wilson (eds), *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London, 1995); G. Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (Basingstoke 1995); A. Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge, 2002); P. Pasture, *Imagining European Unity since 1000 AD* (Basingstoke, 2015).

² M. Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre Européen (1795–1802): De la société des rois aux droits des nations* (Paris, 2006); P. Serna, 'Introduction: l'Europe, une idée nouvelle à la fin du XVIIIe siècle?', *La Révolution française* 'Dire et faire l'Europe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', 14 June 2011, <<https://journals.openedition.org/lrf/252>> [accessed 1 April 2018], pp. 1–16; S. Wahnich, 'L'Europe dans le discours révolutionnaire', *Tumultes*, 7 (1996), pp. 11–28; A. Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2008), pp. 141–96; S. Ghervas, *Conquering Peace: From the Enlightenment to the European Union* (Cambridge, MA, forthcoming); Pasture, *Imagining*, pp. 39–44.

³ An exception is: C. Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and his Heirs, 1794–1854* (Ithaca, NY, 2011). The European idea itself is intimately connected to concepts of the past and future; see W. Schmale, *Geschichte und Zukunft der europäischen Identität* (Stuttgart, 2008).

⁴ In her important study of European historiography in Germany, England and the Netherlands in the twentieth century, Susan Rößner has described how Europe's past, present and future was

and future in history writing, which we can term ‘historical Europeanism’, is a rather neglected topic within the research on the post-revolutionary idea of Europe.⁵

In this essay the (re)construction of the European past in the revolutionary decade is examined, using the curious revolutionary Nicholas de Bonneville (1760–1828) as main case study. Bonneville published a three-volume *History of Modern Europe* (*L’Histoire de l’Europe moderne*), in 1789 (vols I–II) and 1792 (vol. III).⁶ In this work, which Bonneville had already started before the outbreak of the revolution, he made use of a European historical narrative to defend the cause of the French Revolution. Bonneville’s work was neither very original nor brilliant. Essentially, it formed an adaptation and translation of an older work by the Scottish historian William Russell (1741–93). Bonneville’s *History*, however, is of interest as it clearly demonstrated how an older historical narrative could be appropriated for new political purposes in a new political and national context. Bonneville intended his pedagogical history for a large audience, especially children. The work can therefore give us some insight into the European notions, perhaps even consciousness, of people who did not belong to the elite in an older period of political transition, although this essay will not discuss in depth the readership of this work.

Over the last decades much important research has been done analysing the ‘construction’ of national history in the different European countries.⁷ In this field of research, ‘European history’ is often regarded as a variation of national history.⁸ In many ways, this contention is undoubtedly true. The national dimension is very important in the historiography of Europe: usually the country of the author is regarded as the ‘essence’ of European history. Leading historians of Europe such as Voltaire and William Robertson also published on national, colonial and universal (world) history as well. This essay contends, nonetheless, that national and European histories do not entirely overlap and that ‘European history’ forms a separate, relatively autonomous historiographical category with its own self-proclaimed historiographical tradition and canon, as will be described. Stuart Woolf defined ‘European histories’ as ‘histories of Europe viewed as a unitary whole and

imagined in histories of Europe, see her *Die Geschichte Europas schreiben: Europäische Historiker und ihr Europabild im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M., 2009).

⁵ Reinhard Koselleck famously drew attention to the temporalization of history (‘Verzeitlichung’) and changing expectations of the future in what he termed the ‘Sattelzeit’ (c. 1750–1850), in relation to the rise of ideologies. R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979); idem, ‘Einleitung’, in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, I, (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 13–27.

⁶ N. de Bonneville, *Histoire de l’Europe moderne depuis l’irruption des peuples du Nord dans l’Empire Romain, jusqu’à la paix de 1783*, vols I–II (Geneva, 1789) and vol. III (Paris, 1792).

⁷ S. Berger (with C. Conrad), *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015).

⁸ ‘Europe as a spatial entity different from the nation state was effectively nationalised’ (ibid., p. 365).

understood to signify far more than the aggregate of its states'.⁹ As we will see, Bonneville, and many contemporaries, also believed that European history should be more than just a summing-up of the individual national histories, but instead should capture the unique 'European esprit'. In the different histories of Europe different definitions of what 'European history' is can be observed, as will be shown by the example of Nicolas de Bonneville.

In the next section I will first examine the construction of a historical narrative of 'modern Europe', particularly in the eighteenth century, as well as the formation of a canon of 'European historians'. Then I will focus on the literary and intellectual ambitions of Bonneville, a cosmopolitan revolutionary influenced by esotericism. In section III Bonneville's concept of 'modern European History' and his criticism of 'ancient history' are analysed. Consequently a short overview of Bonneville's main historical narrative of original freedom and clerical tyranny is given. In the conclusion, I will examine the extent to which the French Revolution presented a turning point in the 'history of European history'.

I

Bonneville was not the first to publish a history of modern Europe. He could build on many histories published in the preceding decades.¹⁰ French scholars Antoine Lilti and Céline Spector, among others, have argued that during the enlightened eighteenth century, 'Europe' was conceived for the first time as a historical continent and a comprehensive European historical narrative was crafted. According to Lilti and Spector, the concept of Europe in the eighteenth century had three meanings: an institutional federal project to attain 'eternal peace', Europe as a market and trading place for 'commerce' and finally the notion of a 'European civilisation'.¹¹ The enlightened civil society (*société civil européenne*) of the eighteenth century formed in their view a new phenomenon and consisted of a rupture with the humanistic republic of letters.¹² In the

⁹ S. Woolf, 'Europe and its historians', *Contemporary European History*, 12/3 (2003), pp. 323–37, at p. 325; H. Durchardt, (ed.), *Europa-Historiker: Ein biographisches Handbuch* (Göttingen, 2007).

¹⁰ The historical thought of the Enlightenment is a relative new field of study. Following the critical verdict of nineteenth-century romantic historians, the historiographical writings were not valued for most of the twentieth century. In recent decades, however, the crucial role and the merits of the writing of history in the thought of the *philosophes* have been acknowledged. S. Bourgault and R. Sparling, 'Introduction', in Bourgault and Sparling (eds), *A Companion to the Enlightenment Historiography* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 1–22; M. M. Lok (ed.), *The Enlightenment and the Past: Special Issue of 'De achttiende eeuw'* (Dutch-Flemish Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies), 46/2 (2014). Berger, *Past*, pp. 43–79; An older study is H. Bödeker, G. G. Iggers, J. B. Knudsen and P. Reill (eds), *Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1986).

¹¹ A. Lilti and C. Spector, 'Introduction: L'Europe des Lumières, généalogie d'un concept', in Lilti and Spector (eds), *Penser l'Europe au XVIIIe siècle: Commerce, Civilisation, Empire* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 1–9.

¹² In my view, Lilti and Spector, however, somewhat overstate the newness of the enlightened European narrative and underestimate the continuities with the older humanistic history writing.

eighteenth century, 'Europe' became the object of philosophical enquiry and knowledge as well as a historical narrative.¹³

According to English literary scholar Karen O'Brien, a characteristic of the Enlightenment was 'the elaboration of a common descriptive model for the history of Europe through separately periodised ancient, medieval, early modern and enlightened modern stages'.¹⁴ A new reading of European history as the transition from medieval and feudal to modern and commercial social systems was shared in these histories, despite their differences. The beginning of European history was usually traced to the early Middle Ages after the collapse of the Roman empire. The supposedly oppressive feudalism of the Middle Ages was undermined by the development of cities, trades, education and knowledge. The Catholic Church was described by most Protestant or Catholic historians as neither solely an oppressive force nor purely as a civilising institution. For Voltaire and Robertson, the sixteenth century in particular formed an important moment as the century saw the rise of the dynamic European states' system of strong monarchies, so characteristic of European history. The final stage of European history, according to these Enlightenment historians, was the coming of modern commercial societies where commerce had refined manners and brought prosperity and freedom to an increasing number of people.¹⁵

The transnational character of the construction of an enlightened European narrative also becomes evident in Bonneville's 'Notice on the principal historians who have written on European affairs', which preceded the introduction to the first volume of his *History of Modern Europe*. This notice was to large extent based on his *Letter to Condorcet* of 1787, in which he announced his plans to publish a history of modern Europe.¹⁶ In this preliminary text Bonneville discussed the merits, and especially the flaws, of the different French, German and British histories of Europe that had been published earlier, providing a legitimation for the publication of his own work. The aim of the preliminary historiographical essay was to legitimate Bonneville's own project by demonstrating the deficits of the existing histories of Europe. Perhaps implicitly, Bonneville also created a highly selective canon of European Enlightenment historians. He mentioned for instance only German, French and British sources, leaving out other national traditions.

J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II: *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 1–25; A. Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007); F. Clark, *Dividing Time: The Making of Historical Periodization in Early Modern Europe* (in progress); C. Grell, *L'Histoire entre érudition et philosophie: Étude sur la connaissance historique à l'âge des Lumières* (Paris, 1993).

¹³ A. Lilti, 'La civilisation est-elle européenne? Ecrire l'histoire de l'Europe au XVIIIe siècle', in Lilti and Spector (eds), *Penser*, p. 142. For a similar argument see Pocock, *Barbarism*.

¹⁴ K. O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁶ *Lettre de Nicolas de Bonneville, avocat au parlement de Paris, 1a Mr. Le Marquis de Condorcet* (London, 1787).

His essay is a good example of the construction of hierarchies between historiographical centre and peripheries.¹⁷ Only German, French and British historians had, apparently, according to Bonneville the authority to make decisions on what belonged to 'European history'. This emphasis on the three national traditions presented a marked contrast with, for instance, the Italian dominance regarding the early history of Europe, but also the prevalence of Spanish and Dutch humanist scholarship, let alone historians from central, eastern or northern Europe. Also Christian-inspired historians were mostly absent. Bonneville referred with only a few very derogatory words to the influential universal history of the French bishop Bossuet (1627–1704).¹⁸

At the end of his historiographical essay, Bonneville revealed the book he believed was the best history of Europe: the five-volume *History of Modern Europe* by the popular Scottish historian William Russell (1741–93).¹⁹ In the eyes of Bonneville, Russell avoided the dryness of the Germans, such as Pufendorf, as well as the lightness of Voltaire and his French successors.²⁰ He esteemed his 'clarity, style, precision, elegance'.²¹ Bonneville appreciated the fact that Russell not only described the events, but also analysed the general 'progress of the arts and civilization' in every epoch.²² However, even Russell's history showed serious deficiencies in Bonneville's opinion. Apart from the factual mistakes, Russell was above all a compiler of older histories, often, in Bonneville's eyes, in erroneous

¹⁷ On the problem of historiographical 'peripheries', see M. Baar, *Historians and Nationalism: East Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 1–18.

¹⁸ N. de Bonneville, 'Notice sur les principaux historiens qui ont écrit sur des affaires de l'Europe', in de Bonneville, *Histoire de l'Europe moderne*, pp. 3–34, at p. 15.

¹⁹ [Anonymous, by William Russell], *The History of Modern Europe: With an account of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and a view of the progress of society, from the fifth to the eighteenth century. In a series of letters from a nobleman to his son*, I–II (London, 1779). Three further volumes, with the author's name, appeared in 1784, and the whole work was published in five volumes in 1786. Bonneville was asked to publish this five-volume edition. In 1789 and 1794 corrected editions appeared. T. W. Bayne, revised by Alexander Du Toit, 'William Russell (1746–1793)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept. 2004, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24347>> [accessed 1 April 2018]. On Russell's longevity as a textbook, see T. P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760–1830* (New York, 1966), p. 65. Russell also published other histories on national and colonial history. His first work was *The History of America, from the First Discovery by Columbus to the Conclusion of the Late War* (1779). His *History of Ancient Europe, with a View of the Revolutions in Asia and Africa* (1793), was a fragment, and had indifferent success. He was also commissioned to write a history of England from the accession of George III to the end of the American War of Independence, but he never started this project. Russell also published poetry and essays (on the history of women).

²⁰ Bonneville followed in his judgement Russell's own claim that his ambition was to seek a 'medium' between the 'dry chronological method' of Pufendorf and the 'desultory but captivating manner' of Voltaire'. Russell, *History*, I, advertisement.

²¹ 'De toutes les histoires des affaires de notre Europe, la plus utile et la plus estimée, est celle qu'on vient de publier en Angleterre'. Bonneville, 'Notice', p. 26.

²² Despite his apparent popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, surprisingly few publications have been devoted to Russell. M. S. Phillips briefly sketches him as a historian of manners: M. S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 152–4. On the context of the Scottish enlightened historiography see D. Allan, 'Identity and innovation: historiography in the Scottish Enlightenment', in Bourgauff and Sparling (eds), *Companion*, pp. 307–41. Allan, however, does not mention Russell.

translations. Russell did not himself possess genius, but reflected the genius of others such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, Robertson and Ferguson.²³ At the end of his discussion of Russell, Bonneville still had kind words to spare for the effort and the ‘zeal’ of Russell the ‘compiler’ and the ‘usefulness’ of his far from perfect pedagogical history of modern Europe. Finally, Bonneville valued Russell for his use of notes and references, not to sources but to other authorities, a criterion of a trustworthy scholar and apparently a rare phenomenon in the eighteenth-century European historiography.²⁴

Bonneville’s abundant praise for Russell is of course not surprising. Bonneville’s *History* started out as a translation of Russell’s multivolume *History of Modern Europe*. However, Bonneville wrote that he soon became dissatisfied with Russell’s writings: he decided not to produce a mere translation and ‘slavishly follow’ Russell, but in agreement with his publisher Durand to adapt his work and publish the volumes under his own name.²⁵ Also he did not publish the text as a series of letters, as Russell had done, but in several chapters, ‘in the manner of Voltaire’.²⁶ These improvements concerned the style of the history and factual errors. Bonneville also removed several ‘national injuries’ made by Russell.²⁷ Although he stated that a historian should be ‘without fatherland and master’ (*sans pays and sans maître*), he ended the letter by writing that he would adapt Russell’s history for a French audience. Bonneville’s three-volume *History of Modern Europe* is, therefore, a perfect illustration of the ‘travelling’ of European historical narratives between different national traditions, but also shows how ‘foreign’ histories are at the same time adapted to national contexts and to national audiences.²⁸

II

Bonneville’s history of Europe must be understood in the context of his other intellectual as well as political activities. He was born in 1760 in Evreux (Normandy) as the son of a procurator and was described as a good-humoured character with a strong imagination. He left his hometown after a scandal surrounding enthusiastic views on Rousseau,

²³ According to Bonneville, British historians base their work to a large extent on French authors, without acknowledging this debt, implicitly justifying Bonneville’s use of Russell. Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, Postscript, p. 43.

²⁴ On the development and meaning of the footnote, see A. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

²⁵ Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 45.

²⁶ On epistolary form of Russell’s *History*, see Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 92–3.

²⁷ Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 45.

²⁸ ‘Pour tâcher de rendre cette histoire moderne un peu plus le nôtre, j’aurai soin de parler toujours comme si j’écrivois en françois, d’après mes observations et mes idées, sans modestie.’ Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 46. Bonneville also elaborates on the problems of translation in his letter to Condorcet, Bonneville, *Lettre*, pp. 13–15. M. Espagne and M. Werner (eds), *Transferts: Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (xviii^e–xix^e siècles)* (Paris, 1988); M. Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris, 1999).

and went to Paris to study linguistics and languages with the financial aid of the *philosophe* d'Alembert.²⁹ In Paris he lived in a cosmopolitan multilingual environment, regularly meeting Americans, Englishmen and Germans and speaking different languages. The life and work of Bonneville exemplifies the fact that a strict division between literature and history writing did not exist in the late eighteenth century.³⁰ In the 1780s Bonneville worked as translator of German theatre pieces, by, among others, Goethe and Schiller, and novels.³¹ In 1786 he travelled to England, where he became a member of a London freemason lodge and published a work on the supposed infiltration of the freemasonry by the Jesuit order. In 1788 he returned to France. In 1789 he became involved in the Revolution, as elector of the city of Paris charged with provisions, among other positions, proposing the formation of a Parisian 'garde bourgeoise'. He conducted all kinds of activities such as the publication of the journal *Le Tribun du Peuple*, with the aid of Mirabeau. In 1790 he established the 'Cercle Social', a revolutionary forum that aimed to be inclusive and open, in contrast to the more exclusive and closed revolutionary clubs such as a Jacobins.³² In 1791 Bonneville's magnum opus *De L'esprit des religions* was published with considerable success. After the closure of the Cercle Social in 1791, Bonneville worked for several journals associated with the Girondins.³³ He firmly believed that writers had to play a leading role in social and political transformations.

²⁹ On the causes of Bonneville's growing criticism of Rousseau: C. Werner, 'Zu Geschichtsauffassung Nicolas de Bonneville', in W. Krauss and W. Dietze (eds), *Neue Beiträge zur Literatur der Aufklärung* (Berlin, 1964), p. 225.

³⁰ Berger, *Past*, pp. 43–79; L. Gossmann, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*. In his introduction, though, Bonneville explicitly states that he is not a novelist and emphasized the differences between literature and history writing: only history is suitable to educate the new generation. Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. v.

³¹ *Le nouveau Théâtre allemand, traduit par Mrs. Friedel et de Bonneville*, 12 vols (Paris, 1784–6); *Essais – par N. de Bonneville – Choix des petits romans imités de l'Allemand, suivis de quelques essais de poésies lyriques*, I (Paris, 1786).

³² F. Furet, *Nicolas de Bonneville and the Social Circle, 1787–1800* (Paris, 1976); P. Brasart, 'Bonneville et le cercle social, ou le bizarre en révolution', *Littérature*, 169/1 (2013), pp. 67–86; F. Moore, 'The poetry of the Super-Enlightenment: the theories and practices of Cazotte, Chassaignon, Mercier, Saint-Martin and Bonneville', in D. Edelstein (ed.), *The Super-Enlightenment: Daring to Know Too Much* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 137–66; G. Kates, *The 'Cercle Social', the Girondins, and the French Revolution* (Princeton NJ, 1985).

³³ The classic biography of Bonneville is by Philippe le Harivel. Le Harivel defined Bonneville essentially as a 'pre-romantic' and as a freedom-loving revolutionary: 'Grand apôtre de la Révolution, ennemi de toute servitude comme de tout excès, il employa son talent à secourir ses contemporaines et à leur prêcher les principes de l'amour, de la liberté et de l'égalité.' P. le Harivel, *Nicolas de Bonneville: Pré-romantique et révolutionnaire, 1760–1828* (Strasbourg, 1923), p. viii. In her dissertation on Bonneville of 1981, German literary scholar Susanne Kleinert reassessed Le Harivel's analysis. She argued that Le Harivel placed too much emphasis on Bonneville as an Enlightenment author and did not sufficiently underscore the mystical aspects of his thought, as well as not sufficiently highlighting the diversity of his writings. For Kleinert, 'Bonneville steht zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik, allerdings nicht so, als könnte man ihn quasi als eine Mischung aus Voltaire und Chateaubriand erklären: er hat die verscheidende Einflüsse zu einem eigenwilligen und selbständigen, wenn auch nicht geschlossenen Gedankengebäude verarbeitet.' S. Kleinert, *Nicolas de Bonneville: Studien zur ideengeschichtlichen und literaturtheoretischen Position eines Schriftstellers der Französischen Revolution* (Heidelberg, 1981), pp. 12–13. Most recent publications focus on

After 1792 his life took a downward turn. During the Terror, Bonneville narrowly escaped the guillotine and probably returned to his native Normandy. Under Napoleon, Bonneville was suspected of oppositional activities and criticism of Napoleon, such as comparing Napoleon with the English 'dictator' Cromwell, and was kept under strict surveillance. In 1800 his printing press was forfeited by the authorities, resulting in his financial ruin and he was charged with translating Thomas Paine's text *Maritime Pact*. In 1815 he emigrated to the United States, where, with the help of Bonneville's friend Paine, his wife and children had already been living since 1802. In 1819 Bonneville returned to Paris and earned a meagre living in a bookshop until his death in 1828 by which point he had great financial difficulties and was apparently 'half mad'. The heyday of Bonneville's cosmopolitan and revolutionary life was no doubt the first half of the revolutionary decade, when most of his publications appeared. In the conservative climate of the Napoleonic Empire and the Restoration monarchy, Bonneville became a peripheral person, 'a fire extinguished by misery and disease'.³⁴ Fortunes, however, revived for his son, Benjamin, who eventually became a general in the US army.³⁵

Already before the revolution, Bonneville, in his *Letter to Condorcet* of 1787, announced his plans to publish a 'history of modern Europe' at the request of his publisher Durand Neveu. Apart from his historiographical essay on European historians, which would be recycled as the 'preliminary notice' to volume I of his history, Bonneville also sketched his wider ambitions in the *Letter*. Bonneville wrote that he had the ambition of complementing his 'elementary history of our Europe' with a visionary essay on 'the prejudices of the Europeans'. In this essay he would paint a vision of the bright future 'to open the eyes of the Europeans'.³⁶ Only when the European nations realized their true interests, Bonneville continued in a prophetic and utopian vein, would they allow a 'man of genius' ('l'homme de genie') to bring them happiness and prosperity 'to devour the shadows where the demons hide' ('dévorer les ténèbres où se cachent les démons').³⁷ The 'enemies of humanity' would in vane try to extinguish the 'flame of reason', kindled by Voltaire, Rousseau and d'Alembert and supported by the people.³⁸ Bonneville wrote hopefully in 1787 that he expected that in the near future there would be more unity among the nations and mutual understanding. Tyranny and dictatorship, caused by ignorance, would disappear. Superstition would end when men would use their own judgement instead of relying on false authorities and imposters. Earth would awake from its 'lethargical sleep'. The natural equality of

Bonneville's revolutionary as well as literary activities and less on Bonneville as a historian of modern Europe.

³⁴ Cited in Le Harivel, *Bonneville*, p. 15.

³⁵ Kleinert, *Bonneville*, pp. 9–11; Le Harivel, *Bonneville*.

³⁶ Bonneville, *Lettre*, pp. 16, 30; Werner, 'Geschichtsauffassung', pp. 223–4.

³⁷ Bonneville, *Lettre*, pp. 19–20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

all men would be reinstated, including that of the Africans.³⁹ A social contract beneficial to all would be established as the basis of a political community.⁴⁰ The empirical facts he would collect by writing this long-term political history of Europe underpinned his esoteric predictions of Europe's future and long-term development.

Bonneville planned a layered work which consisted of three parts intended for different audiences and levels of understanding: the first part was a narrative of events in European history ('histoire de la naissance et des bouleversements des Empire de l'Europe moderne') for 'men of all classes'. This political history of modern Europe, mainly based on Russell's history, was supposed to be divided in four, unequal and increasingly shorter periods: from the fall of the Roman empire to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), from Westphalia to the Peace of Aix de la Chapelle (1748), from 1748 to the Peace of Paris of 1763, and the fourth period ended with American independence in 1783.⁴¹ The second part of his grand project consisted of a description of the 'history of the sciences and the arts', intended for the more cultivated spirits, with an emphasis on the progress made by European civilization. The third and final part was formed by a 'history of the human spirit in Europe', only to be understood by a small group of 'sensitive and reflective humans beings'. The meaning and inner mechanisms of European history are summarized in a final essay entitled 'Les pourquoi? Ou Récapitulation générale de 'histoire de notre Europe modern'.⁴² For Bonneville, insight into the mechanisms of European history was esoteric and mystical knowledge was to be revealed in layers to ever smaller circles of men, on the model of the freemasons.⁴³ In this respect, interestingly, Bonneville could be regarded as a precursor to counterrevolutionary historians of Europe such as Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), who also regarded the inner workings of European history as mystical and religious knowledge which could be 'revealed' to only a few elevated and sensitive spirits.⁴⁴

Bonneville would achieve only a small part of his wider ambitions. His participation in the revolutionary events and the turmoil of the revolutionary decade, as well as his habit of working on several projects at the same time, prevented the completion of his plans.⁴⁵ In the end, Bonneville only published three volumes of his political historical narrative: volume I (1789, according to the title page published in Geneva, no publisher mentioned) on European history from the fall of the Roman

³⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 20–30. On Bonneville's notion of progress as a synthesis of Rousseau, Voltaire and Mably: Werner, 'Geschichtsauffassung', pp. 227–9.

⁴¹ Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, pp. 35–6.

⁴² Ibid., p. 35.

⁴³ On the esoteric and mystical dimension of the Enlightenment thought: D. Edelstein, 'Introduction to the Super-Enlightenment', in Edelstein, *Super-Enlightenment*, pp. 1–34.

⁴⁴ C. Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and his Heirs, 1794–1854* (Ithaca, NY, 2011).

⁴⁵ Werner, 'Geschichtsauffassung', p. 223.

empire to the death of the Holy Roman Emperor in 1005. The second volume (also published in 1789) started with the death of the English king Alfred in 899 and ended with the Magna Carta (1215). A third and final volume was published three years later, in 1792 (or 'year one of the republic' as it was written on the title page), and chronicles the events of the Holy Roman Empire from 1190 onwards until the foundation of the Swiss republic in 1308.

III

At the start of his work Bonneville explained his concept of Europe and European history. 'Europe', according to Bonneville, had been chosen as the subject of his history as the continent formed the 'main theatre of mankind'. Following Russell, Bonneville argued that true character of 'man' was revealed on the 'European stage'.⁴⁶ Europeans were the universal humans and European history was a prism of universal history.⁴⁷ Europe was unique, according to the Eurocentric Bonneville, as the only region on the globe where society is based on the idea of the social contract. It will not come as a surprise that Bonneville's European history was Franco-centric, providing an example of the close relationship between national and European history. His history naturally started with the history of the French monarchy, the 'most important monarchy' in Europe, followed by that of Spain.⁴⁸

Bonneville explicitly states that he intended his history of Europe to be more than a mere compilation of the history of individual European countries: he believed that a history of Europe that superseded national histories should be written. He aimed to capture the 'spirit (*esprit*) of Europe'. Also a good European historian should not only describe historical events, but should also have the ambition to explain the mechanisms behind them. He dismissed the role of providence in history, prevalent in most Catholic histories such that of Bossuet. Instead of chronicling all individual events, Bonneville focused on the moments of change, the revolutions and turning points in modern European history.⁴⁹ The turning point of the revolution that he himself was experiencing also provided the legitimation for the publication of his new history. Bonneville did not hide the political agenda underlying his history, but instead was very explicit about it. In this introduction to volume I, he stated that 'the revolutions which are going on at the moment turn the attention of

⁴⁶ 'L'Europe est le théâtre sur lequel on a toujours vu le vrai caractère de l'homme se déployer avec de plus grands avantages. C'est en Europe que le pacte social qui unit les fragiles individus, pour en former un corps indestructible, semble avoir atteint, dans tous les temps, un degré de force inconnu à toutes les autres parties du monde; son histoire exige donc une attention sévère.' Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁷ Bonneville did not regard European history as entirely isolated from the outside world but also acknowledged it will be necessary sometimes to examine events in other parts of the world to get a general idea of the 'troubles in the universe'. Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

scholars towards history, a history which is so far missing'.⁵⁰ The turning point of the revolutionary events required and even necessitated a new European history according to Bonneville. His project to publish a new history of Europe was his answer to a call from the 'voice of the people' (*La voix de tout un peuple*). Bonneville's history provides therefore a telling example of the close relationship between politics, especially political turning points, and the production of European history.

Significantly, Bonneville gave his book the title of *History of Modern Europe*, copying the title of Russell's work *The History of Modern Europe*. To my knowledge Russell's work of 1779 was the first book ever entitled *History of Modern Europe*, instead of just *History of Europe*, a title already used in sixteenth-century Italy. The use of the words 'modern Europe' is of course not accidental, but signified a specific agenda. 'Modern Europe' should not be confused with our idea of contemporary Europe. According to Russell and Bonneville the history of 'modern Europe' started with the collapse of the Roman empire. Early medieval history in Bonneville's eyes was therefore also part of 'modern European history'. The concept of 'modern Europe' was above all invented against the idea of a superior Antiquity and the superiority of 'ancient history' over 'modern history', apparently an idea still much in vogue in the late eighteenth century. In his *Letter to Condorcet* Bonneville wrote mockingly of the 'useless' and 'outdated' ancient histories, still so much published in his own times but unsuitable for the new generation:

An elementary history of modern Europe is missing. We are flooded by ancient histories, in which we read [useless details such as] that the archbishop of Mainz was eaten by an army of rats and of dolls which embrace courtesans The years disappear quickly, and we lose precious time for which we can find better use, as the sage [Rousseau] has said.⁵¹

Bonneville approvingly quoted Voltaire, who compared 'ancient history' with 'old medals' and 'modern history' with current coins: the first rested in cabinets, whereas the second circulated to be used in the commerce of men.⁵² The most interesting era in history for Bonneville, following Voltaire and Robertson, is the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The sixteenth century did not just present a return of classical ideas, as humanist historians had argued, but instead should be regarded as the formation of a new and modern Europe. Around 1500 'Europe transformed' ('Europe a change de face'), and became a 'republic' where

⁵⁰ 'Cependant les révolutions qui se préparoient en France, tournoient aussi les études vers l'histoire, vers une Histoire qui nous manquoit'. Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, pp. 33–4.

⁵¹ 'Une histoire élémentaire de l'Europe moderne nous manquoit. Nous sommes inondés d'histoires anciennes, dans lesquelles on trouve des Archevêques de Mayence [Mainz], mangés par des armées de rats, et des poupées qui embrassent des courtisanes. Qu'un jeune homme ait une légère teinture de ces tems reculés. Les années s'envolent d'une aile rapide: et l'on perd toutes les heures, a dit un sage, dont on pourroit faire un meilleur emploi.' Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 12. In a footnote, Bonneville identified the sage as the 'author of Emile' (Rousseau).

⁵² Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 68.

a new balance of power was established that was far superior to what ever existed in ancient Greece.⁵³ As a result of the invention and spread of the printing press, the discovery of the Americas, increased communications and the development of the arts, Europe attained a far higher degree of perfection than was ever attained in either classical Greece or ancient Rome.⁵⁴

Bonneville seemed to regard the Roman empire as the equivalent of the Ancien Régime monarchy and the German tribes as predecessors of the revolutionaries. Intensely studying ancient history was therefore useless in Bonneville's eyes, as it had nothing to teach us. As a late contribution to the 'querelle' of the ancients and the moderns, Bonneville stated confidently that modern Europeans had surpassed the ancient world in most respects, and in the near future would be superior in every respect.⁵⁵ 'The history of modern Europe provides us with everything necessary to understand men and the empires', he wrote.⁵⁶ Tellingly, ancient Greece and Rome are therefore given very few pages in his European history. Underlying the idea of the history of 'modern Europe' was an idea of a certain relationship between past and present.⁵⁷ For Bonneville, the present was superior to past.⁵⁸ The groundbreaking events of the revolution resulted in the need for a new history of Europe. His emphasis was not on continuity and tradition, but on rupture and change in history, but significantly also in history writing.⁵⁹ The uniqueness and newness of 'modern Europe' and 'our modern times' ('nos temps modernes')⁶⁰ required a radical new history. Bonneville's mission was to fill this void.

⁵³ Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 13. David Hume wrote also on the 'newness' of the European balance of power versus that of ancient Greece in his essay 'Of the balance of power': David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (Indianapolis, IN, 1987), essay VII.

⁵⁴ On the 'querelle des anciens et des modernes' in France: E. Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2010); L. F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: History and Literature in Early Modern France* (Chicago, 2011).

⁵⁵ 'Pour tout homme sensible qui voudra sincèrement la méditer, avec la plus grande attention, elle doit être plus utile que le plus beau traité de morale que nous aient laissé les anciens: ces anciens qu'on admireroit sans doute un peu moins si on les connoissoit davantage: ces mêmes anciens que nous avons déjà surpassés en tant de choses essentielles, et que nous surpasserons en tout plutôt, qu'on ne pense.' Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ 'L'histoire de notre Europe moderne fournira tout ce qui nous est nécessaire pour connoître les hommes et les empires'. Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. 2.

⁵⁷ On the conceptual connection between 'Europe' and 'modernity' in the eighteenth century see O. Asbach (ed.), *Europa und Moderne, II: Europa und die Moderne im langen 18. Jahrhundert* (Hanover, 2014).

⁵⁸ 'J'y ai réfléchi long temps, et je préfère au fond de mon cœur le siècle présent à beaucoup de siècles qui l'ont précédé.' Bonneville, *Lettre*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ 'Nous devons nous borner à l'histoire des révolutions mémorables, suivies des conséquences politiques ou civiles qui ont produit quelque altération dans le gouvernement ou dans les mœurs d'un peuple.' Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. 49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

IV

Bonneville wrote that he had published his *History* to explain to a wider and especially young audience why ‘fanaticism’, ‘tyranny’ and ‘superstition’ had so far been able to suppress ‘reason’ and ‘progress’.⁶¹ He started his book by arguing that tyranny was not the natural form of government in Europe. In the beginning of European history at the collapse of the Roman empire, freedom prevailed.⁶² However, during the centuries since then, this freedom was suppressed by a class of fanatical and ignorant priests, aided by selfish princes and noblemen.⁶³ Already countering an argument that would later be formulated by Edmund Burke, Bonneville insisted that Europe’s historically grown institutions were essentially the product of centuries of despotism. He called therefore on all Europeans to abolish or reform them: ‘The hour will come: the purified earth will no longer bring forth absolute kings, grand viziers, neither priests nor volcanoes.’⁶⁴ He was convinced that European history would have a happy ending: ‘In the long run, it is always the case that the most righteous people, the most enlightened, the most attentive, the most generous will make tyranny grow pale and destroy superstition.’⁶⁵ The French revolution was, according to Bonneville, this moment when the centuries of struggle and oppression had finally ended.

Following Montesquieu and Boulainvilliers, Bonneville argued that freedom was brought to Europe by the Germanic tribes who ended the despotic uniformity of the Roman empire and effectively began the history of ‘modern Europe’.⁶⁶ The Germanic tribes ‘established on the ruins [of the Roman empire] new governments, new manners (*mœurs*): they accomplished the most striking revolution in history’.⁶⁷ The collapse of the Roman empire was both a destructive and a creative moment.⁶⁸ The virtuous Germanic tribes even installed an early form of democracy, making them a kind of predecessor of the late eighteenth-century French revolutionaries. The Germanic tribes, however, were weakened by their internal quarrels and civil wars. Nonetheless, they left a lasting legacy of a

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶² On the Enlightenment ‘origin myth’ as a means to establish an alternative tradition to the myths of Scripture and Divine right monarchy: Edelstein, ‘Super-Enlightenment’, p. 15.

⁶³ The deceit of the priestly class also forms the crucial theme in Condorcet’s *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (Paris, 1795 – the year III).

⁶⁴ ‘Ce jour viendra: la terre épurée ne reproduira plus de rois absolus, ni de grand vizirs, ni de prêtres, ni de volcans.’ Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. 406.

⁶⁵ ‘C’est toujours, à la longue, le peuple le plus juste, le plus éclairé, le plus attentif, le plus généreux, qui fait pâlir la tyrannie et terrasse la superstition’. *Ibid.*, p. ii.

⁶⁶ Werner, ‘Geschichtsauffassung’, p. 336; Henri de Boulainvilliers (1656–1722) also defended the freedom of the Frankish people. For Boulainvilliers, it was primarily monarchy and not in first instance the clergy that was responsible for the destruction of original freedom. A. de Dijn, *Liberty in a Levell Society? French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 14–33.

⁶⁷ ‘Ils établirent sur ses ruines de nouveaux gouvernements, de nouvelles mœurs; ils accomplirent la révolution la plus frappante dans l’histoire des nations.’ Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, p. 6.

⁶⁸ ‘Toute Europe changea de face’. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

new European order and a spirit of freedom and independence that could never entirely be suppressed.⁶⁹ Even feudalism, although a flawed system, was never as despotic as had once been the Roman empire.

Although the Germanic tribes laid the original foundations of modern Europe, 'modern history' truly started with Charlemagne, essentially a 'French' king according to Bonneville. Bonneville's judgement on Charlemagne is ambivalent. On the one hand, he is hailed as a bringer of civilization and material progress. On the other, Bonneville chastened him for his despotic style of government and indulgence towards the churchmen. The historian mocked those writers who still despaired of the collapse of the Carolingian empire: Charlemagne aimed for the establishment of a universal and despotic empire that would be detrimental to Europe's original freedom.⁷⁰ At a later moment the Pope would adopt this striving for a homogeneous universal European monarchy.⁷¹ In contrast to his view of the Catholic Church, Bonneville was very positive about Islam. Mohammed had established in Mecca an ideal spiritual and temporal monarchy. Bonneville saw him as a prince who brought enlightenment to his people. The Islamic rule in Spain and its high level of civilization, in contrast with the later Christian rule in that country, was especially praised. Spain, the 'second European monarchy' in rank after France, was above all depicted as a country dominated and oppressed by a monstrous class of priests and monks.⁷² In his narrative of events, Bonneville concentrated on French, English, German and Italian history; eastern Europe, especially the Byzantine empire, was generally not regarded as part of European history. In all events all over Europe – Hungary, Spain, Poland, Sweden – the central theme for Bonneville is the struggle between tyranny and freedom and between ignorance and reason.⁷³

The second volume of his history continued the narrative of European political history in the high Middle Ages, dealing with the struggle for supremacy between pope and emperor, the crusades and even the history of the Arab world and the rise of the Turks. The clergy were once again cast in the role of fanatical evil geniuses, hovering in the shadow and secretly instructing the greedy and power-hungry monarchs.⁷⁴ The crusades were interpreted by Bonneville essentially as an attempt by the papacy to establish a universal theocratic monarchy in Europe: 'in the history of the crusades, one sees above all the hand of the papacy, working in the shadows to achieve the project of a universal monarchy: they aim for

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 167–222.

⁷¹ Bonneville's views on universal monarchy show many resemblances to Montesquieu's work *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe* (1734), ed. Michel Porret (Geneva, 2000).

⁷² Bonneville, *Histoire*, I, pp. 70–5.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 379–80, 399–400.

⁷⁴ 'Que la politique des prêtres a voilé de crimes . . . ! Sans les conseils pervers des prêtres, il est probable qu'il n'eût point déchiré le cœur d'un bon père' *ibid.*, p. 223).

a Church on the Greek [Byzantine] model; their aim is to destroy the freedom of Europe and chain reason'.⁷⁵

Much attention was devoted to English history, which is not surprising as Bonneville's history was based on a work by a British historian. The invasion of England by the oppressive William the Conqueror was described as a disaster for the freedom-loving Anglo-Saxons. In the short run the events of 1066 led to a diminishment of freedom and the corruption of morals as a result of the lack of liberty. In the long run, however, the invasion of 1066 resulted in the Magna Carta of 1215 and the establishment of the English representative institutions, turning England, 'the freest people in the world',⁷⁶ into a model of liberty for the whole of Europe.⁷⁷ In contrast to most other historians of Europe in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, such as Montesquieu and François Guizot, Bonneville argued that the difference between Europe and Asia should not be overdrawn: both continents were characterized by political fragmentation and lack of unity resulting in violent wars.⁷⁸

The third and last volume of Bonneville's *History of Modern Europe* was published in 1792, 'Year I of the Republic'. The different political circumstances of the publication of this much smaller volume were reflected by the insertion of an introduction on 'kings who commit perjury' ('les rois parjurés'). Although Bonneville's line of argumentation is difficult to follow, it appears that he supported the deposition of the French king by referring to examples of revolts against tyrants in medieval European history.⁷⁹ British medieval history formed a counterpoint to French history. The example of King John 'Lackland' (1166–1216) demonstrated, according to Bonneville, that it is possible for a king to accept the people's representation and combine liberty with monarchy.⁸⁰ This introduction on medieval kings who committed perjury perfectly exemplified the malleability of European history, adapting to new political contexts in the fast-changing political climate of the revolution in France. Bonneville also demonstrated the relevance of his medieval Europe for current events.

Full of disapproval and disgust ('dégout' and 'horreur'), Bonneville also chronicled the struggle between emperor and pope in this volume. Instead of an impartial and peace-loving mediator, the papacy is described as power-hungry and aggressive institution. In sharp contrast to the warmongering pope and emperor, the league of Hanseatic commercial cities stood for 'reason', 'peace' and 'freedom'. Interestingly in the context of the developing terror and the abolition of the monarchy at the moment

⁷⁵ 'Dans l'histoire des croisades, on sent partout la main des pontifes, travaillant, dans les ténèbres, à consommer le projet d'une Monarchie universelle; ils en vouloient à l'Eglise grecque; ils voulaient anéantir la liberté de l'Europe, et enchaîner la raison.' *Ibid.*, II, p. 272.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 404.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 299–300.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁷⁹ On the associative character of Bonneville's thought: Kleinert, *Bonneville*, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁰ Bonneville, *Histoire*, III, p. xliii.

of publication, Bonneville was rather positive about certain French kings. Louis IX ‘Saint Louis’ (1214–70) was presented as a ‘good’ and ‘patriotic’ king who was deceived by the clergy into starting religious persecutions and committing himself to the crusades. Remarkable too in this volume is his description of the power struggle in Spain between Muslims and Christians, with the Moors being depicted as reasonable and tolerant and the Christians as intolerant fanatics.⁸¹ As in his book on the *Spirit of the Religions* (1791), Bonneville called for Europeans to call themselves henceforth ‘Francs’, as this name stood for Germanic freedom and the ‘true friend of humanity’ (‘véritable ami de l’humanité’).⁸²

The most important events in ‘these modern times’ (‘ces temps modernes’) were the developments in Britain.⁸³ For the first time in modern history, the people in Britain received a voice in the representative institutions. Bonneville believed that all other countries would follow England’s example and that the will of the free people would triumph over fanaticism and tyranny. Equality and freedom went hand in hand in representative institutions. He, surprisingly for someone caught up in the middle of a revolution, argued that revolutions were unnecessary when representative institutions were installed by peaceful means.⁸⁴ In his narrative of unfolding freedom and progress, first in England and then in the rest of Europe, Bonneville clearly adhered to a Whig interpretation of history.

In his narrative Bonneville suddenly switched to his own era: the developments that started in medieval England would eventually happen all over Europe: in the future the third estate, as the representatives of people, would establish a constitutionally enshrined freedom.⁸⁵ Bonneville, however, also paid attention to the dark sides of medieval English history when describing the attempts by tyrannical English kings to suppress the Celtic freedom of the Scots and the Welsh. The third book ended with the struggle of a freedom-loving common people against a tyrannical ruler. Bonneville analysed the struggle of the Swiss, that noble and free ‘Celtic’ people, against the tyrannical schemes of the Habsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. Obviously, Bonneville saw in the Swiss revolt of 1308 the precursor of the French Revolution in his own time.⁸⁶

V

In his seminal essay ‘The Past is Another Country’, the historian Tony Judt has argued that the years 1945 and 1989 are not only important political turning points in European political history, but that during these crucial years Europe’s past was also redefined (or forgotten). The

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

year 1945 was conceived both in western and eastern Europe as an hour zero (*Stunde Null*), a rupture with Europe's dark past of violent conflict and intolerant nationalism, as part of the attempt to leave behind the experience of war and occupation. This idea of a rupture in history, and sense of a closure of the centuries of violence and warfare as a result of the European integration project, can also be observed in many histories of Europe published in the post-war decades.⁸⁷ For Judt, the year 1989 was not only a turning point of the political European order, but at the same time a reconfiguration of European memory and historiography: 'The revolutions of 1989 have forced open the East-European past, just as the historiographical transformations in the West have removed decades-long taboos on parts of the wartime memory. There will be infinite revisions and reinterpretations, but the recent past will never look the same again, anywhere.'⁸⁸ Judt makes a convincing case for generally regarding European history not as a self-evident given, but as a construction closely related to the political order of Europe itself.

In this essay I have explored the effects of another key turning point in European political history on the writing of European history: the French Revolution of 1789–92. The case study of Bonneville showed in detail that the French Revolution did not create a new European historical narrative, but older Enlightenment histories were adapted to a new political context. As Bonneville clearly stated in the preliminary notice at the beginning of the first volume, he used many enlightened histories of Europe that had been published in the second half of the eighteenth century. The original English version by William Russell was adapted for a French audience and Bonneville inserted many of his own comments. Furthermore, the example of Bonneville also demonstrates the close connection between the revelation of the mechanism of European history and esoteric and mystical beliefs, as well as prophetic and utopian visions of a future Europe, in many ways foreshadowing European ideas in the early nineteenth century. Finally, Bonneville had a clear conception of what 'European history' should be: more than a mere aggregate of the histories of the individual countries, capturing the 'European spirit'. European history should above all be 'modern', that is different from irrelevant 'ancient history'. The new circumstances of the revolution, created the need for a new 'modern European history'.

⁸⁷ For instance J. P. Duroselle, *Europe: A History of its Peoples* (London, 1990). On European post-war historiography: H. Durchhardt and A. Kunz (eds), *Europäische Geschichte als historiographisches Problem* (Mainz, 1997); J. Ifversen, 'Myth and history in European post-war history writing', in M. Spiering and M. Wintle (eds), *European Identity and the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 75–91; Rößner, *Geschichte*; Woolf, 'Europe and its historians', pp. 323–37.

⁸⁸ T. Judt, 'The past is another country: myth and memory in postwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 121/4 (1992), pp. 83–118, at p. 108.