The Renaissance of Peiresc

Aubin-Louis Millin and the Postrevolutionary Republic of Letters

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues for the emergence of a cultural and epistemological divide between amateur savants and members of the Royal Academy of the Sciences in late Old Regime and revolutionary France and suggests that the amateur ideal rose in significance even as intellectual activity came to be increasingly centralized in the postrevolutionary era. At the crux of the tensions between the amateur ideal and the professionalizing reality in the immediate postrevolutionary period stood Aubin-Louis Millin and his journal, the Magasin Encyclopédique. The essay examines, in particular, the revival in the pages of the Magasin Encyclopédique of interest in Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, the seventeenth-century icon of an amateur ideal in which investigations in the natural sciences and scholarship were private, decentralized, often provincial activities. Although the sciences in the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras were often perceived as forward looking and dismissive of the past, this essay finds that a sentimental and nostalgic attachment to the past—to a myth of Peiresc—continued to play an important role in the identity of postrevolutionary men of letters.

AUBIN-LOUIS MILLIN DE GRANDMAISON (1759–1818) was one of the lesser lights of the intellectual community during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, but he worked assiduously to keep his fingers in every pie. A man of diverse scientific and scholarly interests whose career spanned the revolutionary divide, Millin became a chief voice in and even gatekeeper of the Republic of Letters in the immediate postrevolutionary era both by publishing a prodigious number of works of varying quality and by founding the journal Magasin Encyclopédique and editing it from 1796 to 1816...
Intended as a postrevolutionary replacement for the defunct *Journal des Sc¸avans*, the *Magasin Encyclopédique* published a vast array of material of interest to the general French intellectual community, including scientific reports, natural history, biographies, book reviews, and theater reviews. Throughout his career as editor of the journal, Millin also irregularly published annotated selections, submitted by one of his readers, of the unearthed correspondence of the early seventeenth-century scientific *éudit* Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637). An extraordinary Aixois collector, inveterate correspondent, and renowned *amateur* of the sciences, Peiresc was celebrated by many as

(see Figure 1).\(^1\) Intended as a postrevolutionary replacement for the defunct *Journal des Sc¸avans*, the *Magasin Encyclopédique* published a vast array of material of interest to the general French intellectual community, including scientific reports, natural history, biographies, book reviews, and theater reviews. Throughout his career as editor of the journal, Millin also irregularly published annotated selections, submitted by one of his readers, of the unearthed correspondence of the early seventeenth-century scientific *éudit* Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637). An extraordinary Aixois collector, inveterate correspondent, and renowned *amateur* of the sciences, Peiresc was celebrated by many as

\(^{1}\) The catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France lists 226 publications by Millin, including the journals he edited.
one of the principal founders of the Republic of Letters. The publication of his letters and the dialogue their publication provoked in the pages of the journal among savants and gens de lettres constituted a small renaissance of interest in Peiresc.

In his recent study of French science and polity in the revolutionary and Napoleonic years, Charles Gillispie argues quite accurately that the Revolution witnessed the merging of political and scientific activity on a scale never before seen, such that “scientists” and “politicians” became virtually indistinguishable as policy makers propelling France toward industrialization. “There was a complementarity,” Gillispie concludes, “between science and politics in the Revolutionary era. Both were progressive movements, future oriented and dismissive of the past.”3 If one thinks of men such as Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier, the marquis de Condorcet, or Jean-Sylvain Bailly this seems undeniable. But then how do we account for Millin’s and his readers’ sudden and seemingly inexplicable interest in Peiresc, a savant from southern France who had died in 1637?

In this essay I explore (“explain” would be too strong a word) why Peiresc mattered to certain men of letters and savants in the late- and postrevolutionary periods. The revival of Peiresc in the Magasin Encyclopédique actively involved only a few people (I discuss five here). But this brief resurgence of interest in Peiresc, which I believe could also be traced in other historical artifacts that are beyond the scope of this essay, reveals—in the face of the growing centralization and even emergent professionalization of the sciences—the persistence of a private, independent, and amateur ideal of scientific and scholarly practice among savants and scholars, often but not always of aristocratic estate, and usually provincial, that in fact began during Peiresc’s life. Although its adherents sought to recreate the humanistic world of the Renaissance virtuoso, in France this amateur ideal formed part of the discourse of classical republicanism that emerged in the seventeenth century among nobles, patriots, and moralists convinced that the monarchy under Louis XIV had slipped into despotism—a discourse that endured through the eighteenth century and played a role in making the Revolution thinkable. Those men of letters who attached themselves to the amateur vision of the sciences resisted their institutionalization and centralization in Paris, just as they resisted or opposed the centralization of power in the hands of the monarchy during the Old Regime. As April Shelford demonstrates in her study of Pierre-Daniel Huet, these men should not be characterized as reactionary or counter-Enlightenment; they in fact reveal the contested meaning of “enlightenment” as well as of intellectual and scientific practices.4 Continuing to pursue their vision of intellectual practice during the Revolution, the amateurs argued against state-sponsored

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academies and in favor of sociétés libres—free or independent associations of scholars and savants. In the aftermath of the Revolution, however, when centralization and even professionalization seemed a fait accompli, the amateur ideal persisted even among those who actively sought to be included in the emerging, powerful, and increasingly integrated intellectual community of France. To understand the renaissance of Peiresc, then, is to understand some of the factors that governed the course of the French Revolution. But the renaissance of Peiresc is also more than this. The memory of Peiresc, suitably monumentalized and mythologized, promoted a sense of continuity with a vanished past, encouraging a fantasy of a humanistic alternative to the vast, hyperprofessionalized institutions of learning and science that came to dominate—or at least to claim to dominate—our intellectual landscape from the nineteenth century on and that form part of the texture of contemporary civilization.

The renaissance of Peiresc reveals multiple complexities and tensions in the intellectual world of late- and postrevolutionary France that are best explained in stages. The interest in Peiresc that we see expressed in the pages of the Magasin Encyclopédique had to do in the first place with the fashioning or, perhaps, refashioning of identity in the late and postrevolutionary periods. As Mario Biagioli has argued, drawing on the work of Stephen Greenblatt, self-fashioning constituted a basic aspect of early modern scientific culture, in which effective patronage remained essential to success. Throughout the early modern era, French savants had a keen interest in representing themselves, in constructing or fashioning their identities in a world where the métier of “savant” was viewed with suspicion and they had to justify their existence and their authority as producers of knowledge—often by denying that the practice of the sciences was really a métier at all. A frequent tactic was to praise each other’s virtues, usually by adopting the rhetoric of neo-Stoicism or Christian Stoicism that infused the ethical ideals of the Republic of Letters and cloaked their work in the language of objectivity and disinterest. In 1641, in his biography of Peiresc, the mathematician and philosopher Pierre Gassendi elaborated
the virtues of the beloved friend who had died in his arms. Gassendi adapted the virtues he attributed to Peiresc from the *topoi* of classical panegyric, and savants would use them to characterize one other from that point on. Samuel Sorbière, one of the leading organizers of the informal Montmor Academy (about which more below), would point to these same virtues in eulogizing Gassendi, his moral and intellectual idol, after he died in 1655. And with unparalleled literary flair, Bernard de Fontenelle, *secrétaire perpétuel* of the Académie Royale des Sciences from 1699 to 1740, would tailor them perfectly to his famous *éloges* for the members of the academy. The Fontenellian style of eulogy would become *de rigueur* for the secretaries of the academy through Condorcet and the Revolution. Like the Greco-Roman heroes of Plutarch’s *Lives*, the savants represented in these eulogies would thenceforth embody stoic fortitude; they would possess a strong sense of duty; they would be temperate, balanced, courageous, and resolute; they would be endowed with the virtues of “simplicity, humility, honesty, want of ambition, poverty, austerity, and frugality.” “And yet,” as Peter Miller eloquently writes in his study of Peiresc’s era, “Peiresc’s fame in life was more than matched by an oblivion in death so swift and so complete as to elicit from [Pierre] Bayle, who did not forget him, the judgment that the name of Peiresc was unknown, even to some Frenchmen of his own time.”

Few remembered or cared that the virtues savants commonly imputed to each other were in some way “Peireskian” (as the seventeenth-century English translation of Gassendi’s biography of Peiresc puts it) in their origin. Why, then, did Millin help to resurrect the name of Peiresc between 1796 and 1818—in an era when, as Gillispie suggests, science and polity had merged to such an extent that one presumes that savants would no longer have any need to justify themselves through the self-fashioning of panegyric?

The answer to the question “Why Peiresc?” reveals the flip side of the close, equitable relationship between science and polity: loss of independence. Sometimes the relationship could be too close for comfort, especially during the Revolution, when politicians (some of whom were savants, based either within or outside the Royal Academy) disputed the definition of the sciences and scientific practice. Tied to this dispute were arguments over the role of savants and scientific institutions in the constitutional and educational structures of the state. This dispute was by no means independent of a long-term feud between proponents of amateur science—shorthand here for scientific activity not authorized by

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inclusion in the Royal Academy—and the quasi-professional government-sponsored science that had begun well before the Revolution. Jean-Paul Marat, whose amateur scientific work the Royal Academy of the Sciences discredited, had allied with Jacques-Pierre Brissot to oppose academic hegemony over the sciences since the late 1770s. Marat and Brissot together became implacable enemies of the academy during the early phases of the Revolution, until Brissot split with Marat and the Jacobins at the start of the National Convention in September 1792. At that point, Brissot constrained his antiacademic passions to the practical contingencies of working with the moderates of the Girondin faction and its allies, some of whom—such as Condorcet—were prominent savants of the academy. The dispute with the academy came to a head in 1793, just as the conflict between the Girondins and the Montagnards reached its climax. The Jacobin-led purging of Girondin deputies from the Convention in the summer of 1793 and the ensuing Terror of 1794–1795 carried away some of the leading lights of the scientific establishment—Condorcet, Lavoisier, and Bailly, to name a few of the better known. Although Condorcet, as the secretary of the Royal Academy of the Sciences from the mid-1770s on, had argued repeatedly that the sciences must be autonomous and independent of opinion and ideology, the merging of science and politics in the revolutionary era ensured that such autonomy was a fiction.12 The success of the Jacobins in 1793 brought about the ascendancy of their notions of the sciences—notions that were beholden more to Rousseau than to Voltaire and that led the Convention to condemn the academy as a privileged and by nature undemocratic corps of the Old Regime.13 The Convention then proposed the formation of sociétés libres as better suited to a free and democratic regime than state-sponsored academies. Despite Lavoisier’s desperate efforts to save the academy, the Jacobin-led government abolished it on 8 August. Lavoisier entered prison at the end of the month and was executed in early May 1794. Condorcet, of course, had been hounded to his death two months earlier, and Bailly had been dead eight months, having mounted to the guillotine in November 1793.

Millin, like many others, survived the Terror—although just barely, as we shall see. The defenders of amateur science and professional science, respectively, did not divide perfectly along ideological lines during the Revolution—Brissot being the most famous example, perhaps. By 1793, despite his opposition to the academy, Millin, like Brissot, found himself associated too closely with Condorcet and the Girondins to escape the Jacobins’ fury (Brissot, of course, had become one of the chief Girondins). After the Terror, surviving savants sought to reconstruct their identities, often to conceal or reinterpret revolutionary political ties and actions. So, too, did Millin.

As they reconstructed their identities, savants and men of letters like Millin also reconstructed science and scholarship. Institutionalized, more or less professional science, as it existed at the time of the Revolution, was reborn in the Institut de France, just as other scholarly and intellectual activities were subsumed under and authorized by centralizing institutions such as the École Polytechnique, the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, the École

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de Médecine, and the Collège National (later the Collège Impérial and, finally, the Collège de France). Reborn, too, was an older idea of sciences and scholarship that sought to reconnect the realities of the late revolutionary and Napoleonic periods with a partly mythologized early seventeenth-century world where the sciences—and indeed all intellectual activities—were the province of the amateur, the disinterested practitioner enflamed only by his intellectual passions and dependent on the patronage of no state institutions. After the Revolution, Millin positioned himself precisely in the middle of these two views—and benefited gloriously. Both science and politics during the revolutionary era were forward looking, progressive. But after the Terror, for Millin and others like him, the sciences marched forward while at the same time looking back to a semi-mythical era where science and polity were quite distinguishable: the era of Peiresc.

But why someone so seemingly inconsequential as Peiresc?

The first step toward an answer is to understand why the name of Peiresc had been, as Miller notes, apparently consigned to “oblivion” soon after his death in 1637. The death of Peiresc marked the end of an era. The thirty years that followed constituted an interlude in the institutional history of the sciences when the French intellectual community was concentrated in Paris, particularly around Gassendi and the Minim monk Marin Mersenne. This period saw the formation of private informal academies of the sciences, principally the group of some sixty savants that met at Mersenne’s convent from the 1630s up to his death in 1648 and then moved virtually en masse to the Parisian home of Henri Louis Habert de Montmor—which was also Gassendi’s residence until his death.14 This famous “Montmor Academy” collapsed in 1663; nonetheless, thanks primarily to the efforts of those who had been intimately involved in its organization—among them Sorbière, Christiaan Huygens, and the astronomer Adrien Auzout—a new kind of academy was soon born from its ashes.15 In 1666 the new group achieved official institutionalization as the Académie Royale des Sciences. The dawning new age of state-sponsored science required a new way of thinking about both scientific practice and the construction of scientific authority: the practice of the sciences, formerly carried out by amateurs, became increasingly centralized and regulated, and the new quasi-professional corps of salaried or pensioned savants claimed scientific authority and expertise for itself.16

The founding of the Royal Academy of the Sciences marked a fundamental divide in the institutional history of the sciences in France and produced an epistemic shift in the production of scientific knowledge in which, increasingly, the authority to produce and judge such knowledge fell to those authorized by inclusion in the state-sponsored institution. Men like Sorbière, Huygens, and Auzout had brought the state and the scientific community of France together with the motive of achieving greater funding and support for scientific research. They believed that state funding and support of the sciences would,

15 The phrase is from Christiaan Huygens. See Christiaan Huygens to Sir Robert Moray, 12 June 1664, in Oeuvres Complètes, no. 1234 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1888–1950), Vol. 4, pp. 69–70: “l’Académie chez Monsieur de Montmor a pris fin pour jamais, mais il semble que du débris de celle cy il en pourroit ranaistre quelque autre, car j’ay laissé quelques une de ces Messieurs avec de tres bonnes intentions.” As Roger Hahn argues, the project to obtain royal patronage for the Montmor Academy was “the work of no more than a handful of professionally minded scientists who deliberately set out to transform the relatively unproductive nature of amateur scientific circles”: Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution (cit. n. 12), p. 7.
in turn, benefit the state by providing the technology and expertise that would serve to establish and perpetuate its glory and authority. The formation of a close relationship between science and polity in the Old Regime had profound consequences for the practice and culture of the sciences. The state may have received the authority of scientific reason (which would perhaps prove useful if the monarchy needed to justify unpopular policies—something never attempted until the time of Robert-Jacques Turgot, and then disastrously), but how did savants benefit from the relationship? 17

When Sorbière had first called for the formation of a royal academy of the sciences in 1663, he believed that savants could help France achieve political stability by bringing together scientific reason and state authority, ending the chaos that had weakened France since the sixteenth century. Blaming this chaos mostly on the nobility, whom he accused of starting the religious wars and the Frondes, Sorbière favored a form of government that we might now term enlightened despotism. 18 He sought a regeneration of the patrie by limiting the power of the independent nobility and by creating an aristocracy of the learned tied closely to the centralizing state. It is debatable whether the savants’ formation of the Royal Academy of the Sciences helped to establish enlightened despotism under Louis XIV. Certainly they did not help to establish a stronger and more stable France, which increasingly suffered military, economic, and social woes into the eighteenth century. They did, however, achieve the creation of a privileged corps of salaried or state-funded savants: organized hierarchically and willing to impose a monopoly over the official practice of the sciences in France, these savants carried out scientific experiments and asserted their authority to judge inventions, works, theories, and experiments by anyone not associated with the academy. 19 In short, the creation of the Royal Academy of the Sciences provided those elite savants who became academicians with money, power, and prestige in the corporate system of the Old Regime. In this new world of state-sponsored science, the eclectic, humanistic, and amateurish world of Peiresc was seemingly obsolete and soon largely forgotten. Along with his world went the memory of Peiresc himself.

But not everyone became a member of the Royal Academy of the Sciences, and not everyone was convinced that the money, power, and prestige to be gained from royal patronage were worth the loss of independence that such support entailed. Nor were royal support and recognition necessary or even always desirable for the practice of the sciences, as David Lux has shown. Despite the power it wielded as an arm of the state, the Royal Academy as an institution could not exercise hegemony without resistance, and amateur scientific activity, patronized privately, continued to function well into the eighteenth century, even if seriously disrupted by the rise of the Royal Academy. 20 To the

19 Academicians were organized into salaried pensionnaires and unsalaried associés and élèves (later adjoints). Average stipends for pensionnaires were around 2,000 livres a year. See Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution (cit. n. 12), pp. 35–57, 79.
amateurs not associated with the academy, particularly those in the provinces, the revived and monumentalized memory of Peiresc, never really forgotten, would by 1796 begin to inflect their identity as lovers of the sciences. In modern English, owing generally to the success of Big Science as an activity authorized by such powerful institutions as research universities, corporations, and, ultimately, the nation-state, the word “amateur” connotes an inexperienced dabbler, a tyro, someone generally lacking in competence, expertise, and authority. Characterized as the opposite of a professional, the amateur engages in a particular practice only as a leisure activity and is often thought unable to make truly significant contributions, as professionals can. The connotations of “amateur” in early modern Europe, however, retained the original French meaning of the term and exalted the idea that the practitioner was motivated to engage in some activity out of passion or love, not from a base interest in obtaining a material award. The absence of base interests indicated that an activity stemmed from free choice, not material constraints, and was thus morally and intellectually superior to activity motivated by the prospect of material gain. This condition of free action had significant import in early modern Europe.

In the early modern period, free action was a chief indicator of one’s reliability as a bearer or speaker of truth. Those who were free agents—able to make decisions not influenced by external constraints other than virtue and honor, and therefore believed to be capable of free action—were, by nature, gentlemen. As Steven Shapin has argued, the “identification of trustworthy agents is necessary to the constitution of knowledge,” since much of what we know must of necessity be taken on trust. Although Shapin is writing here about situations peculiar to seventeenth-century England, the moral structures within which his English actors operated were common to Western European elite culture in general. In early modern Europe, nobles had an advantage as savants: as free agents, unconstrained, they ostensibly had no reason to lie—and thus they were perceived to be likely to see and report what was truly the case. In fact, their code of honor stressed the significance of truthfulness. Lying, after all, proceeded from constrained circumstances. He who lied was “base, ignoble, and unfree”—and therefore not a gentleman. In fact, anyone base, ignoble, and unfree might be lying or unable to see things as they really were. In the French absolute monarchy under Louis XIV, closeness to the king was the gateway to wealth, prestige, and power; but the more such status emanated directly from a king suspected of despotism, rather than from one’s own inborn nobility, the more unfree one became—and hence the more unreliable as a bearer of truth. As any classically educated French subject knew from reading his or her Aristotle, under a despotic government men are slaves. In fact, the more powerful the monarchy became, the easier it was for opponents to articulate a growing discourse of slavery against it—as a whole generation of French noble moralists, from Henri de Boulainvilliers and François Fénelon even up to Condorcet, discovered. The close association of scholars and savants was, of course, desirable. When such relationships were free and unconstrained, they produced what many in Old Regime France conceived as the height of civilized sociability, le monde or la bonne compagnie. But to accept a salary for one’s work was distinctly...

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22 See Aristotle, Politics, bk. 1.

23 On the eighteenth-century noble moralists see Smith, Nobility Reimagined (cit. n. 4). See also Dena
unsavory. It stank of mercenary interests. It indicated—perhaps it even created—constrained circumstances and thus introduced a credibility problem. In the eyes of the amateurs, the academicians—with a vested interest in protecting their privilege and their power over the sciences so as to safeguard their salaries and prestige—were not free agents. In particular, Millin believed, and with reason, that the academicians cared little for truth or good science, only for guarding their authority—as we shall see in what follows. Why, then, should one trust these academicians? Nobles who joined the ranks of the Royal Academy squandered their inborn credibility. Non-nobles surrendered their chances of achieving credibility through the fruits of their labors.

The academicians attempted to solve their credibility problem by inverting the argument. They insisted that it was the amateurs who were untrustworthy as speakers of the truth, because they could submit their work only to the tribunal of uninformed, inexpert public opinion. Condorcet made this argument cogently in 1780, insisting that the authority of the academicians derived not from their unfounded opinions but, quite reasonably, from the objective, expert judgment of their peers:

The academies have two incontestable uses: The first is to be a barrier always opposed to charlatanism of all sorts . . . the second is to maintain in the sciences good methods and to prevent that any branch of the sciences be absolutely abandoned. They have a very important third use, which is to make savants independent of popular opinion. A chemist, an anatomist, or a mathematician who is a member of an academy has no need to run around like a charlatan in order to enjoy from ignorant people the reputation of a savant. It is the result of his works that merit him celebrity or glory.

To the amateurs, of course, Condorcet’s point was a red herring, because what they meant by “the public” and “popular opinion” was certainly not “ignorant people.” The public that counted was the community of honorable, trustworthy gentlemen— gentlemanly not always by birth, it is true, but by association—who made up the Republic of Letters and shared its common ethic. In fact, one of the chief reasons for a renaissance of interest in Peiresc at the end of the eighteenth century is that in the early seventeenth century Peiresc had helped to form that field, the Republic of Letters, in which savants could attain intellectual and moral independence from the corporate structures of their day— principally from the Church and universities, but also, after the mid-seventeenth century, from
the royal academies. In the Republic of Letters savants established an egalitarian alternate society, a public with its own governing ethic, which operated outside the recognized hierarchies and in which they could attain validation and recognition for their work.

The effect of the founding of the Royal Academy of the Sciences, then, was the formation of two distinct and incompatible epistemes, two opposing criteria of knowledge. These two opposing epistemic styles were part of a moral debate that divided France by the eighteenth century. As Jay Smith has demonstrated, at the turn of the eighteenth century the “invocation of the patrie” as a solution to the despotic imbalance of power associated with the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV “gave birth to two powerful impulses of moral reform.” Both impulses sought to reintroduce virtue, believed to be sadly lacking, into the French polity, but by opposing means. One sought to reconstitute the nobility as the bearers of virtue, which could then check the despotism of the king; the other challenged the viability of the nobility, which was blamed for the moral degeneration of the nation. Epistemology was, and remains, an issue of morality—to identify the good one must be able to identify the truth—and in eighteenth-century France one’s epistemological commitments boiled down to a fundamental question: Whom does one trust to speak the truth, the state-salaried experts of the Royal Academy, whose work is judged by other recognized experts (that is, the professionals), or the amateurs who have achieved moral virtue because they engage in their work as free agents and submit it to the judgment of public opinion? One’s answer depended on one’s definition of nobility. With a sort of Weberian presentiment, Brissot characterized the whole epistemological debate, more accurately than perhaps many have recognized, as a dispute between “moderns” and “ancients.”

Millin (see Figure 2) was the quintessential amateur—one of the ancients, we might say—and this fact explains both his epistemic commitments and his hostility to the academy quite well. Born in 1759, the son of an intendant des vivres who was apparently murdered by the natives while on duty in the East Indies, Millin enjoyed a generally carefree youth of privilege and wealth—not dissolute, but hardly marked by serious application. His biographer, Charles-Guillaume Krafft, notes Millin’s “love of independence”—both a revolutionary and a Peireskian virtue, perhaps, but certainly made possible by the extreme freedom from want granted by his family’s aristocratic fortune as lords of Grandmaison, near Paris. In fact, the word “independent” here is code for “amateur” in the early modern sense: a gentleman not constrained by association with the Royal Academy of the Sciences.


Refusing a traditional military or ecclesiastical career, young Millin gave himself to the Muses, associated with *le monde*, and cultivated the urbane, objective temperament he thought worthy of a scholar in pursuit of public utility. Working, as befits the free and unconstrained gentleman, “without any determined end” (or so writes Krafft), he nevertheless managed to produce several books on language and literature by the beginning of the revolutionary era. Around 1778, when he was nineteen, he became friends with Pierre-Remy Willemet, son of the famous botanist of the same name. Willemet the younger, following in his father’s career path, inspired a taste for natural history in the directionless Millin. Resolving to write a study of natural history, Millin began attending lectures at the Collège Royal and at the Jardin Royale des Plantes—eventually becoming a “weekend herborizer” and assistant to the academic botanist Antoine Laurent de Jussieu.31

Millin’s much-vaunted love of independence must have drawn him to Jussieu, who was a top-ranked botanist serving just under Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, but who

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also had a reputation as something of a rebel. Although the Royal Academy of the Sciences issued an official report (sometimes termed the Condorcet Report) in 1784 condemning the popular and fashionable “animal magnetism” of Anton Mesmer as pseudo-science, Jussieu released a dissenting report. The Condorcet Report enhanced the popular perception of the academy as a privileged corporation exercising despotic authority over the sciences—a perception voiced succinctly by Brissot in his response to the report. “The moderns have introduced into the empire of the sciences a kind of elective aristocracy,” he wrote. This aristocracy, Brissot continued, gave itself the unjust right to judge “productions of genius”—an authority that ought to belong only to public opinion.32

At first Jussieu seemed to be an ally of the amateurs, a fifth column inside the ivory walls of the academy itself. But this was a role he eventually refused, and Millin broke with him over the issue of Linnaean taxonomy. Linnaeus enjoyed widespread popularity among amateurs furious at the academy’s perceived despotism, becoming “a symbol of scientific freedom” chiefly because Buffon—head of the Jardin Royal des Plantes and, thus, perceived as the despotic voice of official botany—criticized the Linnaean system. For various reasons the other leading academic botanists, Michel Adanson and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck as well as Jussieu, maintained academic solidarity and followed Buffon’s lead in refusing to adopt Linnaean taxonomic methodology.33

On 28 December 1787 Millin put himself beyond the pale of the academy by founding the Société Linnéenne de Paris with four other disaffected naturalists: André Thouin, the head gardener at the Jardin du Roi; the botanist Auguste Broussonet; the chemist Louis Bosc d’Antic; and the entomologist Guillaume-Antoine Olivier. This was, of course, a time for more overt resistance to despotism, but the academy was still strong enough to quash opposition to its monopoly on the sciences. The new Linnaean Society recruited few qualified naturalists, and many of those it did attract soon distanced themselves from it. Among the dissenters were two of the founders, Broussonet and Thouin, driven away mainly by the bitter anti-Buffonianism of Millin. As E. C. Spary has shown, most naturalists did not equate an interest in Linnaeus with a rejection of Buffon. Others feared, with good reason, that association with the society would ruin their chances of election to the academy. As a result of these defections, the society disbanded on 26 December 1788. Millin may have entertained conspiracy theories about the academy’s desire to crush competitors, but, as Hahn shows, there was in fact no methodological solidarity within the academy itself, only an agreement to uphold “philosophical pluralism.” The academicians opposed sectarian science societies because they adopted a single doctrine as scientific dogma. To the academicians, the Linnaeans appeared dogmatic, perhaps with ambitions to despotism and demagoguery; the academicians saw themselves as the defenders of freedom of inquiry.34 In short, there was an unbridgeable chasm separating the professionals from the amateurs; each saw the other as an impediment to the truth.

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33 Gillispie, Science and Polity in France (cit. n. 3), p. 170 (quotation); and Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution, p. 113.

34 E. C. Spary, Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 175–176. Hahn points out that the academy disapproved of “voluntary associations” and would not elect members who were associated with such groups; Hahn, Anatomy of a Scientific Institution, pp. 112–115. Darnton also notes that opposition to the academy might persist only so long as the savants felt
Meanwhile, however, the founding members of the Linnaean Society discovered other means to combat despotism—as revolutionaries. The storming of the Bastille five days before his thirtieth birthday drew Millin into the revolutionary fervor. Taking on the aptly chosen revolutionary pseudonym “Éléuthérophil(e)” (“friend of liberty”), he published several political pamphlets criticizing censorship. In August he cofounded and edited the *Chronique de Paris*, the motto of which—“Liberté, Vérité, Impartialité”—echoed the prevailing moral sentiments of the day. The *Chronique* reported on the debates in the National Assembly and eventually became Condorcet’s chief outlet for political opinions and accounts of the actions of the National Assembly. Although no longer a scientific society, the Linnaeans enthusiasts promoted their antiacademic agenda throughout the early revolutionary period. In 1790 they organized a petition to the National Assembly asking to raise monuments to great savants at various spots around Paris. When permission was granted, the first bust (in plaster) they unveiled was of Linnaeus; it was placed, in an obvious affront to the shade of Buffon, in the Jardin des Plantes itself on 23 August 1790. The Linnaeans chose the date strategically: on that very day the Finance Committee of the National Assembly, one member of which had been a member of the Linnaean Society, debated the fate of the financially mismanaged Jardin des Plantes and the Cabinet d’Histoire Naturelle du Roi. The committee decided to nationalize the institutions and merge them as the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle. Four days later, on 27 August, the former members of the Linnaean Society, minus Broussonet, reorganized as the Société d’Histoire Naturelle. Millin served as secretary.

Such political maneuverings eventually brought the Linnaeans into the larger political conflict between the Girondins and Montagnards over control of the constitutional, scientific, and educational structures of France. Many of the Linnaeans, like other, higher-profile savants such as Condorcet and Lavoisier, came to be associated—rightly or wrongly, and often accidentally—with the Girondins. Thouin seems to have survived, and even thrived politically, throughout the Terror. Broussonet, however, fled to Montpellier as early as September 1792; the local Jacobins soon accused him of federalism and imprisoned him. Released after a few days, he escaped to Spain and then to Morocco, where he became the staff physician for the American consul there. The Jacobins also arrested Bosc briefly. He tried to save his erstwhile patrons, the Rolands, but failed; after Madame Roland’s execution he became for a time the guardian—and eventually the spurned suitor—of their thirteen-year-old daughter, Eudora. He ended up waiting out the Terror in Charleston, South Carolina. For Millin, it was his association with the *Chronique de Paris* and Condorcet that finally brought trouble with the Jacobins. On 10 March 1793 armed squads of uniformed soldiers raided the offices of several “Girondin” newspapers, including the *Chronique*—where they reportedly held a pistol to the chest of Fiévé, the printer—and smashed their presses. After Condorcet’s bitter denunciation of themselves and their work to be spurned by it: Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).

35 Among the revolutionary pamphlets authored by “Éléuthérophil(e)” were *Lettre d’un empereur romain à un roi des Gaules* (1789), *Lettre sur la censure des gravures* (1789), and *De la liberté du théâtre* (1789).

36 The next bust the Linnaeans intended to present was to be of Buffon, however; see Spary, *Utopia’s Garden* (cit. n. 34), p. 176.


39 See Fiévé’s report in the *Chronique de Paris*, 14 Mar. 1793, 73. After this harrowing episode, the *Chronique* moved its offices to 2 rue de Christine and no longer regularly printed the names of its editors on the
the Jacobin Constitution in early July, both Millin and Condorcet went into hiding.40 Condorcet’s tragic fate is well known. Millin, for his part, made an inept attempt to escape France by enlisting on a military transport under an assumed name. Soon recognized, he was dragged back to Paris and thrown into prison at Saint Lazare.

Watching his fellow prisoners die one by one, and with little hope of escaping execution himself, Millin decided in true eighteenth-century style to compose a general study of the field of natural history, as he had resolved in 1778 but never carried through. The Convention had recently offered a prize for the best works of elementary science, and Millin in his mad desperation apparently saw the prize as an opportunity to change his and perhaps even his prison comrades’ fate.41 Devoting himself to his work, he gave himself up to the abandonment of the time and the place, frantic to produce something before the end. He could not have known then that 9 Thermidor would change everything. After nearly a year in prison, Millin emerged alive and free; but his family fortune was gone and his noble title alienated. Facing poverty for the first time in his life, he dropped the now useless title “Grandmaison” and found a job—as a division chief in the office of the Committee for Public Instruction. Within a few months he secured a chair in the new écoles centrales, department of the Seine. He also completed and edited his prison writings as a book entitled Éléments d’histoire naturelle, dedicated to his executed comrades. “These Elements,” he wrote in the preface,

were composed during a long captivity I suffered with so many other virtuous and educated men whose fate I was on the eve of sharing. I had intended to help them . . . and the more the persecution against men of letters was violent, the more its effects were rapid, the more numerous its victims, the more I threw myself into my work with constancy and tenacity, and the more impatient I was to speed its completion. . . . I thought that the importance of elementary works for education would engage the panel of judges to hasten its decisions, and I flattered myself that its judgments would perhaps arrive before the bloody decisions of the revolutionary tribunal; I deluded myself with the idea of being crowned by one future and immolated by another.42

In the end, Millin avoided the latter fate but enjoyed the former. His book won the Convention’s prize but saved no lives at all, not even his own. Chance had intervened in that matter. Thereafter, Millin’s “love of independence” trumped his constancy. Or perhaps he was bitter. He all but abandoned natural history and devoted himself to antiquities—a field in which, paradoxically, he began to build a centralized power base at odds with the amateur, private scholarly ethic he nevertheless continued to champion. A foothold on the rungs of power seems to have introduced a contradiction into his outlook that mirrored, or perhaps was merely a part of, the state of affairs in the late- and postrevolutionary Republic of Letters as a whole. As scholars have noted, the institutions of the sciences—indeed, all public institutions—in postrevolutionary France remained

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functionally dependent on what one might assume were “premodern” or Old Regime practices such as symbolic displays, personal relationships, patronage, friendships, and family relations. Even as French science moved into the future, the customs of the past could not be entirely discarded. In 1795 Millin succeeded the abbé Barthélemy as keeper of the king’s coin collection at the newly nationalized Bibliothèque Nationale (formerly the Bibliothèque du Roi), and he soon became curator of the cabinet of antiquities. Millin’s position put him, in theory, in charge of national antiquities. To transform theoretical power into real power, Millin sought to centralize the study of antiquities around his own person. He did this by founding the journal *Magasin Encyclopédique*, ostensibly to replace the defunct *Journal des Scavans*, which had been the main outlet for scholarly and scientific news since the mid-seventeenth century. According to an advertisement Millin issued in 1806, for 36 francs per year subscribers could read

the most important Reports on all aspects of the Arts and Sciences . . . principally those which accelerate the progress of them. . . . We also publish ingenious discoveries and useful inventions in all fields, accounts of new experiments, the minutes of the most interesting meetings of literary societies, and a description of the most curious contents of those depots of objects of the Arts and Sciences. You will also find Reports on the lives and works of distinguished savants, writers, and artists.

In short, Millin envisaged the *Magasin Encyclopédique* as a central clearinghouse for news on the arts and sciences, but with a special focus on the study of antiquities and history—a site where he could perform the role of gatekeeper once discharged by the great seventeenth-century correspondents such as Peiresc. Millin’s role as gatekeeper in the postrevolutionary Republic of Letters differed from Peiresc’s in the early seventeenth century in fundamental ways, however, because the Republic of Letters as it had existed from Peiresc’s time to the eve of the Revolution had been transformed by that upheaval. A cultural world born with Peiresc finally disappeared in the postrevolutionary era, and Millin represented a new centralized and nationalized manifestation of the Republic of Letters. Continuities and similarities between the old and the new existed—Millin was, in fact, keen to promote them—but they were overshadowed by discontinuities and dissimilarities. To make the *Magasin Encyclopédique* successful, for example, Millin built up an impressive circle of correspondents, similar to what Peiresc had done in the early seventeenth century. Millin’s circle was not, however, a self-regulating “interactive web” of scholars favoring private exchange and stoic reserve, as many believe Peiresc’s circle had been, but an exploitative “agency network.” News flowed to Millin before its wider dissemination. Moreover, Millin himself became a political creature, giving up his agency for power: dependent on support from the Minister of the Interior, he satisfied his master by convincing correspondents to donate or swap antiquities, intended to improve the holdings in the new national museum of art in the Louvre, in exchange for the privilege of publication in his journal.

The success of the *Magasin Encyclopédique* made Millin a major voice in the late- and postrevolutionary Republic of Letters, and he expressed all its underlying tensions. Even


44 This advertisement by Millin appeared on the inside cover of the *Dictionnaire des Beaux Arts* (Paris, 1806).

while he represented the new, centralized, nationalized postrevolutionary Republic of Letters, Millin (who was elected to the Institut de France in 1806) continued to promote a sentimental sense of continuity with its decentralized, provincial, and amateur past. The myth and ideal of Peiresc conjured the stoic integrity and credibility of the old Republic of Letters. Most important, the renaissance of Peiresc in the pages of Millin’s journal revealed that, among amateur provincial scholars at any rate, he had never been forgotten at all.

Millin, in fact, did not initiate the publication of Peiresc’s correspondence; that role fell to his readers. The trauma of the Revolution for men of letters, particularly those of provincial aristocratic heritage, and the perceived need to restore and renew their private, amateur, and provincial vision of the arts and sciences—not to mention the political privileges of their provincial estates—brought about the ideation of a mythologized and monumentalized memory of Peiresc. Peiresc also expressed for them the virtue of freedom under the new despotism first of the Jacobins, then of the Directory, and later of Napoleon. As early as 1795, an unnamed correspondent from Provence wrote to the *Magasin Encyclopédique* to bemoan that so many of the monuments and antiquities of French history had been destroyed or vandalized by fanatical revolutionaries: “On 10 August 1792,” he complained, “a collection of paintings which decorated the palais de justice was torn down and burned. Some, painted by Finsonius, represented the members of parlement in 1616, among them the celebrated Peiresc.”

Several issues later—perhaps spurred, like the anonymous reporter from Provence, by the desire to restore everything that Peiresc represented (or at least to complain about its decline, which was a much easier task)—a former distinguished Provencal Parlementaire and antiquarian by the name of Fauris de Saint-Vincens de Noyers of Aix-en-Provence published an extended footnote regarding Peiresc in a long article on Roman antiquities. Although the article had nothing specifically to do with Peiresc, the author took up nearly two full pages of the journal in detailing the importance of Peiresc for the practice of scholarship and the collecting of antiquities. The footnote concentrated in particular on the fate of Peiresc’s papers after his death—as it was the disposition of those papers that provided the living link between the past of Peiresc and the present. In particular, the author’s long footnote revealed that Peiresc, far from being “confined to oblivion,” had remained a subject of interest to both provincial and foreign scholars and antiquarians practically from the time of his death. “One knows that Peiresc was in epistolary commerce with all the savants of his time,” wrote Saint-Vincens. “Therefore, there are in all countries, above all in France and in Italy, a great number of his letters.” Peiresc contributed to all the important works on antiquities in his time, Saint-Vincens noted, as well as to works of literature, history, and the sciences. But he never published anything—such self-interested labor having undoubtedly been beneath his dignity. Reading his letters, then, is the only way to understand the importance of his contribution as well as to comprehend the sentiments and ethics of a true amateur—indeed, a prince among amateurs. “Several savants have had some of his letters printed,” remarked Saint-Vincens, thereupon embarking on an extended disquisition on the publishing history of the letters. The largest collection was to have been published by one Thomassin “Marangues” (this was a misprint; Saint-Vincens certainly knew that the correct spelling of the name was

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46 *Magasin Encyclopédique*, 1795, 4(14):230–233. The *Magasin*’s system for numbering its issues was not entirely consistent. This was the fourth volume for the year 1795 and the fourteenth issue; there were, in general, four issues to each volume.
“Mazaugues”), president of the Parlement of Aix, who had possessed thirty folio volumes of Peiresc’s letters. Working on the project between 1739 and 1740, wrote Saint-Vincens, Mazaugues prepared two volumes for publication, but his death in 1743 before they could be printed terminated the project. His manuscript passed from his heirs to Jean-François Séguier de Nîmes, a renowned antiquarian, and was then acquired by Malachie d’Inquimbert, bishop of Carpentras, who also collected many other Peiresc papers and housed them in a public library in Carpentras. In 1791 the count of Buchan, founder of the Edinburgh Society of Antiquities, began a colossal project to publish all the correspondence of Peiresc, but he gave it up at the outbreak of the revolutionary wars. “One can say,” lamented Saint-Vincens, “that foreigners have made more of the case of Peiresc and have honored his memory more than the country where he was born, where he lived, and which he made illustrious by his works and his fame.” But, he continued, “one citizen of Aix [Saint-Vincens did not mention that it was his own father], who could but feebly pay the debt of the past century, erected a monument in 1777 to Peiresc in the church of the Dominicans, where Peiresc was interred. The barbarous devastators [of the Revolution] destroyed both the monument and the inscription in 1793 and dispersed the pieces.”

Saint-Vincens did not refuse his part in paying the debt and restoring the pieces of Peiresc’s legacy. Seven issues after his article on Roman antiquities, our prolific annotator published an edited collection of Peiresc’s letters in the *Magasin Encyclopédique* (see Figure 3). Saint-Vincens held four volumes of Peiresc’s letters in his own cabinet, obtained through marriage: his wife, Marguerite-Dorotheé de Trimond, was the grandniece of Thomassin de Mazaugues, grandnephew of Peiresc through Peiresc’s brother Valavez (Peiresc himself never married). Mazaugues had inherited Peiresc’s estate, including a large collection of Peiresc’s papers, and bequeathed this estate to his nephew, the comte de Trimond, Saint-Vincens’s father-in-law. Clearly, then, Trimond had not sold all of Peiresc’s letters to d’Inquimbert.

The submission of Peiresc’s letters by an amateur, provincial man of letters to Millin’s new national journal highlights the tension in the postrevolutionary Republic of Letters. On the one hand, the submission of the letters showed the desire of the amateurs to insist on the revival of their old Republic of Letters, with all its provincial opposition to the centralization and nationalization represented by Paris and its claims to moral superiority. On the other hand, the need to submit the letters for publication at all, and the eager expropriation of them by Millin for the purposes of promoting a fantasized continuity with the past, in fact reveals the stark discontinuities between the pre- and the postrevolutionary Republic of Letters. As L. W. B. Brockliss notes, the new Republic of Letters, not unlike our contemporary academic culture, “demanded a visible profile” in which one “published regularly.”

Tacitly accepting this new order even while offering up a pathetic resistance to it, a Provençal amateur with deep connections to the history and memory of Peiresc began to publish selections of his correspondence. The renaissance of Peiresc, then,

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47 Fauris de Saint-Vincens, “Description d’un trésor trouvé a` Rome lors des fouilles faites en 1794 au pied du mont Esquillin, dans le jardin des religieuses de St. François de Paule,” *Mag. Encyc.*., 1796, 1(1):357–379; the footnote was on pp. 374–375. According to Saint-Vincens, twenty-eight letters by Peiresc were found among the letters of William Camden (an antiquary of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries), published in London in 1691; one to Lucas Holste`nius on an antique ring was in the “curious research of Spon; another in the *Gallia Orientalis* of Colomies.” He is referring to Jacques Spon, *Recherches des antiquités de Lyon* (1673); and Paul Colomies, *Gallia orientalis, sive Gallorum qui lingua hebraeam vel alias orientales excoluerunt vitae, variis inde inde praesidis adornatae, labore et studio Pauli Coloniesii . . .* (1665).

corresponded to a cultural renaissance in the study of antiquity presided over and controlled by Millin.

“Citizen F.S.V.,” wrote Millin in introducing the selection,

who possesses some of the letters, wanted to send them to me, and I believe I render a service to the letters in making them public. . . . These letters are critical to understand the extent of spirit and bountifulness of heart of this great man [Peiresc], who lived only for the sciences, letters, and arts, and whose memory ought to be forever respected by all those who cultivate them, and who ought to be counted, because of this, among the benefactors of humanity.

What followed was a selection of twelve letters—not, as we might now expect, between Peiresc and one of his more famous correspondents, such as Gassendi or Mersenne, but between Peiresc and an obscure Provençal collector named Boniface Borrilly (1564–
1648), Borrilly was a notary from Aix; his claim to fame was a cabinet of curiosities that rivaled Peiresc’s—so much so that (legend has it) Louis XIII visited the cabinet in 1622 and presented Borrilly with his own baldric to add to the other curiosities. In choosing to publicize Peiresc’s correspondence with a Provençal compatriot, rather than a Parisian érudit, Saint-Vincens was insisting on his own view of the postrevolutionary Republic of Letters: that it should not be overly professionalized or centralized in Paris, that its decentralized, provincial, private character was worth preserving.

As both a fellow countryman and, through his wife, a kinsman of Peiresc, Saint-Vincens fancied himself the protector of Peiresc’s memory and the promoter of Peireskian virtues—of the ideal of the Republic of Letters as an amateur, private, decentralized, and provincial association of gens de lettres. The son of a distinguished magistrate and provincial man of letters, Saint-Vincens himself, like Peiresc, had a long career in the magistracy of Aix. Initially a counselor in the Sénéchaussée of Aix (from 1775), he became president of the Parlement of Aix, if only for a few months, upon the resignation of his father in 1789. The Revolution soon abolished the judicial institutions of the Old Regime, however, and Saint-Vincens lost his office. He became mayor of Aix in 1790, a position he held for three years. It was during these years that Saint-Vincens first contacted Millin. Apparently already envisioning a central role for himself in the study of antiquities, Millin had created in the Chapelle des Bernardines in Paris an ad hoc museum to protect treasures and antiquities, including religious treasures, from the destructive elements of the Revolution. Since such treasures faced similar dangers in Aix, Saint-Vincens placed some of the local holdings under Millin’s protection. He also collected paintings, inscriptions, and other curiosities and stored them in his own cabinet in Aix. This Peireskian concern with the objects of the overturned and discarded past apparently suggested to the local Jacobins that Saint-Vincens maintained an overly strong attachment both to the Old Regime and to his own noble status. Accordingly, he found himself arrested and jailed in 1793, along with his seventy-five-year-old father; he languished, like Millin, until 9 Thermidor. After this harrowing episode, Saint-Vincens decided to renovate the monument his father had dedicated to Peiresc in 1777, which had been defaced during the Revolution, and to publish the Peiresc correspondence he owned. Could Saint-Vincens have been the anonymous correspondent who wrote to the Magasin in 1795 to lament the destruction of priceless paintings and artifacts? Certainly, he bewailed the loss of the world that Peiresc represented.

The letters between Peiresc and Borrilly that Saint-Vincens chose to publish primarily


51 On the preservation of medieval antiquities in Provence by Saint-Vincens père et fils see Brockliss, Calvet’s Web (cit. n. 27), pp. 362–363.

52 He published a notice to advertise the renovation: Fauris de Saint-Vincens, Monument consacré à la gloire de Peiresc (1798). Saint-Vincens held no further offices until 1808, when he was elected mayor of Aix once again. He had been offered the office of first president of the Appellate Court of the Bouches-du-Rhône in 1799 but declined, apparently still gun-shy of political involvement. In 1811 he was named second president of the Imperial Court of the Bouches-du-Rhône, a post he held until his death in 1819.
concern Peiresc’s collecting interests and, as Millin attempts to tease out, his interests in natural philosophy and taxonomy. Peiresc and Borrilly each boasts of his most recent acquisitions. They exchange books on the lives of kings, which Peiresc had bound in expensive red Moroccan leather, and they discuss the weather. Peiresc scolds Borrilly for opening a mummy acquired from Egypt (“If you have had your mummy opened I blame you very much for it”) and expounds scientifically on a giant’s tooth a friend had sent him from North Africa (“They suppose [it] to be from a giant, but I consider it to be from an elephant, and to convince myself more surely of this, I put my hand in the mouth of [a live] elephant in order to touch and grasp its own teeth”).

These letters evoked a world, already passing away, for which many, particularly in the provinces, still pined, and to which Millin sought to connect his own mission to become the gatekeeper of the study of antiquities in France. Accordingly, Millin noted that his own learned interests were reflected in those of Peiresc. In his only specific comment about the content of the letters, Millin, still a Linnaean enthusiast who had not entirely given up his interest in natural history, emphasized Peiresc’s taxonomic genius, demonstrated by his having understood the importance of dental identification in determining animal species. Not only did Peiresc write about elephant teeth; in another letter he wrote of examining a skeleton Borrilly had sent him, concluding from the shape of the teeth that the animal could not have been a serpent, as Borrilly had claimed, but was, rather, “some race of otter or hedgehog.” (One wonders what Borrilly did with the limbs.) Millin commented enthusiastically, “This proves that Peiresc had already conceived that it was necessary above all to concentrate on teeth as a certain characteristic for identifying animals.”

The publication of the Peiresc letters sparked a brief but furious flurry of editorials, comments, and exchanges in the pages of the Magasin Encyclopédique, focused primarily and pedantically on the general disposition of the Peiresc papers as a whole. We see in these exchanges, I believe, a passionate but implicit resistance to the centralization and control of scholarship by the agents of the central government—a desire of provincial gens de lettres to preserve what they saw as their own patrimony. One Simon Chardon de la Rochette, a renowned Hellenist and philologist originally from the Gévaudan, submitted a note to Millin and forwarded with it a letter from his esteemed colleague, the Lyonnais bibliophile and former monk Barthélemy Mercier de Saint-Léger, then an embittered old man made nearly indigent by the Revolution. Millin published these letters seven issues after Saint-Vincens’s contribution. “I hasten to address a letter to you that Citizen Mercier de Saint-Léger just wrote to me,” Chardon-la-Rochette (as he then styled himself) wrote breathlessly. “It concerns Peiresc, and in consequence it will be read with interest by your subscribers, above all by Citizen F.S.V. [Saint-Vincens], who appears to me to march worthily in the footsteps of his father, and to honor, as his father did, the patrimony of Peiresc.” What followed was a long, detailed, and didactic account by Saint-Léger of the whereabouts of a great number of the Peiresc letters and the history of attempts to bring them to the light of day.

53 “Lettres inédites de Peiresc” (cit. n. 49), pp. 372.
54 Ibid., p. 381.
55 Mag. Encyc., 1796, 4(14):247–255, on pp. 246–247. Saint-Léger claimed to possess precisely that collection that Thomassin de Mazaugues intended to have printed, given by his heirs to Séguier de Nîmes and thence passed on to Saint-Léger—who was merely the guardian, not the owner, of the letters. He noted that the collection contained twenty-four letters from Peiresc to Borrilly, whereas Saint-Vincens had published only twelve, and, furthermore, that there were four from Borrilly to Peiresc. On Chardon de la Rochette see Michaud, Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne (cit. n. 50), Vol. 7, pp. 508–510; on Saint-Léger see ibid., Vol. 28, pp. 10–11.
“One [Saint-Vincen] has said,” Saint-Léger grumbled, “that the president Mazaugues undertook, in 1739 or 1740, the project of giving to the public a choice collection of the letters of Peiresc. . . . This lacks exactitude; the project of the president was older than 1739; it was also more extensive.” Saint-Léger then cited a note in the journal Nouvelles Litteraires, in February 1724, announcing Mazaugues’s intention to publish two collections, the first containing three volumes of letters and the second to be yet longer, and inviting all savants who possessed letters to or from Peiresc to contact him. “You see that this good project was announced in 1724,” he adds. “From 1720 there had been a question of it in the Journal des Savans.” And even as early as 1708, Saint-Léger insisted, men of letters were interested in reading Peiresc’s correspondence—and he cited a passage from the “rather rare” Abrégé de l’histoire des savans, itself ultimately quoted from Bayle’s Dictionnaire historique et critique, which read in part: “Never had anyone rendered more services to the Republic of Letters than this learned man [Peiresc]: it seems that he was its procurer-general. . . . His commerce of letters embraced all parts of the world: the physical experiments, rarities of nature, works of art, antiquities, history and languages were all equally the object of his curiosity. M. de Balzac called him, in his letters, a piece of the shipwreck of antiquity, and the relics of the golden age.” And what happened to his extensive library and renowned cabinet of antiquities after his death? Saint-Léger did not hesitate to share this information: the Collège de Navarre purchased the library, and at least a part of the cabinet was acquired by Claude du Molinet and placed in the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève—where, one must note, Saint-Léger was librarian from 1760 until the Revolution.

But the greatest part of the Peiresc correspondence remained at the library at Carpentras, as Saint-Vincen had reported. Several issues later, the librarian at Carpentras himself, one J.-D. Fabre de Saint-Véran, submitted a note on the library’s holdings to the Magasin Encyclopédique. Saint-Véran’s story, I should add, is similar to those of the other aristocratic gens de lettres we encounter here, and as such his views of Peiresc were commensurate with theirs: he lost his post as librarian in 1793 and was later imprisoned, reemerging only in the winter of 1796. He temporarily regained his position at the library in the spring of 1797, only to lose it again that winter, although the circumstances are unknown. Saint-Véran’s friends appealed to Millin to use his connections with the Minister of the Interior to restore Saint-Véran to his post, but Millin apparently could do nothing. Saint-Véran resumed his position officially only in 1804, although in the interim he served as professor in the new écoles centrales. It is unclear whether Millin helped him obtain that post.

The library, wrote Saint-Véran during his short stint back at work in 1797, contained about seven hundred manuscripts, eighty-six volumes of which were Peiresc’s. D’Inguimbert had purchased these volumes from the comte de Trimond, nephew of the younger Thomassin Mazaugues, sometime in the 1740s or 1750s (d’Inguimbert died in 1757). The same Trimond later ceded four other volumes of letters to his son-in-law, Saint-Vincen. Still other volumes, unfortunately, had been separated and sold to collec-

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56 Mag. Encyc., 1796, 4(14):247–255. Saint-Léger dated his letter “14 August 1796 (old style),” in apparent contempt for the revolutionary calendar. By 1796, however, the Revolution had apparently left him in a deep depression; he would not go outside and survived until his death in 1799 on a small pension awarded him by the Minister of the Interior.

ners years before. Saint-Véran had traced some of these sales, but the records of others, he lamented, were lost—and here he moralized against private ownership of material that was important to learning: “Jealousy and bad faith have contributed to the loss of the others.” Also, he argued, “these manuscripts would be made much more useful to the public and more honorable to this library by reuniting in their entirety the scattered remains of this rich collection.”

Saint-Véran did not mention Séguier or Saint-Léger.

Like Saint-Vincens and Millin, Saint-Véran monumentalized Peiresc’s memory, transforming him into a guardian of knowledge serving the public good—very much like an idealized and aggrandized version of Saint-Véran himself, a simple librarian: “Peiresc,” eulogized Saint-Véran, “consulted by savants of every profession and of every country, applied himself in good time to form a storehouse [magasin] of erudition which could serve everyone. Savants never found a Maecenas more aware nor more communicative than he.” He continued: “The manuscripts of Peiresc surely interest the public. . . . But his correspondence with French as well as foreign savants has always been desired with yet more ardor by men of letters: often promised and never published, the letters languish still, to our great regret, in obscurity in the dust of diverse cabinets.”

Clearly Saint-Véran had little regard for Saint-Vincens’s short selection of Peiresc letters. He was perhaps hoping for a more complete publication of the Peiresc correspondence, such as had been attempted by the Mazaugues, but the project had outlived them, and no one seemed eager to take up such a laborious task—life is short, after all. Not until the 1880s would anything resembling a substantial publication appear: Philippe Tamizey de Larroque’s seven-volume (and still nowhere near complete) *Lettres de Peiresc*, which came out between 1888 and 1898.

No one replied directly to Saint-Véran, but some issues later an unknown “S.C.” attacked Saint-Léger’s account of the fate of the Peiresc letters. “I have read with pleasure, in your journal, n. XIV of this year, a letter from the learned bibliographer Saint-Léger on the manuscript letters of Peiresc,” began S.C., perhaps with feigned politeness. “I have seen this manuscript in the hands of the learned and virtuous Séguier, my master and friend,” he continued; he then asserted that Séguier had never claimed to have obtained it from the heirs of Mazaugues, who sold the entire library and all its manuscripts to Malachie d’Inguimbert, bishop of Carpentras: “Séguier assured me that the portion he had [of the Peiresc letters] is but a small fragment of that which existed in the public library of Carpentras, founded by the generous and beneficent bishop of whom I just spoke.”

In an extraordinarily detailed note published in the next issue, Saint-Léger submitted his “last word,” as he called it, on the literary correspondence of Peiresc and on Séguier. “To assure the authenticity and value of the collection deposited with me,” he raged, “I find myself therefore forced to respond to Monsieur S.C.”

58 Saint-Véran, “Mémoire sur les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque publique de Carpentras, et sur ceux de Peiresc en particulier,” pp. 504–505. According to Saint-Véran, several volumes went to Michel Bégon, an intendant of Rochefort in the late seventeenth century; some to the Gaufridi family (Jean-François and his son Jacques, both counselors in the Parlement of Aix at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries); and some to Claude Gros de Boze, a Lyonnais academician in the early eighteenth century.


62 Saint-Léger wrote, in part: “Happily, I can reverse this proof of Monsieur S.C. because I possess the originals of five letters written by Séguier himself, from January 1773 to September 1775, to one of the heritors of the president Mazaugues in which he states that the heritor had deposited with Séguier this collection of letters, which he has since deposited with me.” *Mag. Encyc.*, 1797, 5(18):235–241.
Saint-Vincens, for his part, did not deign to engage in the minutiae of this debate. Instead, he sought to fulfill Saint-Véran’s injunction, at least in part. Over the next few decades he edited the Peiresc letters he owned and published them in the Magasin Encyclopédique and its successor, the Annales Encyclopédiques. In 1806, after Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition initiated a rage for all things Oriental, Saint-Vincens aptly chose those letters that highlighted Peiresc’s interest in the Levant: his correspondence with a Provençal expatriate (and apostate) living in Tunis, one Thomas d’Arcos. These provincial amateurs, Saint-Vincens implied, were far ahead of the academicians at the new Napoleonic Institut d’Égypte with regard to Oriental and Levantine ethnology.63

“One of the most curious of correspondences in my collection of Peiresc letters,” Saint-Vincens wrote in his introduction to the letters, “or of the contemporaries of this savant, is that which is composed of letters written by Thomas d’Arcos to M. de Peiresc and to M. [Honnoré] Aycard, of Toulon, and by Aycard to Peiresc, from 1630 to 1635. One sees here details on the customs and the monuments of Tunis and environs. These details will always be interesting, in spite of all those which have been published since.”64 The letters focused on the collecting of exotic Levantine curiosities and on observations concerning the geography and natural history of North Africa. The correspondence opened with d’Arcos’s claim to have found the skeleton of a twenty-five-foot giant in an ancient sepulcher in the ruins of the old Roman provincial capital of Utica. Incredulous, Peiresc demanded to see the skeleton. Unfortunately, d’Arcos informed Peiresc, the skeleton just happened to have turned to dust when it was touched, and all d’Arcos could send were a few teeth. Peiresc, as we learned from his letters to Borrilly, judged that the teeth were from an elephant. This judgment proved to the satisfied readers of the Magasin that Peiresc was a sober empiricist—just like themselves—able to dispel the flights of fancy to which lesser men and decadent Orientals were subject.65

Saint-Vincens published several more collections of Peiresc letters in the Magasin and in its 1817 successor, the Annales Encyclopédiques. After the 1806 installment nothing appeared until 1815, when he published twelve more letters between Peiresc and d’Arcos. Three more selections came out in the Annales Encyclopédiques in 1817 and 1818. These were heavily annotated by the erudite Millin. In November 1819, the same month that Saint-Vincens died, the Peiresc letters published in the Annales in 1817 and 1818 were reprinted in the Extrait des Annales Encyclopédiques to commemorate Saint-Vincens’s death—so securely had Saint-Vincens tied his identity to that of Peiresc. Millin had already been dead a year. At the end of the reprints, the Aixois art historian and magistrate Toussaint-Bernard Émeric-David added an epitaph for Saint-Vincens in which Saint-Vincens himself took on the Peireskian characteristics of the ideal man of letters: “The loss of this respectable magistrate will be strongly felt by the friends of letters,” wrote Émeric-David. “His cabinet, rich in books of archaeology, in medals, in Greek and Latin inscriptions, and even in paintings from the early ages of the art, was constantly opened

64 Mag. Encyc., 1806, 5:110.
65 In a letter to d’Arcos dated 10 May 1631 (which Saint-Vincens did not publish in his selection), Peiresc wrote concerning the giant: “I believe, as do you, and as all men of good sense must, that these [stories] are only fantasies. But I assure you that you have given me a singular pleasure in making known to me . . . what these poor people [the Moors] believe.” Larroque, ed., Lettres de Peiresc (cit. n. 60), Vol. 7, p. 95. Later d’Arcos excused his own foolishness (on a different subject) with a few disparaging remarks about the degenerate North African Moors: “Excuse in this if you please my ignorance and fragility, and remember that I am in Barbary, from which nothing comes that is not barbarous.” Mag. Encyc., 1806, 5:139.
to the research of students for whom he became a guide and sometimes a patron, as well as to those scholars who wanted to examine the richness of it.”

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In the years after the Revolution, the mythologized memory of Peiresc became in itself a monument to the culture, or the cult, of French science and scholarship, erected in an effort to revive and reconstruct an ideal that had been swept aside during the years of turmoil but that, like Peiresc himself, had never been entirely forgotten. Properly speaking, a clear distinction between amateur and professional never existed in early modern French science, but the ideal of the amateur remained an important part of the culture of science. In his essay *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874), Nietzsche states that monumental history “belongs above all to the active and powerful man, to him who fights a great fight, who requires models, teachers and comforters and cannot find them among his associates and contemporaries.”

It may be a little difficult to imagine the savants discussed here as fighters; but as Millin and many of his contemporaries struggled to define their place in postrevolutionary France, they found in the reconstructed memory of Peiresc a monument to inspire them to emulation and to action—even if this action was the repudiation of one past in favor of another or the forging of sentimental continuities to gloss over glaring discontinuities.

Nietzsche recognized that remembering the past in order to live also involves forgetting. Life can require letting some things sink down into oblivion, into the darkness of a selective amnesia, while others are remembered imaginatively. By reconnecting their lives to the idealized, even monumentalized, memory of Peiresc, the men of the postrevolutionary Republic of Letters engaged in the highly imaginative act of pretending that the present was similar to the past and that the Revolution had not altered their lives—for monumental history, to paraphrase Nietzsche, does not find complete truthfulness to its advantage. “Monumental history deceives with analogies,” and for Millin and those contributing to the renaissance of Peiresc in the *Magasin Encyclopédique*, the construction of a similarity between themselves and an obscure early seventeenth-century amateur of science was an antidote to resignation as they set to work creating their postrevolutionary lives.

One final and particularly illustrative example: In 1804 Millin undertook a journey through the southern departments of France to catalogue the antiquities and monuments of the French patrimony and, undoubtedly, to forge relationships among the provincial, amateur *gens de lettres* who were busily dusting themselves off and getting back to work after the frenzy of the Revolution. Upon arriving in Aix-en-Provence, Millin dwelt at length on the monument to Peiresc that Saint-Vincens had recently renovated. Standing before the monument, Millin glorified the memory of Peiresc. “The name of Peiresc must ever be dear to the French,” he wrote.

No one ever rendered greater service to letters than this learned man. He encouraged authors; he furnished them with memoirs and materials; he expended his revenues in purchasing or

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obtaining copies of the most rare and useful manuscripts, which he liberally communicated to
the learned of all nations. His correspondents were diffused over every part of the habitable
globe. Experimental philosophy, the wonders of nature, the productions of art, of antiquities,
history, and language, were equally the objects of his study.69

When Millin died in 1818, his fellow men of letters eulogized him, as they could not
fail to have done, in unmistakably Peireskian tropes: “His house was open to all weary
men from all countries,” said one. “He paid for their research, their expenses, and their
difficulties. He gathered them together to assist their enterprises or ease their work.
Member of a great number of academies, and correspondent with nearly all national and
domestic savants, he made for himself a particular life of sociability, obligation, and useful
relations. His death will leave a deep void that we will all feel greatly.”70

Ultimately, the renaissance of Peiresc in the pages of the *Magasin Encyclopédique* tells
us little about who Peiresc might have been, but it does tell us what postrevolutionary men
of letters wished they were but could not quite become. In their own eyes, the more they
were like Peiresc, the more they were not like the academicians in Paris, and this
dissimilarity gave them the solace of moral superiority in consolation for the power they
shunned even while, as in the case of Millin, they reached out to grasp it with both hands.
Both science and politics in the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras were radically trans-
formed, but the radical discontinuity between past and present did not lead to a total
dismissal of an obsolete past. Instead, the past continued to grip the members of the
Republic of Letters—not with the cold, spectral hand of death, but with the crushing
warmth of life. It even provided a way of redefining their identities for the future.

69 A. L. Millin, *Travels through the Southern Departments of France: Performed in the Years 1804 and 1805*
70 Alexandre de Laborde, member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, cited in Krafft, “Notice
sur M. Aubin-Louis Millin” (cit. n. 30), p. 75.