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Graduate College

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POPULAR SOCIETY ADDRESSES OF THERMIDOR

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Bridget A. Roussell

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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

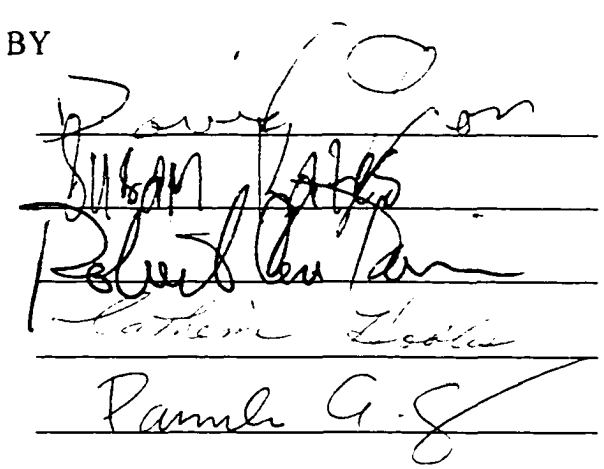

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

The following pages comprise a rhetorical analysis of a selected group of letters written by political clubs of the French Revolution to The National Convention. The letters are rare examples of texts composed collectively to be read aloud to the membership, signed by them, then sent to Paris where they were to be read aloud again to the membership of the National Convention. The letters are therefore oral in their conception (as committees of correspondence deliberated over their content) as well as oral in their function: they were written to be read. As such, they are full of the oratorical features which have been analyzed by Walter Ong as residual orality. These remarkably oral texts are the first to repeat the story of Thermidor which has become a foundational and controlling myth for popular conceptions of the futility of revolution. As texts that form the initiation of a modern political myth, their orality functions in much the way orality did in the making of myths whose origins lie in the purely oral world of ancient pre-literacy. One might say that the committees of correspondence who spoke these letters were the singers of songs, the Homers, of one of our culture's foundational myths. Further, as epideictic rhetoric, the letters are in the conservative, literary form that is traditionally appropriate for a mythic hero tale.

The tradition of sending letters of congratulation from the provinces to Paris on important events of state predates the French Revolution. Forgotten during the first years of the Revolution, the tradition of letters of felicitation returns to

the scene after the declaration of the Republic in 1792, which is the Year I of the Revolutionary calendar. The *Archives Nationales* in Paris contain hundreds of these letters for various events. For example, the letters of felicitation for the "*Fête de l'Être suprême*" are numerous and arrived in Paris for several days and weeks after the actual celebration which was on 20 Prairial of the Year II (June 8, 1794). This Revolutionary festival was Robespierre's pet project, and it is therefore ironic to find the letters congratulating the National Convention on the *Fête de l'Être suprême* in the very cartons where lie letters congratulating the same body for the arrest and execution Robespierre, an event known ever since simply as "Thermidor".

The first chapter of this study examines the Myth of Thermidor, its significance, and the letters' role in its construction. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Thermidor has been a point of division in French, as well as international, politics. Yet the letters of congratulation to the National Convention on the ninth of Thermidor present a fairly uniform perspective. This is the result of the concerted efforts of the National Convention to put forth a persuasive account of the execution without trial of members of the central committees of the revolutionary government and the principle leaders of the capital city government, known as the Paris Commune. The portrait of Robespierre, St. Just, and Couthon which the National Convention invented continues to dominate contemporary accounts of "the Terror." This narrative of the events will be referred to in this study as the myth of

Thermidor. Because the executions conducted during the years 1793 and 1794 were not by any means the first, the last, or the most egregious of French history (consider, for example, the executions after the fall of the Paris Commune of 1871), the appellation "*the* Terror" is inappropriate. It is also a legacy of the myth of Thermidor which depends upon the premise that "the Terror" was the epitome of terror -- the worst of its kind in some way. When referring to "the Terror" as an account of history supporting the myth of Thermidor, i.e., as a story told, I enclose the words in quotation marks. However, when using the words as shorthand for the period of time so designated as the Terror, I leave the words without quotation marks. Likewise, I capitalize the Revolution when I am referring to the French Revolution, but do not capitalize it when I am referring to revolution(s) in general.

No event produced more letters of congratulations to the National Convention than the ninth of Thermidor. The significance as well as the actual facts of the ninth of Thermidor have been in hot debate since the events themselves. Firsthand accounts of the day are contradictory and historians' interpretations have generated debate rather than settling it. As I am aware that most in the field of Composition/Rhetoric/Literacy have little or no knowledge of the events of Thermidor, I have provided an explanation in the following chapter. Thermidor is significant because it was a turning point in the French Revolution. Many would say, and I believe it is justifiable to do so, that Thermidor marked the end of the Revolution. With Thermidor the interests of the

sans-culottes, the working poor, lost centrality. In popular presentations of the story of Thermidor, it is the point in the Revolution when the Terror was ended. The executions of those convicted of the various forms of treason had been urged by volatile street demonstrations. Those doing the demonstrating and lynching were a particular class of citizen. The Terror was therefore not only a period of swift executions, it was also a time when the interests and demands of the working poor took center stage. Yet this latter aspect of the period does not appear in the history and reference books to which the average curious reader would turn when seeking information. I therefore call the received narrative of Thermidor a myth, not because it is not true. That would be too naive an understanding of what any narrative does. Rather, the popularly presented story of Thermidor is a myth in the sense that it informs our consciousness as the classical myths did for ancient civilizations. Like all myths, the myth of Thermidor is based on earlier ones, most notably, Plato's. It has been the foundational and controlling narrative which informs us that revolution is futile because it leads to tyranny and terror.

Yet, as thoroughly examined and analyzed as Thermidor has been, the letters from the sociétés populaires to the National Convention after the event have languished in France's national archives virtually unread. Though many scholars make a habit of reporting the existence of the letters in their accounts of Thermidor, they have given only cursory quotes from those few letters which were printed and distributed. As a body of writing done collectively by groups of working people in the

summer of 1794, the addresses merit examination on two scores. First, they are unique documents in that they were composed by groups of artisans, shopkeepers, day laborers, and professionals whose collective voices are rarely documented in the early modern period. There were sociétés populaires organized in all *départements*, in both rural and urban areas, and among the armies. There were even a few women's and young people's societies. Second, the addresses are unique forms of discourse which, although existing in written form, were never meant to serve as written text, but as oratory. The letters were composed by groups whose meetings were entirely events of oratorical performance. The French Revolution was, in itself, a series of events in which oral performances played a more significant role than they ever would again. The structure of the provincial société populaire system, as well as the structure of the letters the societies wrote to the national leadership in Paris, relied upon the capacity of oral discourse to promote group unity.

The sociétés populaires had been proliferating rapidly in the course of the year preceding Thermidor:

> In 1793 and 1794 the entire Republic was covered by a tight, efficient network of clubs affiliated to the Jacobins in Paris. Their total number is hard to calculate. In the southeast, where the counterrevolution threatened for a time, they seem to have been especially numerous: 139 sociétés populaires for a total of 154 communes in the Departement of the Vaucluse, 258 clubs for 355 communes in the Drôme, 117 clubs for 260 communes in the Basses-Alpes. These societies played a decisive part in defeating the domestic enemy and in establishing the new revolutionary institutions (Soboul, 106).

The letters have a style like that of many other revolutions' discourses. Their aggregative, participatory, situational, and agonistic qualities are the result of their orality. These letters are so replete with oral qualities that it is safe to say only texts created by electronic media (e.g., on the internet or in other "chat room" formats) can compare with them in this regard. Using Walter Ong's understanding of oral and literate features in discourse, this study will approach the letters as highly oral documents which create meaning in ways not privileged in literate discourse. Because they were created in a discourse which used oral devices in spite of being situated within a society which had what Ong calls literate consciousness, the letters participate in the creation of the Myth of Thermidor in such a way as to heighten the volatility of the situation. More than simply using violent metaphors or expressions, the letters participate in a discourse which does not value objectivity and distance, nor analytical approaches. Their oral features make the letters arguments for the perpetuation of the Terror even when they nominally oppose it.

It is largely the orality of the letters of Thermidor which have led to their being ignored by historians. The oral features of the letters are examined in the second chapter of this study. as Ong points out, literate sensibilities find most oral qualities distasteful. It is, in fact, the orality of their work which writing instructors are generally charged with fixing in student compositions. The letters therefore seem repetitive, naïve, bombastic, and hyperbolic. The prevalence of such common places as *"Robespierre-buveur du sang"*

["Robespierre, Drinker of Blood"]and exhortations to "*restez à votre poste*" ["remain at your post"] give literate minds the impression that they are reading redundant, empty discourse. That is, that the letters are "rhetoric" in the most negative sense. The classification of discourse into which the letters fall, epideictic, further enhances this effect. Sometimes called panegyric rhetoric, epideictic is one of Aristotle's three classifications of rhetoric. It is primarily concerned with praising or blaming, but not (explicitly) with persuading. The letters are classic examples of this type of oratory -- and that they were very much conceived as oratory makes them uniquely suited to be exemplars of this form of rhetoric. Describing epideictic oratory has been a bit difficult for contemporary rhetoricians since it seems to be, as Kenneth Burke expresses it in *Rhetoric of Motives*, a "catch-all" for discourse that doesn't cleanly fit into Aristotle's other two types of rhetoric. Burke wrestles with the frustration:

> Aristotle probably assigned this third kind to the present because, having defined the others with reference to the future (the deliberative concern with expedients) and the past (the forensic concern with justice or injustice of thing already done), by elimination he needed a kind aiming primarily at the present. Then he goes on to say that "epideictic" or demonstrative speakers, in their concern with praise and blame (the honorable and dishonorable) also frequently recall the past or look to the future -- which would seem to take back all that had been given (71).

Yet the letters of Thermidor are part of a tradition of very real political function in a discourse not yet so literate in its forms that this oral traditional form was useless. This

study takes the understanding of Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca: "Our own view is that epideictic oratory forms a central part of the art of persuasion, and the lack of understanding shown toward it results from a false conception of the effects of argumentation" (49).

History has been critiqued as a discourse in which the past is invented (rather than discovered or explained) by means of artificially linear narratives, yet one which traditionally resists this identity in favor of that of a discipline in which events, persons, and cultures of the past are chronicled in as exact and precise a way as possible. Joan Wallach Scott, herself a historian, has argued for the usefulness of critiques of positivistic history, and asserts that the attack from feminists and poststructuralists

> undermines the historian's ability to claim neutral mastery or to present any particular story as if it were complete, universal, and objectively determined.... Such a reflexive and self-critical approach makes apparent the particularistic status of any historical knowledge and the historian's active role as a producer of knowledge. It undermines claims for authority based on totalizing explanations, essentialized categories of analysis ..., or synthetic narratives that assume an inherent unity for the past (7).

Citing Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Barbara Johnson, Scott resolves to use the poststructuralist concepts of dichotomy, gender construction, power/knowledge, and discourse in her social history of nineteenth-century working women. This study will employ the same theoretical approach for the same reasons:

> This analytic approach takes seriously the boundaries of disciplines and the different genres they represent

> but makes these a matter for investigation rather than a set of preconditions for scholarly work.... When, instead, we take the disciplines as analysts and producers of cultural knowledge, we find that what is at stake is not simply a literary technique for reading but an epistemological theory that offers a method for analyzing the processes by which meanings are made, by which we make meanings (8-9).

Like Scott's, this study focuses on documents from archives. In this case, they are letters written by provincial political clubs in France, called *sociétés populaires*, during the late summer of 1794. The approach I wish to take with these documents is quite different from that which an archival historian would take -- as Scott points out, "For many social historians, archives are sacred places where one culls from documents 'facts' about the past" (8). A study which would focus on "analyzing the processes by which meanings are made" must approach archival documents as it would approach any other written document, whether a work of fiction or history. In fact, the distinctions between "fiction" and "history" blur in such an analysis since both the novel and the history book, as well as letters, political pamphlets, and advertisements, equally employ the elements which create meaning in writing. James Berlin historicizes this approach:

> The influence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories in the humanities, social sciences, and even sciences -- what Jameson has called the linguistic turn -- can be seen as an effort to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs. One of the supreme conquests of the Enlightenment has been to efface the unique work of language in carrying out the ideological projects of the new dominant group. This victory has been accomplished by denying the inevitable role of signification in effecting communication, insisting instead that signs can and

> must become neutral transmitters of externally verifiable truths -- truths, that is, existing separate from language (xvii).

Not wishing to attempt the dubious quest for origins, causes, or intentions of the authors, I am solely interested in the ways the letters create meaning.

The addresses (sometimes called "letters" or "proclamations") composed by the sociétés populaires to congratulate the National Convention on the events of Thermidor are too numerous to include in this study. Such letters of congratulations can be found in the regional archives and libraries as well as the National Archives in France. In the National Archives in Paris, they are preserved in cartons C325. Fortunately for researchers, they have been microfilmed and are therefore easily copied at the archives. The scope of this study would not accommodate even all of the three hundred, sixty-five addresses in the National Archives under C325, written during the months of Vendemiaire and Brumaire 1794 -- a collection that is not exhaustive of all the extant addresses. The task of deciding which letters would be included, and which excluded was not an easy one. It would have been possible to use only those displaying the best examples of the rhetorical features in which I am interested, but that did not seem fair as it would skew the overall impression of what the addresses tend to contain and in what proportions. Another reasonable method would have been to use only those letters written on a particular date. However, each letter has a date on it which corresponds to date on which the société populaire met.

Therefore, since certain days of the week would have been preferable for meetings, only a few different dates are found on the letters, and for each of these dates there is an overwhelming number of addresses. It would have been possible to use the National Archives' numbering system as a guide and include a sequence of letters as they are ordered in the cartons there. However, that would have been too random a system as I have not bee able to discern any logic behind the sequence in which they are numbered in the National Archives cartons. Finally, I have settled upon using the letters from a particular region of France. I have chosen the *Region du Nord* because it was an area which saw moderate amounts of violence from both the "Red Terror" and the "White Terror," but little of the foreign and civil wars. My desire to exclude theatres of war is derived from my interest in the discourse of the Terror. I found it difficult when reading letters from the periphery of the country or from areas in and around the *Vendée* to discern references to death and violence due to the war and those which were due to the Terror. Of course, the Terror was related to the foreign and civil wars, but for the purposes of this study it was simpler to avoid those areas of the country and focus on the specific question of the myth of Thermidor and the Terror as they are constructed in the letters. There are fifty-six addresses from the *Région du Nord*. The average length of the addresses is four hundred, forty words.

The *Région du Nord* was the section of France north and north-east of Paris. I selected the *Région du Nord* because parts of it saw a significant number of executions for treason

and prospecting in food produce (almost exclusively the reasons for arrest and execution during the Terror) occurred there during 1793 and 1794. Consequently, it also saw its share of "the White Terror" in which anti-Jacobin elements sought their revenge against their one-time Jacobin neighbors in a bloody backlash that went virtually unchecked by national and local authorities. The *Région du Nord* was therefore neither uncharacteristically quiet nor unusually violent by comparison the the other regions. For this reason, it seemed a good choice. In addition, the *Region du Nord* has the added advantage as a sample in that it saw relatively little of the foreign war. In this way, I can be sure that the references to violence are not local experiences of the war, but local experiences of the Terror.

This study is an example of the role rhetoricians can play in the analysis of history texts. I mean this in two senses. First, a rhetorician is appropriate as an analyst of the documents conserved in archives which have traditionally been the basis of historical researcher. Among historians, archival research has gone out of fashion. As a result, texts which have not had traditional value -- like, for example, the letters of the sociétés populaires -- have languished in archives untouched. We rhetoricians who can understand the value of writing which may seem superficially to be empty language may be the only ones motivated to take up such works. Secondly, our reason to be so motivated is that, as those who are interested in how reality is created by language, rhetoricians are well employed to critique and question the

narratives which History passes on to us as "factual." the letters of Thermidor, long ignored and dismissed, are examples of how myths are made.

Chapter Two: The Myth of Thermidor

The Myth

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Anthony Trollope wrote:

> Half a century has passed since Robespierre died, and history has become particularly conversant with his name. Is there any one whose character suffers more under a more wide-spread infamy? The abomination of whose deeds has become more notorious? The tale of whose death has been oftener told; whose end, horrid, fearful, agonized, as was that of this man, has met with less sympathy? (Trollope, 300)

Though Trollope claims his century was so familiar with the story of Thermidor that he could pose the rhetorical question as to who did not know it, one would be hard put to find this century anyone who actually knew it. Yet, though the story itself is almost universally unfamiliar, it is the central and controlling story for the western understanding of the Revolution as well as of revolution in general. It serves as the base narrative for the fate of all people's uprisings: the idealistic beginnings which quickly go bad as lust for power among members of the revolutionary leadership leads the nation inexorably into dictatorship. The violence of revolution inevitably becomes the violence of oppression. Then, as the popular simile preaches, the revolution, like Saturn, devours her children. Utopia is a noble ideal, but like all ideals, doomed to failure because human frailty forces the people's power to be used against them.

The fact that the story of Thermidor was commonly known in Trollope's day is certainly due to the nineteenth-century vogue of Carlyle's work. The English-speaking world was

familiar with it from this central source. In France, there was an even more dominant single popular source for the story: Jules Michelet's history of the French Revolution. Michelet's nineteenth-century tome is still an important text in France. In fact, the archival research Michelet supplies in his history is a source for many of the popular works on the Revolution in the English-speaking world as well. Virtually any historian writing in any nation is obliged to touch base with Michelet's text in the course of writing a new history. It has been said that the nineteenth century was obsessed with the Revolution, seeking an identity in coming to grips with its causes and effects. The popularity of Michelet's and Carlyle's histories in the nineteenth century is reason for such an assessment of the century. The twentieth century has had other historical focal points, and so, though the myth of Thermidor continues to serve as a base narrative for the course of history, the actual story of Thermidor is little known. Therefore, before examining the ways in which the story of Thermidor functions as a base narrative, it would be useful to tell the story.

The story of Thermidor is dotted with what historians have come to see as paradoxes. The notion that these aspects of the narrative are paradoxical is a twentieth-century understanding -- both Carlyle and Michelet made clear in their narratives that the personalities of the parties involved were almost fated to produce the behaviors and events which comprise the story of Thermidor. The story actually begins on the eighth of Thermidor with a speech Robespierre gave at the National Convention. This speech, in itself one of the "paradoxes" of

Thermidor, came after a long absence from his seat on the revolutionary government's central committee, the Committee of Public Safety. Robespierre had been appointed to the committee less than a year before. Why Robespierre had been so long absent from the government is the first paradox. Historians come to various solutions: he had been nearly fatally ill the previous winter and was still weak and unwell, he suffered from migraines, he had premonitions of his own death ever since an assassination attempts a few months before, he was disgusted with the direction the Revolution was taking, he was repulsed by the corruption of his colleagues, he was physically exhausted from too little sleep and food, and too much work. Whether they attribute his absence from government to psychological causes, physical causes, or a combination, historians agree that the absence gave Robespierre's political enemies time and means to organize a conspiracy. Speculation on the motives for the conspiracy vary, of course. Though Robespierre had no greater authority than any of the other eleven members, the traditional Thermidorean line attributes the conspiracy to Robespierre's "power" in the government. Counter-arguments from the political left focus on the personal motives of the Thermidoreans themselves. Of course, the rationale which one attributes to Robespierre's absence prefigures how one will interpret the speech which marked his return on the eighth of Thermidor.

The speech of the eighth of Thermidor has a remarkably wide range of evaluation. Some historians have labeled it a suicide. Others have viewed it as more or less incoherent.

Still others have hailed it as an eloquent testament. The speech was characteristically long -- more than two hours. In it, Robespierre denounced certain members of the Revolutionary government as corrupt, but refused to name names when challenged by members of the National Convention. When Robespierre finally left the rostrum, a debate ensued as to whether or not the speech should be printed. This was usual since it was an established routine after speeches by central committee members to call for the publication of the speeches. That night, Robespierre delivered the same speech at the Jacobin club. There it received an enthusiastic reception. The speech is full of Robespierre's predictions of his own impending martyrdom, and at one point the painter David, a Jacobin and member of the Committee of General Security, shouted out that he would drink the hemlock after Robespierre, should it come to that. The hall then resounded with voices making the same assertion. Collot d'Herbois (who was serving as the president of the National Convention that month -- a post which rotated) and Billaud-Varennes, obviously among the unnamed accused, tried to defend themselves and were literally thrown out of the Jacobin hall. It must be said that Robespierre's accusations against Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varennes were justified. They had been enthusiastic terrorists and had, among other evils, the blood of the people of Lyons on their hands. Robespierre had already called for those responsible for the excesses of the provinces to be called to account. Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varennes rightly perceived that they would have to strike or be struck down. In

the course of the night of the eighth to the ninth of Thermidor, St. Just, Robespierre's friend and ally on the Committee of Public Safety, composed the speech he would read the next day. Conspirators conspired. Robespierre, however, went home to sleep. This is another of the paradoxes of Thermidor. Why didn't Robespierre use the night to plan a course of action? The next morning, St. Just was scheduled to speak first during the session of the National Convention. The conspirators' tactic was to see to it that the Robespierrists did not get the floor:

> Saint-Just was allowed only to deliver a few sentences of his prepared speech before the chair recognized Tallien, one of the conspirators, on a point of order. None of the robepierrists would again have the floor. Tallien did not, in fact, make a point of order. He started denouncing Robespierre. Collot then recognized several conspirators who continued in this vein, denouncing Robespierre and his friends who stood mute and dumbfounded around the speaker's tribune. Robespierre, soon roused from his stupor, tried to shout over the noise and invectives, but was unable to make himself heard (Jordan, 218).

As Jordan's narrative reveals, the story of Thermidor is one in which the Paradoxes after the speech of the eighth of Thermidor are of unaccountable inaction. Robespierre was in "a stupor." The Robespierrists were "mute and dumbfounded." The paradox of the ninth of Thermidor is why they were so passive and why so stunned. The one element of this paradox which Jordan omits is the question of St. Just's unaccountable passivity. Shama includes this in his account, along with a rather different sense of the mood in the room at that point:

> Astonishingly, instead of Saint-Just launching one of the counter-attacks for which he was much feared, his eloquence seemed to dissolve. He sat wanly in his seat

> while the accusations mounted. Seeing his defense fall apart, Robespierre attempted to secure the tribune for himself but was shouted down. The moment of complete collapse was perhaps not when his arrest was called for by an obscure deputy but when Vadier held up the standard devices of his rhetoric to ridicule. "To hear Robespierre, he is the only defender of liberty; he is giving it up for lost; he is a man of rare modesty and he has a perpetual refrain 'I am oppressed; they won't give me the floor' and he is the only one with anything useful to say, for his will is always done. He says 'so and so conspires against me, I who am the best friend of the Republic.' That is news." The one weapon against which Robespierre was helpless then struck him down: laughter (844).

After the decree for Robespierre's arrest came the heroics. Robespierre's younger brother, also a member of the Revolutionary government, insisted upon being arrested as well. He got his wish in spite of his brother's attempts to argue against it. The arrest of Couthon and St. Just was also issued. Then LeBas, a close friend of both Robespierre and St. Just, demanded to be arrested as well. Lebas' name was included. As it is variously told by historians and self-proclaimed witnesses, the scene is high drama. The five were led away, processed, and sent to five different jails in Paris. At the Luxembourg Palace, the jailers refused to accept Robespierre and set him free to seek shelter with his supporters at the Paris Commune, the city government, housed in the Hôtel de Ville. The other four were also released and sent to the Commune. This, then is the next paradox. By law, the prisoners were now "outlaws" and, as such, could be executed without a trial. By leaving the Luxembourg and entering the Hôtel de Ville, Robespierre committed himself to fight the National Convention. A number of historians have puzzled over such a

Robespierre participating in, if not leading such a move. Adding to the mystery of such tactics is the fact that the forces assembled to defend the Hôtel de Ville against the National Convention's troops were so poorly organized. Barely more than half of the city's armed citizen forces, the sections, answered the tocsin. When they did arrive, they straggled off in the early morning hours -- some suggest because it started to rain, some suggest because they had not had dinner, some because they lost interest when they didn't see the National Guard show up promptly. And here again there is the paradox of passivity:

> The outlawed quintet was as incapable of its salvation as was Paris. They sat, in the meeting room of the Commune's council on the second floor, paralyzed. Saint-Just was sunk in an impotent stupor... LeBas was similarly supine.... Couthon too was incapacitated. Even Augustin Robespierre ... could only pace the room, possessed and rendered impotent by rage turned inward. These men of action could not act. Only Robespierre's passivity was in character (Jordan, 219).

Strangely, the Convention's forces were able to pass into the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville without incident. Precisely what happened when the building was invaded is a mystery. Shama disposes of the problem by taking the point of view of the National Convention's forces:

> The forces under Barras' orders took their place and advanced to seize the proscribed deputies, who had taken shelter inside the building. As they did so, a body fell from a window at the feet of the officers. It was Augustin Robespierre, Maximilien's younger brother. Inside, they found the crippled Couthon lying helplessly on the staircase, having fallen down the steps. Inside the hall of the Great Council, LeBas had shot himself and Robespierre's face and body were covered in blood from a botched attempt at suicide.

> Saint-Just rose, standing quietly and almost nonchalantly to greet his captors (844-5).

In Schama's version, the National Convention's troops only discover carnage, they don't create it. It leaves the reader to wonder how the body came to fall at the feet of the troops in the courtyard and how Couthon (a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair) came to "fall" down stairs. A careful reading of the passage makes the alert reader wonder if St. Just had a hand in it. One can't help but be suspicious of the man standing calmly amidst the inexplicably bloodied bodies of his co-workers. Of course, Schama doesn't intend any such suspicion, but the description is strange. However, such descriptions are in keeping with Schama's political position: revolutionaries bring all this on themselves. Schama's message is very much the Thermidorean myth: revolution is chaos and leads to terror which inevitably turns on its makers.

Jordan, on the other hand, provides more context in his account of events, though he draws conclusions of his own as to why Augustin and Couthon "fell":

> When the guardsmen broke suddenly into the room where the outlaws and the insurrectionary committee sat, Augustin Robespierre climbed out a window and fell, nearly killing himself, to the street below. The totally helpless Couthon, trying to move, tumbled down a stone staircase and injured his head. Saint-Just, inert, yielded without a struggle. LeBas gave one of his pistols to Robespierre, turned the other on himself, and died almost at once. Robespierre shot himself in the lower left jaw. He was alive but gravely wounded (219-20).

In his effort to avoid stating the intentions of those involved, Jordan leaves the reader to wonder why Augustin

Robespierre was out on the ledge in the first place. Was he trying to escape or to commit suicide? It is still more confusing as to why a man would shoot himself in the jaw. What a man's intentions are when he shoots himself in the head go without saying, but a man shooting his jaw really calls for some explanation. Jordan only provides one in an end note where he explains his conclusion that Robespierre's injuries were self-inflicted (a hotly debated question):

> Even at the end of his life there is vexation over what happened, as well as what it means. The question is whether or not Robespierre attempted suicide or was shot by a certain Sergeant Méda [sometimes written Merda which carries its own editorial comment on the man's veracity], who burst into the room with the armed troops sent by the Convention.... Jaurès has him wounded by Méda; Mathiez insists on an attempted suicide; Ratignaud has him wounded. Palmer attempts a compromise: he has Méda fire at almost exactly the moment Robespierre did, so that in insisting he had wounded the tyrant, he genuinely believed it to be true. The modern consensus, including most recently Hampson, *Life and Opinions*, is for suicide. For some there is a political or moral issue involved: suicide would be the stoic response and a fit end for a republican. As with much else in Robespierre's life and career, the ambiguity of the evidence calls for interpretation, which means views and values drawn from sources outside the history of the French Revolution (293-4).

Jean Massin's unashamedly pro-Robespierre biography gives the version of events favored by Mathiez and the political left of French historians of the Revolution. Here all persons injured were suicide attempts except for the crippled Couthon who is victimized by the Thermidoreans:

> LeBas se tire un coup de pistolet et se tue sur le coup. Augustin Robespierre se jette par la fenêtre et ne réussit qu'à se briser une cuisse. Saint-Just se laisse garrotter sans résistance. Couthon, saisi et

> brutalement poussé dans l'escalier, fait une chute terrible et se blesse gravement à la tête.... Comme LeBas et comme son frère,... Robespierre ne veut pas tomber vivant aux mains de ses ennemies. Il se tire un coup de pistolet dans la bouche et ne réussit qu'à se fracasser la mâchoire. (Plus tard, les thermidoriens trouveront plus gloirieux d'agrémenter leurs exploits militaires en affirmant qu'ils ont abattu eux-mêmes leur ennemi; ils accréditeront la légende, encore crue généralement de nos jours, selon laquelle un gendarme appelé Merda a blessé Robespierre à la mâchoire: sur le moment même, Barère affirmera que Robespierre a voulu se tuer.) (298)
>
> [LeBas fires a pistol shot and kills himself. Augustin Robespierre throws himself out the window and only succeeds in breaking a thigh. St. Just allows himself to be taken without resistance. Couthon, seized and brutally thrown down the stairs, takes a terrible fall and is badly wounded in the head.... Like LeBas and his brother,... Robespierre does not want to be taken alive by his enemies. He fires a pistol shot in his mouth and only succeeds in fracturing his jaw. (later, the Thermidoreans will find it more glorious to enhance their military exploits in asserting that it was they who had attacked their enemy; they will give credence to the legend, still generally believed to this day, according to which an officer named Merda wounded Robespierre in the jaw: at the same time, Barère will assert that Robespierre wanted to kill himself.)]

As is evident in the account above, historians such as Mathiez and writers such as Massin have had to self-consciously pose the counter-argument to the Thermidorean myth. They retell Thermidor as a story in which Robespierre and his allies are twice the victims of the Thermidoreans (once in the events themselves, and again in the telling of them) rather than the children of Saturn, playing their role in the inevitable outcome of any story of revolution.

In asserting that the story of Thermidor is popularly

presented is a myth, I run into a problem of definition acknowledged by Robert W. Brockway:

> Twentieth-century theorists in various relevant disciplines such as the history of religions, literature, anthropology, archeology, and popular culture have coined private definitions so that definitions have proliferated to the point of chaos.... There is very little dialogue between workers in these various fields. As a result, we are bedeviled by problems in definition and meaning, some of which are contradictory (10).

For the purpose of discussing the myth of Thermidor, I will use Brockway's own definition:

> To me the common denominator in all definitions of myth, ancient and modern, is the word "story." A myth is not necessarily a story about gods and supernatural beings, nor necessarily a traditional tale. It is, however, a story. The narrative might be either fictional, historical, or cosmological in form. It might be either prose or poetry. Yet not all stories are myths, and this is the chief problem in the definition. Essentially a myth is an important story which interprets reality. It is also something presented and not a topic for rational analysis and discussion... (10).

Brockway's definition is useful because it permits the inclusion into the realm of myth narratives from science -- and therefore also from history narratives, a discipline with scientist origins:

> There are other forms of myth-making as well, perennial forms which fit neither the idea of the traditional tale nor the modern story based on the traditional tale. These are the theories we compose partly out of empirical evidence and partly out of our imaginations. Many archeological theories, for example, are the subjective interpretations of highly prestigious scholars such as Marcus Childe or Abbé Breuil; the theories persist long after anomalies occur in them which finally result in their disintegration. The megalithic religion theory of Childe became an academic myth. It did not originate

> in the Bible or any other archaic work but in Childe's mind, and it was perpetuated until the mid-1960s because of his great prestige (14).

Brockway's broad yet specific understanding of myth is derived from that of Northrop Frye -- even the wording echoes Frye's:

> A myth to me is primarily a mythos, a story, a narrative, or a plot, with a specific social function. Every human society has a verbal culture, and in the preliminary phase, when abstract thought has not developed, the bulk of this culture consists of stories. Usually there then arises a distinction between stories which explain to their hearers something that those hearers need to know about the religion, history, law, or social system of their society, and less serious stories told primarily for amusement. The more serious group are the myths: they grow out of a specific society and transmit a cultural heritage of shared allusion (238).

I choose to use Brockway's definition which is built on Frye's rather than using Frye's directly because of Brockway's formulation of myth as a way of interpreting reality. This is the central interest I have in the myth of Thermidor: how it serves as a foundation for our understanding of revolution and terror.

Brockway goes on to establish that the origins of secular myths, particularly those of history, are not only imagination and empirical evidence, but the classic texts of a culture:

> Mythic themes are also detectable in theories of history such as the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner. Most nations have national myths: ... for instance, the American as revealed in Jefferson's preamble to the American Declaration of Independence or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Such myths express the theological aspirations of whole peoples and are based on archaic religious traditions. Those of the West emerge from the Bible and classics (15).

In the case of the myth of Thermidor, a classical model certainly was available in Plato's *Republic*. Plato's work established a similar law of the revolution of governments, and it is not to be forgotten that the men of the French Revolution were not only well educated in the classics, but styled themselves as republicans in imitation of the Greek and Roman republics. Plato's assessment of democracy's rise and fall was as part of a fixed and unavoidable cycle of governmental possibilities:

> The excess of liberty, whether in States or individuals, seems only to pass into excess of slavery.
>
> Yes, the natural order.
>
> And so tyranny naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme form of liberty?
>
> As we might expect (*Republic*, 564).

Of course, the French Revolutionaries never imagined themselves as doomed to fall into tyranny. Various factions at different times raised the specter of impending tyranny from fellow citizens, foreign leaders, or other factions. However, all Revolutionaries understood themselves to be participating in a return to the natural state of humanity, that if liberty, equality and brotherhood. If they identified with anything from Plato's *Republic*, it would have been with passages such as this:

> And then democracy comes into being after the poor have conquered their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an equal share of freedom and power; and this is the form of government in which the magistrates are commonly elected by lot.
>
> Yes, he said, that is the nature of democracy, whether the revolution has been effected by arms, or

> whether fear has caused the opposite party to withdraw (557).

Those responsible for these events, collapsed into the appellation "Thermidor," immediately constructed a mythology of the origins, progress, and end of the Terror -- a myth useful in exonerating them from blame for all the abuses of power during the Revolution.

A concise statement of the myth of Thermidor is easy enough to find. On page 270 of Grolier Incorporated's 1994 *Academic America Encyclopedia* one finds: "The Reign of Terror (1793-94), a period of brutal dictatorship under the leadership of Maximilien Robespierre, was ended by the Thermidorean Reaction of July 1794. Thereafter, France was ruled by a Directory...." This assignment of "the Terror" to those who were executed on the tenth of Thermidor (the month of the Revolutionary calendar corresponding roughly with late July and early August) was designed by "the Thermidoreans" (the members of the central committees who organized the arrest of Robespierre, his brother, St. Just, Couthon, and Lebas) who had the benefit of telling the world what had happened on Thermidor and why. Such is always the case: the victors tell the tale, but Thermidor has proved particularly resilient. Trollope goes on to assert of Robespierre in *La Vendée*:

> Yet it is not impossible that some apologist may be found for the blood which this man shed; that some quaint historian, delighting to show the world how wrong has been its most assured opinions, may attempt to vindicate the fame of Robespierre, and strive to wash the blackmoor white (301).

As Trollope finished *La Vendée* in 1850, he was well aware of the rehabilitation of Robespierre among French revolutionaries of 1830 and 1848. Consistent with any mention of Robespierre since the ninth of Thermidor 1794, Trollope uses the name as a synonym for terrorism. Like terrorism, the name is utterly indefensible, a word entirely negative in every connotation. It is therefore an unexamined commonplace which no speaker/writer can dare defend without suffering incapacitating ethos damage:

> For fifty years the world has talked of, condemned, and executed Robespierre. Men and women, who have barely heard the names of Pitt and Fox, who know not whether Metternich is a man or a river, or one of the United States, speak of Robespierre as of a thing accursed. They know, at any rate what *he* was -- the demon of the revolution; the source of the fountain of blood with which Paris was deluged; the murderer of the thousands whose bodies choked the course of the Loire and the Rhone. Who knows not enough of Robespierre to condemn him? Who abstains from adding another malediction to those which already load the name of the King of the Reign of Terror!...
>
> I am not the bold man who will dare to face the opinion of the world, and attempt to prove that Robespierre has become infamous through prejudice.... He made himself a scourge to his country; therefore, beyond all other men, he has become odious, and therefore, historian after historian, as they mention his name, hardly dare, in the service of truth, to say one word to lessen his infamy (Trollope, 300-1).

Here Trollope suggests that the report of historians forms the "opinion" which he would not "dare to face" with a counter-argument. This nineteenth-century faith in the historian as the one who discovers the truth of the past and reproduces it for readers is one source of the myth of Thermidor's stamina.

Before it solidified into the myth more eloquently narrated by Trollope and others, the story of the Thermidoreans

was initially the bizarre collection of assertions with which they had charged Robespierre, Couthon, and St. Just on the ninth of Thermidor. These preliminary efforts to render Robespierre and his supporters culpable were the same slanders that were levied against virtually every person denounced after the execution of the king. As has been pointed out by many historians, there is an irony in the fact that the very same lies used to tarnish the name of Marie Antoinette were later used against Robespierre. In both cases, legitimate reasons for accusing the victim were set aside, by men who knew perfectly well what they were doing, in favor of the fashionable ad hominem arguments of the day, for example:

> La première "fable", source de toutes les autres, est celle de "Robespierre-roi" dont les mécanismes ont été mis en lumière par Bronislaw Baczko. Lancée à la Convention, elle est répercutée par la rue parisienne, puis réapparaît bientôt, preuves à l'appui, dans le discours officiel....
>
> La rumeur s'enfle dans la nuit du 9 au 10 thermidor et devient "information".... On est ici en présence de l'unique manipulation effectivement opérée par des membres du comité de Sûreté générale, sans doute Vadier (Brunel, 118).
>
> [The first "fable", source of all the others, is this of "King Robespierre" the workings of which were brought to light by Bronislaw Baczko. Told to the Convention, it was repeated through the streets of Paris, it soon reappeared, supported by proof, in the official discourse....
>
> The rumor grew during the night of 9 to 10 Thermidor and became "news".... One sees here the only manipulation actually conducted by the members of the Committee of General Security, Vadier no doubt.]

Brunel is able to trace this particular myth to Vadier and to Barère who wrote an official government report of the events of Thermidor. Brunel further notes that the myth was corroborated

by Billaud and Collot in their report on the eleventh of Thermidor, this time in Roman dress -- a mode equally fashionable for praise as for blame in the oratories of the Revolution: *"Il en résulte que ce monstre* [Robespierre], *de concert avec Saint-Just, devait se partager l'empire. Antoine Couthon régnait dans le Midi, Lépide Saint-Just au Nord, et Catilina Robespierre au centre"* (118). [The result is that this monster [Robespierre], in concert with St. Just, was going to divide the empire. Antoine Couthon would reign in the south, St. Just in the north, and Robespierre in the center.] The production of supports for this myth came from Thermidoreans in the provinces as well as in Paris. The texts Brunel cites are *"la Relation de l'événement"* by Roux, *"les Faits recueillis aux derniers instants de Robespierre et de sa faction"* by an unnamed author, and *"Capet et Robespierre"* by Merlin de Thionville. In addition, a number of salacious *"Vies secrètes"* appeared. These documents, printed and circulated throughout France, make outrageous assertions on false evidence. One would be tempted to assume they were written by highly inflamed but poorly informed anti-Jacobins. Yet these texts carry the names of men of state who wrote from the position of insiders to the events which they depicted.

It is common to understand History as the story the victors tell about those who are no longer in a position to speak themselves. How precisely this happens is less often discussed. Mathiez and his followers at the University of Paris have made the case exonerating Robespierre, St. Just, Couthon, and the rest. The counter-argument has been amply made. This

study, however, examines the documents in which the myth of Thermidor was first popularly recognized. As one might expect, the story is not yet straight. Which events of 1793-94 are "excesses" and which are genuinely what they were named at the time, "glorious," has yet to be agreed upon. Some letters contain odd mixes of Robespierre's pet turns of phrase, which would soon pass out of fashion along with professed Jacobinism, and denunciations of Robespierre, sometimes of the sort almost never heard in the decades and centuries to follow. After all, even as soon as the year following Thermidor, aristocratic tastes had come back into fashion with a vengeance. It was only in the confusion immediately after Thermidor that accusations of being aristocratic would have any sting. In addition, the ways in which the letters' arguments in praise of Thermidor make use of the violent language of the Terror demonstrate the tone of the period. This violent language betrays the sensibilities of France in 1794 which led to the White Terror of the following years. In the course of the White Terror, counterrevolutionaries acted on their resentment against their revolutionary neighbors throughout France, creating a period of vigilante terror against those associated with Jacobinism.

Steven Lawrence Kaplan's *Farewell, Revolution*, contains a chapter on Robespierre which gives a tidy description of the debate surrounding him since Thermidor. After enjoying intermittent popularity among revolutionary French of the nineteenth century, Robespierre became a fixture in the Sorbonne which, as Kaplan aptly puts it, is just a step from the Pantheon. Owing the inspiration for his biography of

Robespierre as much as his information to the French academics who began to rehabilitate Robespierre from the Thermidorean portrait in the early part of this century, Jean Massin was able to write in 1956:

> Ainsi les thermidoriens ont réussi à imposer une longue postérité le portrait de leur victime qu'il leur convenait de répandre. Et malgré les efforts postérieurs d'histoiriens considérables (au premier rang, d'Albert Mathiez, dont l'oeuvre continue à dominer toute étude sur Robespierre), c'est ce portrait, repris et buriné par Jules Michelet, qui continue à s'imposer dans les idées reçues et l'opinion courante.
>
> Un portrait? non: un masque (Massin, 3).

> [Thus the Thermidoreans had succeeded in imposing upon many generations a portrait of their victim which it was convenient to them to paint. And in spite of the later efforts of significant historians (Albert Mathiez first among them, whose work continues to dominate all studies of Robespierre), it is this portrait, taken up again and carved out by Jules Michelet, which continues to be a must in received ideas and popular opinion.
>
> A portrait? No, a mask.]

The Myth of Thermidor Today

The continuation of the myth of Thermidor in contemporary summaries of the Revolution is inconsistent. Though Grolier Incorporated has the negative characterization of Robespierre quoted at the beginning of this chapter, another Grolier publication, *The New Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (of the same year), has a very sympathetic portrayal. It is interesting to note that the more in-depth entries for "the Terror" tend to present more positive views of Robespierre, while the cursory entries fall back upon the Thermidorean Robespierre. (*Collier's Encyclopedia*, published by

Macmillan Educational Company, is also sympathetic. However, The New Encyclopedia Britannica, published by the University of Chicago, follows the Thermidorean model.) It would seem that this tendency for encyclopedias with longer entries for the Terror, the Revolution, and Robespierre to avoid the Thermidorean myth while more cursory entries assert the myth holds true even among entries published by the same company.

In the United States, the Thermidorean myth has been challenged by the chair of the department of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago, David P. Jordan. Jordan's autobiography of Robespierre offers social and psychological explanations for the venom of the Thermidorean reaction:

> Robespierre was a living rebuke to many. The grossly exaggerated stories of men trembling in his presence lest he discern their thoughts are both preposterous and revealing. Men who live with flamboyant virtue make others uneasy. Robespierre, once he had authority, made men tremble, both for their deeds and for their moral shortcomings, since he was incapable of separating the two. But he was no Stalin, who delighted in intimidating his comrades. Although Robespierre was feared by many, he was less treacherous and deadly than both the cool administrators and passionate terrorists of the Revolution. It is often what a man says rather than what he does, that influences. Robespierre talked a good deal about punishment and Terror and moral laxity in others and consequently earned a sinister reputation. He morally browbeat his contemporaries, and they never forgot how unpleasant an experience that was. For the period of Robespierre's ascendancy, during the final year of his life, men felt powerless before his superior virtue because it was enforced by the Terror. Moral intimidation is humiliating; physical intimidation is not (228).

Though Jordan makes this argument as a genuine believer in Robespierre's purity of motive and genuine commitment to high

ideals, he is not himself an admirer of Robespierre as were some of the historians who rehabilitated his reputation in France. Rather, Jordan finds it necessary to describe Robespierre as "no Stalin," "less treacherous and deadly," and as having "superior virtue" because he is writing to an audience of Americans who, with only very rare exceptions, know only the Thermidorean myth if they know anything about Robespierre. Using the argument above as an explanation of Robespierre's enemies' motives, rather than trusting the accounts of his enemies which attribute Thermidor to a thirst for liberty from a tyrant and the terror, Jordan explains how and why the myth of Thermidor was constructed:

> As Robespierre lay on a table in the antechamber of the Committee of Public Safety, drifting in and out of consciousness, his ball-shattered jaw bound up with a bandage, his triumphant enemies, in another room of the Tuileries palace, were creating the monster who would soon pass into historical legend. This Robespierre, created by using materials scavenged from old calumny, damaging anecdote, and sometimes sheer malicious invention, was one of the founding acts of a new revolutionary government.... The vengeful malice of the Thermidoreans was partly successful: their caricature of Robespierre has proved durable (14).

This explanation is the counter-argument to the received truths of the Thermidorean myth repeated, more than assembled, by Jordan. Jordan acknowledges the origins of the counter-argument to the myth in his evidence and tracing of the history of publications about (as well as visual portraits of) Robespierre. It is in Jordan's book that the counter-argument to the Thermidorean myth makes its first appearance in English Language publication.

Jordan presents the history of publications about Robespierre from the first reports disseminated by the Thermidoreans to the Napoleonic period when, "the legend of the monstrous Robespierre not only grew unchecked, for when it was being made none dared challenge the new masters of the Revolution, but was reiterated and embellished by government apologists and men who found the legend useful for propaganda, a reminder of the revolutionary excesses from which they insisted they had saved France"; to the nineteenth century rehabilitation of Robespierre by the political left, beginning with Albert Laponneraye's publication of Robespierre's sister's memoirs. Here Jordan makes an important point: "With Laponneraye begins not only the rehabilitation (and eventual revolutionary apotheosis) of Robespierre, but the emphasis on his words. He became again what he had been during the Revolution, the ideologue, the man whose deeds were verbal..." (19). And, Jordan argues, the verbiage that matters most has always been Robespierre's own words -- his compositions which have been compiled into several volumes, "the collected works":

> In revolution a man of words is a historical actor, and Robespierre is the first example of the exceptional importance of verbal acts.... As Robespierre lived and articulated it, the Revolution was a transcendent spiritual experience.... The record of Robespierre the revolutionary is to be found not in the usual sources of political history, the documents, both official and private, but in his collected works. This self-conscious and extensive repository is the best source for his revolutionary career. The annals of the Revolution record where he was and what he did. His utterances express the spiritual revolution. They are a chronicle of the Revolution itself, reflecting and refracting the extraordinary events that he saw and shaped. No previous rebel had created and left behind such a record as this (7).

What Jordan does not note, however, is that this "chronicle of the Revolution itself" was only published once: as a project of the *Société des études robespierristes* which is affiliated with *l'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française* at the *Sorbonne*, University of Paris. The project was halted by the Second World War and never resumed publication. A complete set of the collected works is extraordinarily rare at the antiquary book stores of Paris. Still more remarkable, French university libraries, even the the University Blaise-Pascal in Clermont which houses the *Centre de Recherches Révolutionaire et Romantique,* lack copies of the collected works. Attempts by Robespierrist organizations to take up publication of the collected works has met with insurmountable resistance from the original publishers, the *Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française*. The reason given for resisting these efforts has been that there is no interest in the collected works. This specious argument certainly has more to do with politics in contemporary France than with the potential market for the collected works of Robespierre.

Attitudes toward Robespierre and the Thermidorean myth continue to be an important part of political identity among the French. In his two volume analysis of the French bicentennial, Steven Kaplan devotes the last chapter to "The Bicentennial Destiny of Robespierre." Kaplan begins with a quote from a French poem commemorating the bicentennial in which Robespierre's voice laments, *"Et parmi tous ces noms, oui! le mien Robespierre, Peut encore diviser la France toute*

entière." Kaplan then goes on to observe:

> It is hardly surprising that a man who had become a dramatic, albeit never unequivocal, marker of political position in his own time should have remained an object of intense controversy. Nor has he served simply as a litmus of Revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary persuasion. While counterrevolutionaries have always clustered around a common horror/hatred of Robespierre. Revolutionaries have been divided among themselves in their appreciation of him since well before his fall on the ninth of Thermidor (442).

As is consistently the case in France, these rescue attempts came from the political left. It was Mathiez who organized the *Société des études robespierristes* at the Sorbonne. His inspiration had been archival research he had done to disabuse his professor, Alphonse Aulard, of his misplaced admiration for Danton. Having discovered evidence of Danton's corruption, Mathiez came to admire Robespierre, "the Incorruptible." After Mathiez's death in 1932, George Lefebvre took the chair of the *Société des études robespierristes* and continued the work of rehabilitating Robespierre, if without the zeal of the original chairman. Enthusiastic work on the counter-argument to the Thermidorean myth was resumed with the arrival of the communist historians at the Sorbonne, Albert Soboul and Michel Vovelle.

In his concise but thorough tracing of French academic history, Jacques Revel asserts that it is for reasons not so much due to his own history as to the history of the French academy that a defense of Robespierre is never politically neutral. This is commonly attributed to the function of Robespierre's name as a synonym for the Terror. But "the Terror" is also defined by the myth of Thermidor. More than a

simple icon for the Terror, Thermidor functions as a complete political argument, an unanswerable assertion that revolution is dangerous. The myth of Thermidor presents the downfall of Robespierre in Thermidor as the end of terrorism in France -- an end brought about when those who preferred order to violence finally spoke out and put an end to the fanaticism of revolution. As Trollope could clearly understand, to speak against the Thermidorean myth is to speak against the condemnation of terrorism. But on a deeper, still more important level, to speak against the Thermidorean myth is to suggest that the violent and blood-thirsty Revolution has no point of distinction from the bourgeois parliament, that terror is not confined to the political extremists, that the those responsible for the purges and executions were the same people responsible for peace and prosperity. By maintaining these binaries, the myth of Thermidor serves to limit what position one can legitimately take in reference to Robespierre, and thus his name "*peut encore diviser la France* [indeed, all people engaged in political/historical discourse] *toute entière.*" And Kaplan's research is replete with examples from the 1980's of attempts to pose a counter-argument to the Thermidorean myth and the inevitable reception of such a move:

> Scholars on the right tend to follow François Crouzet, the excellent historian of French economic development. His public lecture at University College, Swansea, dealing with the historiographical treatment of Robespierre was predicated on the impervious conviction that no reasonable case could be made for Robespierre. One had only to remember that in Brazil a "Robespierre" is an undercooked piece of beef, "*très saignant*," or very rare. Though he did not stop there: to avenge colleagues on the

> extreme and moderate right, from Pierre Chaunu to François Furet, Crouzet assimilated Michel Vovelle to Robespierre. The holder of the chair of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne was an ayatollah, a "Tartuffian" manipulator, an "unashamed apologist" of Revolutionary violence (445).

Kaplan translates Vovelle's reaction to the attack: "'Without being singled out as archaic or perhaps shamefully bloodthirsty, could one speak openly today in the name of the *Société des études robespierristes*?'" (554) Though it might seem otherwise to a scholar working in the Sorbonne's organization for Robespierrist studies, the answer to Vovelle's question is, "No."

The myth of Thermidor is sustained by one of the central common-places of bourgeois political discourse: leftist violence (whether by government or by those opposing the government) as "terrorism." The agreement on "terrorism" as the name used in this argument is almost certainly directly descended from the Thermidorean myth. Of course, the foundations for the "terrorism" common-place were established by the first conservative, anti-revolutionary writings of the early Revolution -- particularly those of Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre. The Thermidoreans themselves (that is, those who organized and carried out the execution of Robespierre without a trial) systematically positioned themselves in reference to Robespierre -- as, of course, a counter-discourse is obliged to do, just as scholars from Mathiez to Massin have been obliged to position their arguments in reference to the Thermidorean myth. The Revolution which had long been articulated in terms of what it opposed as much as what it

proposed came, after Thermidor, to dwell on its non-Jacobin and non-Robespierrist identity. This is the reason why, as Kaplan observed, Robespierre has been consistently at the center of counterrevolutionary identity since Thermidor. Though the myth of Thermidor has been challenged by Mathiez, Soboul, and Vovelle, among others, the counter-argument they constructed has followed the fortunes of the political left in France. It was with the rise in popularity of communism that Soboul and Vovelle were appointed. When politics took a sharp right turn in the eighties,

> his [Robespierre's] name served as a shorthand for epitomizing every deviation, an alibi for the indolence of those who ached to excoriate, but not at the cost of elaborating a real argument. To prove that Robespierre still mattered to his enemies as well as his friends, the former were no longer content to identify him with the Terror, or even the Enlightenment-run-amok. In his anniversary aggiornamento more than ever before, Robespierre was Modern Evil, Totalitarianism, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot.... He was lynched in the media in the name of human rights (444-5).

Thus receiving the occasional infusion of fresh encouragement, the Thermidorean myth persists in popular thought as well as in many texts which attempt to condense the Revolution for a popular audience, including text books in schools. Kaplan cites a French study in which "a commission that examined textbooks in the third year from the last of lycée was struck by 'the deliberately negative image given to Robespierre'" (444). Thus the myth of Thermidor, initiated for the purpose of gaining popular acceptance of a new "revolutionary" government and later sustained by a nineteenth-

century positivist faith in historical record, continues to survive as a political commonplace (much as its creators intended) passed on to next generations in the places where readers with a residual positivist faith in History can be found: student text books, popular history narratives, and superficial reference volumes. Outside of these venues, attitudes toward Thermidor continue to serve as markers of political position: left for those who see Thermidor as the end of the Jacobin Revolution, and right for those who see Thermidor as the end of the Jacobin Terror.

Development of the Myth in the Nineteenth Century

Yet the myth of Thermidor, which is refined in the nineteenth century and persists in our own, presents leftist revolutionary action as inherently violent and bloody while counter or anti-revolutionary action is inherently rational and pacifying. The two great histories of the Revolution written in the nineteenth century and still reverently consulted today are those written by Jules Michelet and Thomas Carlyle. Even those twentieth-century revisions begun by Mathiez and Soboul cannot help but turn to Michelet's 1853 work to find their own position, even if it is only to find themselves in contrast to it. Michelet chose the tenth of Thermidor as the end of the Revolution. This tradition has persisted despite some historians' attempts to mark the Revolution's end at Napoleon's declaration of the end of the Revolution when he terminated elections for national government. Michelet explains his choice of the Thermidorean executions as the end of the Revolution by telling the anecdote of a citizen, on the morning of the tenth

of Thermidor, offering the wounded Robespierre a drink of water to which Robespierre somehow manages to reply (despite a shattered jaw), *"Je vous remercie, Monsieur."* As a good Romanticist, Michelet appears to be more interested in the story's resonance than its veracity, and he pondered the significance of Robespierre's substitution of the Revolutionary appellation, *"Citoyen,"* with *"Monsieur"*:

> Ce retour inattendu au language du vieux passé fut-il instinctif chez l'homme qui en avait gardé les formes? ou bien crut-il la Révolution finie avec lui, la République en lui morte? Les cinq grandes années, comme un rêve, disparurent-elles de son esprit, biffées, vaines, évanouies? Par une prévision de mourant, on peut le croire encore, il eut comme un sens amer de la réaction qui venait, de l'éternel roc de Sisyphe que roule la France, et crut qu'à partir de ce jour, on ne pouvait dire: Citoyen.
>
> Robespierre ne se trompait guère, si telle était sa pensée. Une réaction violente, immense, dès son point de départ, avait commencé à l'heure même (892-3).

> [This unexpected return to the language of the distant past, was it instinctive on the part of the man so conscious of form? Or did he believe the Revolution ended with him, the Republic die with him? The five great years, like a dream, had they disappeared in his mind, blotted out, vain, faded away? By means of a premonition of the dying, one can still believe, he had a bitter foretaste of the reaction to come, the eternal rock of Sysiphus that France rolls, and believed that from this day on, one could no longer say, Citizen.
>
> Robespierre was hardly mistaken, if such were his thoughts. A huge, violent reaction had begun at the very moment of his departure.]

It is another anecdote, now famous, which Michelet uses to summarize the effects of Thermidor:

> Peu de jours après Thermidor, un homme, qui vit encore et qui avait alors dix ans, fut mené par ses parents au théâtre, et à la sortie admira la longue file de voitures brillantes qui, pour la première fois,

> frappaient ses yeux. Des gens en veste, chapeau bas, disaient aux spectateurs sortants: "Faut-il une voiture, mon maître?" L'enfant ne comprit pas trop ces termes nouveaux. Il se fit expliquer, et on lui dit seulement qu'il y avait eu un grand changement par la mort de Robespierre (896).
>
> [A few days after Thermidor, a man who is still living and who was then ten years old, had gone out to the theatre with his parents, and upon leaving admired a long line of gleaming coaches which his eyes beheld for the first time. Some men in coats and hats said to the exiting theatergoers: "Do you need a coach, sir?" The child couldn't fully understand these new terms. He sought an explanation, and was told only that there had been a great change with the death of Robespierre.]

Michelet's Romantic sense that one ends the narrative of the Revolution at the point where the revolutionary sensibilities alter is followed in what is the best known history of the French Revolution in the United States: Simon Schama's *Citizens*. It is appropriate that Schama follows Michelet's lead since Schama's preface is essentially an explanation of how history writing went awry in the early twentieth century with the devaluation of good old-fashioned narrative. George Rudé's concise *The French Revolution: Its Causes, Its History, and Its Legacy after 200 Years* also asserts that "The Revolutionary government fell, together with its Robespierrist leaders, in late July 1794 (on 9th - 10th Thermidor, according to the revolutionary Calendar)" (107).

Like Michelet's history, Carlyle's was a Romantic epic built upon the Myth of Thermidor. But both were also well researched (if mixed with much anecdote and legend) narrative accounts of the politics of the Revolution. As such, they were

relied upon by their respective nations' artists in constructing literary works touching on the Revolution and revolution in general. In the nineteenth century, the continent of Europe suffered regular and wide-spread outbreaks of revolution. England, long able to curb revolutionary impulses in its people, felt the upheavals of the time less than most nations. Its printing presses rarely issued deviations from the attitude first set down by Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century. Carlyle's *The French Revolution* was first published in 1857. Its perspective on Thermidor is built upon the myth, and echoes with the vindicated prophesies of Burke:

> For despicable as Robespierre himself might be, the death of Robespierre was a signal at which great multitudes of men, struck dumb with terror heretofore, rose out of their hiding-places; and, as it were, saw one another, how multitudinous they were; and began speaking and complaining. They are countable by the thousand and the million; who have suffered cruel wrong. Ever louder rises the plaint of such a multitude; into a universal sound, into a universal continuous peal, of what they call Public Opinion...; gods and men have declared that Sansculottism cannot be. Sansculottism on that Ninth night of Thermidor suicidally 'fractured under the jaw'; and lies writhing never to rise more (419).

Carlyle's Revolution, like Burke's, is doomed because it is out of step with the natural order. "Gods and men" cannot long tolerate the ambitious artifice of revolutionary government. What the Romantic sentiment of Carlyle will grant the Revolution that Burke would not, is the grandeur of its dreams. But even the most resplendent Tower of Babel must fall.

After Carlyle, Trollope was to add to the English Myth of Thermidor by returning to Burke's argument more precisely than

Carlyle had. Unfettered by a Romantic admiration for humanist ambition, Trollope returned to an older interpretation of the French Revolution via his interpretation of Robespierre:

> Honesty, moral conduct, industry, constancy of purpose, temperance in power, courage, and love of country: these virtues all belonged to Robespierre; history confesses it, and to what favoured hero does history assign a fairer catalog? Whose name does a brighter galaxy adorn? With such qualities, such attributes, why was he not the Washington of France?... Because he wanted faith! He believed in nothing but himself, and the reasoning faculty with which he felt himself to be endowed. He thought himself perfect in his own nature, and wishing to make others perfect as he was, he fell into the lowest abyss of crime and misery in which a poor human creature ever wallowed (303).

This is clearly a critique of the Revolution, and the "Enlightenment" which is credited with spawning it, using the name of Robespierre in place of "revolution," a trend which continues to this day, rather than an actual critique of Robespierre himself since it was Robespierre who ended the dechristianization efforts of his colleagues (many of who would later be Thermidoreans), and who argued for full citizenship for Jews. Robespierre's speeches asserting faith in "the Supreme Being" are among his most famous. It is, in fact, his belief in the need for religious beliefs and practices -- if not precisely Christian religious beliefs -- which distinguish him from his fellow revolutionaries. Here Trollope is not following historians' lead so much as working from the ideological underpinnings of their histories.

Charles Dickens made use of both the ideology (which he would call "philosophy") and the record of "facts" in his

contribution to the narratives of the Terror. Dickens' use of Carlyle is not only obvious in *A Tale of Two Cities*, it is acknowledged in the preface to the first edition in 1859:

> Whenever any reference (however slight) is made here to the condition of the French people before or during the Revolution, it is truly made, on the faith of trustworthy witnesses. It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book.

And it is as much the "philosophy" of Carlyle's "wonderful book" as the history which Dickens employs in describing the two cities, Paris and London, in stark contrast to each other. For all the heroes, London is the city of peace, civilization, moderation, and ultimate safety. One can be wrongly accused in London, but justice finds a way to triumph there. In Paris, however, violence, barbarism, and hysterical extremism thwarts justice and truth. In Paris, the good and the bad are swept away in random acts of violence. Such things simply cannot happen in London -- *unless* the British are not mindful to preserve their moderate, liberal stand:

> Along the Paris streets, the death-carts rumble, hollow and harsh.... And yet there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a sprig, a peppercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions more certain than those that have produced this horror. Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind (362).

Here the myth of Thermidor serves to collapse the whole of the Revolution into a mere backlash against immoderate monarchy.

There is no longer even a distinction between the Revolution proper and the Terror. The Revolution is the Terror, and the Terror is retribution. Such an understanding of events would be foreign even to the Thermidoreans themselves. But by 1859 they are safely in their graves -- graves many miles from Tavistock House.

Anthony Trollope made his contribution to nineteenth-century French Revolution fiction in England with *La Vendée*. Where Dickens had contented himself to write about fictitious characters against the backdrop of the French Revolution, Trollope, like Victor Hugo, presented portraits of the central figures of the Revolution. He not only shows his readers Robespierre, but even follows Robespierre into the realm about which historians have almost no information at all, a realm upon which even Hugo would not encroach: his private life. In presenting Robespierre alone with his finacée, Eleanor Duplay, Trollope demonstrates a Robespierre cold and paranoid enough for the approval of the Thermidoreans. When Eleanor suggests, "'They talk of shedding the blood of innocent children -- of destroying peasant women, who can only think and feel as their husbands bid them. You will not allow that this should be done, will you?'" Trollope's Robespierre responds with three pages of accusations against her as a spy and a traitor, culminating in an implicit threat on her life:

> After hearing this energetic warning, Eleanor Duplay left her lover's room, firmly believing that she had greatly sinned in speaking as she had done, but conscious, at any rate, of having intended no evil, either to him or to the unfortunate country respecting which he expressed so constant a solicitude.
>
> As soon as she was gone, he again took up the

> papers he had written, and re-read them with great care. In the letter to the two commissioners he underscored the passages which most forcibly urged them to energy in their work of destruction, and added a word here and there which showed more clearly his intention that mercy should be shown to none (316-7).

In contrast to Trollope's version of life at home with Robespierre, Marge Piercy's 1997 novel, *City of Darkness, City of Light*, gives a version of Robespierre at home during the Terror which is based on the counter-argument rather than the myth of Thermidor. Piercy's Maximilien Robespierre is "Max" who is the exemplar of the modern revolutionary. The author states this as her intention in the author's note which precedes the novel:

> Why write about the French Revolution? For me, modern politics, the modern left (even the terms "left" and "right" in a political context) began there, as did the women's movement. I have a slight advantage over many previous storytellers in that I have been passionately involved in left and women's politics, have taken part in many demonstrations and countless meetings, and I knew all of these characters very well indeed, under different names of course (x).

Like Piercy and Trollope, Hugo presents the reader with first-hand views of the Revolution's leaders. However, Hugo holds these men in too much awe to portray their private moments. He is, in the Romantic tradition, interested in their greatness. But this is not the Romantic view of the Revolution seen in the histories of Michelet and Carlyle. Writing during the Paris Commune of 1870-1, Hugo writes of the Terror of 1793 with full consciousness of how the Thermidorean myth and its counter-image (not yet a full argument until Mathiez) had been and were continuing to be used as political arguments. Hugo's

Robespierre is a compromise between the two polar opposites of his time (Robespierre-martyr and Robespierre-murderer). Except in his treatment of certain Thermidoreans, Hugo is moderate in his appraisal of all the Revolutionaries. For Hugo, the question is not one of personal responsibility in any case. The leaders of the Revolution are caught up in a struggle too large for any of them to understand, and too powerful for any of them to control. As a result, the revolutionaries seem more like bickering children than men in power:

> Est-ce que l'éléphant regarde où il met sa patte? Écrasons l'ennemi.
> -- Je veux bien
> et il ajouta:
> -- La question est de savoir où est l'ennemi.
> -- Il est dehors, et je l'ai chassé, dit Danton.
> -- Il est dedans, et je le surveille, dit Robespierre.
> -- Et je le chasserai encore, reprit Danton.
> -- On ne chasse pas l'ennemi du dedans.
> -- Qu'est-ce donc qu'on fait?
> -- On l'extermine.
> -- J'y consens, dit à son tour Danton.
> Et il reprit:
> -- Je vous dis qu'il est dehors, Robespierre.
> -- Danton, je vous dis qu'il est dedans.
> -- Robespierre, il est à la frontière.
> -- Danton, il est en Vendée.
> -- Calmez-vous, dit une troisième voix, il est partout; et vous êtes perdus.
> C'était Marat qui parlait (127-8).

> ["Does the elephant look where he puts his foot? Crush the enemy."
> "I would like to." He added, "The question is to know where the enemy is."
> "It is outside. I've hunted it," said Danton.
> "It is inside. I am watching it," said Robespierre.
> "And I will go on hunting it," said Danton.
> "One doesn't hunt what is inside."
> "What does one do with it?"
> "One exterminates it."
> "I'll give you that," said Danton in his turn. And

> he repeated, "I tell you that it is outside, Robespierre."
> "Danton, I tell you it is inside."
> "Robespierre, it is at the border."
> "Danton, it is in the Vendée."
> "Calm yourselves," said a third voice. "It is everywhere, and you are lost."
> It was Marat who spoke.]

Of course, for Hugo, the representation of historical events and individuals is only a platform from which to argue the larger questions of meaning and interpretation:

> Dieu livre aux hommes ses volontés visibles dans les événements, texte obscur écrit dans une langue mystérieuse. Les hommes en front sur-le-champ des traductions hâtives, incorrectes, pleines des fautes, de lacunes et de contresens. Bien peu d'esprits comprennent la langue divine. Les plus sagaces, les plus calmes, les plus profonds, déchiffrent lentement, et, quand ils arrivent avec leur texte, la besogne est faite depuis longtemps; ils y a déja vingt traductions sur la place publique. De chaque parti croit avoir le seul vrai texte, et chaque faction croit posséder la lumière (Part Four, Book I, 403-404).
>
> [God communicates his visible will to men in events, a murky text written in a mysterious language. the first men on the scene have hasty translations, incorrect, full of mistakes, gaps and contradictions. Very few minds understand the divine language. The wisest, calmest, most profound decipher slowly, and, when they arrive with their text, the chore has long been finished; there are already twenty translations in the market place. Each party believes they have the only true text, and each faction believes it possesses the light.]

And, in the Hugolian universe, the French Revolution (extended into the nineteenth century via the revolutions of 1830, 1832, and 1848) is one of God's messages to be translated, and its actors were in the service of God: "*Ces soldats sont des prêtres. La Révolution française est un geste de Dieu*" (*Les*

Misèrables, 273). ["These soldiers are priests. The French Revolution is an act of God."] For Hugo, the poet and the revolutionary have similar roles. Both channel divine creative powers to relate truths to their fellow creatures who are not similarly talented. The poet is the translator of God's language of events, and the revolutionary is the scribe taking God's dictation:

> Le 14 juillet est signé Camille Desmoulins, le 10 août est signé Danton, le 2 septembre est signé Marat, le 21 septembre est signé Grégoire, le 21 janvier est signé Robespierre; mais Desmoulins, Danton, Marat, Grégoire et Robespierre ne sont que des greffiers. Le rédacteur énorme et sinistre de ces grandes pages a un nom, Dieu, et un masque, Destin. Robespierre croyait en Dieu. Certes! (*Quatrevingt-treize*, 171)
>
> [The fourteenth of July is signed Camille Desmoulins, the tenth of August is signed Danton, the second of September is signed Grégoire, the twenty-first of January is signed Robespierre; but Desmoulins, Danton, Marat, Grégoire, and Robespierre are nothing but transcriptionists. The great and terrible author of these great pages has a name, God, and a mask, Destiny. Robespierre believed in God. Certainly!]

Here Hugo ends with reference to Robespierre. Of the revolutionaries listed, only Robespierre was a believer, a deist. Of course, a mere scribe doesn't have to understand the origin of the dictation he is taking in order to do an efficient job, but Hugo seems interested in assigning Robespierre a special cognition of events. Hugo describes him as having *"l'air prêtre ... au-dedans de lui"* (*Quatrevingt-treize*, 142). ["the air of a priest ... about him."]

The Letters of Thermidor in Context

To present-day sensibilities, these texts present

bizarre, incongruous arguments. However, their arguments serve the oral function of being immediately inflammatory rather than documentary, regardless of their stated purpose of informing the public. They are, in a sense, oral arguments which are useful as immediate acts meant to produce a particular effect (pious outrage) on a particular group of people (the politically involved French) at a particular point in the revolution. They are not literate in that they do not evidence the literate preference for objectivity and distance. Further, they resort to commonplaces regardless of the applicability of the accusation. For example, the accusation of royalism was one of the central commonplaces in depicting the enemies of France -- both from without and within. The assertion that France fights against all the crowned heads of Europe was used as a matter of course by 1794. Accusations of royalism or aristocracy were common in the purges that characterized the Terror. Though it was clearly an incongruous accusation against Robespierre made no difference. The common-places would be paraded in this case because the orality of Revolutionary discourse made it almost necessary to construct highly situational arguments. The commonplaces were connected by their own logic which meant that once tyranny was discovered, immorality was the issue. *"Et l'immoralité, c'est bien sûr le sexe"* (Brunel, 119) ["And immorality is certainly sex"]:

> Dans le discours post-thermidorien, loin d'être toujours d'une "austérité sombre et constante", Robespierre a parfois les moeurs aristocratiques du libertin. Une première mention de cette rumeur surgit immédiatement après "Robespierre-roi", lorsque Frécine, député du Loire-et-Cher, relate de fréquentes visites à Issy, dans la maison de princesse de

> Chimay.... Viennent ensuite les mentions d'orgies collectives à Auteuil.... Ce dernier trait est indispensable pour faire admettre la plus politique des identifications, "Robespierre-buveur de sang", Robespierre-Terreur (Brunel, 119).
>
> [In the post-Thermidorean discourse, far from always being "austere, serious and consistent," Robespierre sometimes has the aristocratic morals of a libertine. The first mention of this rumor came immediately after "King Robespierre," when Frécine, a deputy from Loire-et-Cher, relates his [Robespierre's] frequent visits to Issy, in the house of the princess de Chimay.... Then come the mention of orgies at Auteuil.... This last trait is indispensable for admitting the most political of identifications, "Robespierre the Drinker of Blood," Robespierre-Terror.]

This chain of accusations, ultimately constructing the Thermidorean myth which persists and continues to play a part in the political identities of the French, made its way into the realm of popularly accepted national myth via the discourse of which the letters of Thermidor are a part:

> Ce discours, d'abord limité à la "dernière des factions" dans le flot sans pareil des adresses à la Convention, légitime le 9 thermidor, mais frappe bientôt les fonctionnaires publics de l'an II, les Jacobins, les derniers Montangnards. C'est lui qui fabrique l'événement, qui lui donne son sens voulu.... Les pétitions qui félicitent les Conventionnels de leur "révolution" [i.e., the "revolution of 9 Thermidor"] n'ont pas peu participé à ce transfert insidieux de souveraineté et on mesure, ici, l'ambiguïté de la proposition énoncée par Barère le 10 thermidor (Brunel, 120).
>
> [This speech, at first limited to the "last of the factions" in an unprecedented flood of addresses to the Convention, justifies the ninth of Thermidor, but soon strikes out against the public officials of the Year II, the Jacobins, the last montagnards. It is they who construct the event, who give it the desired meaning.... The petitions which congratulate the members of the Convention on their "revolution" [i.e., the "revolution of 9 Thermidor"] had no small part in

> this insidious transfer of power and one assesses here the ambiguity of the proposition introduced by Barère on the tenth of Thermidor.]

The most significant effect of Thermidor was that the democratic nature of the revolutionary system of government was immediately dismantled. Though the years of the Terror had brought a powerful central government to power, the defining difference between that centralized power and those which would follow, as well as those which had come before, is that the popular vote still formed the basis of the government. That consent of the governed could be revoked by the Directory (among whose members were many Thermidoreans) on the eighteenth of Brumaire 1799 only because it had been substantially undermined by the "reforms" which followed Thermidor. The subversion of popular sovereignty began during the Terror. The National Convention had outlawed all women's sociétés populaires in October of 1793 (eight months prior to Thermidor) after a group of market women broke into a meeting of the Paris women's society, the *Républicaines-Révolutionnaires* (the Revolutionary Republican Women), and attacked its members. The market women then lodged a complaint against the Républicaines-Révolutionnaires for harassing them to wear republican symbolic dress. It is not a coincidence that some of the voices calling for the destruction of women's sociétés populaires were later to be Thermidoreans':

> The ruling authorities quickly widened the scope of their investigation beyond the original complaint brought by the market women. Women's rights to govern and to meet in political associations were sharply contested.... Speaking on behalf of the Committee of General Security, André Amar [a Thermidorean] reduces

> women's political rights to meddling and reproaches women for lacking in the necessary physical and moral strength required to debate, to draw up resolutions, and to deliberate (Landes, 143).

The fate of the women's societies was a foreshadowing of what was to become of all the sociétés populaires:

> In 1794 all attempts at legal and social reform for women were curtailed. In May 1795 [ten months after Thermidor] the Convention declared that women were to be kept out of the galleries [observing, and sometimes audibly commenting upon, the proceedings of the Convention]. Workshops were closed in February. In May 1796 the Council of Five Hundred ruled that "the interests of society and morality" excluded women from senior teaching positions. The Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804 reinforced the authority of husbands and fathers at the expense of wives and children. It resurrected unequal standards of divorce and deprived women of the right to perform as civic witnesses, to plead in court in their own name, or to own property without the husband's consent (Landes, 145-6).

The suspension of progress on women's rights during the Terror, which became a series of decades of repression, is commonly attributed to the Jacobin centralization of power during the period. Landes, for example, makes this connection, yet she avoids the common assumption that the Jacobin leadership during the Terror, specifically, those executed on the tenth of Thermidor, counted such repression of women's rights among their goals. Landes does not, however, point out explicitly that the French Constitution of 1793, which she lauds, was supported by the very men who were executed in Thermidor:

> An even more ambitious program for women's civil and political rights appeared in the never-implemented Constitution of 1793, which guaranteed the rights of the populace to work, assistance, and education, as well as the right to rise in insurrection "when the government violates the rights of the people." (139)

A counter-argument to a definition of the Terror as the darkest hour of the Revolution is created within the histories which focus on efforts to advance the rights of certain sections of the population or certain classes of citizens. The feminist history written by Landes, for example, argues the Terror as the will of the proto-feminists of the *Républicaines-Révolutionnaires*:

> The climax of women's political influence was reached during six months of 1793 when women formed a radical group exclusively for women, the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women [*Républicaines-Révolutionnaires*]....
>
> The Society was committed to a radical democratic program and to militant republicanism, its stated purpose being "to be armed to rush to the defense of the Fatherland [*la Patrie*]." It sought to frustrate the schemes of the enemies of the Republic, aristocrats, hoarders, and speculators (140).

Landes finds demands for bread and price controls linked with demands for the swift execution of traitors (defined as both spies/saboteurs as well as hoarders/speculators) provided for by the Terror. Terror was therefore a goal of women's movement among the sans-culottes. This argues against a foundational support for the myth of Thermidor which assumes that the Terror was perpetuated by power-hungry and blood-thirsty members of the central government (none of whom were women, and none of whom were themselves sans-culottes) who sought a way to destroy political enemies and keep the population fearful of contradicting the dictatorship of the central committees:

> In association with the *enragés* and other radical democratic factions, the Society applied enormous pressure to sections, sociétés populaires, Jacobin clubs, and Convention deputies to support a full program of protective and repressive measures for the

> safety of the people. The Convention legalized the Terror in September and then voted an armée révolutionnaire, a law of suspects, and a law of general maximum providing for uniform price controls on necessities. The Society's members pressured the revolutionary authorities to enforce this legislation energetically.... They engaged actively in surveillance, identifying suspects guilty of possible revolutionary infractions to be brought before the revolutionary tribunals (140-1).

This inclusion of "the politics of the street" as a causal in the Terror is an all-important element to counter-arguments to the Thermidorean myth. Albert Soboul's Marxist account of the Terror is in accord with Landes' feminist account in this respect. Soboul's summary of the effects of Thermidor makes the connection between the interests of the working class and their support of the Terror:

> The decree of 4 Nivôse, Year III (24 December 1794) abolished all maximums and fixed prices, putting an end to the directed economy. The *assignat* [Revolutionary paper money] collapsed and inflation became rampant: by April 1795 the general index of prices stood at 758 compared with a base of 100 in 1790, while food prices stood at 819. In this sense, 9 Thermidor had proved to be a day of Dupes for the sans-culottes.... Ten months after Robespierre's death, driven by poverty, famine prices, and the rigors of a particularly harsh winter, the Parisian sans-culottes rose for the last time, demanding a return to the controlled economy (123).

Though Furet and Soboul use the same analytical perspective (i.e., that "social forces," not the stresses of the foreign war, led to the fall of the revolutionary government -- an explanation which Kaplan analyzes as having the same Marxist foundation though Furet asserted that his work was an essential break with the Marxists of the Sorbonne), Soboul understands a

lack of class consciousness among the sans-culottes to be the central weakness which led to Thermidor:

> The Sans-culottes were not a class, and their movement was not united by class feeling. Shopkeepers, and artisans, journeymen and day-laborers, with a small group of bourgeois, could form an irresistible alliance against the aristocracy. But within this alliance there was antagonism between the artisans and shopkeepers, who lived by the profits they derived from private ownership of the means of production, and the day-laborers and journeymen, who lived entirely on their wages (122-3).

This conflation of a call for the defense of the country against its enemies and a call for bread and price controls is an important consideration in examining the construction of the Thermidor letters. What can appear to be an exclusive focus on military and political combat is, within the context of sans-culotte discourse, also a reference to an old synonym for the vanquishing of domestic enemies: a demand for economic controls. This will be considered further in chapter four.

However, before leaving the subject of myth of Thermidor and its counter-argument, the question of overt counter-argument in the letters themselves should be addressed. In letters about what was such a cataclysmic moment for the Revolution, there is a striking lack of protest against the execution of the sociétés populaires' own central leadership in Paris. There are several possible explanations for this. First, the centralization of the government during the Terror led the sociétés populaires to view themselves as the support for the national leadership against the domestic traitors who lurked everywhere. Second, the very tradition of the letters

themselves formulated response to Revolutionary events as felicitation. Viewing these two explanations together, it is striking to consider how the old regime's monarchical structures (i.e., the tradition of letters of felicitation) fit the centralized government's need for vigilant unity in time of civil war. Yet, it is remarkable to see that the sociétés populaires could not see that the closing of the Jacobin club was their own death knell. There is, in fact, record of only one actual outcry mailed to the National Convention. After asserting, as all historians do, that "*De tous les points de la capitale, les adresses de félicitations affluent,*" [from all parts of the capital, addresses of congratulation poured in"] Jacques Castelnau writes that only one of the sociétés populaires dared to speak up for their own origins, the Jacobin club:

> Soudain, parmi tant d'oubli et de lâcheté, brille l'éclair du courage et du défi. La société de Renan, au district de Brest, se borne à rappeler qu'aux termes de l'article VII de la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme.... Elle y ajoute un extrait de l'Acte constitutionel garantissant à tous les Français "le droit de se réunir en sociétés populaires."
>
> La Convention traite cette manifestation d'"ironie indécente" et réclame des "mesures rigoureuses." Elle préconise aussitôt aux moyens qu'elle a condamnés solennellement en demandant qu'on "fasse tomber la tête des complices de la tyrannie." Robespierre avait raison: le peuple a changé de chaînes, non de destinées (252).
>
> [Suddenly, amid so much forgetfulness and cowardice, burned a light of courage and defiance. The society of Renan, of the Brest district, took it upon themselves to remind the Convention that according to article VII of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.... They include an excerpt from the constitution guaranteeing to all Frenchmen "the right to assemble in popular societies."

> The Convention considered this a demonstration of "indecent irony" and called for "rigorous measures." They immediately recommended the means which they had solemnly condemned in asking that "the heads of the accomplices of tyranny fall." Robespierre was right: the people had changed their chains, not their destinies.]

Such exceptions to the rule of congratulatory tone are not included in this study for the same reason that no letters from women's clubs appear: because no such letters appear among the letters from the Région du Nord.

Chapter Three: Oral Feature of the Popular Societies' Addresses

Walter Ong

Studies in the distinction between oral and literate discourse have developed throughout the twentieth century. The earliest work was done by linguists and anthropologists, though its roots lie in the speculations of the eighteenth-century scholars such as archeologist Robert Wood who was interested in the tales of Homer. Perhaps the best known scholar of oral and literate discourses is Walter Ong. In the first chapter of *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Ong provides the lineage of the scholars in the field of oral and literate discourse studies. Prominent among the many are Albert B. Lord, Milman Perry, and Eric A. Havelock who worked on the texts of Homer. The studies of linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and literary theorists have examined the ways in which pre-literate cultures told stories using memorization systems which disappear after writing is introduced into a culture. This study is not of that long line of discoveries. Rather, it is interested in how the specific texts under its scrutiny create meaning within the specific context of the French Revolution in 1794. It is an effort to analyze the ways in which the letters of the sociétés populaires constructed Thermidor, a foundational myth of western political identity. There is, therefore, an appropriate harmony with the scholarship upon which I am building and the intentions of this study. It was, after all, in the study of myths, of founding narratives of Greek culture, that the workings of oral discourse were first examined.

I have chosen to focus on Ong's work in the area because he incorporates the work of the scholars who came before him as well

as that of contemporaries working on different aspects of the same issues. Further, Ong's central focus in doing his work is much like my own. My work in Rhetoric/Composition/Literacy is informed by the understanding that the culture in which I teach, write, and speak is a literate one with areas of heavy oral residue (to use Ong's term). The influence of electronic media on the discourses in which I train my students and in which I work have produced a secondary orality, making the divide between oral and literate features in discourse more pronounced. Therefore, perhaps ironically, this study of the sociétés populaires' letters of Thermidor is, in part, an effort to examine what is currently apparent in contemporary discourses. I also use Ong because his focus is on the ways in which language creates reality. Ong views the scholarship on oral and literate differences as revolutionary:

> Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy, and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. We have had to revise our understanding of human identity (*Orality and Literacy*, 1).

Ong asserts that oral cultures discourse, and therefore think, in ways very different from literate cultures. Though the industrialized western nations have been literate for centuries, Ong considers the oral features which live on in our discourses as residue of an older epistemology -- a way of ordering the world which is archaic, yet persistent. Ong carefully outlines the development of the theory of oral discourse which he employs, beginning with Adam Perry's work on the Homeric texts, and continuing to Marshall McLuhan's particular uses of the theory.

Ong has been the object of some controversy, however. Following earlier literacy scholars, Deborah Brandt, for example, vilifies his use of oral discourse theory in her *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts*. Brandt denounces oral theorists such as Ong, Deborah Tannen, and David R. Olson as "strong text" proponents (analogous to Brian V. Street's "autonomous model," James Gee's "commodity myth," and James Berlin's "objective rhetoric/epistemology") who decontextualize -- and thereby render socially, politically, and morally neutral -- all technologies, including the technology of writing and print. At least in the case of Ong, her judgment is hasty since Ong's project is thoroughly compatible with her assertions about literacy's social and political involvement.

It is unfair to suggest that Ong presents literacy as a neutral, decontextualized technology, but Ong does leave himself open to the criticism when he writes about literacy without considering that the turf on which he treads when doing an analysis of "literacy" is politically charged. My own use of Ong's presentation of literate and oral discourses therefore makes two arguments at once; that such analysis is fruitful when applied to the letters which are the object of this study, and that Ong's theory of literate and oral discourses is in fact useful to an analysis which is very much concerned with the political and social involvement of texts.

Literacy in Eighteenth-century France

Walter Ong's understanding of "literacy" does not refer to mere functional literacy, but to "the literate mind." "More than any other single invention," Ong asserts, "writing has transformed

human consciousness" (78). Therefore, when making reference to "literate discourse," this study is not referring to reading and writing per se (i.e., functional literacy), but to literate consciousness and discourse which is characterized by the qualities of literacy, of written text, and of writing itself. However, in addition to considering how Ong's theory of oral and literate features can be employed in this study of the Thermidor letters, it would be prudent to address the historical question of reading and writing abilities in the French provinces in 1794, as this was a period of rapidly expanding functional literacy. Furthermore, it is useful to consider the extent to which the authors of the letters were familiar with the conventions of written texts since the observation that the letters contain a great number of oral features could lead to the facile conclusion that their authors created such texts out of ignorance. This is by no means in evidence. Consideration of functional literacy levels in the French provinces during the Revolution is also significant because it is related to the mix of social and economic strata represented by the memberships of the political clubs which wrote the letters. It is important to consider that these documents are the rare examples of writing done collectively by a real cross section of a nation's population.

In their 1977 study, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Ferry*, François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, two of the most respected names among historians of the French Revolution, assign an entire chapter to "The Peasant, from Oral to Written Culture" (149-196). In this chapter, Furet and Ozouf make what they can of the scant and sketchy literacy records before the nineteenth

century and conclude that Normandy serves as a typical example of the state of affairs in France during the Revolution:

> In the Normandy countryside, in the second half of the eighteenth century (figures by occupation are not available prior to this date), the 'notables' had long been 100% literate, the land-owning peasants or farmers were almost all literate too, though presumably more recently. More than three-quarters of the merchants, and just about three-quarters of the artisans signed their *acte de marriage*, and more than one weaver in two even. Only a single category failed to cross the threshold of 50% in 1750, the agricultural day-laborers who, with the weavers, though more so than they, constituted a pool of humanity long impervious to the progress of literacy... (105).

This last group of day-laborers is the one class of French not involved in the political clubs of the revolution. If it is true that the political clubs of the French Revolution have their origins in the trade guilds and Free Mason societies, both specifically urban phenomena, it is easy to see why there was no flow of rural day laborers into the clubs. Though Furet and Ozouf, true to their counter-Marxist project (for a detailed account of Furet's position as revisionist and anti-Marxist within French academia, see Steven L. Kaplan's *Farewell, Revolution: The Historians' Feud*), describe the day-laborers as "long impervious to the progress of literacy" as if they had natural or social defenses against the assault of literacy which overcame all other classes of Frenchmen, ignore the socio-economic position of the rural peasantry during the Revolution. The fact that the rural day-laborers were silent in the political action of the Revolution (though they were a force in the counter-revolution of the Vendée) is one of the reasons many French communists have long followed Karl Marx in interpreting the French Revolution as a bourgeois

effort which led only indirectly to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century struggles for socialism:

> For each new class which puts itself in the place of the ruling one before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society.... Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of the other classes which are not winning a dominant position, but only insofar as it now puts these individuals in a position to raise themselves into the ruling class. When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the power of the aristocracy, it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only insofar as they became bourgeois (Marx, "The German Ideology," 138).

And Marx expresses this still more succinctly in "The Manifesto of the Communist Party": "The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property. The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property" (Marx, 346). It is at this point that the Revolution was neither a socialist nor a Romantic phenomenon. Its orators evoked the enlightenment notion of the *civitas* as the center of human life -- but it was a bourgeois, nationalist *civitas*. Simon Schama quotes Guy-Jean Target (in Schama's translation):

> We have acquired enlightenment, but it is patriotism, disinterestedness and virtue that are needed to seek and defend the interests of a great people Each man must forget himself and see himself only as a part of the whole of which he is a member, detach himself from his individual existence, renounce all *esprit de corps*, belong only to the great society and be a child of the *patrie* (291).

The statement above also serves as an excellent example of bourgeois national identity, catchwords of the Revolution (e.g., lauding of "disinterestedness" and "virtue" -- both being

particularly attached to Robespierre who invoked "virtue" compulsively and is still called by his popular nickname, "*l'incorruptible*"), and literate consciousness. A new sense of nationhood had to be created independent of the personification of the nation in the royal family. Much has been written of the "family romance" of the French Revolution. In place of a *pater familias*, the Revolution made due simply with the "*la patrie*" (ironically, a feminine noun), and the Thermidor letters are replete with affirmations of this fact. The national identity was based on adherence to the national representation -- as one Paris section expressed it:

> La section de Tuileries n'a connu et ne connaîtra pas d'autre centre, d'autre point de ralliement que la Convention nationale. Point de puissance, point de corporation qui rivalise avec Elle (A.N. C325 1402 12).
>
> [The section of the Tuileries has not known and will not know any other center, any other rallying point than the National Convention -- no power, no corporation, who would challenge it.]

Yet a body of bourgeois men soon came to serve as new personifications of the nation -- many of the letters of Thermidor open by addressing the members of the National Assembly as "*pères de la patrie*" ["fathers of the Fatherland"]. That Target wishes each Frenchman to "detach himself from his individual existence" indicates the literate mind's equation of detachment with reason, as well as literacy's distaste for discourse using the context of human life experience to create meaning. These characteristics of the oral and the literate minds will be examined in following sections.

What Furet and Ozouf's study demonstrates is that the popular

societies who composed the addresses of Thermidor had become increasingly diverse in their literate abilities as their membership boomed and consequently came to include more peasants and artisans. This conclusion is backed by the research of other historians of the revolutionary period:

> In the year II [1794] citizens organized more than 3,000 new popular societies, meaning that over 5,300 French communes altogether now had clubs.... By the spring of 1794 the density of clubs in certain departements reached remarkable levels. While no departement boasted more than 50 clubs in 1791 or 100 in 1792, in the Year II the Drôme had 268, the Pas-de-Calais 186, the Seine-Inférieure 180, and the Seine-et-Oise 167. The membership of the new clubs also reached more deeply down the social order -- into ranks of artisans, journeymen, small shopkeepers, clerks, and small peasants -- than the clubs of the early years.... After Thermidor the backlash against the Terror was therefore ... flavored by bitter resentment over the unnatural hegemony of cobblers and tailors, village carpenters and small peasants who had briefly exercised and sometimes abused a modicum of power (Woloch).

Attribution of the violence of "the White Terror" which followed Thermidor to the "unnatural hegemony of cobblers and tailors, village carpenters and small peasants" reveals Woloch's adherence to the François Furet explanation of the Revolution's causes and consequences.

The diversity of popular societies' membership, and consequential diversity of literate abilities, is evident in the Thermidor letters themselves. Though the majority of the signatures are written in a relatively smooth and practiced hand, interspersed among them are names signed in unsteady printed letters. Examples of this kind of "signature" among the letters from the Region du Nord are found in A.N. C325 1411 27 from Eure. In the lower left of the signature page, the name "Goucher" hand-printed in a hand not

practiced enough to control the slant of the letters in a single direction. This is also found among the signatures of A.N. C325 1405 18 from the département Aisne, A.N. C325 1412 39 from Nord, A.N. C325 1410 24 from Seine, A.N. C325 1412 1 from Seine-et-Marne, A.N. 1412 23 and A.N. C325 1411 34 from Seine-et-Oise, and several appear among the signatures on A.N. C325 1404 22 from St. Pol in Pas de Calais. However, the letters do not function neatly as a poll of the literacy levels among popular society members since fully half of them do not contain signatures of the whole memberships, but only carry those of the secretaries of the correspondence committee for the club. Considering that non-cursive hand-printing was not a standard form of writing or signing letters in eighteenth-century France, it is probable that these hand-printed names indicate men and women who were of what Furet and Ozouf call the "reading only" literate population. Those unable to spare the time and money to obtain full functional literacy, opted for learning to read only. E. Jennifer Monaghanam, among others, has examined the eighteenth-century understanding of reading and writing skills as distinct abilities to be learned sequentially -- reading first, possibly to be followed by writing. Having learned to read from printed texts, members of the popular societies in provincial France imitated the printed letters in writing their names even though the literate convention was (as it still is) for signatures to be cursive. This phenomenon is an example of what Ong refers to as the clinging to typographical convention common to those with a literate consciousness but only a little formal education.

Not surprisingly, Furet and Ozouf find that literacy rates

were always and everywhere higher for men than for women. However, as the literacy rates grew, the rates for women escalated at an even sharper rate for women. Functional literacy, at least "reading only," was more or less a requirement of urban life in France. This has been well documented by a number of historians who provide evidence that the everyday demands of the retail and domestic work women did in eighteenth-century Paris assumed the ability to read. How important literacy was to the daily work of women in the provinces has yet to be examined, but the existence of letters from women's popular societies outside of Paris argue that enough fully literate women lived in the provinces to sustain the considerable reading and writing activities of political clubs. Unfortunately, there are very few Thermidor letters from women's popular societies. However, it is perhaps surprising that there are any at all as the National Convention had outlawed all women's popular societies in October of 1793 (eight months prior to Thermidor). The fate of the women's societies was a foreshadowing of what was to become of all the popular societies.

Oral Features of the Thermidor Letters

It is perhaps surprising to find oral features to be the defining characteristics of Revolutionary discourse. After all, the center of the Revolution was in Paris where literacy was a requirement and where tastes were sophisticated enough to have established and supported the highly literate theatrical and literary texts of the period. Yet the Revolution seemed to promote a discourse so highly oral that it struck even its contemporaries who were outside of it as strange, naïve, and bombastic. The sociétés populaires' letters of Thermidor are prime examples of

this inflated revolutionary oratorical style:

> Citoyens Representans,
> Nous avons lue avec la plus grande satisfaction l'adresse au peuple français, nous applaudissons aux principes sacrés qu'elle contient et aux intentions que vous y manifestez pour le bonheur et la gloire de la republique. Guerre a mort aux tyrans, aux fourbes, aux fripons et aux aristocrates, aux hommes de sang et a toutes ces hordes impures de brigands... (a.N. C325 1409 16).
>
> [Citizen Representatives,
> We have read with the greatest satisfaction the address to the French people. We applaud the sacred principles which it contains and the intentions that you manifest in it for the happiness and the glory of the Republic. War to the death to tyrants, to the deceitful, to rascals and to aristocrats, to men of blood and to all those impure hordes of brigands....]

Biographies of the Revolutionaries commonly address the personality traits which led this or that man to have a "tendency" toward such language, or they attribute their subject's "style" to the fashion of the times. But these arguments only avoid the question. An answer can be found in the relationship between orality and community. The Revolution required that diverse segments of society unite themselves to create social change, a unity among "shopkeepers and artisans, journeymen and day laborers, with a small group of bourgeois, [who] could form an irresistible alliance against the aristocracy" (Soboul, 122). The Jacobin centralization of government sustained this unity via the popular societies whose membership included all the allied groups:

> The Jacobins perfected the use of small committees to define their course of action and political program, which they then expressed in slogans.... All the citizens were held in the grip of a network of affiliated clubs which followed the lead of the central Jacobin Club... (Soboul, 107).

The Paris club could not hold the whole nation together -- certainly not in times of civil war as well as foreign war. The integrity of the network was vital, and it depended on the integrity of each of the affiliated clubs. It was therefore important that each community have an organization which would know all its members and hold them accountable. Because the system was one of local adherence of members with a central leadership in the capital, "These societies played a decisive part in defeating the domestic enemy and in establishing the new revolutionary institutions" (Soboul, 106). Such an organization made it possible for members to be more thoroughly united than would have been possible otherwise. They were united by their participation in the meetings of the popular societies which were oral performances in which votes were taken by voice, and in which speeches were read aloud if they existed in written form, but were more often extemporized. The meetings of the popular societies therefore contained all the unifying and conservative elements of orality, a fact which made them all the more effective in their role as watchdogs and unifiers:

> Because in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken forms human beings into close-knit groups. When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered, to be reestablished only when oral speech begins again (Ong, 74).

The orality of the popular societies' mode of operation served to further the unifying potential of the network of popular societies.

It is therefore not surprising to read Soboul's assertion that the popular societies were most numerous in the departements where there was the most counterrevolutionary activity, for that is where there would be a greater need for unity against political enemies. Unity is, in fact, one of the repeated themes of the letter of Thermidor. For example, the heading "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, Union" is common. After such a heading, the société populaire de Chambray weaves unity into its tapestry of flamboyant praise:

> Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, Humanité, Unité indivisibilité de la République ou la mort ... Représentans d'un peuple qui a juré de mourir ou d'être libre, continuez de bien meriter la patrie. Législateurs, votre amour immuable pour elle, votre union, l'attitude ferme et imposante que vous conserverez, l'énergie que vous avez faits parâitre, l'humanité, la sagesse, les virtues, qui guident vos pas, assurent à ce peuple sa liberté et son triomphe (A.N. C325 1412 39).
>
> [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Humanity, Unity indivisibility of the Republic or death ... Representatives of a people who have sworn to die or be free, continue to deserve well the Fatherland. Legislators, your immutable love for the Fatherland, your union, the firm and imposing attitude which you keep, the energy that you have shown, the humanity, the wisdom, the virtues, which guide your steps, assure this people of their liberty and their triumph.]

Oral discourse creates unity in specific ways which Ong breaks into nine specific characteristics for the purpose of analysis

However, before turning to Ong's characteristics and how they are manifested in the letters, it is important to establish how the oral features came to be such defining qualities of this discourse. One possible explanation would be to suggest that the oral residue was thick enough to provide the letter-writers with an understanding of orality. That is, the primary orality of the

French people still survived in the countryside where literacy had yet to take over the conventions of speech and thought. Such an explanation would be considered highly improbable by experts in primary orality. Primary orality is more than the absence of literacy. It is a complex memory system which was wiped out in most of Europe during the middle ages. By 1794, literate consciousness, if not complete functional literacy, was firmly in place. While it is probable that the least educated among the members of any given société populaire were inclined to use oral features in their expressions which would then find their way into the letter via the (oral) deliberation of the correspondence committee, other explanations also exist. Alain Renoir explains the origins of oral formulas in the written literature of various periods:

> I would rather think they had been studying Homeric Greek and that some of it had rubbed off on them or that they had been influenced by Latin or earlier English texts containing vestigial elements of oral-formulaic rhetoric. We likewise recall how those nineteenth-century who turned to medieval or pseudomedieval genres and topics wrote in a manner typical of their own time but nevertheless sprinkled their texts with forms and devices which their audiences would have associated with the middle ages... (127).

More will be said on the psuedo-orality of nineteenth-century Romantic texts later in this chapter.

Ong has distilled nine defining characteristics of oral discourse. These qualities are found in the communication systems of cultures without literacy, and exist in residual forms in literate cultures. These are the features of the letters of Thermidor which qualify them as examples of residually oral discourse.

1. Additive Structure

Ong explains that oral discourse is additive rather than subordinative in its expression because of oral discourse's reliance on context to create meaning. Only in written discourse is it necessary to build fixed grammatical formulas since written texts can create meaning only from the linguistic strategies available to it. Oral and residually oral discourse create meaning by adding one idea to the other, like beads on a string, rather than creating a structure which would present the ideas in a hierarchical fashion. Ong suggests that it is because we have literate consciousness that we sense a need to use subordinating structures even in our oral communication today. Of course, this was also true of the writers of the Thermidorean addresses. The French Revolution was specifically marked by the practice of oratory as a real political force. Yet the oratory of the Revolution was not at all the same as that of Cicero's time, much less Aristotle's. Even if the French orators regarded themselves as ancient Romans, their oratory -- at least that of the assembly halls and the majority of that of the political clubs -- was written carefully before being read aloud with the intention of its being published in one of the political journals or as a small pamphlet. David P. Jordan takes care in his biography of Robespierre's career to examine the role and understanding of oratory in revolutionary France:

> Revolutionary oratory in France was the offspring of classical models, which had once been modified to accommodate the needs of the pulpit, law court, or lecture room, and now were further modified for the Revolution. Demosthenes and Cicero, the greatest orators of antiquity, were closely studied, as were the critics and grammarians who had rationalized and analyzed what was essential for oratory.... The revolutionaries loved oratory as one might love the opera or the theatre. The newspapers of the

> Revolution are filled with critical appreciations of oratorical performances, and most of the great revolutionary careers rest on oratory (65).

Yet, Jordan goes on to explain, Robespierre's oratory was seldom extemporaneous. The manuscripts from which he read were marked with layers of revisions and rewrites, the structures of his speeches read aloud differing little if any from his printed articles. There are other reports of orators during the Revolution who habitually spoke extemporaneously -- Danton and Desmoulins, for example. Then as now, definitions of eloquence depended on a taste for embedded and subordinative structures. This first of Ong's characteristics of oral discourse therefore applies far less to an analysis of documents like the Thermidor letters since they are creatures of literate consciousness. Yet all additive structure was not corrected out of the letters:

> Dans cette adresse que vous faites au peuple, l'intrigue, l'égoïsme, l'anarchie, l'hipocrisie et la trahison avec cruaté masqué de patriotisme, l'eclipsent.
>
> La vertu, la franchise, l'humanité et le vrai bonheur du peuple, voilà ce que nous vous voulez.... La justice sera rendue, le coupable sera punis, les loix seront éxécutées et l'innocent vivra paisible et heureux au milieu des siens (A.N. C325 1410 25).
>
> [In this address that you give the people, intrigue, egoism, anarchy, hypocrisy, and treason with cruelty masked as patriotism pass away.
>
> Virtue, frankness, humanity and the true happiness of the people, these are what you wish for us.... Justice will be done, the guilty will be punished, the law will be executed and the innocent will live peacefully and happily among their own kind.]

Yet because these were documents meant to be read aloud -- indeed, written by such large bodies to such a large body of men that private silent reading of all but the letters which were printed

and distributed probably never happened until the researchers of this century picked them up again -- their less eloquent features may have caused less consternation to their hearers than to their readers. As Simon Schama describes:

> ... it was the sounds rather than the sights of the Jacobins that were their most compelling feature. The walls of their clubs echoed to endless speeches, arguments, critical readings of legislation -- set-piece oratory in imitation of the viruosi of the Paris club and the National Assembly. Every provincial club would have its local star emulating the expressions of patriotic indignation and Ciceronian rhetoric the alternative rhetorical styles of Mirabeau (hot), Barnave (crisp), and Robespierre (logical-sentimental). And it was the large local clubs, at Bordeaux and Lyon for example, that the next generation of revolutionary politicians who would go on to be the Ciceros and Catos of the Legislative Assembly -- Lanthéans, Isnard, Vergniaud and Gensonne -- had their apprenticeship (527-8).

2. Aggregative Function

Ong describes oral discourse as aggregative rather than analytic. This is one of the Thermidorean letters' most striking features to the contemporary reader. It is this characteristic, along with their agonistic tone, which renders documents from the French Revolution particular in their style -- one might say they tend to "sound" like this:

> Enfin vous mettrez la vertu à l'ordre du jour; et vous ferez executer les principes consacrés dans votre adresse au peuple français, que nous regardons comme la base du bonheur, et de la liberté publique ...; nous jurons d'employer pour seconder vos travaux toute notre énergie; et de vous faire un rampart de nos corps (A.N. C325 1412 22).
>
> [At last you make virtue the order of the day; and you put into operation the principles consecrated in your address to the French people, which you regard as the foundation of happiness, and of public liberty.... We swear to reinforce your works with all our energy; and to make for you a rampart of our bodies.]

They contain characteristic bombastic turns of phrase also found in other revolutions' discourses: nineteenth-century Europe's, the Soviet Union's, Communist China's, and the contemporary Middle East's. The original function of such a device is to aid memory. It was easier to memorize a story as a series of stock elements. These elements must remain consistent integers in order for the system to work. Therefore one was not to call into question whether, for example, *les travaux* were in fact consistently connected with *l'énergie* or were in fact *gloirieux*. These are always connected in the Thermidor letters because they were a part of the orality of the discourse. No one was concerned with finding new ways of expressing the same sentiment any more than they were with analyzing the sentiment. The quote above, brief as it is, contains other stock expressions: *"mettrez la vertu à l'ordre du jour"* (periodically exchanged with *"mettrez la justice à l'ordre du jour"* ["make justice the order of the day"] as a play on the stock phrase, *"mettrez la terreur à l'ordre du jour"* ["make terror the order of the day"]), the assertion that various ideas or documents compose *"la base du bonheur, et de la liberté publique"*, and the promise to *"faire un rampart de nos corps"* should the Revolution find it necessary. The qualities which make the orations, *journaux*, and letters of the Revolution seem naively dogmatic are qualities which Ong describe as

> ... those which set off orally based thought and expression from chirographically and typographically based though and expression, the characteristics, that is, which are most likely to strike those reared in writing and print cultures as surprising (36).

In the observation above, Ong collapses chirographic and

typographic thought and expression in order to compare them with oral thought and expression. My own references to "literate" and "oral" will do the same. This is particularly necessary since the letters themselves carry all three forms of expression and consciousness.

Ong's description of the aggregative quality which distinguishes oral discourse even uses revolutionary language as examples:

> The clichés in political denunciations in many low-technology, developing cultures -- enemy of the people, capitalist war-mongers -- that strike high literates as mindless are residual formulary essentials of oral thought processes. One of the many indications of a high, if subsiding, oral residue in the culture of the Soviet Union is ... the insistence on speaking there always of "the Glorious Revolution of October 26" -- the epithetic formula here is obligatory stabilization, as were Homeric epithetic formulas "wise Nester" or "clever Odysseus", or as "the glorious Fourth of July" used to be in the pockets of oral residue common even in the early twentieth-century United States (*Orality and Literacy*, 38-9).

The literate mind rebels against, or at least has a received distaste for, slogans and epithetic formulas. This feature of many revolutionary discourses is often the target of special criticism by literate bourgeois. Rather than understanding this quality as characteristic of a low technology culture's epistemological heritage, it is misunderstood and criticized as mindless or merely naïve. Interestingly, while "the Glorious Revolution" would provoke universal scoffing in the U.S., other epithetic formulas are ignored as when "the Great Communicator" challenged "the Evil Empire." Though Ong implies that this specific characteristic of orality is more or less dead and buried in high technological cultures, this characteristic of orality lingers on in current U.S.

culture as well.

But if the aggregative features of orality are symptomatic of low technology in a culture, and Romanticism is born of the technological revolution of the late eighteenth century, is this not a contradiction? Shouldn't we expect a marked divergence from oral modes of discourse in this particular revolution? If this revolution had happened in England the answer might be yes. But France was slow to industrialize herself while still benefiting from the industrialization of Europe generally. France was still a nation whose people were new enough to industrialization that they had not yet abandoned the oral tastes for literate ones. Perhaps this is one reason why the Romantics of nineteenth-century France tended to be politically progressive or revolutionary while the Romantics of England quickly veered to the right after the French Revolution: the oral features of Romanticism were historically tied to revolution in France, whereas the connection was not so firm in England.

3. Copious Language

The third characteristic of orality is that it is redundant or "copious." This is one of the natural qualities of all speech which is eradicated -- or which composition instructors *hope* is eradicated -- in written discourse because there is no need for repetition when previous statements are in plain view. Only in spoken discourse are past statements unavailable. Yet there is the single consistent example of unnecessary repetition in the Thermidor addresses in the frequent inclusion of an opening sentence stating the name and location of the popular society even though the first page of every letter, almost without exception,

follows the custom of the day in containing a heading at the top which states the name and location of the society. To a literate sensibility, this natural oral feature seems unsophisticated and poorly organized. Only when one considers that the letters were to be read aloud to the National Convention does it seem reasonable to include information in the body of the letter which is already plainly written just a few inches above in the heading. Wanting credit for their patriotism (for epideictic rhetoric is always as much about the speaker/writer as it is the subject of the discourse, or the audience being addressed), the popular societies couldn't chance the heading not being read. Since only the body of the letter might be read aloud, it should contain all important information. But this functionality of repetition is lost on the silent reader who has the text before him/her.

There are, however, other redundancies in the letters. For example, the société populaire de Braÿ tells the truth about the use of slogans in the letters: "*et nous répéterons sans cesse: vive la Convention Nationale*" (A.N. C325 1412 1) ["and we will relentlessly repeat: long live the National Convention"]. The literate reader is frustrated by a tendency to repeat anything *sans cesse*, but it performs the function of impressing material upon a hear's memory when orally presented. Therefore, the redundancy of the letters is still performing its traditional function in the letters as they oral presentation of the letters as they were read aloud to the National Convention would have been there only presence to the membership there. Very few were ever printed.

4. Conservative Purpose

Fourth, orality is conservative, or traditionalist. Like

redundancy, the conservative aspect of orality is not an issue in a study of the Thermidor letters since this characteristic is a factor only in comparison to writing. In a culture like eighteenth-century France, writing and literate consciousness were already taking over the memory function of oral traditions and so there had not been a need to conserve the wisdom of the past via memorization. This particular "characteristic" of orality is really more of symptom of the use of story-telling in oral cultures. Since material had to be memorized, it was necessarily resistant to innovations of any radical kind. More than a quality of orality, this is a function of orality.

We can understand, to some extent, that this function is performed by the aggregative quality of the Thermidor letter, for example. That stock phrases connecting in the speaker's/writer's and the audience's minds the "*travaux*" of the *Convention Nationale* and "*l'énergie*" so much that they habitually think the other upon speaking or hearing the one indicates these phrases' capacity to direct the thoughts of those engaged in the discourse. It becomes harder to think of the National Convention in very different terms than those readily available via the stock phrases. In performing this function, the aggregative feature of orality serves a conservative function for the power system using the phrases.

And, it must be said that the letters do in themselves serve a conservative function -- though it is to conserve revolution rather than to be conservative in the vernacular sense. The letters' many repetitions and slogans serve to reinforce the unity of their group while also communicating their unity and loyalty to the National Convention. More will be said on the function of the

letters' many assurances to the National Convention of their unflagging loyalty to the national representation.

5. Discourse Close to the Human Life World

Because orality does not provide (or perhaps it is fairer to say, because it does not value) the possibility of objective distance and abstract conceptualization, it keeps its subject matter and ways of reasoning close to the concrete experiences of the everyday life of its culture's members. This particular characteristic of orality is one upon which Deborah Brandt focuses in her critique of Ong and other, what she calls, "strong text proponents":

> Most troubling of all, analyses premised on antagonism between an oral and literate code create exclusionary definitions of standard literacy largely by dint of semantic fiat. To call standard literacy abstract, decontextualized, and psychically separating excludes from its character that which is concrete, contextualized, and communal. Then, to associate certain social groups with loyalty to concrete, contextualized, and communal language is to put them outside the sphere of literate possibilities. But what if, as this discussion has been advocating, standard literacy were recharacterized as concrete, contextualized, and communal? Then adherence to these values would be understood as part of the foundation for literacy (109).

To reduce the argument to one of semantics and say, in effect, that it would be more satisfying if the more attractive characteristics were attributed to the disadvantaged social groups is not a very good argument. Brandt's central point, however, that written discourse frequently has what Ong would describe as oral features, is very much the point of this study. The Thermidor letters, and revolutionary texts in general, are replete with oral features; or, as Ong would say, the features of residual orality.

This is evidenced in the Thermidor letters by frequent reference to the specific behaviors of the society writing the letter. For example, the letters usually tell of the response the Thermidor report received when it was read aloud (applause, cries of joy, etc.) and the action taken at that same meeting (usually a swearing of an oath of allegiance). Some letters go into matters of business unrelated to the subject of Thermidor (the supplies they are sending to Paris for distribution, or the collection they have taken to supply the troops at the fronts). In the case of both these examples, the letters function as a very specific communication. Most parts of them read as relatively abstract statements about revolution, but in these places where immediate concerns which were pressing at the moment of their writing, the letters take on the oral feature of being close to the human life world.

6. Agonistic Tone

This particular characteristic of orality is found in the Romantic preference for strong passions over detached reason. Ong describes it:

> Many, if not all, oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic in their verbal performance and indeed in their lifestyle. Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human life world, orality situates knowledge within the context of struggle.... When all verbal communication must be by direct word of mouth, involved in the give-and-take dynamics of sound, interpersonal relations are kept high -- both attractions and, even more, antagonisms (*Orality and Literacy*, 43-5).

Though the French Revolution is commonly made to serve as a

marker of the climax of "the Enlightenment" or "the Age of Reason," many of its orators were employing highly "Romantic" devices in their expressions of enlightenment and reason, resulting in certain ad hominem critiques of the Revolutionary orators from historians of the Revolution. The inflammatory speeches of Revolutionaries have been analyzed as symptoms of paranoid or hysterical personalities -- this evaluation appearing side-by-side with the assertion that the revolution itself was an Enlightenment phenomena. Yet, when one views the rhetoric within its proper context, the orators of the Revolution do not appear as inexplicably self-contradicting (i.e., as hysterical rationalists) but as evidencing the characteristics of speakers grappling with the political, social, and economic issues of a culture whose native orality was to serve one last cultural purpose before being overtaken by literate tastes which would permanently render its agonistic tone foolish at best, and maniacal at worst. So Schama asserts that,

> revolutionary rhetoric was tuned to a taut pitch of elation and anger. Its tone was visceral rather than cerebral; idealistic rather than realistic; most powerful when it was dividing Frenchmen into Patriots and traitors, most stirring when it was most punitive.... One can see that this was bound to happen. For [revolutionary rhetoric's] sentimental panaceas were perfectly attuned to the resolution of social unhappiness of all kinds.... (292-3)

Schama considers this to be a critique of the "rhetoric" (i.e., the style of speaking and writing independent of any "cerebral" content -- the sense in which "rhetoric" is *always* a "panacea") chosen by a political position (which he abhors) rather than seeing the agonistic intonation as an integral part of rhetoric in a residually oral culture. The extent to which "this was bound to

happen" is due to the cultural context of the Revolution rather than to some vapid quality belonging to the Revolution as such.

Yet another of the striking features of the Thermidor letters, and Revolutionary discourse in general, is the presence of the reverse of agonistically toned language:

> The other side of agonistic name-calling or vituperation in oral or residually oral cultures is the fulsome expression of praise which is found everywhere in connection with orality.... The fulsome praise in the old, residually oral, rhetoric tradition strikes persons from high-literacy culture as insincere, flatulent, and comically pretentious. But praise goes with the highly polarized, agonistic, oral world of good and evil, virtue and vice, villains and heroes (*Orality and Literacy*, 45).

The elaborate praise found in the Thermidor letters is, nominally, their purpose, given that they were written as letters of felicitation. They offer praise and congratulation to the National Convention in consideration of the past:

> Vous allez retabler dans toute la République comme vous avez retablé dans votre sein la liberté des opinions, qui ne peut faire trembler que les méchants, et les despotes; c'est elle qui a brisées nos fers; c'est elle qui peut maintanir son ouvrage (A.N. C325 1412 22).
>
> [You will reestablish in all of the Republic as you have reestablished it in our breast liberty of opinion, which cannot but make evil ones and despots tremble; it is that liberty which has brokens our chains; it is that liberty which can sustain its work.]

They congratulate the convention on the present state of affairs:

> Respecte aux loix émanées de la représentation nationale, ralliement à la convention nationale, attachement inviolable à ses représentants, guerre aux tyrans et aux intriguants; tels sont les principes qui animeront sans cesse la société populaire de Chauny (A.N. C325 1403 28).
>
> [Respect for the law eminates from the national representation, rallying to the National Convention, inviolable attachment to its principles, war to tyrants and

> intriguers. Such are the principles which never cease to animate the société populaire of Chauny.]

And the future is considered within a context of praise for the National Convention:

> Citoyens representants, c'est vous seuls que nous avons delegués pour assurer notre liberté et notre bonheur.... Rester au poste où nous vous avons placé pour y achever le grand ouvrage que vous avez commencé et soyez assurées de notre eternelle reconnaissance (A.N. C325 1405 10).
>
> [Citizen Representatives, it is you alone who we have delegated to assure our liberty and our happiness.... Remain at your post where we have placed you to achieve there the great work that you have begun and may you be assured of our eternal gratitude.]

As Ong suggests, the initial response to reading such lines as those above is esthetic distaste. They certainly do strike the literate mind as "insincere, flatulent, and comically pretentious." Yet they were taken very seriously indeed by a culture not much less thoroughly literate than our own.

7. Empathetic Language

"Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced" (*Orality and Literacy,* 44) is the result of oral cultures' epistemological attachment to the context of discourse. In such cultures, what one knows and how one knows are products of the specific time and place of the discourse since, unlike written information, knowledge in oral cultures is produced and consumed at the same instant. The social context of all discourse is therefore a part of the discourse itself. With written discourse, however, the information exists independent of the time, place, and conditions of its production. Only literacy brought a demand for "distance" and "objectivity" in legitimate discourse.

8. Homeostatic Quality

Like the seventh characteristic of orality, this quality derives from the fact that oral discourse uses the specific time, place, and conditions of the production of discourse as components of its meaning. The past is not privileged in oral cultures in the same way it is in literate ones because in literate societies, texts are almost always products of the past. In oral societies, however, only the present can communicate. Even when speaking of the past, oral cultures must use the material conditions of the present to communicate since oral performance exists only in the present. The past only exists as it is represented by oral performers who purposefully make the account as palatable as possible to the specific persons present. The sense of nostalgia which characterizes Romanticism is therefore very much a literate phenomenon. Here Ong's explanation of Romanticism's relationship to the rise of literacy seems perfectly correct. In oral cultures, "history" is the tale told in the immediate here and now, always having relevance and reference to the here and now. In literate cultures, conceptions of history take on the form of archives, museums, and lists.

9. Situational Discourse

Ninth and last, orality is situational rather than abstract. Again, this characteristic of oral discourse is related to the two preceding ones. While acknowledging that all thought is, to one degree or another, abstract, Ong argues that high and low degrees of abstraction can be identified. Abstract concepts such as "tool" (independent of its use and the material on which the tool would operate) and "circle" (rather than some form of a name for the

specific objects which have this characteristic, e.g., a plate or a ring) are not used in oral discourse. It is the personal experience and specific use of things that matters in a homeostatic world where meaning is related to the human life experience. Abstraction is a useless exercise outside of literacy. This relates back to the second characteristic of orality -- i.e., that it is aggregative rather than analytic. Abstraction is always necessary for analysis. The aggregative quality of oral discourse derives from its lack of abstraction.

As is apparent from this breakdown of the characteristics of oral cultures, orality is only understandable to us as that-which-is-not-literacy. Our literate consciousness makes a full understanding of primary orality impossible. In analyzing texts which come from cultures closer to orality than our own we become aware of some of these differences immediately in the "sound" of the narrative. Ong uses the Homeric epics as examples of this strangeness -- a strangeness imparted, as I have pointed out above, primarily by the aggregative and agonistic qualities of oral narratives. Fairy tales also carry oral features. This accounts for their enduring effect on children who are developmentally unprepared for the abstractions of more literate narratives and therefore naturally respond to the repetitive and predictable nature of folk stories.

The Bible is another example of a text rife with oral features. It is therefore not at all surprising that cultures which base themselves on religious texts such as the Bible or Koran would be particularly prone to using in oral devices. The oft-mentioned "biblical style" of some orators of the French Revolution -- for

example, Anacharsis Cloots and Robespierre -- is therefore perhaps not so simple a matter as it is often made out to be. The instances of Representatives of the People shouting each other down with invectives and outright threats of violence are a much noted aspect of the minutes of the National Assembly. Rather than stemming from the orators' intention of appropriating the weight of Biblical prophesy for their speeches, perhaps their violence and invectives are the result of appeal to orality.

Literacy as Literate Consciousness

Having examined the oral features of the letters, it would be useful to establish the unique qualities of literate thought and expression and how they have an effect on these eighteenth-century hand-written letters. A small fraction of the Thermidor letters from the larger departements were printed at local or Parisian publishing houses and exist only as printed texts.

Ong describes several features of writing that render it distinct from oral communication. First, writing is artificial: "There is no way to write naturally" (82). Where oral communication is begun naturally in childhood, and its rules and forms are absorbed unconsciously, "The process of putting spoken language into writing is governed by consciously contrived, articulable rules ..." (82). Second, it allows for analysis because written knowledge does not have to be stored in the memory and differing concepts and theories can therefore be held open for examination beyond the time and space limitations of the individuals and cultures who created them. These two fundamental qualities of writing, its artificiality and its capacity to permit ideas to transcend time and space, lead to discourse which is more

distanced, "objective," and potentially revolutionary than oral discourse would allow. Written discourse allows basic ideas to be recorded and thus relieves a culture and its individual members from the knowledge-preservation onus of oral discourse. With elements of ideas in print, not only are more individuals aware of a culture's stored knowledge, but those so inclined are able to make use of the ideas of others in different places and eras to formulate new theories to challenge the old. Thus a discourse of theorizing and debate is set in motion. The result is a consciousness which privileges discourse which has these literate features, and "modernity," as described by Andreas Huyssen in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, is the extension to the whole of civilization of those values imposed on consciousness by literacy.

Print technology heightened these effects and coincided with Romanticism. In fact, the most dramatic changes between primary orality and literacy in cultures comes with the invention of movable type printing presses. Ong asserts that "Print reinforces the sense of language as essentially textual. The printed text, not the written text, is the text in its fullest, paradigmatic form" (*Orality and Literacy,* 130). This is not unrelated to the rise of industrial capitalism:

> Print created a new sense of the private ownership of words. Persons in a primarily oral culture can entertain some sense of proprietary rights to a poem, but such a sense is rare and ordinarily enfeebled by the common share of lore, formulas, and themes on which everyone draws.... Typography had made the word into a commodity. The old communal oral world had split up into privately claimed freeholdings (*Orality and Literacy,* 131).

This relates to the rise of Romantic thought in that "Print

culture gave birth to the Romantic notions of 'originality' and 'creativity', ... seeing its origins and meaning as independent of outside influence, at least ideally' (*Orality and Literacy,* 133).

This distinction between the effects of print and of manuscript are significant to this study as the letters are, with very few exceptions, texts that were written as manuscripts with no intention of their ever being printed. In fact, the intended use of letters from the provinces to the National Assembly was that they be read aloud to the Assembly. Coming from a society in which literate consciousness was mixed with much residual primary orality, the letters of Thermidor do in fact function more like oral discourse than the printed texts of the same era. These letters are, as Ong expresses it,

> ... in dialogue with the world outside their own borders. They remained closer to the give-and-take of oral expression. The readers ... are less closed off from the author[s], less absent, than are the readers of those writing for print (*Orality and Literacy,* 132)

Literate Consciousness as Romanticism

At this point, it would be useful to discuss precisely what I mean by "Romanticism." This term is defined in many ways, and, it has been suggested, has become overdetermined so as to mean nothing specifically anymore. However, I use the term to indicate a specific epistemology. The late James Berlin took to using the words epistemology and rhetoric interchangeably: "rhetoric/epistemology." His definition of rhetoric was that it is the generation of text -- as opposed to poetic which is the

interpretation of text. All human acts of communication are "poetic" or "rhetoric." Primarily concerned with rhetoric (though he acknowledges that rhetoric is always combined with poetic, even when it is only the writer reading what he/she has just written in order to make decisions in the composition process), Berlin asserts that

> the term *rhetoric* refers to a diverse discipline that historically has included a variety of incompatible systems. While one particular rhetorical theory may predominate at any historical moment, none remains dominant over time.... At any historical moment, it is common to discover a number of different rhetorics, each competing for attention and each claiming to be the one, true system. The difference in these rhetorics is not ... a matter of the superficial emphasis of one or another feature of the rhetorical act. The difference has to do with epistemology -- with assumptions about the very nature of the known, the knower, and the discourse community involved in considering the known (*Rhetoric and Reality,* 3).

According to Berlin, two of the dominant competing systems of rhetoric/epistemology today are objective rhetoric and subjective rhetoric. The distinction is in where each system locates truth. Objective rhetoric understands truth to be found in the material world available to the five senses which seeks to cooberate evidence with the observations of others. The goal of objective rhetoric is to use clear and precise language so as to re-present reality -- the one reality which is external to humans. Subjective rhetoric seeks truth in the internal realm of the mind, the imagination, the inner sight. This rhetoric holds only the subjective experience as reality. It is therefore possible to have as many "realities" as individuals. Reality is therefore something experienced but not easily communicated because language is a vessel already shaped by the community and as such is unfit to

express the unique experiential reality of the individual. However, beneath the superficial democracy of this rhetoric lurks the elitist notions of "the genius" whose inner sight is somehow better than others'. What Berlin describes as "subjective rhetoric" is the epistemology of Romanticism. I prefer this definition of Romanticism because understanding Romanticism as an epistemology which "locate[s] truth either within the individual or within a realm that is accessible only through the individual's internal apprehension, apart from the empirically verifiable sensory world" (11) because it works equally well in literary, political, and social theatres. Berlin rightly explains that the origins for subjective rhetoric are in Plato and extend into Freud's ideas and beyond, thus allowing consideration of romanticism outside the dates provided by definitions dependent on a tradition of literary periodization. Of course, there is, in the modern language discipline, a "Romantic period" which has "romantics" and a variously defined "Romanticism." I, however, am defining romanticism as an epistemology with historical moments of dominance rather than as a period in history (Romanticism) or a self-conscious aesthetic movement. In this way I can consider the romantic aspects of the enlightenment rather than seeing them as separate "periods." Also, though I compare objective and subjective rhetorics (because they are the dominant forms of the last two centuries), Berlin elaborates upon other rhetorics of the past and present. We, like the eighteenth century, live in literate consciousness and with a number of rhetorics/epistemologies.

It is also useful to consider romanticism as a way of viewing the world (defining reality, discerning truth) when

evaluating its relationship to orality and literate consciousness. Ong's description of oral and literate consciousnesses is compatible with Berlin's consideration of rhetoric systems as epistemologies. There is not an exact correlation, of course. Orality and Literacy (as consciousnesses) do not correspond to subjective and objective rhetorics. Rather, orality and literacy, as Ong defines them, are consciousnesses which permit certain epistemological perspectives and exclude others. Primary orality, for example, excludes the possibility of objective rhetoric because the data gathering and analysis required in objective rhetorics is not possible without some form of writing. Albert Bates Lord has examined the oral features common to Romantic poetry and concludes that the Romanticism of a poem by Yeats is very literate:

> This poetry must be seen as well as heard, so that one may go over it again and again to appreciate its subtleties. If Yeats' lines were *really* oral-traditional lines, and if you were in the traditional audience or its equivalent, you would not need to go back over them to savor them. The traditional diction would be familiar, known, understood, and appreciated on first hearing, because words and word-clusters or configurations like them had been heard before (18).

Lord goes on to explain that a chief interest of the Romantic poets was to innovate in their uses of images and combinations of words. "The technique here, indeed, is to seek a striking nontraditional image" (18) -- just the opposite of the oral culture's use of language. Ong makes a similar point:

> What both Wordsworth and Coleridge were objecting to was a poetic style which in fact manifested in high relief the formulary features of the old oral tradition.... Wordsworth's style ... is of course not close to the language of rustic or other "simple" folk at all. It is a highly sophisticated style, which results when language, originally oral of course, is first formalized over many

> generations ... and then carefully diversed of many of its typically oral features (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 282).

Though Lord and Ong specifically choose to analyze the pseudo-orality of Romantic poets, their conclusions fit equally well other genres of Romantic artistic expression. For example, Ong would remind us that the novel is itself a genre of the literate mind. Ong examines the connection between women writers and readers and the novel and concludes that the oratory taught in the boys' schools through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led males to appreciate purely literate forms later than females who had only their literate consciousness, unschooled in oratory, to guide their interests.

The epistemology of romanticism privileges the individual and assumes that irreconcilable differences will always result in the struggle between individuals who cannot understand each other's reality -- nor should they strive to do so as that would imperil their own unique vision. However, in an epistemology where some individuals' capacity is inherently greater than others', certain individuals are bound to rise by virtue of their "genius." In this way, romanticism is an epistemology which serves as a justification of capitalism in which natural ability, rather than birth, determines the heights an individual can reach. There is an elitism inherent in this notion: the cream rises. All people are equal, but some are more equal than others. The romantic epistemology is therefore not inclined to progressive revolution. It is at home with liberalism which promises diversification of opportunity to the worthy "underprivileged," but still offers protection to the

elite groups. It is at home in Plato's Republic. The myth of Thermidor is therefore more a romantic artifact than are the letters of Thermidor.

Just as Ong is careful to avoid being misunderstood as asserting exclusive or conclusive descriptions of oral and literate characteristics, I intend to avoid making claims on the capacities or intentions of the authors of the Thermidor letters. The fact is that the Revolution was a context in which oral devices were everywhere plentiful and very much in vogue. An explosion of print coincided with a fascination for ancient Rome. Ong claims that this is the result of boy's schools continuing to use the Latin oratorical education of the pre-print era. Thus generations of "literate" males (literate in their consciousness as well as functional ability due to print technology) were trained in oral forms of discourse. Therefore the romanticism of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was characterized by an overlap of spoken and written devices. The divide between conventions of spoken argument and that of written argument seems not to have been firmly established in the period of the Revolution. Ong argues in *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* that the burgeoning publishing industry gave rise not only to literate consciousness, but also to romanticism:

> Knowledge conservation and retrieval was immeasurably helped by writing, but even more by alphabetic print.... Looking up masses of material in print and even in the best of manuscripts are two different things. Until print had its effect, man still necessarily carried a heavy load of detail in his mind. Memory systems flourished until typography had its full effect -- until romanticism.... With knowledge fastened down in visually processed space, man acquired an intellectual security never known before. The enterprise of fixing knowledge in space reached a peak

> ... in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) of d'Alembert and Diderot, with its huge fold-out chart at the beginning which, in the best Ramist fashion, presented a schema of the entire 'field' of knowledge (a typographically favored concept) in a spatial lay-out (278).

For Ong, "the enterprise of fixing knowledge in space" was a causal precursor to an epistemology which privileges the mysterious and unknown, i.e., that which is knowable only through an internal apprehension. The abundance of stored knowledge was leading to the exploration and celebration of the unknown which would be a foundation of romantic thought:

> A typical manifestation of romanticism on which we have focused is interest in the remote, the mysterious, the inaccessible, the ineffable, the unknown. The romantic likes to remind us of how little we know. If we view romanticism in terms of the development of knowledge as we are beginning to understand this development, it is little wonder that as a major movement romanticism appeared so late.... Knowledge conservation and retrieval was immeasurably helped by writing, but even more by alphabetic print.... With all that was by now immediately accessible in print, the German proverb *Wenige Leute wissen wieviel man wissen muß um zu wissen wie wenig man weiß.* [Few people know how much one must know in order to know how little one knows.] ... The romantic age felt it knew enough to savor its unknowing. (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology,* 276-8)

However, because Ong's understanding of the relationship between romanticism and print technology is a causal one and his analysis of the relationship is a good deal less plausible than all the connections he traces leading up to it:

> Examining romanticism in terms of knowledge storage and retrieval problems, one can suggest some new and plausible reasons as to why the romantic movement arose when it did and not earlier or later. Romanticism appears as a result of man's noetic control over nature, a counterpart of technology,

> which matures in the same regions in the West as romanticism and at about the same time, and which likewise derives from control over nature made possible by writing and even more by print as a means of knowledge storage and retrieval (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 20).

Ong's explanation of Romanticism's origins in the printing press is too narrowly focused on technology's role in cultural change. No doubt Ong's argument has validity, but only as a contribution to an explanation for Romanticism's victory over the western popular imagination. It is important to remember that the revolution and romanticism came upon the scene at the same time that capitalism was rapidly entering its industrial phase. Industrial capitalism and industrial text-production are therefore simultaneous. How can we tease one away from the other? Industrial capital needed technological advances. Resources directed to such advances came from this need. That printed materials would allow the psychological security to laud "the unknown" is certainly a force in play, but this theory of causality does not answer why such was the case. Why laud the mystic as a response to the proliferation of printed facts? Simply because one could? Introducing the role of the rise of capitalism into Ong's argument would clarify the situation. Subjective epistemology was the response to the print boom because it served the interest of those making the print boom -- and those making the print boom were those making a profit from the print boom.

Certainly, printing was related to the rise of romanticism as Ong suggests:

> Romanticism emerges at the same time as modern technology and with a double and paradoxical relationship to the old oral world. On the one hand, romanticism appeared to favor the old primary oral world by rejecting the chirographically and typographically grounded rationalism that had slowly been destroying the oral world and by programing an academic or para-academic interest in popular literature, folk ballads, and ultimately folklore generally, where the old formulary patterns persisted. On the other hand, romanticism covertly relied on rationalism. It manifested its reliance in one way by a stylistic which writing culture and, even more, print culture had implemented (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 294).

The relationship is surely a real one, "a double and paradoxical relationship," but not a causal one. Romantic attraction to the unknown and mystical, to the transcendent beauty of nature, and to the isolation of the individual seems obviously related to the rise of cities, the isolation of the individual who lives among strangers:

> ...the alienation of the individual expressed by writers from Rousseau to Baudelaire was gradually reinforced by the real economic and social estrangement experienced by the majority of its inhabitants. For Benjamin Constant, writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire, urban estrangement was a consequence of the centralization of the state.... For Marx, writing some thirty years later, individual estrangement had become class alienation (Vidler, 4)

This reification of individualism also serves as a justification for capitalism. In turn, industrial capitalism had the capacity to further individuals' sense of the alienation (which served as experiential evidence of their individualism) in suddenly providing access to a great number of texts, but texts which, like today's copious offerings on

the internet, are indiscriminately jumbled together; the authentic with the spurious, the erudite with the amateur. The unguided or unfocused shopper of eighteenth-century printed texts was, like today's surfer of the internet, more likely to find him/herself directed away from the central debates of the day than to find a way to monitor or contribute to them. And the media of France at the time of the Revolution were at least as available to the general public as internet access is today:

> Historians such as Robert Darnton have produced a wealth of new information on the readers, the writers and the entrepreneurial publishers of the increasingly large numbers of books, newspapers and pamphlets sold in this period.... Others [e.g., R.A. Houston and R. Darnton] have focused on the spread of literacy, and the changing nature of the experience of reading.... Many writers have also pointed to the establishment, all over Europe, of new institutions and organizations where ideas could be explored and discussed. Some of these institutions, like Masonic lodges, learned academies and societies, were formal affairs, whose membership was carefully controlled. Others, such as public lectures, coffee houses, lending libraries, art exhibitions, operatic and theatrical performances, were nearly all commercial operations, open to all who could pay and ... together formed what Jürgen Habermas has described as the 'new public sphere' of the eighteenth century (Outram, 14-15).

In "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensibility," from *The Great Cat Massacre*, the above-mentioned Darton connects the emergence of Romanticism to the way the novel created a new relationship between reader and writer, assuming that romanticism has its origins in the literary innovations of printed texts rather than in their ubiquity. But the ubiquity of printed texts did produce a

greater sense of alienation from others with similar reading and life experiences and from the sources of the information read. This distance from the sources of information created by reading works by people far distant in space and/or time is addressed by Ong, but he does not entertain the possibility that it might be related to the romantic sense of isolation and fascination with the unknown. Habermas' "new public sphere" of the eighteenth century provides an answer to the *why* of Ong's theory about the relationship between the rise of Romanticism and print culture. Like Outram, Joan B. Landes employs Habermas to make this point:

> The great capital cities functioned as major nodes within a national and international system of exchange in which cash purchases of unfamiliar goods were possible for growing numbers of people. For the eighteenth-century urban dweller, the "public" came to mean an arena of strangers and acquaintances.... And the new cultural institutions arising in urban centers -- coffee houses, clubs, reading and language societies, lending libraries, concert halls, opera houses, theatres, publishing companies, lecture halls, museums, journals and newspapers -- were all distinctive products of a swelling verbal and written culture (39).

In fairness to Ong, he does make the point that he wishes to avoid reductionism:

> To say that a great many changes in the psyche and in culture connect with passage from orality to writing is not to make writing (and/or its sequel, print) the sole cause of all the changes. The connection is not a matter of reductionism but of relationism. The shift from orality to writing intimately relates with more psychic and social developments than we have yet noted. Developments in food production, in trade, in political organization, in religious institutions, in technological skills, in educational practices, in means of transportation, in family organization, and

> in other areas of human life all play their own distinctive roles. But most of these developments, and indeed very likely every one of them, have themselves been affected, often at great depth, by the shift from orality to literacy and beyond, as many of them have in turn affected this shift. (*Orality and Literacy*, 175)

This claim to "relationalism" rather than reductionism rings a bit hollow after the list of additional effects on the dawn of Romanticism. This list includes the usual areas affected by new technological advances (transportation and food production particularly) but fails to include the economic realities of developing capitalism. It is a list of areas of social organization affected by technological advances rather than a modification of his claim that the technological advance in question was the cause of these resulting changes. On this one point of causality Ong is unconvincing in his claim to be avoiding reductionism.

The oral features of the Thermidor letters could be superficially explained as the result of the eighteenth-century fascination with ancient oratorical style or simply the product of a marginally literate rural population. A deeper consideration would take into account that the letters arise from a period in which Romantic attraction to orality was the fashion. What to make of the influence of romanticism on the letters is a difficult question. Ong, whose theories of orality and literacy I find useful, would suggest that the oral features of romantic texts are, ironically, due to the dominance of literate consciousness in the culture. Not wishing to follow Ong's causal argument, I portray the oral

features of the Thermidor letters as a part of a complex web of cultural forces in play in the French countryside of 1794: romantic influences gaining dominance due to industrial growth, and the specific kind of rhetorical form used in the letters of congratulation, epideictic. This study is not an attempt to tease apart that web to divine the origins of the oral features found in the Thermidor letters. Instead, I am interested in how the oral feature, in their various aspects, effect the meanings in the texts.

Writing History as Myth-making

In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White analyzes positivist history writing which asks, "what are the 'historical' components of a 'realistic' art?" by reversing the question into, "what are the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' historiography?" (3) Making heavy use of Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke, and lighter use of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, White takes up the task to

> consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is -- that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them (2).

Here it is again important to consider the context in which a discourse develops. The discipline of History as such came into being in the nineteenth century and owes its genesis to the nearly overwhelming abundance of stored information which Ong describes as allowing for the birth of Romanticism. The printing of texts and keeping of archives provided both

Romanticism and History with what they needed to arise. This is true whether one takes Ong's route and attributes the rise of Romanticism to the sheer abundance of texts, or if one takes the materialist explanation of Romanticism's rise as a response to industrialization and urban growth. In either event, it is possible to say that Romanticism is a specifically literate movement. Not only is Romanticism dependent upon the development of literate consciousness and the industrialization which created it, it depends on a tacit understanding of literate discourse to make intelligible its ostensive opposition to those literate modes. Likewise, History participates in literate consciousness, but not as a nominally counter argument. Instead, History solidifies the features of literate consciousness so that they are not merely preferences but epistemological foundations:

> "History" was considered to be a specific mode of existence, "historical consciousness" a distinctive mode of thought, and "historical knowledge" an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.... (White, 1).

To return again to epistemology, what White is observing is that the field of History has always been as much founded on objective rhetoric/epistemology as the physical sciences. An assumption underlying objective rhetoric is that there is an absolute reality in the external world. It is the task of the scientist or historian to locate that truth, corroborate his/her data, and present it in clear and objectively descriptive language. This assumption brings about the use of "History" not only as a noun denoting a discipline, but also

as a noun indicating a single, objectively verifiable past: e.g., "History teaches us...." Alan M. Olson expresses the relationship between history as a scientist discipline and myth-making:

> To oppose myth to history, however, is not correct either, for there is myth in history just as there is history in myth....
>
> Myths as such imply morality or immorality, whereas history calls for objectivity. Myths take sides; history remains neutral. Myths display passion; history is opposed to anything resembling passion. Its only contact with passion is the readiness to record it as it does anything else. We speak of a sense of history, and we try to abide by the so-called laws of history.... So history has become an implacable force. Its truth is powerful, its power truthful. In other words, it has become personalized. History has created its own gods, its own myth (22-3).

The myth of Thermidor fits this description: it is a morality tale which argues that certain characters were in the wrong. Further, it offers us laws of history and asks us to remember them lest we repeat them: revolution leads to terror. Terror -- unlike war, the death penalty, or police actions which may kill hundreds of thousands -- is never justifiable. Revolution devours its children.

Chapter Four: Thermidor Letters from the *Région du Nord*

Epideictic Rhetoric

In arguing that the addresses of the sociétés populaires reveal a perspective on the Terror which is not the revulsion anti-Revolutionary historians have projected, but rather support for the Terror based on an understanding of it as the means of the sans-culottes keeping control of the revolutionary agenda, I come against a counter-argument that the discourse in which I am reading is nothing more than "mere rhetoric," the content of which is to be dismissed as untrustworthy since it is politically invested. This argument, bred of the Thermidorean myth, is amply present in studies which include consideration of the société populaire addresses in particular, and of the all persons or groups during the Terror in general. Interestingly, it is by presenting the addresses as "rhetoric" that Emmet Kennedy follows Furet's lead in dismissing them:

> Rhetoric at the beginning of the Revolution was used to obviate proof, to substitute for debate, to short-circuit parliamentary procedure. Listeners were gradually induced to consent to propositions, which, if plainly enunciated from the outset, would never have been approved. Rhetoric broke down resistance by making sudden departures from custom seem less radical....
>
> Between June 1793 and July 1794, parliamentary rhetoric and communication changed, as by now speakers and listeners were presumed to have identical knowledge and convictions. The role of rhetoric as persuasion, with consensus as its goal, was superseded by a discourse in which consensus was the premise and its celebration the end (302-3).

The understanding of "rhetoric" here is essentially the use of language to deceive. That is, "rhetoric" is lying. Rhetoric is what one engages in when obviating proof, avoiding for debate,

and short-circuiting parliamentary procedure. Rhetoric makes one thing "seem" like another. This is the apparent nature of rhetoric as a tool; it is opposed to some rhetoric-less discourse which would "plainly enunciate" truth. The use of rhetoric, the lying tool, leads directly to "a discourse in which consensus was the premise and its celebration the end." Such a nightmarish discourse is none other than epideictic rhetoric. Furet warned historians to beware of reading Jacobin texts at face value. They are, he assured, codes for ideas other than the ones being presented on the surface. Kennedy explains epideictic rhetoric in terms very similar to those used by Furet to invalidate Jacobin texts:

> Fear and distrust lurked beneath the assurances of epideictic speech of the triumph of wish over reality, certitude over doubt. The future of the Revolution after the expulsion of the Girondins on 1 June and the murder of Marat was open, and this openness produced anxiety. The Jacobins chose terror, with its suppression of civil liberties, to master this uncertain future and the fear it produced. Epideictic speech, including festival and theatre discourse, was effective in its redundancy. It allayed the worries of both speaker and audience (303).

Epideictic is therefore the rhetoric of terror, a particular species of rhetoric, the methodology of lying. Kennedy goes on to assert that the addresses written during the Terror, prior to Thermidor, one can discern the divergent interests of the warring parties within the nation. Without bothering to explain exactly how this statement is something other than a refutation of his assertion that the epideictic spawned by the Terror was homogeneous except that there was "fear and distrust," Kennedy asserts:

> But beneath this epideictic function of discourse in the Terror existed divergent interests -- of the sans-culottes, the indulgents, and the *engragés*. The addresses after Marat's assassination (13 July 1793) insisted on the need of terror to crush the (Federalist) conspiracy within. These sans-culottes demands were couched in such abstractions as "la dignité nationale outragée" (national dignity outraged). Under the veil of a unanimous "nous" and a confidential "vous" lay references to "conspirators who sit still in the national Convention." Hence the threat of more expulsions, prescriptions, and even executions of legislators (303).

Kennedy's claim that epideictic was a veil for threats and medium for sans-culottes demands is certainly true, but to argue that these constituted "a discourse in which consensus was the premise and its celebration the end" is obviously untrue. If the epideictic of the société populaire addresses is, as Kennedy insists on claiming, at best empty language and at worst lies, it cannot also be an effective mode of argument for the demands of the sans-culottes -- unless, perhaps, the demands of the sans-culottes themselves amount to empty words and lies. This is a possible understanding of Kennedy's contradiction of himself.

Kennedy's assumptions and conclusions are those of the Thermidorean-based political right. From such a vantage point, the sans-culottes demands are in fact, like epideictic itself, empty at best and deceits at worst. Kennedy offers as further evidence of the empty and deceitful qualities of sans-culottes epideictic by pointing out that the letters written in January and February never criticize the Mountain (the political left in the National Convention of which the Jacobins were considered members):

> None of these addresses [written upon the occasion of the fall of Toulon on 27-28 August 1793] includes a word of criticism, unlike the cahiers of 1789 and unlike the petitions before Jacobin supremacy. The Terror abridged the freedom of the sociétés populaires and the occasional brave individuals who dared to criticize (305-6).

This bourgeois assumption that only with the contention of class interests is "liberty" evident is an irrelevant comment when the rhetoric in question is epideictic since epideictic is, by definition, either praise or blame without arguments for future action or about the nature of past events. It also ignores the tradition from which the letters derive. That is, the epideictic of the société populaire letters exists within the context of French letter-writing traditions. The tradition of writing letters of congratulation to the Paris on events of national significance was well established in France before the Revolution. Naturally, the sociétés populaires took to writing letters of congratulation, even if congratulation strikes the twentieth-century, literate bourgeois mind as indicative of naivete or dishonesty.

Kennedy's claims also lose weight when the letters of Thermidor are taken into consideration. He uses only letters from early events in the Terror and neglects to examine the letters of "the end of the Terror," Thermidor. As has been argued throughout this study, the letters of Thermidor present those same encouragements toward violence and terror found in the letters of earlier months and years. If the Thermidorean myth were a valid account of the motives of the Thermidoreans and the attitudes of the public, the Thermidorean letters

should represent a rift in the thinking of the Terror. Instead, the Thermidorean letters are the continued demands of the sans-culottes for the hard line of Revolutionary sentiment and action. Very little has changed in the letters after Thermidor except that the Terror is sometimes nominally directly connected to conspiracy and deception.

Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard has used George A. Kennedy's understanding of epideictic to explain the kind of interpretation it is frequently given by "outsiders" such as Emmet Kennedy:

> [George A.] Kennedy has suggested that Aristotle's definition "needs to be broadened" to include "any discourse that does not aim at a specific action but is intended to influence the values and beliefs of the audience." This emphasis on influencing values and beliefs rather than decisions and actions has led epideictic's critics (usually "outsiders" peripheral to the community addressed) to regard what is often a very specialized discourse as "mere rhetoric".... But this image of epideictic that comes down to us through criticism of sophistic texts oversimplifies its motives and underestimates its significance. It does not, for instance, help us explain such rhetoric's legitimate role in institutional, social, political, cultural, or even personal *change*. Consequently, it is epideictic discourse that we so often hear referred to pejoratively in the popular press as simply "rhetoric," as if all rhetoric were equivalent to sophistry in its most negative sense (768).

Sheard suggests that epideictic is more intimate than deliberative or forensic in that it draws upon and either affirms or destabilizes the values and beliefs particular to a community. Therefore, an outsider is more than likely to find the discourse empty and/or deceptive since he cannot see the values and beliefs being affirmed or subverted.

Sheard uses Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric* to support her understanding of epideictic as real argument rather than mere display rhetoric. *The New Rhetoric* puts forth a revised definition of epideictic which disputes the classical understanding of epideictic as an ethos-heavy show piece for the orator, i.e. "mere rhetoric":

> Epideictic oratory has significance and importance for argument because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds. It is because the speaker's reputation is not the exclusive end of epideictic discourse, but at most a consequence, that a funeral eulogy can be pronounced without lack of decency, beside an open grave, or a lenten sermon can have a purpose other than the renown of the speaker (50).

This is a more limited definition than that put forward by Sheard. Where Sheard wants to argue for epideictic's capacity to speak for change, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca only advance epideictic from mere display to genuine argument -- but genuine argument for the status quo, not for change:

> The very concept of this kind of oratory -- which, in Tarde's phrase, is more reminiscent of a procession than of a struggle -- results in its being practiced by those who, in a society, defend the traditional and accepted values, those which are the object of education, not the new and revolutionary values which stir up controversy and polemics (51).

It is Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's understanding of the function of epideictic that best fits the function of the Thermidor letters. Rather than taking the traditional definition of epideictic and understanding the letters as an "outsider," the sociétés populaires' addresses are better defined as texts which have "significance and importance for

argument because [they] strengthen the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values [they] laud". Though the function of the letters can be examined from a number of perspectives, I have chosen to evaluate their arguments on four themes: terror, violence, virtue, and memory.

Violence

As is examined in chapter three of this study, the oral features of the Thermidor letters make them prone to the agonistic tone of oral discourse. One therefore finds violent language in the letters:

> Répresentans du peuple, poursuivez vos immortels travaux, achevez l'édifice de la félicité publique, en dépit des Tirans coalisés du dehors, et des factions de l'intérieur. S'ils osent s'agiter encore, la massue de peuple est entre vos mains, frappez! qu'ils soient anéantir! perissent toutes les tirannies. Vive la République une et indivisible! Vive la convention! (A.N. C325 1405 18)
>
> [People's Representatives, continue your immortal works, complete the structure of public happiness, to the chagrin of the tyrants allied in the exterior, and the factions of the interior. If they dare to rise again, the might of the people is in your hands. Strike! Annihilate whoever they may be! Destroy all tyrannies. Long live the Republic, one and indivisible! Long live the Convention!]

Unlike the use of "Terror" in the letters, violent language is nothing particular to the letters of Thermidor. Such was the general nature of Revolutionary discourse -- in part, because of its orality. It is, however, interesting to examine the objects of hostility which appear in the letters. For example, in the letter quoted above, all the bases are covered: enemies of the exterior as well as the interior, and all tyrannies in

general are to be attacked and destroyed. Other letters make use of slogans like the one which opens with: "*Guerre aux scélérats, paix aux hommes probes et vertueux, justice pour tous*" (A.N. C325 1406 23) ["War to villains, peace to honest and virtuous men, justice for all"]. *Scélérats* was a useful name to call both foreign and domestic enemies. However, it was a more common appellation for domestic traitors. The use of "*justice*" in this slogan reveals the extent to which "justice" could mean terror or violence since both *guerre* and *paix* fall under its range of expression.

The address from the commune of Blerancourt made use of the expression "l'ordre du jour":

> Enfin vous mettrez la vertu a l'ordre du jour; et vous ferrez executer les principes consacrés dans votre adresse au peuple français, que nous regardons comme la base du bonheur, et de la liberté public, qui vous sont confiées; nous jurons ... de vous faire un rampart de nos corps (A.N. C325 1412 22).
>
> [Finally you make virtue the order of the day; and you execute the principles consecrated in your address to the French people, which we regard as a foundation of happiness, and of public liberty which you have confided; we swear to make for you a rampart of our bodies.]

This is derived from the declaration that terror was the order of the day. It is therefore impossible to have an allusion to *l'ordre du jour* without simultaneously invoking the legalization of the Terror in 1793. In the quote above, the société populaire of Blerancourt reconfigures this popular expression so that virtue is in the place of terror. In doing so they follow the example of the National Convention itself who altered the expression in their report on Thermidor. Other

societies used the National Convention's exact version of the phrase and cited the address from the National Convention as the source:

> Nous en avons fait le serment, législateurs, la justice et la probité que vous avez mises à l'ordre du jour seront maintenues, ils n'y a pas un seul de nous qui ne soit décidé a defendre au péril de sa vie les éternelles verités qui sont developpées dans l'adresse que vous venez de faire au peuple français pour lui retracer ses droits et ses devoirs... (A.N. C325 1410 6).
>
> [We have taken the oath, Legislators, the justice and probity which you make the order of the day will be maintained, there is not one of us who would not defend with his life the eternal truths that you develop in the address that you have made to the French people in order to relate to them their rights and their duties....]

Where the Blerancourt address sought to qualify who was to be the victims of terror (i.e., those without virtue), the commune of Vernon (quoted above as A.N. C325 1410 6) defined how the severity of the law was to be applied (i.e., with justice and probity). Neither expression, however, changes the understanding of terror as the order of the day into something other than terror. The alterations only qualify what kind of terror was now the order of the day. In fact, like the Blerancourt letter, the Vernon address goes on to list those who need to feel the justice and probity of the law:

> La Convention nationale de son coté jura l'aéantissement de la tyrannie et toutes les factions .... Continuez, Legislateurs, les français ne souffirons pas que de nouveaux intriguants et de laches hipocrite.... Ils sauront frapper avec toute la sévérité de la justice ceux qui seraient encore tentés d'imiter leur scélérats qui ont payé de leurs têtes....

> [The National Convention, in its turn, swore the annihilation of tyranny.... Continue, Legislators, the French will not tolerate new intriguers and cowardly hypocrites.... They will know to strike with all the severity of justice those who would try again to imitate those villains who have paid with their heads....]

Virtue

The société populaire of Blerancourt's idea to substitute *"mettrez la terreur a l'ordre du jour"* with *"mettrez la vertu a l'ordre du jour"* is ironic in that Robespierre is the Revolutionary most frequently associated with the cult of virtue which he invoked incessantly in his Rousseauist speeches. References to virtue are found in many of the Thermidor letters:

> Enfin vous mettrez la vertu a l'ordre du jour; et vous ferrez executer les principes consacrés dans votre adresse au peuple français, que nous regardons comme la base du bonheur, et de la liberté public, qui vous sont confiées; nous jurons d'employer pour seconder vos travaux toute notre energie; et de vous faire un rampart de nos corps (A.N. C325 1412 22).
>
> [At last you make virtue the order of the day; and you put into operation the principles consecrated in your address to the French people, which you regard as the foundation of happiness, and of public liberty, all of which are confided in you; we swear to support your works with all our energy; and to make for you a rampart of our bodies.]

Virtue is one of the qualities for which some of the letters praise the National Convention. Virtue is what distinguishes the National Convention from the enemy:

> Courage fideles et laborieus represntans, les français sont debout et attentifs, mais c'est pour admirer votre constance et les vertus qui vous font détester nos ennemis (A.N. C325 1410 26).
>
> [Have courage, faithful and industrious

> Representatives, the French are standing and attentive, but it is to admire your constancy and the virtues which cause you to hate our enemies.]

The National Convention is not only a virtuous body, it is the inspiration of virtue in the French people:

> Peres de la patrie, ce sera par la stricte observance des loix, par la practique des vertus, par l'attachement aux principes sacrés qu'elle contiens que nous vous prouverons l'impression profonde qu'elle a fait sur nos coeurs (A.N. C325 1405 18).
>
> [Fathers of the Fatherland, we will prove to you the profound impression which your address has made on our hearts by the strict observation of the law, by the practice of virtue, by the attachment to the sacred principles contained in [your address].]

It is often asserted that the government leads the character of the people and is the source of their desire for virtue. This was the founding assumption of Robespierre's fête de l'être suprême which was celebrated less than three months prior to Thermidor:

> Il ne peut être de République si le caractère du peuple n'est vertueux. Il n'est point de vertu sans justice; Et la justice ne serait qu'un mot, si elle n'était réglée par les loix.
>
> Faisons respecter les loix que la justice soit inflexible, qu'elle soit sévére contre ceux qui les enfreignent. Qu'elle protège efficacement ceux qui les observent, et les hommes reviendront à la vertu. Les bons vivront dans la sécurité, les méchants seront comprimés si ils ne sont anéantis (A.N. C325 1408 8).
>
> [There cannot be a republic if the character of the people is not virtuous. There is no virtue without justice. And justice would be nothing but an empty word if it were not ruled by law.
>
> Have the law respected that justice may be flexible, that it will be severe against those who break it. That it may efficiently protect those who observe it, and men may return to virtue. The good will live in security, the evil will be constricted if they have not been annihilated.]

It is common to find virtue hailed as a specific characteristic of the French people -- as Robespierre himself was wont to do:

> Oui, Legislateurs, la justice et la probité seront les vertus qui animerons constament les français, et s'il est des abus echappés a votre vigilance, vous vous empresserez de les detruire....
>
> Continuez Legislateurs, de lancer la foudre sur ces tetes coupables. Perfectionez le que vous avez si heureusement commencé et que la sagesse qui preside a toutes nos deliberations, soit l'exemple de tous les peuples a fin que d'un pol (sic) a l'autre l'on ne reconnaisse plus que des hommes libres et verteux (A.N. C325 1410 22).
>
> [Yes, Legislators, justice and probity will be the virtues which constantly animate the French, and if some abuses escape your vigilance, hasten to destroy them....
>
> Continue, Legislators, to hurl lightening bolts upon the guilty heads. Perfect this which you have so happily begun and that the wisdom which presides over all your deliberations may be the example to all peoples until, from one pole to the other, only free and virtuous men can be found.]

Note that the last two addresses quoted above make a direct connection between virtue and terror: that terror is for the protection of the virtuous. The address immediately above goes yet another step further: terror is for the eradication of those who would work against liberty and virtue, so that the earth may be reserved for the free and the virtuous alone. This is not a rupture in the discourse of terror which characterized 1793 and 1794. The Revolution ended with Robespierre's death because the course of the Revolution went from one which sought to control the propertied classes and put political power in the hands of the citizens to one which sought the reverse. However, contrary to histories with Thermidorean foundations,

executions continued just as before Thermidor, and the language of the Revolution altered only in respect to "terror." As is discussed in chapter two, contentions that there was not only a rupture in the Terror after Thermidor, but that it ended are obviously based on the association of terrorism with the political left which developed through the nineteenth century and continues to this day.

The loyalty to the National Convention found in the addresses is expressed in terms which conflate virtues and political opinions:

> Nous poursuivons sans relâche les aristocrates, les Royalistes, les Fédéralistes, dès qu'ils levent une tête audacieuse; les modérés dangereux, les intrigants, les ambitieux, les egoïstes, les insouciants, en un mot, les gens sans moeurs, tous fléaux destructeurs du gouvernement démocratique. Par conséquent, législateurs, la convention nationale est et sera toujours notre seul point de ralliement. Tout ce qui n'est pas elle, nous est étranger et suspect. Tout ce qui est contr'elle, est notre ennemi déclaré (A.N. C325 1411 37).
>
> [We relentlessly pursue aristocrats, royalists, federalists, wherever they may raise an audacious head; dangerous moderates, intriguers, the ambitious, egoists, the indifferent, in a word, the people without morals, all destructive blights on democratic government. Consequently, Legislators, the National Convention is and will always be our only rallying point. All opposed the National Convention are our declared enemies.]

There are many sorts of enemies: those with vested interests in seeing the republic fail (aristocrats), those with political agendas contrary to those of the national government (royalists and federalists); as well as those whose character faults make them anti-democratic (those who are moderate, egotistical,

indifferent, and ambitious). But all of them are conflated into a single category: the immoral. The Revolutionary insistence on "virtue" cannot therefore be simply understood as shades of Rousseau. Certainly, the philosophizing about virtue and nature in the eighteenth century are the origins of the preference for the word. But, more significantly, "virtue" was a way of naming the correct political orientation. It was not a way of naming any particular orientation -- both the progressive and the reactionary arguments of the day called the supports for their arguments "virtue." It is useful to observe the use of "virtue" and "democracy" as terms for terror. Our contemporary, western, capitalist understanding of terror is that it is antithetical to virtue and democracy. During the French Revolution, however, there was a popular understanding of terror as an instrument of the virtuous for the promotion of democracy. When the Thermidoreans coopted the word for the political right and center, they achieved a rhetorical coup which has held power ever since.

The letters frequently contain lists of enemies which include "*les modérés*." Adhesion to the National Convention based on hatred of moderates sounds strange as a response to Thermidor since the Thermidoreans were largely the very sorts of political leaders of the period whom one would call *les modérés*. The distinction being made in this letter, despite the odd designation of moderatism as a characteristic of those who were executed on the tenth of Thermidor, is the distinction between the National Convention and the committees of the government. The committees were the central authority during

the Terror, and their abolition was the first task of the Thermidoreans. This, again, is an example of what has been dismissed by historians as the empty rhetoric of the sociétés populaires' letters. Yet it is not empty. The flattery in the letters performs many real communicative tasks. In this case, to relate the société's acceptance of a new government in which the central committees' authority is shifted to the National Convention. This is an important point for the sociétés to communicate in the fast-paced political climate of 1794. One therefore finds a number of assertions that the National Convention is the only legitimate Revolutionary government, for example:

> Nous jurons de nouveau un attachement inviolalbe à la Convention Nationale. Nous jurons qu'elle seule sera notre unique boussole, quelque faction qui puisse agiter la République (A.N. C325 1404 18).
>
> [We swear anew an inviolable attachment to the National Convention. We swear that it alone is and will be our only compass, regardless of what faction may agitate the Republic.]

But because the pre-Thermidor language continues to be used, the enemy is still *les modérés* even when this language is no longer descriptive of the politics of the government's enemies. However, the use of such language cannot be seen to be empty. *Les modérés* were still the enemies of the sociétés populaires. that they would still list them as such indicates the extent to which the sociétés populaires were unaware of the depth of political change which had occurred with Thermidor.

The société populaire of Lepellier les Bois wrote of the virtue of the French in a way more appropriately denouncing

Robespierre whose name is commonly misspelled "Robertspierre" so as to make allusion to Robert Damiens, the man who had, a generation earlier, tried to assassinate Louis XV well-known convicted murderer of the period:

> Robertspierre (sic) et ses suppôts ne pouvaient soutenir leur tyrannie qu'en rendant le peuple complice de leurs forfaits; mais le caractère français n'est point féroce: les seuls esclaves qui ne savent qu'obeir aux depotes qui les enchainent peuvent être froidement sanguinaires.
> L'autorité arbitraire imprime la terreur.
> L'autorité légale inspire la confiance. (A.N. C325 1411 27).
>
> [Robertspierre (sic) and his subversives could not support their tyranny except by making the people accessories to their crimes; but the character of the French is not fierce: slaves who only know how to obey depots who enchain them and who can be coldly bloody.
> The arbitrary authority imprinted the terror.
> The legal authority inspires confidence.]

Here again the legitimacy of the government wielding terror, not the presence or absence of bloodshed, is the single differentiation between past and present terror. The argument that *"le caractère français n'est point féroce"* is, once again, the old justification for the Terror as a temporary measure to ensure that liberty survived the civil and foreign wars. Now, in the Thermidor letters, it is useful as a denunciation of the advocates of the Terror who first employed it. Character is also a consideration in the justification of the use of terror by the National Convention. If only the virtuous may legitimately use terror, then *"La convention nationale doit être pûr comme l'aurore d'un beau jour"* (A.N. C325 1411 37). [The National Convention ought to be pure like the dawn of a

beautiful day.] This is, again, the language of purity and virtue used by Robespierre in his speeches outlining the nature of a true Republic and true republicans.

Memory

This study has already examined how common-places such as *"Conduisez le vaisseau de la République sagement au port"* ["Conduct the vessel of the Republic wisely to port"], and *"la justice et la probité que vous avez mises à l'ordre du jour"* [justice and probity which you have made the order of the day"] are aggregative. They are therefore unappealing to literate minds which regard analytic texts as rational, and aggregative texts as superficial or naïve. Yet these phrases serve as a kind of shorthand to express adherence to the cause of the National Convention. For example, in the two common-places above, the first communicates an understanding of the Revolution as not yet complete. The second is an instance of the reworking of "terror" in Revolutionary discourse.

Another example of seemingly empty language which is, in fact significant is found in the Commune of Blerancourt's use of the expressions *"mémorables journées"* ["memorable days"] is a way of putting the ninth and tenth of Thermidor in the same category as other important events of the Revolution -- rather than as an event which ended or changed the Revolution. The *grandes journées* of the Revolution could hardly be referred to at all in the discourse of the period without being prefaced by *"les mémorables journées."* This is a hold-over expression from the old regime under which it was used for the celebrated events of the monarchy. as it did then, the expression was used

in the Revolution as an indicator that a given event belonged in the pantheon of Revolutionary events. The use of the phrase demonstrates that the writers of the letters were conceiving of Thermidor as one event in the course of the Revolution rather than a rupture in the revolution, as the expression *"la Révolution du neuf Thermidor"* (which is less frequently found in the letters) indicates.

Ong describes the function of aggregative features in oral discourse as a unifying one. That is, the stock phrase, once created, reifies the notion it articulates so that the correlation between the noun and the adjective is made permanent. The great days of the Revolution are memorable. This cannot be questioned. Which days are the ones that belong in this canon is up for discussion, but not the status of the days as memorable days. The commune of Ouneau (Eure et Loire) begins its letter with an invocation of the memorable days of the Revolution: *"Législateurs, Déjà la société populaire d'Ouneau avait applaudie à la nuit mémorable du 9 au 10 Thermidor, qui sauva la représentation nationale et la liberté"* (A.N. C325 1406 10). ["Legislators, the société populaire of Ouneau has again applauded the memorable night of the ninth and tenth of Thermidor which saved the national representation and liberty."] It is strange to write that something is *already* memorable. An event so recent that to applaud it at the present time is to *already* applaud it is hardly in need of being remembered. It would seem more appropriate to assert that it is a great day, or a glorious day. But, in this context, the insistence that the day is memorable is not merely an assertion

that it is a day hard to forget. Rather, it is an indication of the orality of Revolutionary discourse. And in this expression is the the articulation of the second function of aggregative features of orality: memorization. The great events of the Revolution must be remembered, and in order to remember them, we will not only assert that they are doubtlessly memorable, we will repeat the appellation "*les memorables journées*" so that we cannot help but to remember which days are the memorable ones, and, if possible, why they are to be remembered:

> La société populaire fraternelle et Républicaine de la commune de Heugueville canton et district d'Audely departement de l'Eure, vous adresse ses sentiments de reconnaissance pour l'energie vraiment republicaine, que vous avez deplaycé depuis le 9 thermidor, Epoque à jamais mémorable où vous avez aneanti le tiran & son regne affreux; continuez citoyens representants a rester ferms au poste au la confiance du peuple vous à places & ou il saura vous soutenir contre les attaques sans cesse renaissantes des ennemis de la patrie.... (A.N. C325 1404 8).
>
> [The fraternal and republican société populaire of the commune of Heugueville, canton and district of Audely, departement of the Eure, addresses to you its sentiments of gratitude for the truly republican energy which you have stirred since the ninth of Thermidor, epoque forever memorable, when you annihilated the tyrant and his hideous reign. Continue, citizen representatives, to stay firm at your post where the confidence of the people has placed you and where they will know to support you against the relentless attacks of the Fatherland's enemies.]

What is ironic about the "memorable days" of the Revolution is that they underwent changes as the political structure of the Revolutionary government changed. Considering the short space of time during which the Revolution can be said

to have existed, it is striking how rapidly events were labeled memorable, and then quickly forgotten when remembering them no longer served a current political purpose. For example, The letters congratulating the National Convention on the ninth and tenth of Thermidor are stored in some of the same cartons in the National Archives as the letters sent from those same sociétés populaires to Paris congratulating the National Convention on Robespierre's memorable day of the *fête de l'Être suprême* [festival of the Supreme Being]. The *fête de l'Être suprême* was initiated as an annual holiday when it was first staged less than three months before Thermidor, but it was never again celebrated. In fact, the Directory quickly replaced Robespierre's calendar of Revolutionary holidays with a new one. Of all the *fêtes* celebrated on this new calendar, only one (other than that of the declaration of the French Republic, held on the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration which was the first day of the Revolution's calendar) has a political memory associated with its name and date: the *fête de la liberté* to be celebrated on the ninth and tenth of Thermidor. The other five *fêtes* have no political memory associated with them at all: *la fête de la jeunesse* [festival of youth] (10 germinal), *des époux* [of spouses] (10 floréal), *de la reconnaissance* [of gratitude] (10 prairial), *de l'agriculture* [of agriculture] (10 messidor), and *des vieillards* [of the elderly] (10 fructidor). Ong cites work by Jack Goody, Ian Watt, David Henige, Laura Bohannan, Emrys Peters, and Godfrey and Monica Wilson in the homeostatic nature of memory devices in oral cultures. Though France in the time of the Revolution

was not a primary oral culture, it was residually oral, and had an ability to take up and drop items from the list of memorables just as primary oral cultures do. Ong uses an example from Goody and Watt's anthropological research:

> Written records made by the British at the turn of the twentieth century show that Gonja oral tradition then presented Ndewura Jakpa, the founder of the state of Gonja, as having had seven sons, each of whom was ruler of one of the seven territorial divisions of the state. By the time sixty years later when the myths of state were again recorded, two of the seven divisions had disappeared, one by assimilation to another division and the other by reason of a boundary shift. In these later myths, Ndewura Jakpa had five sons, and no mention was made of the two extinct divisions. The Gonja were still in contact with their past, tenacious about this contact in their myths, but the part of the past with no immediately discernible relevance to the present had simply fallen away. The present imposed its own economy on past remembrances (*Orality and Literacy*, 48).

Ong points out that memorability is also related to the tendency toward hyperbole found in cultures with a great deal of oral residue:

> The heroic tradition of primary oral culture and of early literate culture, with its massive oral residue, relates to the agonistic lifestyle, but it is best and most radically explained in terms of the needs of oral noetic processes. Oral memory works effectively with "heavy" characters, persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable, and commonly public. Thus the noetic economy of its nature generates outsize figures, that is, heroic figures, not for Romantic reasons reflectively didactic reasons but for much more basic reasons: to organize experience in some sort of permanently memorable form (*Orality and Literacy*, 70-1).

In rendering figures more heroic, the French Revolution frequently made them Roman. The address from Blerancourt makes

an explicit connection between the Roman analogy and the memorability of Thermidor. It is almost as if to say that the more the Revolutions events resembled the events of the Roman Republic, the more they also carried the historical important and memorability of Rome:

> Ainsi Rome fut eblouie par les exploits brillants des Marius, des Sylla, des Pompees, et des Cesars; le resultat fut le pouvoir sans bornes de quelques particuliers, et l'aneantissement de la liberté publique; sans votre energie aux mémorables journées des neuf et dix thermidor... (A.N. C325 1412 22).
>
> [Just as Rome was dazzled by the brilliant exploits of Marius, Sylla, Pompei, and Ceasar; the result being the unlimited power of a few individuals, and the anihilation of public liberty; without your energy on the memorable days of the nineth and tenth Thermidor....]

The sociétés populaires also make the *journées* memorable by, as Ong described, making the characters larger than life. The outsized evil of Robespierre is compared to the inflated goodness of the Convention:

> Liberté Egalité et Justice
> MORT AUX TYRANS.
> La société populaire de lepellier les Bois en la ditte commune penetrée des principes de justice et d'humanité que caractorisent l'aume vraiment Republicaine voue a l'execration publique les buveurs de sang, et les terrioristes villes satellites du tyran Robespierre; elle felicite la convention et le comité de surté géneralle de son activité a poursuivre tous ceux qu'ils réconnaissent vouloir propager le sisteme sanguinaire de cet infâme catilina, elle jure en outre de ni connaitre pour centre unique et pour point de raliment que la convention nationalle et elle se declare l'ennemi de qui voudrait revaliser avec elle (A.N. C325 1411 27).
>
> [Liberty Equality Justice
> DEATH TO TYRANTS
> The société populaire of Lepellier de Bois in the

> Ditte commune, penetrated by the principles of justice and humanity which characterize the truly republican spirit, dedicated to the public execration of the drinkers of blood, and of the vile terrorist satellites of the tyrant Robespierre; the société congratulates the Convention and the Committee of General Security on their activity in pursuit of all those who they know to want to spread the bloody system of this despicable Catilina, in addition, the société swears never to recognize as its only center and as rallying point anyone other than the National Convention and declares itself the enemy of anyone who would challenge the National Convention.]

And the mythic quality of the evil against which the letters speak is enhanced occasionally by the allusion to vampirism, as in the letter above's *"les buveurs de sang."* Other addresses from the Région du Nord also make reference to vampirism:

> L'homme immoral pour qui le désordre est un element; l'ambitieux qui ne cherche les places que pour dominer; le factieux pour qui le crime est un besoin, et qui demande du sang pour cacher dans la confusion ses turpitudes et ses vices, tous ces vampires politiques seront les ennemis que nous saurons démasquer (A.N. C325 1406 23).
>
> [The immoral man for whom disorder is an element; the ambitious who only look for a position in order to dominate; the factious for whom crime is a need, and who ask for blood in order to hide in the confusion their depravities and vices, all those political vampires whom we will unmask.]

Another letter makes the allusion more subtly: *"Vous avez decreté que ces monstres alterés de sang humain, seroint* (sic) *partout poursuivir, et livrés au glaive de la loi"* (A.N. C325 1410 22) ["You have decreed that these monsters thirsty for human blood be pursued everywhere, and be delivered to the sword of justice."] The use of such characterization could be construed as evidence for the irrational, virtually hysterical

stereotype of what Carlyle and Dickens would portray as "the mob" of the French Revolution. Yet even so bizarre a characterization as Robespierre as the blood-drinking vampire is explicable as a thoroughly rational device of a culture with heavy oral residue trying to preserve memories:

> Colorless personalities cannot survive oral mnemonics. To assure weight and oral memorability, heroic figures tend to be type figure.... The same mnemonic or noetic economy enforces itself still where oral settings persist in literate cultures, as in the telling of fairy stories to children: the overpoweringly innocent Little Red Riding Hood, the unfathomably wicked wolf, the incredibly tall beanstalk that Jack has to climb -- for non-human figures acquire heroic dimensions, too. Bizarre figures here add another mnemonic aid: it is easier to remember the Cyclops than a two-eyed monster, or Cerberus than an ordinary one-headed dog (*Literacy and Orality*, 70).

Some societies even assert the inadequacy of words to describe the monumental qualities of the memorable historic moment: *"Nous l'avons lue, et nous n'essayerons pas de vous rendre les sentiments délicieux qu'elle nous a fait éprouver; nos expressions seraient trop au dessous de la verité"* (A.N. C325 1405 18). ["We have read, and we will not attempt to express to you the exquisite sentiments which your address moved in us; our words could not express the depth of our feeling."]

Terror

If a reader of the Thermidor letters were to take as accurate the explanation of Thermidor's significance found in those history narratives based upon the Thermidorean myth, he/she would be astonished to find passages such as these:

> Vous avez anéanti des factions et des factieux de tous les genres.... la France entiere n'a qu'à se louer de ses representans, et la France entiere a tout lieu

d'espérer que jamais ils ne se deshonoront par un pas retrograde.

Tous les dangers ne sont pas passés, tous les scélérats ne sont pas exterminés, et semblables au serpents ils sont plus à craindre à mesure qu'ils sont plus cachés. Toutes les factions ne sont pas anéantier... (A.N. C325 1403 16).

[You have annihilated the factions and the factious of all kinds. All the French have only to congratulate their representatives, and all of France can hope never to be dishonored by a step backward.

All dangers are not passed, all the villains are not exterminated, and, like snakes, they are more to be feared the more they are hidden. All factions are not annihilated....]

Ne souffrez pas citoyens representants, que de vils intriguants osent vous dicter des loix, combien nous applaudissons à cette phrase prononce à la tribune au nom du comité de Salut Public, il est tems que la Convention Nationale faisisse (sic) de son bras terrible touttes (sic) les factions et les frappe l'une contre l'autre pour les reduire en poudre, et qu'elle annonce qu'elle seul veut rester dépositaire du droit du peuple (A.N. C325 1403 5).

[Do not tolerate, Citizen Representatives, vile intriguers dictating the law to you, how we applaud this statement pronounced at the rostrum in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, it is time that the National Convention grind the factions against each other until they are reduced to powder, and to announce that it wishes to remain the only depository of the people's rights.]

Nous avons juré, (et nous tenons à ce serment) nous avons juré une guerre implacable aux tyrans quels qu'ils soyent, de quelques masques qu'ils se couvrent au dedans et au dehors. Nous poursuivons sans relâche les aristocrates, les Royalistes, les Fédéralistes, dès qu'ils lèvent une tête audacieuse; les modérés dangereux, les intrigants, les ambitieux, les egoïstes, les insouciants, en un mot, les gens sans moeurs, tous fléaux destructeurs du gouvernement démocratique (A.N. C325 1411 37).

[We have sworn, (and we keep this oath) we have sworn to fight an implacable war against tyrants, whoever

> they may be, whatever the masks they cover themselves with, from without and from within. we pursue relentlessly aristocrats, royalists, federalists, as soon as they raise their audacious heads; dangerous moderates, intriguers, the ambitious, egoists, the indifferent, in a word, people without morals, all destructive scourges on a democratic government.]

These arguments which urge the pursuit of traitors variously identified as *"les modérés dangereux, les intrigants, les ambitieux, les egoïstes, les insouciants, ...les gens sans moeurs, tous fléaux destructeurs du gouvernement démocratique"* (A.N. C325 1411 37); *"ennemis de la lumière ... les ennemis du genre humain!!"* (A.N. C325 1405 28) ["enemies of the light ... the enemies of the human race!"], *"ces orateurs perfides, qui s'elevent sans cesse contre les droits du peuple"* (A.N. C325 1404 22) ["these treacherous orators who incessantly put themselves above the rights of the people"] ; *"ces tîgres farouches"* (A.N. C325 1404 17) ["these feroches tigers"]; or as *"ces hommes de sang, ces ambitieux, ces intriguans, ces oppresseurs du peuple qui ont deshonoré le sol de la République"* (A.N. C325 1412 10) ["these men of blood, these ambitious ones, these intriguers, these oppressors of the people who have dishonored the soil of the Republic"] are at odds with the assertion that the tenth of Thermidor marked the end of "the Terror" by popular disgust for the shedding of blood. On the contrary, the letters are rife with urgings for the bloodshed. Beneath this contradiction is the shifting of the meaning of certain Revolutionary terms. The dreaded factions against which the Revolution had railed since 1793 were now understood as the Terrorists. In very few months, they

would be understood to be the Jacobins. In fact, all the long used invectives of the Revolution would come to mean "Jacobin" and "Terrorist." Thus, in a sense, the oral qualities of Revolutionary discourse assisted the Thermidoreans in their reversal of the Revolution. The conservative nature of oral discourse kept the language fixed while the connotations changed. The agonistic tone of the discourse was also preserved so that the violent enthusiasm for terror converted quickly to violent enthusiasm for revenge. No reevaluation of the Revolution was indicated because the Revolution still sounded like the Revolution. However, the language of the Terror was now available for a White Terror. The only change necessary was that the Terror (which is not to say terror) was now replaced as *l'ordre du jour*. Instead, *l'ordre du jour* was to be justice. Of course the difference between visiting "justice" upon an enemy and using terror is a matter of perspective. What would be justice to those dropping the guillotine blade would be terror to those upon whom it is dropped.

And so, the letters contain a number of denunciations of terror and "the Terror." Sometimes the denunciation is based on an assertion that the victims of terror have been the friends or brothers of the authors:

> Eh! qui mieux que nous, Citoyens rèprésentans, pourrait vous rendre compte des epreuves du sistheme pratique des terroristes? Nous qui avons vu l'echafaud erigé en divinité, le sang de nos freres versés à grands flots.... (A.N. C325 1404 22)
>
> [Oh! Who more than we, Citizen Representatives, could call to account the ordeals of the operation of the terrorists' system? we who have seen the scaffold elevated to a divinity, the blood of our brothers

courses in great floods....]

Other denunciations of terror argue a sentimental desire for a kinder, gentler France:

> Sans doute les bases d'un gouvernement Republicain sont le fermeté, la justice et l'humanité; et non le barbare sistême de terreur qui opprimait une nation genéreuse et bienfaisante; la rendait l'opprobre du genre humain....
>
> O, notre chere Patrie! qu'allait tu devenir? Une terre de sauvages et d'hommes farouches. Non, non! Nous voulons ton bonheur.... (A.N. C325 1412 23)
>
> [Without doubt, the foundation of a republican government is firmness, justice and humanity; and not the barbarous system of terror which oppressed a generous and kind nation; it was a disgrace to the human race....
>
> Oh, our dear fatherland! What will become of you? A land of savages and ferocious men. No, no! We want your happiness....]

Though to avoid being *farouche* is not to confused with being soft: *"Maintenez le gouvernement révolutionnaire, qui doit être le regne d'une Justice sevêre, et non celuy de terreur et de sang, comme le dèsirent les tîgres farouches"* (A.N. C325 1404 17). ["Maintain the revolutionary government which must be the reign of a severe justice, and not that of terror and of blood as is desired by the ferocious tigers."] The urging to punish factions *"avec toute la sévérité de la justice"* and *"l'aéantissement"* of tyranny are in keeping with the more radical Jacobin program which identified itself with, if not as, the sans-culottes.

However, in areas where the population were less interested in the radical agenda set by the new proposed constitution of 1793, terror was suspect as it had been used in

the provinces in a way unlike in the capital. With the streamlined system of arrest, trial, and execution available through the judicial practices of the Terror, regional officials had an easy time settling out grudges and rivalries as well as amassing fortunes. One finds such sentiments in letters like the one from la société populaire de la commune de Blerancourt (which is, coincidentally, St. Just's hometown) written to the National Convention on the twenty-sixth of Vendemiaire:

> Après avoir abbatu les monstres qui versaient comme l'eau le sang de ceux dont ils jalousaient les talents ou les possessions vous epuiserai au flambeau de la justice ces fortunes rapids et tenebreuses fruit du crime et de l'intrigue.... (A.N. C325 1412 22)
>
> [After having beaten the monsters who pour out like water the blood of those of whose talents or possessions they were envious, you will exhaust at the torch of justice these quick fortunes and dark fruit of crime and intrigue....]

It was these excesses of violence and personal appropriation of arrested citizens' goods that led to the vehemence of the "White Terror" in the provinces. Such injustices were held against the Jacobins and contributed to the support for closing all the sociétés populaires even among the sans-culottes who would have benefited most directly from the radical Jacobin structures and the constitution of 1793 which they supported. The assertion that certain *"monstres" "versaient comme l'eau le sang de ceux dont ils jalousaient les talents"* is clearly directed at local concerns of the moment rather than at the national question of the executions of Robespierre, St. Just, and the rest. The Thermidorean myth never included the

accusation that Robespierre or the others who were executed on the tenth of Thermidor were blood-thirsty out of envy for the abilities or possessions of those who were executed during the Terror. The motives Billaud and Collot attributed to *"ce monstre"* was that *"Robespierre-roi"* and his friends intended to divide France up among themselves (Brunel, 118). Other than a desire for absolute power, the Thermidoreans accused him of outlandish sexual behavior and cannibalism -- but not *envy* of others or the amassing of personal wealth as such. Yet the commune of Blerancourt is concerned with monsters who act out of envy for the abilities and possessions of others.

This is almost certainly an allusion to local events since the letters are otherwise enormously consistent in their charges against the executed Jacobin leaders. These unique accusations are, in fact, some of the very few original lines in the Blerancourt address which is otherwise replete with the stock phrases of the moment: *"faire un rampart de nos corps," "la base du bonheur"* ["the foundation of happiness"], *"ferrez executer les principes consacrés dans votre adresse au peuple française"* ["have put into action the principles consacrated in your address to the French people"], *"mettrez la vertu a l'ordre du jour," "memorables journées des neuf et dix Thermidor"* ["the memorable days of the nineth and tenth of Thermidor"], *"votre energie"* ["your energy"], *"le code de morale et de vertue"* ["the code of morality and virtue"], and comparisons of France's tribulations with those of ancient Rome. As Françoise Brunel points out, this consistency is attributable to the letter from Dijon which was sent to the

National Convention immediately after Thermidor and which was printed and read at the sociétés populaires. It clearly served as a model in both content and form for the letters which came after it in the second wave written during Vendemiaire and Brumaire. But even the stock phrases derived from the Dijon letter are not the invention of that société populaire which wrote it. Like the phrases listed above, they were a part of the standard repertoire of Revolutionary orators. In impersonating their role models in Paris, the provincial société populaire orators perpetuated a series of slogans which function in the letters as they did in extemporaneous or scripted oratory, as common-places of Revolutionary discourse.

That the Blerancourt letter contains unusual reference to avarice and envy as motives for those who were executed on the tenth of Thermidor is evidence of another oral feature. The participatory nature of oral discourse contrasts with the distanced and decontextualized communication encouraged with literacy. The local issues of the Terror became a part of their address to the national government on the Terror as a whole because the oral qualities of the sociétés populaires' proceedings made the reference to the particular people and place of the construction of the text seem a natural inclusion. A more literate approach would have been to stick with the universal Terror and avoid conflating it with the local Terror.

Interestingly, even the commune of Blerancourt's seemingly anti-terror letter contains support for further purging of France's interior (in itself a definition of domestic terror):

> Vous allez retabler dans toute la République comme vous avez retablé dans votre sein la liberté des opinions, qui ne peut faire trembler que les mechants, et les despotes; c'est elle qui a brisée nos fers; c'est elle qui peut maintenir son courage.
>
> [You will restore in all of the Republic, as you have restored in our breast, liberty of opinions, which causes only the evil to tremble, and despots; it is that liberty which has broken our chains; it is that liberty which can sustain its courage.]

The phrase "*ne peut faire trembler que les mechants*" appears in many of the letters from all parts of the country. It was an expression of the time of the Terror which conveyed the revolutionary government's stated purpose in using terror: that only the guilty need fear it. That it is still used to praise and encourage the National Convention is an indication of the extent to which the sociétés populaires understood Thermidor to be just another purge of the national leadership rather than a complete reversal of direction. It is not surprising that confusion of this kind would be found in the letters which were written before the less politically aware of the provinces could have observed that the Revolution was over. What is less expected is that the very letters which assert a distaste for "the Terror" also encourage terror. In the case of the Blerancourt letter, the distinction between good terror and bad terror is made explicitly:

> Le code morale et de vertue, que vous avez consigné aux votre adresse au peuple française, nous apprend combien un gouvernement legitime differe du pouvoire tirannique et liberticide; tandis que celui-ci appelle a son secours la violence et la terreur seuls appris d'une authorité usurpée: l'autre s'environne de la constance des administrees, parce qu'il ne veut que leur bonheur.

> [The code of morality and virtue that you have recorded in your address to the French people, we learn how a legitimate government differs from tyranical power and *liberticide* [the assassination of liberty, as it were]; while the one calls to its rescue only violence and terror from a usurped authority, the other surrounds itself with the constancy of its constitutents because it only wants their happiness.]

Here the distinction between Robespierre's terror and that of the revolutionary government in general is motive. It is the *"authorité usurpée"* which renders *"la violence et la terreur"* something other than action which works in favor of the happiness of the people. *"Pouvoire tirannique et liberticide"* is opposed to *"un gouvernement legitime,"* not to a government which uses terror. The Commune of Blerancourt understands terror to be the tool only of legitimate government which would use it to promote the happiness of good citizens. Therefore, to make virtue *"l'ordre du jour"* is to reaffirm the condition under which terror had always been understood to be a proper tool of the revolutionary government:

> Ainsi Rome fut éblouie par les exploits brillants des Marius, des Sylla, des Pompees, et des Cesars; le resultat fut le pouvoir sans bornes de quelques particuliers, et l'aneantissement de la liberté publique; sans votre energie aux memorables journées des neuf et dix Thermidor, notre Republique naissante malgré ses triomphes en dehors allait eprouver toutes les horreurs de Rome viellie.
>
> [Just as Rome was dazzled by the brilliant exploits of Marius, Sylla, Pompeii, and Caesar; the result was power without limit for a few individuals, and the annihilation of public liberty; without your energy during the memorable days of the ninth and tenth Thermidor, our new Republic, in spite of its triumphs outside, would have had all the horrors of ancient Rome.]

Because of the conflict between an understanding of terror as the sans-culottes' best weapon against anti-revoluionaries and the National Convention's public opinion campaign against "the Terror" which played on festering personal grudges, the letters sometimes make seemingly contradictory calls for an end to "the Terror" without letting go of the methods and attitudes of terror:

> Maintenez le gouvernement revolutionaire, qui doit etre le regne d'une justice sevêre, et non celuy de terreur et de sang, comme le dèsirent ces tîgres farouches (A.N. C325 1404 17).
>
> [Maintain the revolutionary government which must be the reign of a severe justice and not that of terror and blood as the ferochous tigers desire.]

The sociétě populaire of the commune of Nogent (Eure et Loire) makes an effort to sort out this contradiction:

> La terreur et la mort ne doivent être à l'ordre du jour que dans les bataillons d'esclaves fugitifs devant nos armées victorieuses, et dans l'interieur contre les conspirateurs. En applaudissant a votre sublime adresses du 18 vendèmiaire, nous concevons enfin l'espoir de voir bientôt les partisants du terrorisme et de l'anarchie rentrer dans le néant (A.N. C325 1406 12).
>
> [Terror and death do not have to be the order of the day except in the battalions of fugitive slaves before our victorious armies, and in the interior against conspirators. In applauding your sublime address of the eighteenth of Vendèmiaire, we finally find the hope to see soon the supporters of terrorism and anarchy sink into oblivion.]

Nogent's argument is interesting because it allows the terror to continue exactly as it had before, but with only a change in definition of key words in the Revolutionary vocabulary of praise and blame. The Terror had always named its enemies from

within *"conspirateurs,"* but now that would not be the same group of people. Now the conspirateurs would be those who had supported the Terror as much as actual spies and counter-revolutionaries. What this société apparently could not see is that this new understanding of who the enemy was would lead directly to the closing of the sociétés populaires because they could be understood as conspiratorial by virtue of their previous function as the grassroots surveillance force of the Jacobin Terror. The great change after Thermidor was one facilitated by the orality of Revolutionary discourse: the government separated itself from "the Terror" while preserving for itself the use of terror.

Chapter four: Conclusion

The myth of Thermidor, a narrative which argues that the Terror was Robespierre's tool for consolidating personal power by eliminating or terrorizing his political enemies, has served and continues to serve as the base narrative for histories of the French Revolution. The letters written by the sociétés populaires of provincial France, the creation of the Jacobin Society, are the first telling of the Thermidor story after its creation. The encouragement the letters give to violence and further terror are products of their orality. Because they were composed by committees's deliberations and for the expressed purpose of being read aloud, the letters are examples of what one might call written oratory. Like the ancient, pre-literate singers of songs, the sociétés populaires used their (written) oral performances as means of promoting group unity, reinforcing adherence to the nation, and conserving the values of the Revolution. It is ironic that such efforts were to immediately precede the dissolution of the sociétés populaires, the isolation of the central government from the voters, and the end of the Revolution.

Though the myth of Thermidor is central to virtually all developed nations' telling of the French Revolution (with the possible exception of nations with long socialist histories, like the former Soviet Union, which have valorized the more radical phases of the Revolution -- though it will be interesting to see if this too will be changing there), it has a counter-argument in French leftist histories. The counter-

argument has only begun to make its way into the English language narratives of the French Revolution, particularly via the work of David P. Jordan. The myth has, however, has found its way into literary presentations of the revolution. Through the nineteenth century, attitudes toward the Thermidorean myth have been a means of identifying the various positions on the political spectrum. The reactionary use of the myth to tell the historical morality tale of revolution refined itself in the last century. Through Charles Dickens' canonized Tale of Two Cities, the myth entered popular imagination despite its counter-narratives by Victor Hugo. In recent years, Marge Piercy's novel has given the English language a different narrative of Robespierre and the Terror. Piercy's work is in conflict with the venerable works of Dickens, Hugo, and Trollope -- though her sympathies are more in line with those of Hugo who was also an admirer of the Revolution.

Although, in France, Robespierre has been a touchstone for political identity since his lifetime, he has been an unambiguously black figure in works in the English language. This is due, at least in part, to the Anglo tendency to rely upon the seminal histories written by French conservatives like Furet rather than consulting original sources documents from the Revolution. This study has proceeded from the understanding of history writing to be as much a political question as was the original writing of the sociétés populaires letters -- the great difference being that the sociétés populaires were self-consciously politically involved, but the historians of the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been in the habit of denying their political involvement when constructing their narratives of "History." The myth of Thermidor is only able to maintain its internal logic if the voices of the sociétés populaires and the more radical Revolutionary groups (which would have had members of working and lower classes) are excluded. Furet has argued that the sociétés populaires' voices could not be trusted as they were Jacobin and were therefore based on ideology rather than "reality." Such a narrow view of which historical documents merit consideration by scholars reveals the positivist standards that still exist from the origins of history as a scientist discipline.

The role of analyzing the documents discarded by historians falls to the language disciplines. The addresses written by the sociétés populaires have been neglected because they have the sound of "mere rhetoric": they are aggregative rather than analytic, redundant and verbose, fraught with slogans, agonistic in tone, and are highly emotional. These qualities are inherently unattractive to literate minds and render the letters easily dismissible. However, by examining how the letters function as residually oral discourse in a literate society, they are revealed to be texts actively involved in the political moment. The letters written by the société´s populaires are of interest precisely because they form a body of writing rich in orality. There is almost certainly no greater body of written documents displaying oral traditions of early modernity. Certainly, it is the most

extensive body of epideictic letters extant in the western world. The letters represent a unique moment in the development of literacy and politics in the west. As such, they merit attention by scholars reading for linguistic and rhetorical devices, particularly as an expanding electronic literacy (which Ong calls secondary orality) renders the millennium "an age which also in its forms of expression is evidently more oral than the age of print which immediately preceded it" (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 20). The attention that has been given social organizations of the enlightenment and the public sphere in late modernity deserves should be directed toward these documents. The only apparent reason for their exclusion from studies of the political and literary developments of the eighteenth century is that they are unpublished and exist only in their original hand-written form. It is a measure of the increasing power of the printing press that works not published go unstudied. Archival research is is falling into disfavor and diminishing in the Modern Language disciplines (among which I include English).

Because the theories of Walter Ong connect the rise of literacy, the rapid advances of technology, and changing epistemologies, it is necessary to consider how these are related. The Romanticism which has surrounded the myth of Thermidor since its inception, and which itself is related to a vogue for oral features in literate discourse, has never been genuinely oral in the ways the letters are, for example. Romanticism has been a very literate movement despite its

claims to appreciate certain oral features of discourse on aesthetic grounds. It has been argued here that Ong's suggestion that technology led the way and literacy and Romanticism followed as consequences is unsatisfactory because it ignores the role of early capitalism as such. The myth of Thermidor serves the modern capitalist understanding of revolution and its consequences. Not wishing to follow Ong's causal argument, I portray the oral features of the Thermidor letters as a consequence of their composition and intended use (as texts meant to be heard rather than seen) as well as of the specific kind of rhetorical form used in the letters of congratulation, the epideictic. This study is not an attempt to tease apart that web to divine the origins of the oral features found in the Thermidor letters. Instead, I am interested in how the oral feature, in their various aspects, effect the meanings in the texts.

This study has argued that the addresses of the sociétés populaires reveal a perspective on the Terror which is not the revulsion anti-Revolutionary historians have projected, but rather support for the Terror based on an understanding of it as the means of the san-culottes keeping control of the revolutionary agenda. The addresses' oral qualities create texts which heighten rather than lessen the tensions and tendencies toward violence in the political situation. Not only does the highly oral quality of the letters make them volatile, but they also contain the bombastic praise characteristic of epideictic rhetoric, of which they are an example. There is a

traditional understanding of "rhetoric" as essentially the use of language to deceive. That is, "rhetoric" as lying. Rhetoric is what one engages in when obviating proof, avoiding for debate, and short-circuiting parliamentary procedure. Rhetoric makes one thing "seem" like another. The use of rhetoric, the lying tool, leads directly to "a discourse in which consensus was the premise and its celebration the end," to quote Emmet Kennedy's description of the sociétés populaires' letters. Kennedy is an example of the legacy of the Thermidorean myth:

> The Jacobins chose terror, with its suppression of civil liberties, to master this uncertain future and the fear it produced. Epideictic speech, including festival and theatre discourse, was effective in its redundancy. It allayed the worries of both speaker and audience (303).

Epideictic is therefore the rhetoric of terror, the rhetoric of the Terror. This is certainly true, but only in the sense that the epideictic rhetoric of the sociétés populaires' letters performed the function which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe as the function of epideictic: "it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds." The letters respond to the National Convention's change of Revolutionary memory by denouncing the Terror. However, this is simply a new use of Revolutionary words. Terror is replaced with "justice" or sometimes "virtue" as *l'ordre du jour*. Yet the urgings to seek out and destroy those who lack virtue or who need justice waged against them demonstrate the extent to which terror continued by other names. In this way, the letters function as examples of oral

memory which, utterly unlike scientist History, easily drops, exchanges, or adds to memories of the past. The mercurial formation and reformation of memories in oral or residually oral discourse permits the culture to always have at hand only a history which is relevant to the present, one which has a specific reference to the conditions and personalities of the present. That which serves no power's purpose is ignored and left in the archives as irrelevant.

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28

La République Une et Indivisible

La Société d'opinion
Régénérée dans la commune de Chauny
Dépt de l'Aisne.

C H. 2. La Convention Nationale.

1403

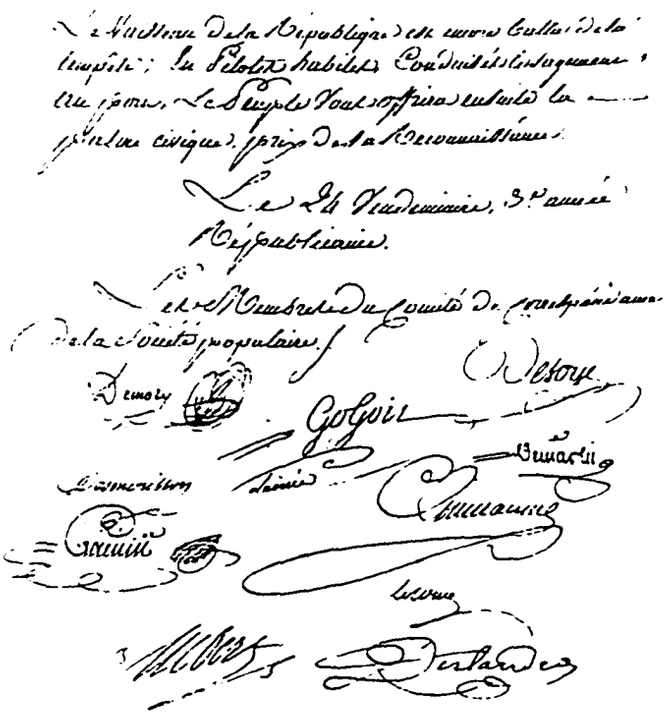
Citoyens Représentans

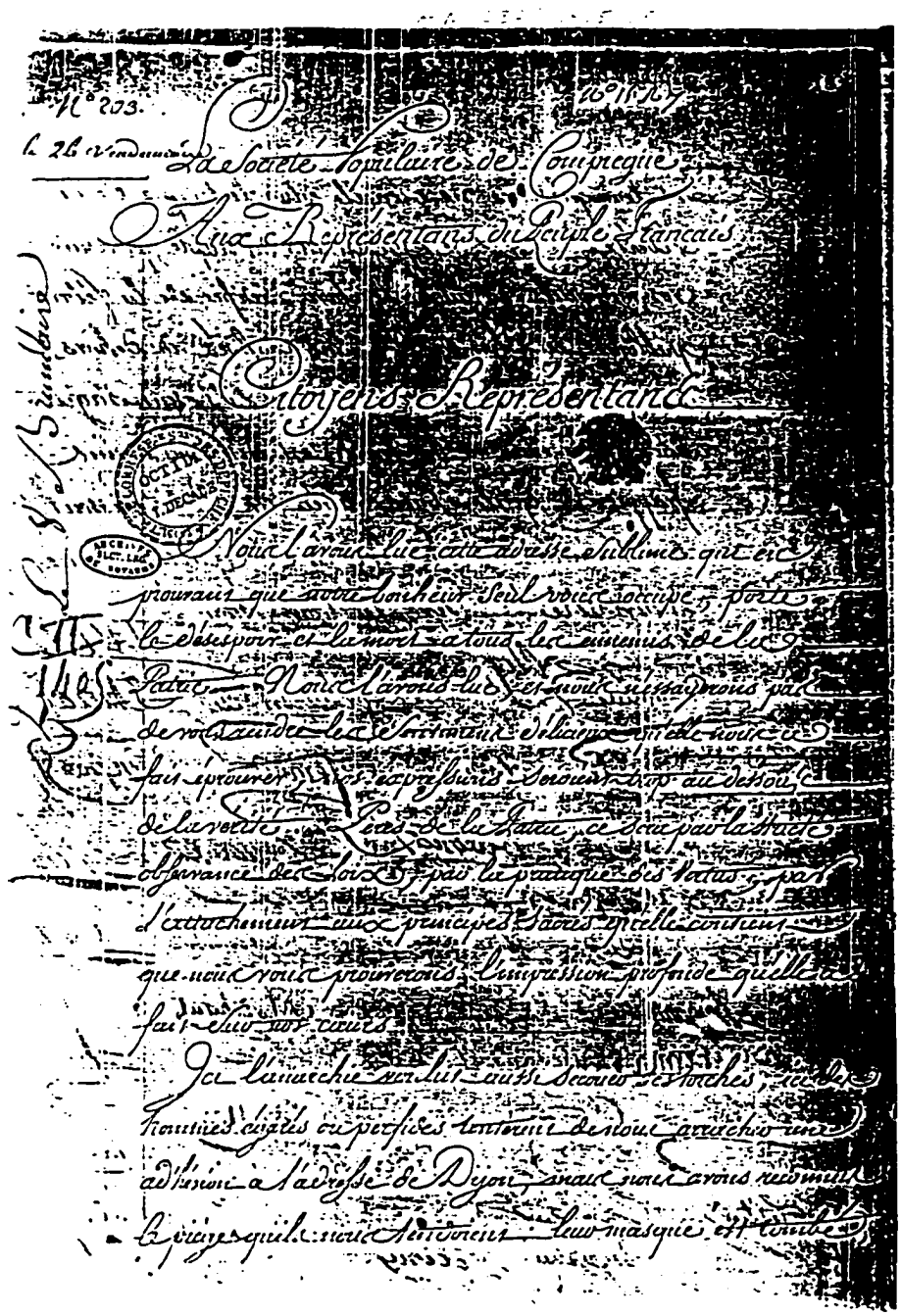
RECEU LE 22 AVRIL

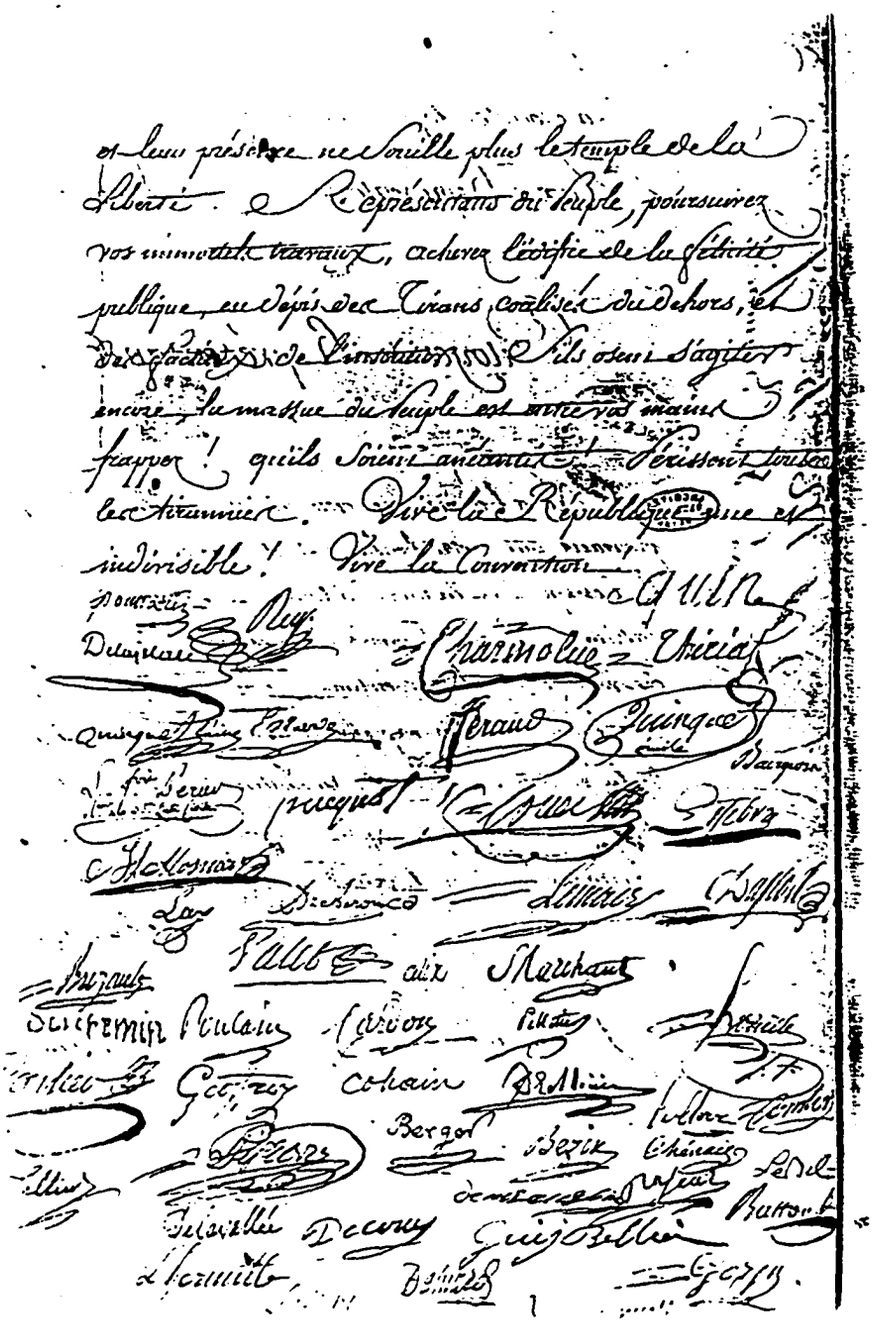
Cette adresse du 18 Vendémiaire, an deuxième, Chauny, assurée à jamais son bonheur, puisqu'elle le croit lié à celui des Français qui immolent comme la tribune et la guillotine les auteurs de la coalition. Respectueux amis de la représentation Nationale, Partisans de la Convention, Attachés inviolablement à ses Représentans, Guerriers, Esprits sans peur, Patriotes, et tous les Républicains qui animent dans cette Société populaire de Chauny. Elle a pleuré avec vous, elle a applaudi avec enthousiasme à vos travaux. Elle a vu avec quelle [illegible] vous avez déployé votre énergie, vous avez déclaré que vous ne souffrirez jamais qu'elle soit souillée par le sang de vos représentans. Vive la Convention, Vivent tous les Républicains.

dissertation

Appendix: A.N. C325 1403 28







B. Roussell
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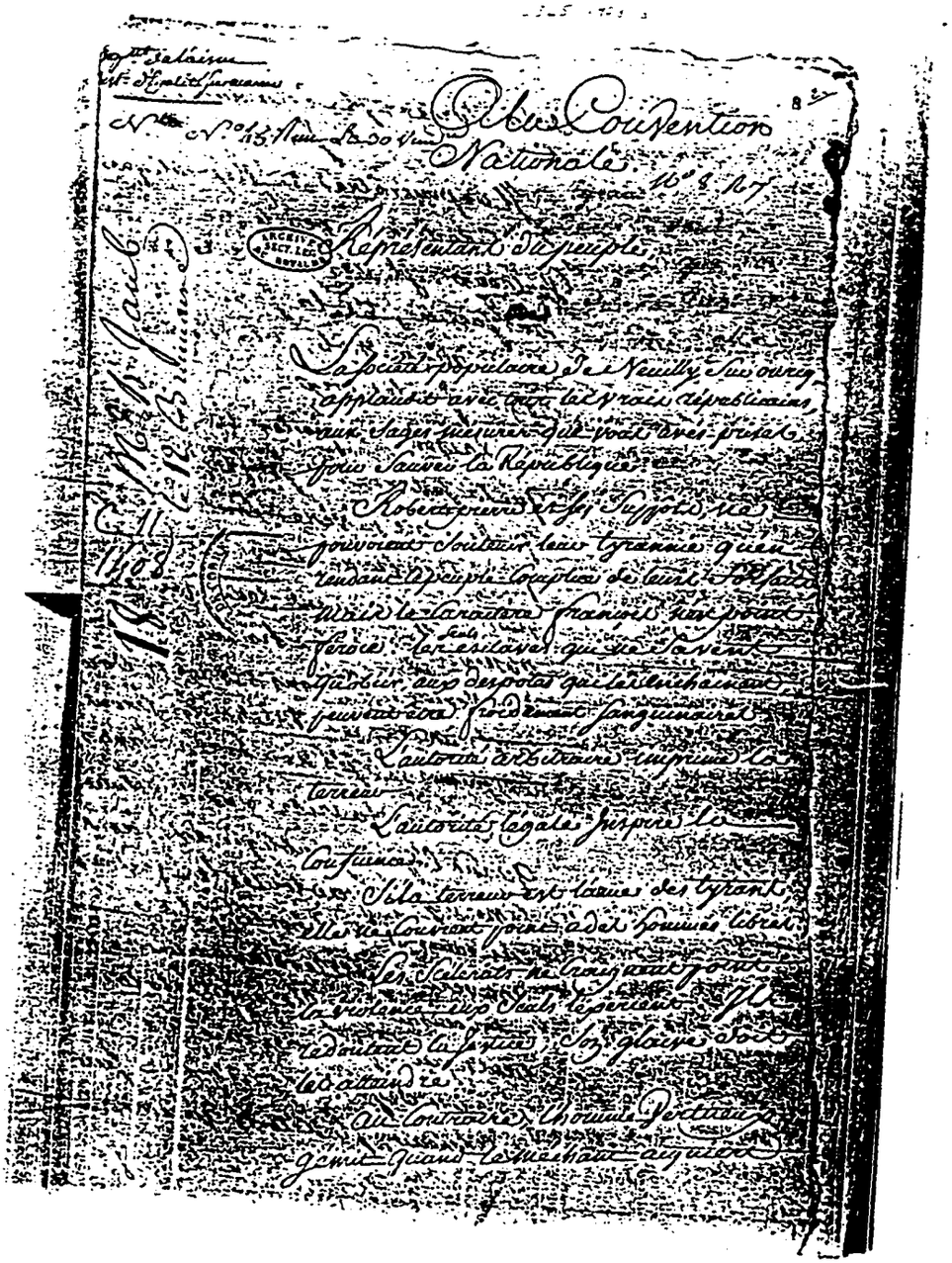

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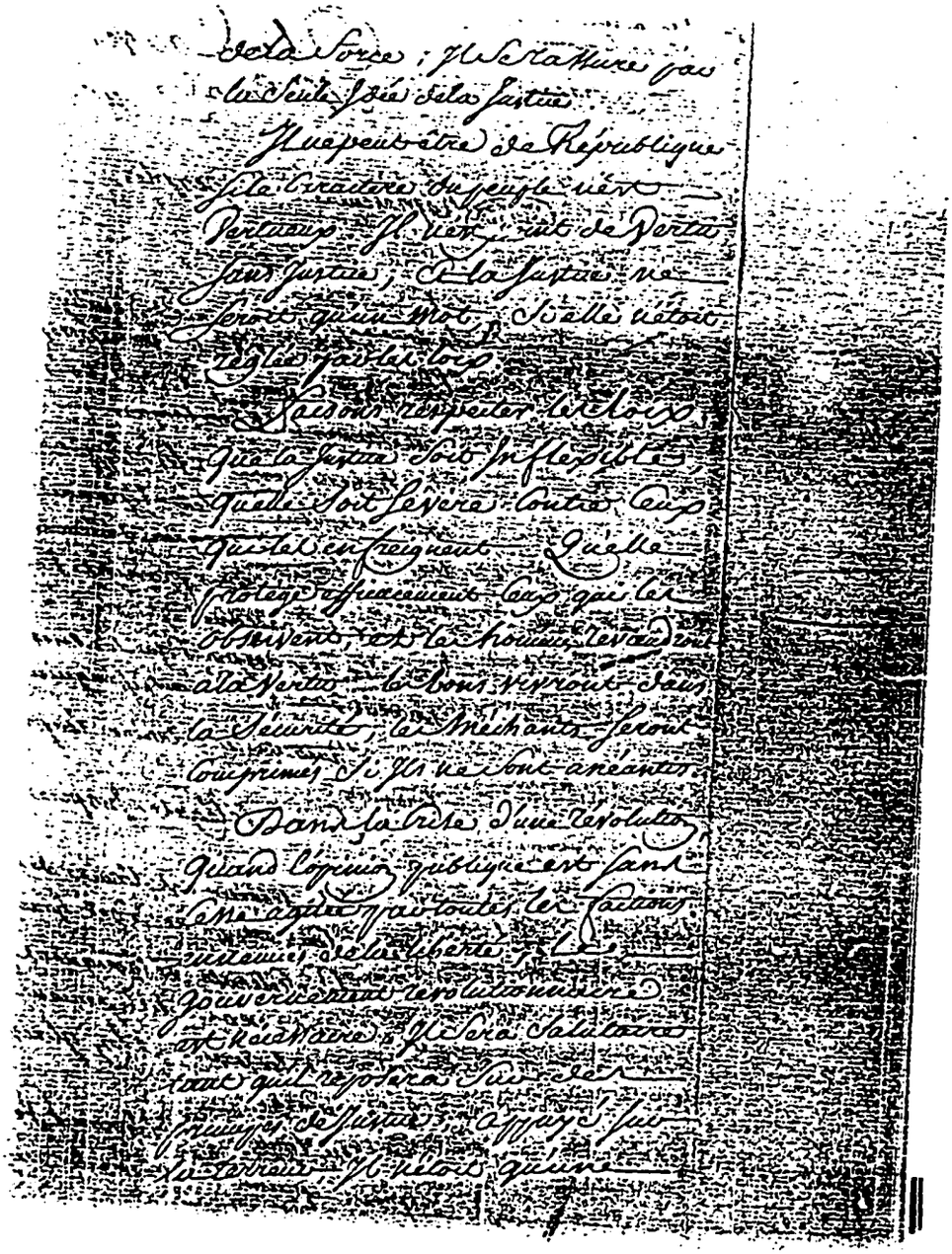
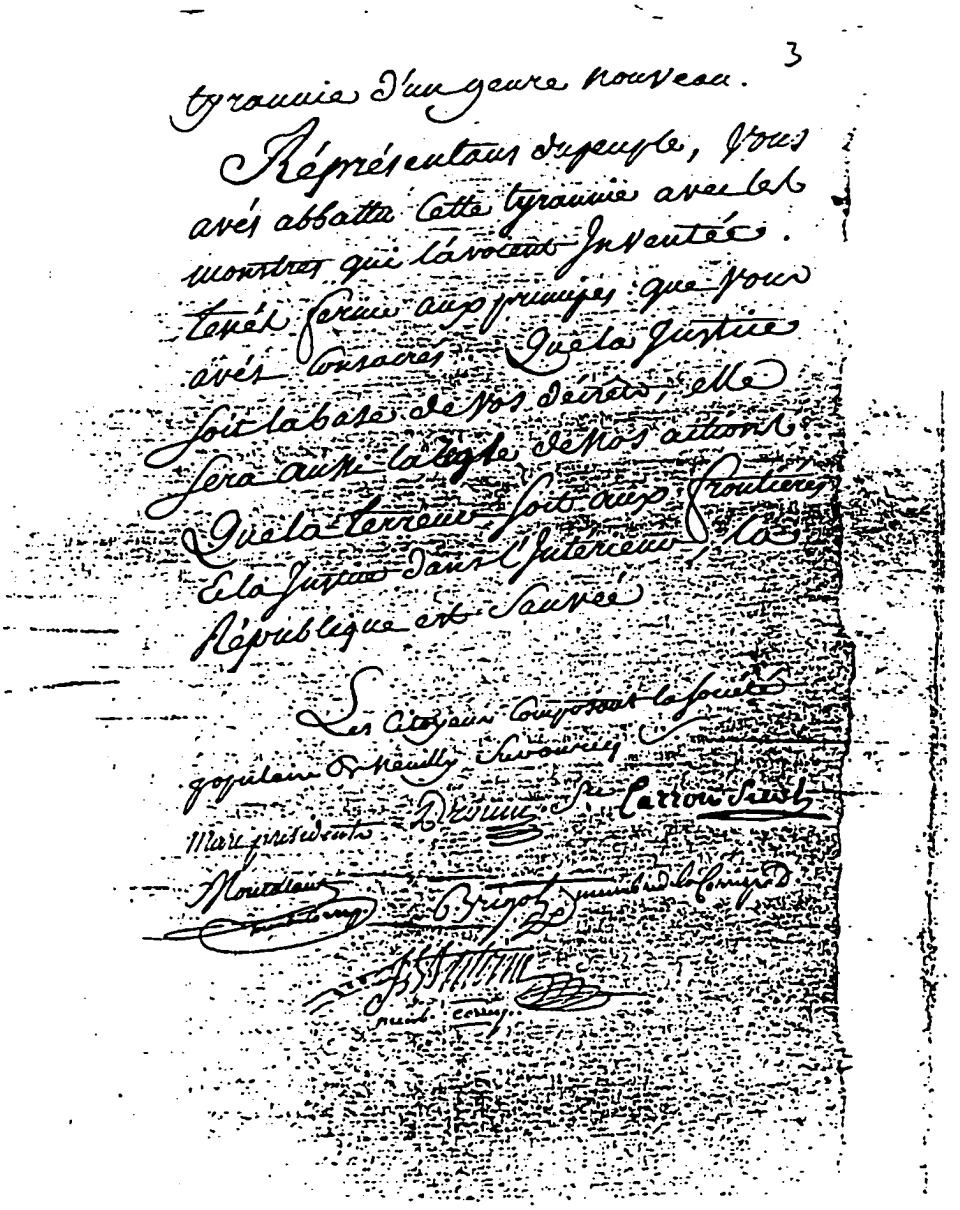




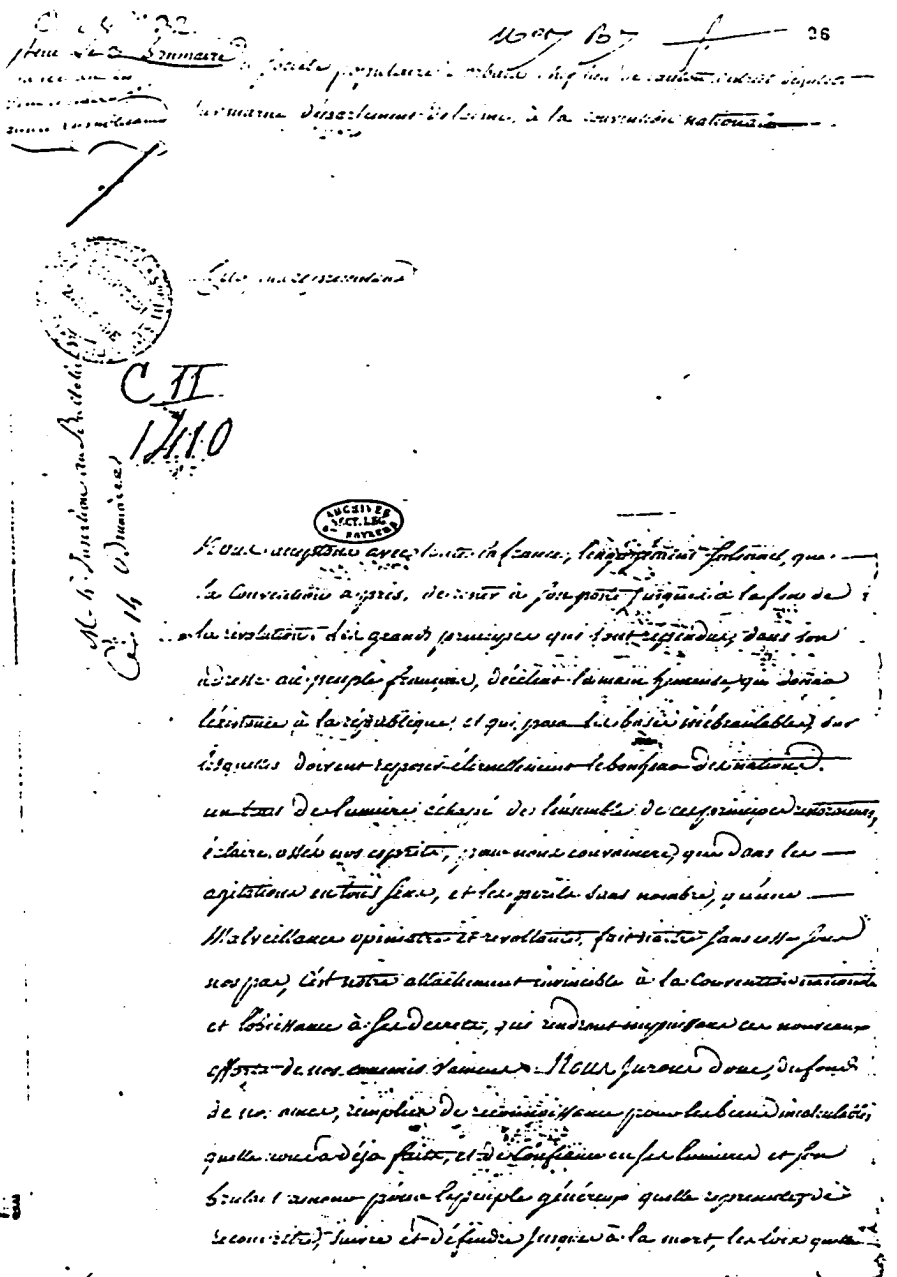
3

tyrannie d'un genre nouveau.

Représentans du peuple, vous
avés abbatu cette tyrannie avec elle
montrez qui l'avoient inventée.
Tenés fermes aux principes que vous
avés consacrés. Que la justice
soit la base de vos décrets, elle
sera aussi la règle de vos actions.
Que la terreur soit au pied de votre trône
Et la justice dans l'intérieur de vos
République est sauvée

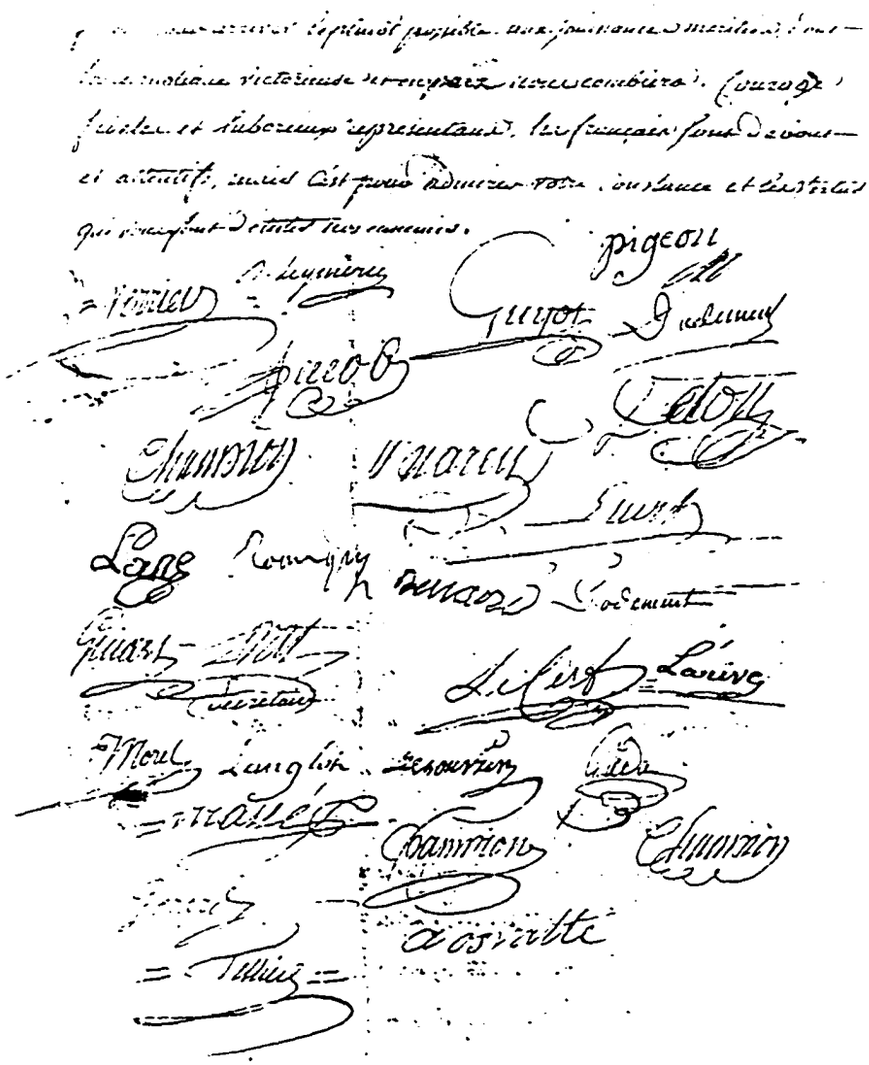
Les Citoyens composant la société
populaire de Neuilly sur Marne
Marie Jean Desruisseaux Président
Montclaux Brigot secrétaires

C325 1410 26



C II
1410

Nous acceptons avec toute la franchise, l'empressement fraternel que la Convention a mis, de venir à son poste jusqu'à la fin de la révolution, du grand principe qui doit cimenter dans tout l'univers le pacte sacré des hommes libres. Nous jurons haine à la royauté, et guerre implacable aux tyrans. Nous jurons haine éternelle à la monarchie française, et à tout gouvernement qui tendrait à rétablir le despotisme et l'esclavage. Nous jurons de maintenir de tout notre pouvoir la liberté, l'égalité, ou la mort. Nous jurons de ne jamais souffrir que la représentation nationale soit avilie, violée, dissoute, ni attaquée dans aucun de ses membres, ni dans sa dignité, ni dans son indépendance, ni dans sa liberté, ni dans sa sûreté, ni dans sa souveraineté, ni dans aucune des propriétés nationales, de quelque nature que ce soit, et de quelque manière que ce soit, que nous ne jurons de la défendre jusqu'au dernier soupir, et de punir de mort quiconque tentera de violer ce serment.



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Liberté / Egalité / Justice / Fraternité ou la Mort — 20e An 3 de la R.F. — Liberté / Egalité / Probité

Sᵗ Quentin le 4 Thermidor an 3ème de la République une & Indivisible

Les Citoyens de la Société Populaire & régénérée de Sᵗ Quentin, Département de l'Aisne, et autres Citoyens de la même Commune

à la Convention Nationale

Citoyens Représentans,

La lecture de votre proclamation au Peuple Français, des applaudissemens longtems prolongés, dont parmi de tous les coins de la Salle de notre Société; Signes non équivoques de l'adhésion formelle que nous donnons aux grands principes de Démocratie que vous venez de développer, que vous promettez au Peuple, et que le Peuple Souverain saura maintenir en dépit de ses nombreux ennemis.

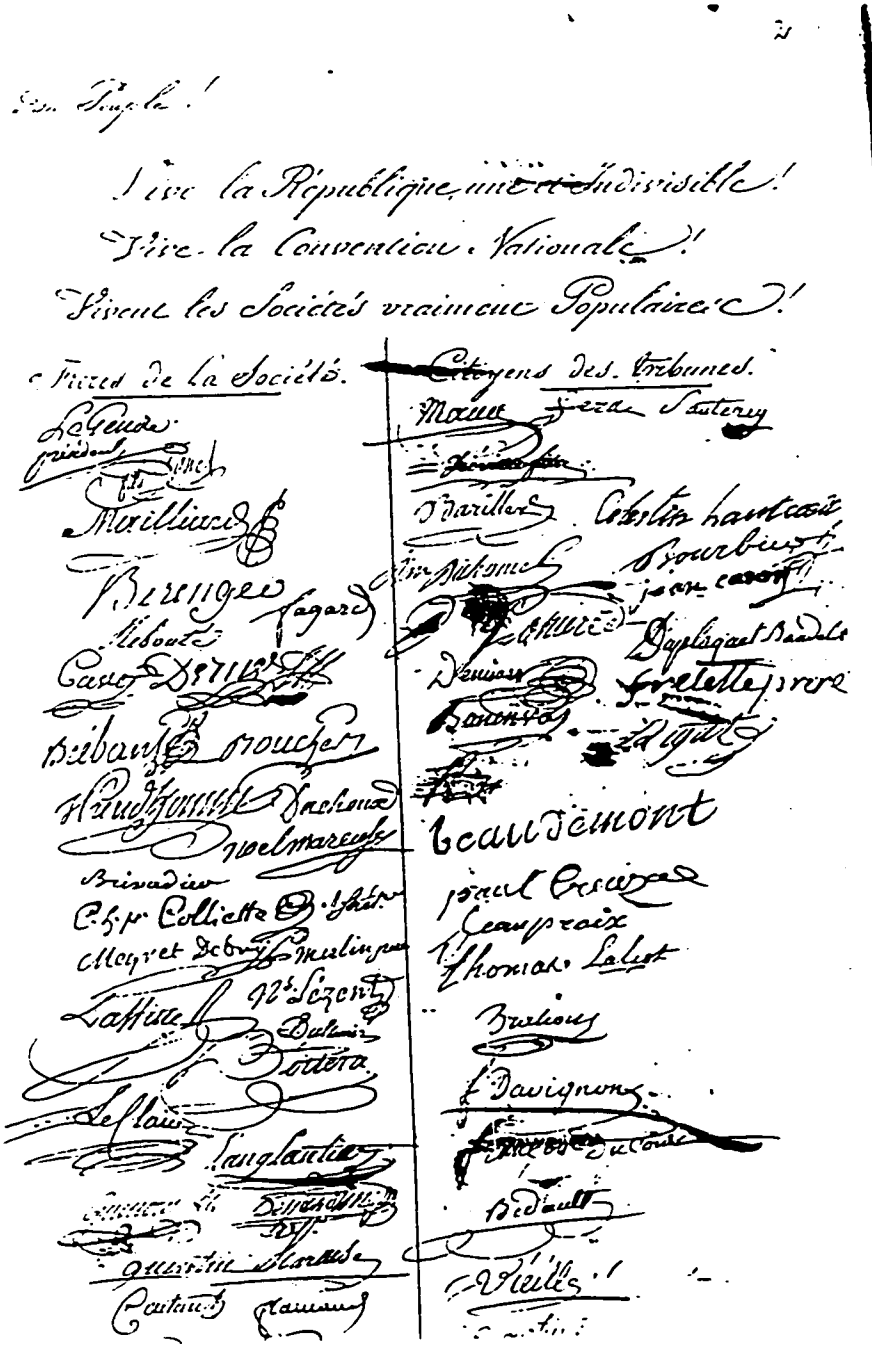
Ces principes éternels, émanés de la Nature, recueillis par J. J. Rousseau, et proclamés par vous, forment la base de notre Conduite politique. Nous les avons placés en tête de notre Réglement depuis notre régénération; ils y parlent à tous les cœurs, à tous les esprits, et semblables à ces flambeaux éloignés des édifices publics qui annoncent aux passans la Divinité, à laquelle ils sont consacrés. Aussi nul Citoyen n'osera parmi nous s'il n'a pas constamment pratiqué la Justice, & la Probité; S'il n'aime même la Mort que la perte de la Liberté, de l'Egalité, de la Fraternité; S'il n'est pas ami inséparable de la République une & Indivisible.

Nous avons juré, (et nous tenons à ce serment) nous avons juré une guerre implacable aux Tyrans quels qu'ils soyent, de quelques masques qu'ils se couvrent au dehors et au dedans. Nous poursuivons sans relâche les Aristocrates, les Royalistes, les Fédéralistes, — tous qui lèvent une tête audacieuse; les Modérés dangereux, les —

les Intrigants, les ambitieux, les égoïstes, les Insouciants; la moitié
des gens sans moeurs, tous Ennemis Naturels du Gouvernement
Révolutionnaire. Par Conséquent, Législateurs, la Convention
Nationale et ses Comités ont votre confiance et votre amour entier. Tout
ce qui n'est pas elle, nous est étranger et Suspect. Tout Législateur
Contre lequel, est notoirement déclaré. Nous Punissons et Combattons
Sans Cesse, dès que nous le Connaissons. Armés de la Massue
Populaire, nous donnons des Coups Mortels, et Vous, Législateurs,
vous Sauvez Vos, et la Représentation Nationale sera vengée, Car
nous préférons les orages de la Liberté, au calme de la Servitude.

Finissons les Calomnies, propagées par les Puissances coalisées,
publiées dans la République que la Convention Nationale veut anéantir
les Sociétés Populaires. Ce mensonge est trop évidemment pour y croire.
Une bonne Mère ne maudit pas tous ses enfants, par ce que dans le
nombre il se trouve des Scélérats. Si ceux-ci la déshonorent, les autres
font sa gloire et sa force en se ralliant autour d'elle.

Pères de la Patrie, les agitations intestines, renouvellées au
Commencement par la malveillance et la perfidie, nous prouvent que la
Révolution n'est pas encore achevée. Restez donc à votre Poste jusqu'à
la Paix, afin de maintenir avec force et Constance le Gouvernement
Révolutionnaire, tant que, par la faute de notre Sublime
Constitution, il marche sur la ligne de la Déclaration des
Droits, méconnue, foulée aux pieds par les vils Conspirateurs
que vous avez frappés du Glaive de la Loi, N'épargnez pas
Ceux qui voulaient les imiter. La Convention Nationale
doit être juste. Comme l'Auteur d'un beau jour. Lancez la foudre
contre les Ergotmilleurs Pillards qui tentaient encore de s'élever,
de rivaliser et de balancer les Dieux. Frappez d'une main
hardie et Vigoureuse le chien rapide de la Révolution; et que,
dans sa Course, il écrase enfin tous les Ennemis



C325 1412 22

Département de [illegible]
N° 232 Liberté Egalité Fraternité ou la mort
[illegible] Janvier 40°30.R7
Adresse Copiée de la Commune de Bergerac
Chef-lieu de Canton, Département de la Dordogne
Collationné

[illegible]

A la Convention Nationale,

Citoyens Représentants,

C II
1412

Le C.D. Bergerac en Dordogne, que Vous avez chargé
dans Votre Adresse au Peuple Français, nous apprend
le bonheur du Gouvernement d'Epithète de Souve-
rain qu'on lui accorde; Tandis que quelques cy-
devant Sections de Nantes et de Terreau Paulx
appuyés d'une autorité Usurpée; Lautre Sauvi-
gnon de la Confiance des Administrateurs, parce que
ne Nous que leurs bourreaux,

Les Terroristes nous Vantoient les Victoires
Remportées au Courage de nos Frères d'armée; glo-

Conservons Nos Conquetes ..... qu'elle ait pour nom
une Victoire et nos Conquetes Sa Lettre devant être
Sentiment de Sapprettement; Ainsi, Nous Sommes Obligés pour
les Exploits Brillants Des Marins, Des Soldats, Des
Compagnes, et Des Cabard; Le Rétablissement Par la Convention
Sur Bornes De quelques Particuliers, et
L'Anéantissement De la liberté Publique; Sans Notre
Energie aux memorables Journées Des neuf et Dix
Thermidor, Notre République Naissante malgré les
Triomphes au Dehors allait Gémir Sous les
Horreurs De la Plus Vieille,

La France a Déployé Une Force invincible, elle
a Humilié L'Orgueil Des Despotes, elle a Fait
Connaitre a Leurs Esclaves, que la liberté est un
Bien precieux quand ils Voudront Le maintenir —
Heureux; C'est a la Sagesse De Vos Loix, c'est a notre
Bonheur a Faire aimer la liberté,

Jeune ville Inébranlable Dans Toute Les —

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dissertation

Appendix: A.N. C325 1412 22

le malheur comme Vous avez rarement dans Votre
Sein la liberté des Opinions, qui ne peut faire
d'ombrage que les machants, et les Despotes; ceux
elle qui a bercé nos Pères, c'est elle qui a maintenu
[illegible] ouvrage,

Après avoir abbattu les monstres qui Versoient —
comme l'Eau! le Sang de ces Dieux plus puissants
les Rois, ou les patriciens; Vous Epouverez au
Flambeau de la justice ces Fureurs rapides, et
Ténébreuses, fruit du Crime, et de l'Intrigue; et
Vous répondrez des Administrateurs ces Grands
Vils et méprisables, qui ont méconnu la Voix de
l'Homme, et de la Probité, comme celle de la
Patrie,

Citoyens Vous mettez la Vertu à l'ordre du jour; et Vous
Venez avec tous les principes Consacrés dans Votre
Cercle au Temple Français, que nous Regrettons

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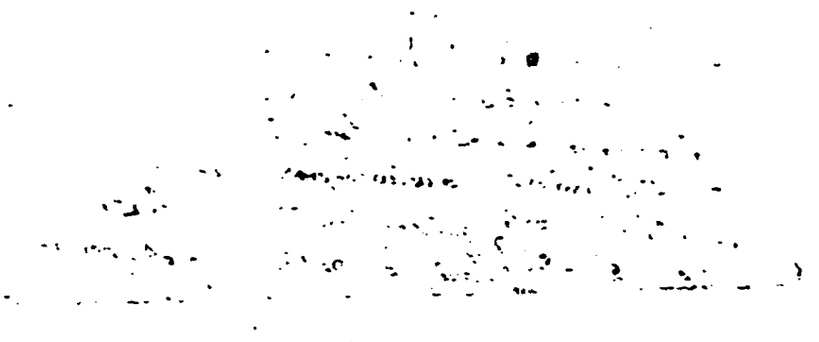

Pour Extrait Conforme

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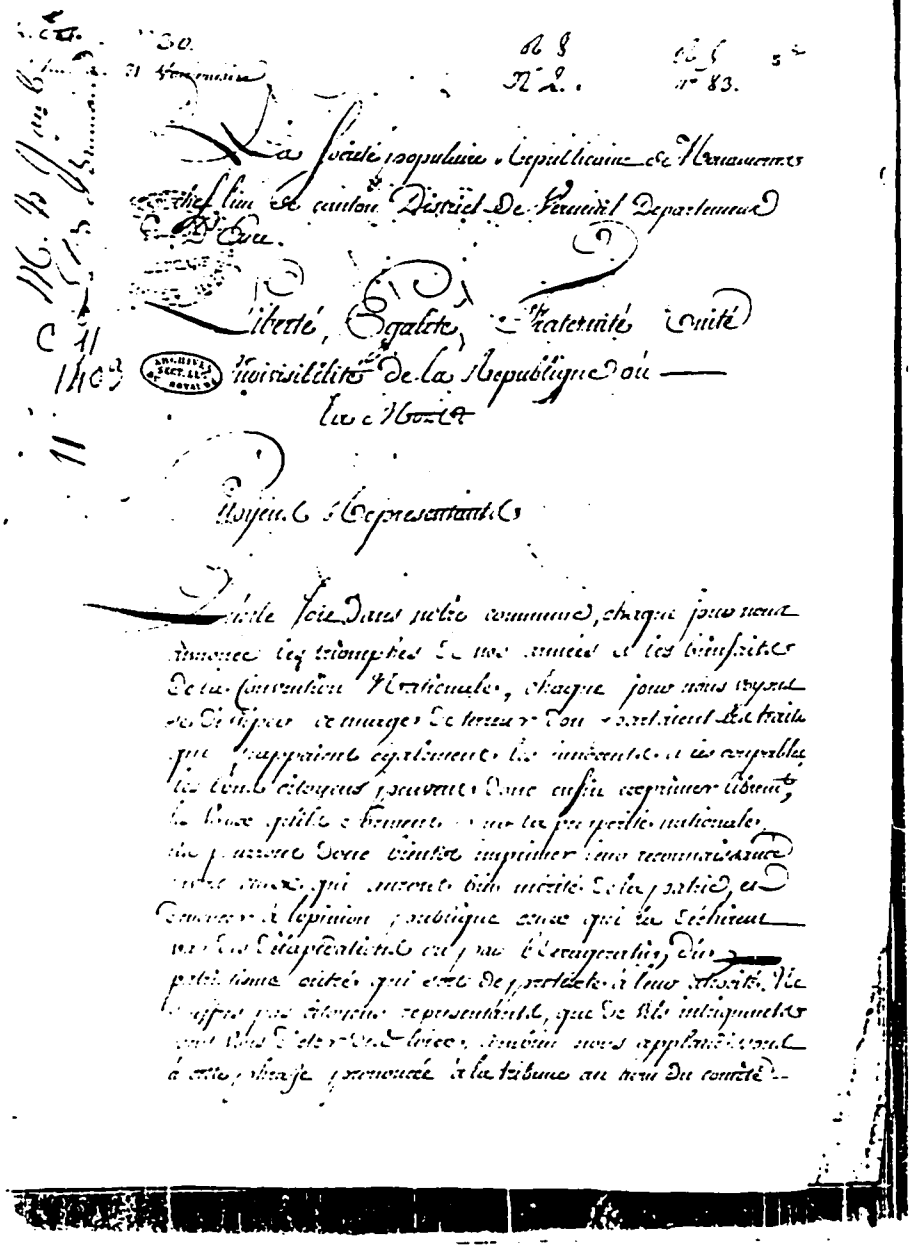

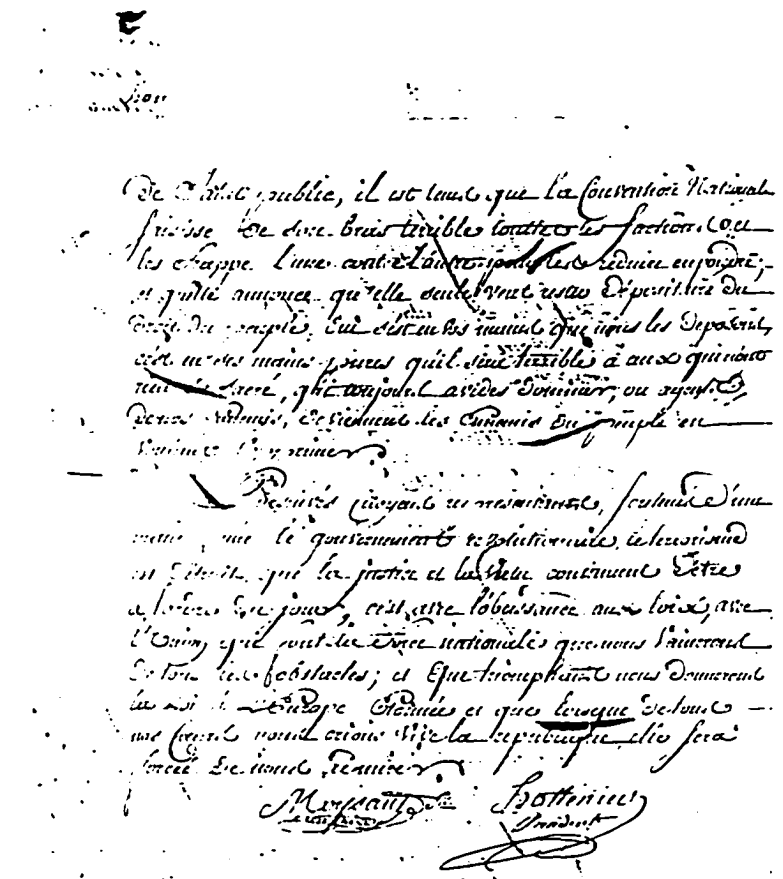

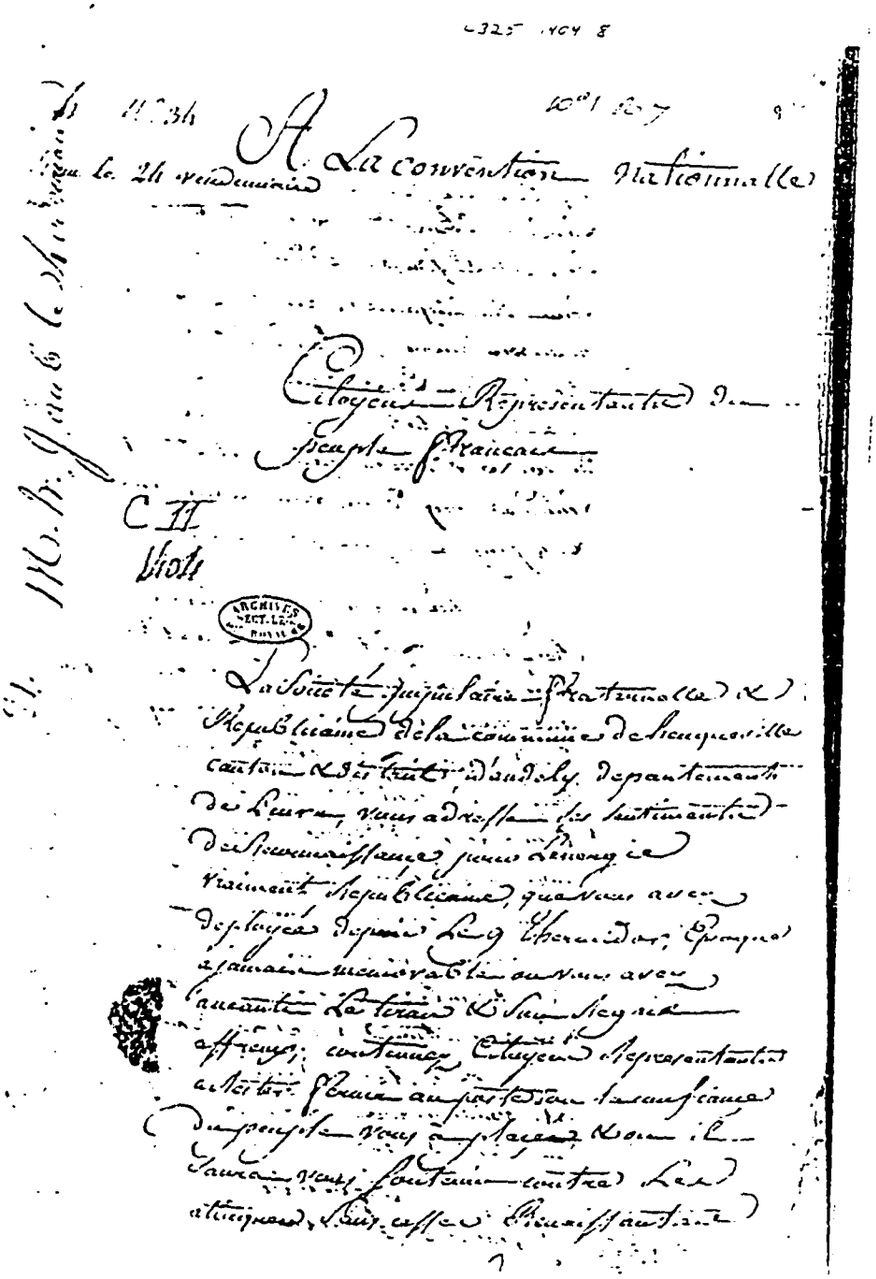

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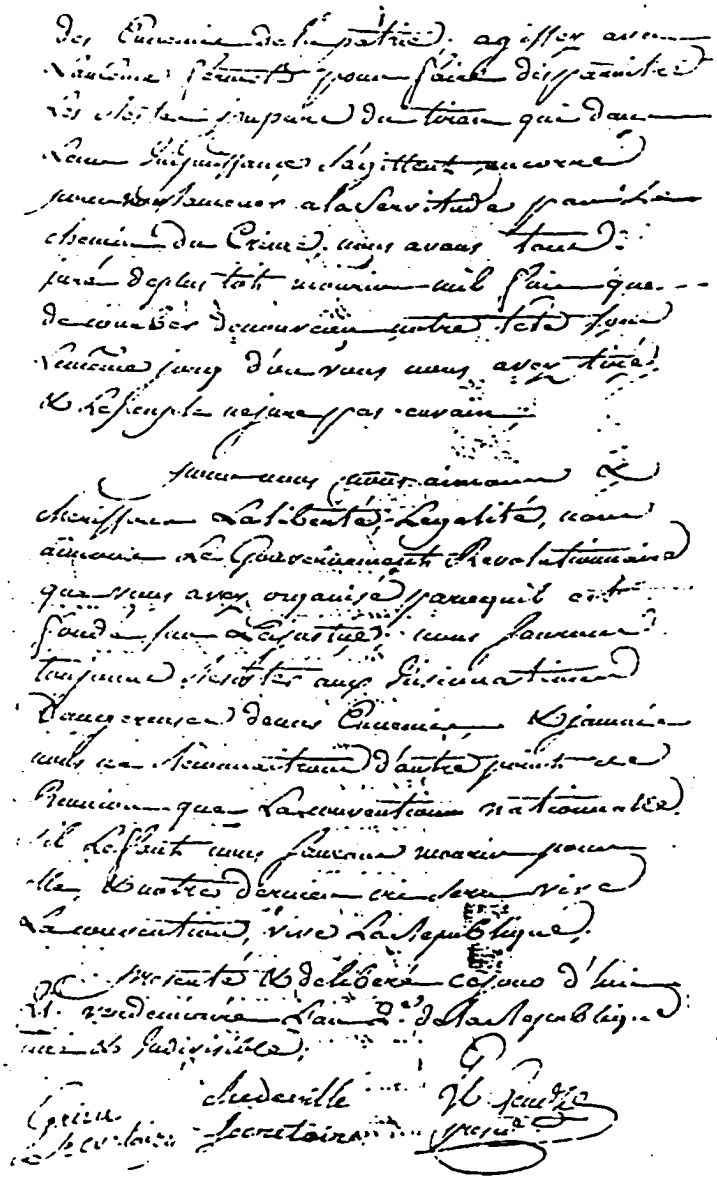
A la Convention Nationale

Citoyens Représentants du peuple Français

C II

Var

Liasse Jurisdiction Nationale (de) Republicaine de la commune de Sainpuiville canton de Vitry d'Auxerre département de l'Yonne, vous adressons les sentiments de reconnaissance, pour avoir vraiment Republicaine, que vous avez déployés depuis les Glorieux Epoques à jamais memorable au nom avec [illegible] les traits de Sur Negre affreux, contenus Citoyens Représentants en Lettre Chiffre au portefeuille ci jointe dont nous vous prions Nous il [illegible] vous soutenir contre les attentats, Sur ces Reconnaissances



C 325 1406 23

Liberté Elbeuf Le 5e Brumaire Egalité 33

An 3eme de la République une et indivisible

A la Convention Nationale.

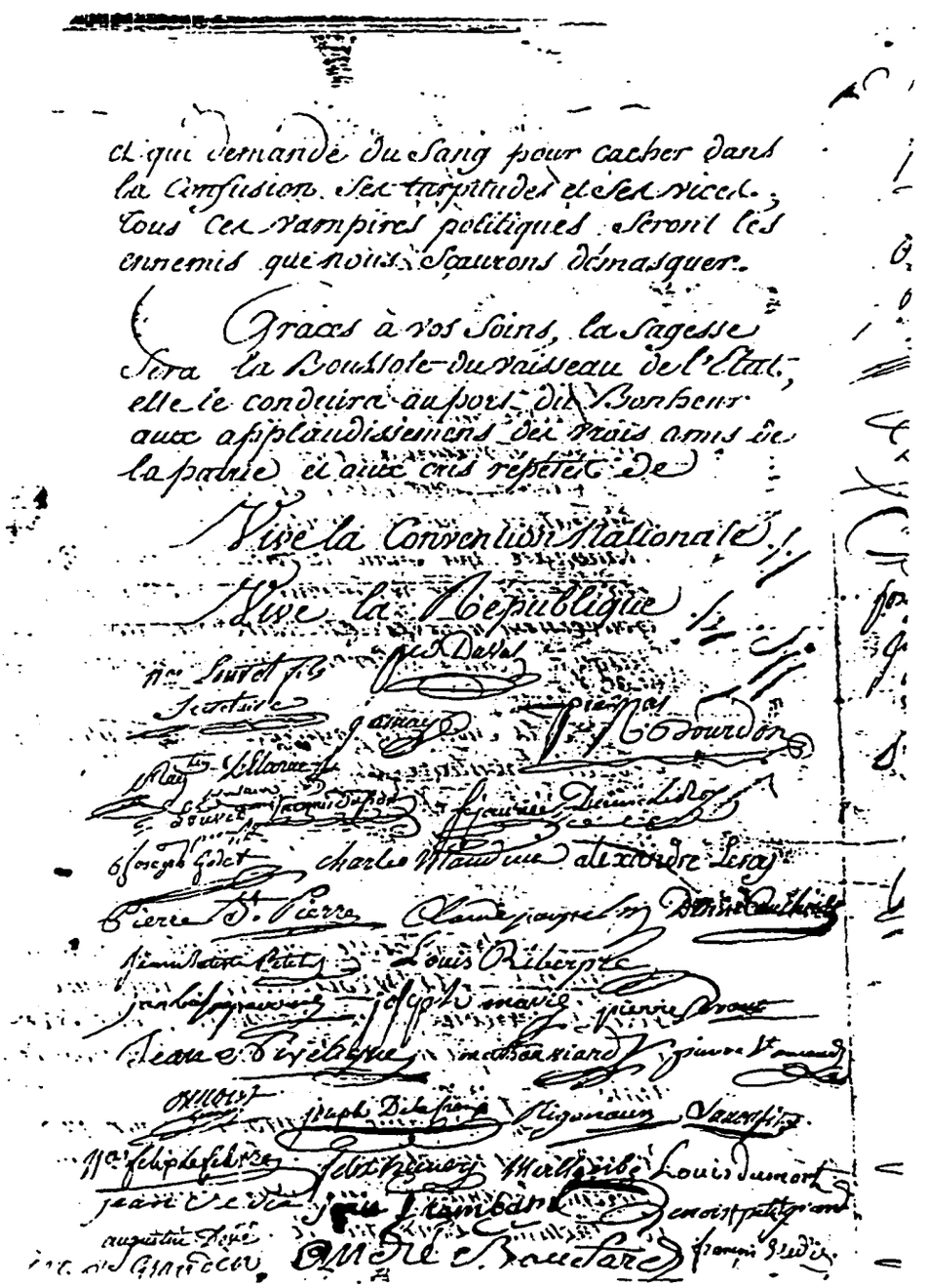
Guerre aux Scélérats, paix aux hommes probes et vertueux, justice pour tous.

Respect pour les loix émanées de la Convention, union étroite à la Représentation Nationale qui seule a reçu des mandats pour établir les loix régénératrices, maintien du Gouvernement Révolutionaire énergique et pour jusqu'à l'entier affermissement de la liberté et de la République.

Tels sont les principes que les Membres de la Société populaire et Républicaine d'Elbeuf ont juré, et elle sera fidèle à ses Sermens.

Votre adresse au peuple Français, Citoyens Représentans, renferme des Vérités terribles aux Méchans, elle sera le Fanal qui nous éclairera sur nos vrais amis.

L'homme immoral pour qui le désordre est un élément, l'ambitieux qui ne cherche les places que pour dominer, le Factieux pour qui le crime est un besoin,



qui demande du Sang pour cacher dans
la Confusion ses turpitudes et ses vices.
Tous ces Vampires politiques seront les
ennemis que nous saurons démasquer.

Graces à vos Soins, la Sagesse
sera la Boussole du vaisseau de l'Etat;
elle le conduira au port du Bonheur
aux applaudissemens des vrais amis de
la patrie et aux cris répetés de

Vive la Convention Nationale !!!

Vive la République !!!

C325 1410 6

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ou la Mort

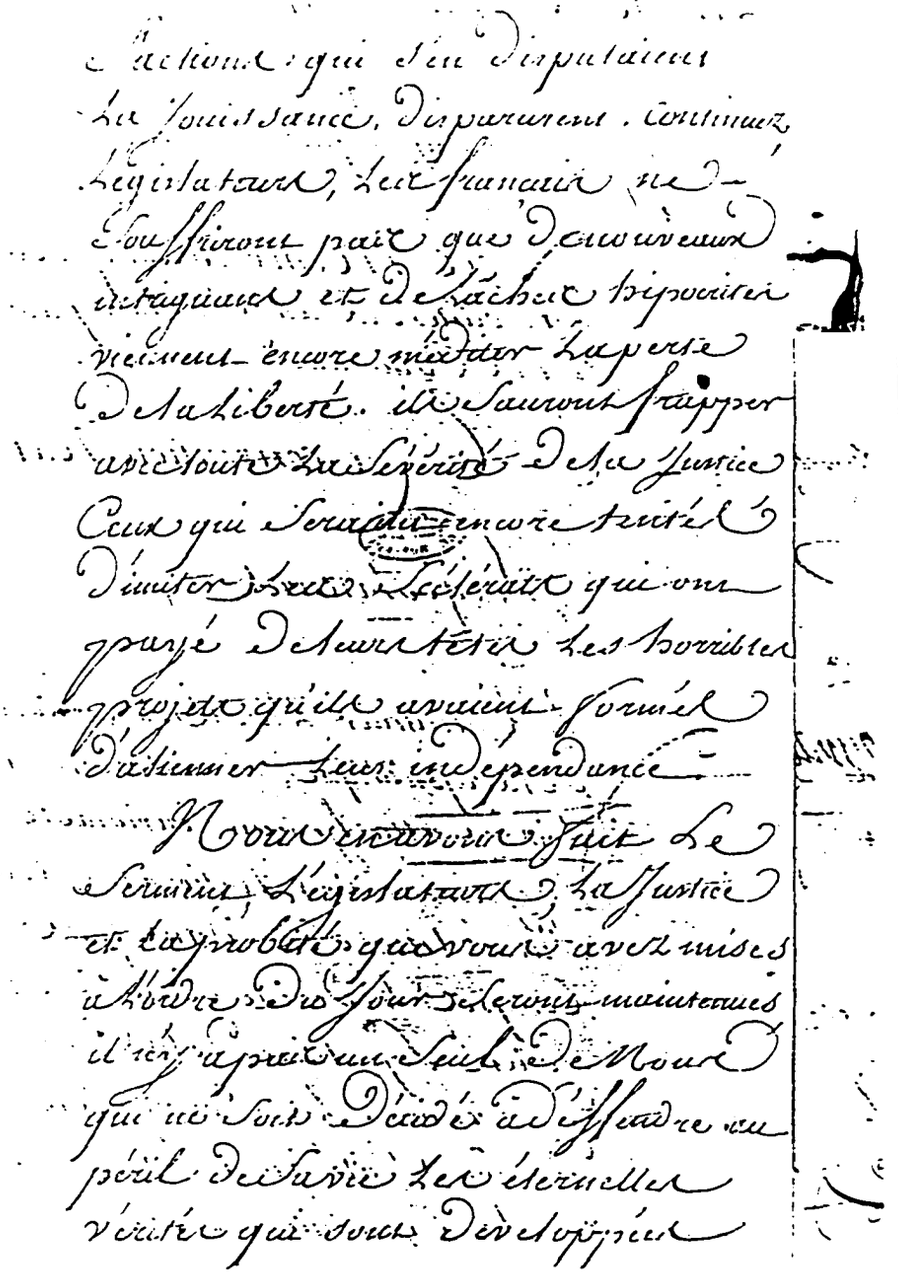
5e c 4me 120. Vernon le 29. Vendemiaire l'an 3me
rien Le 2 Brumaire
de la République française une et indivisible

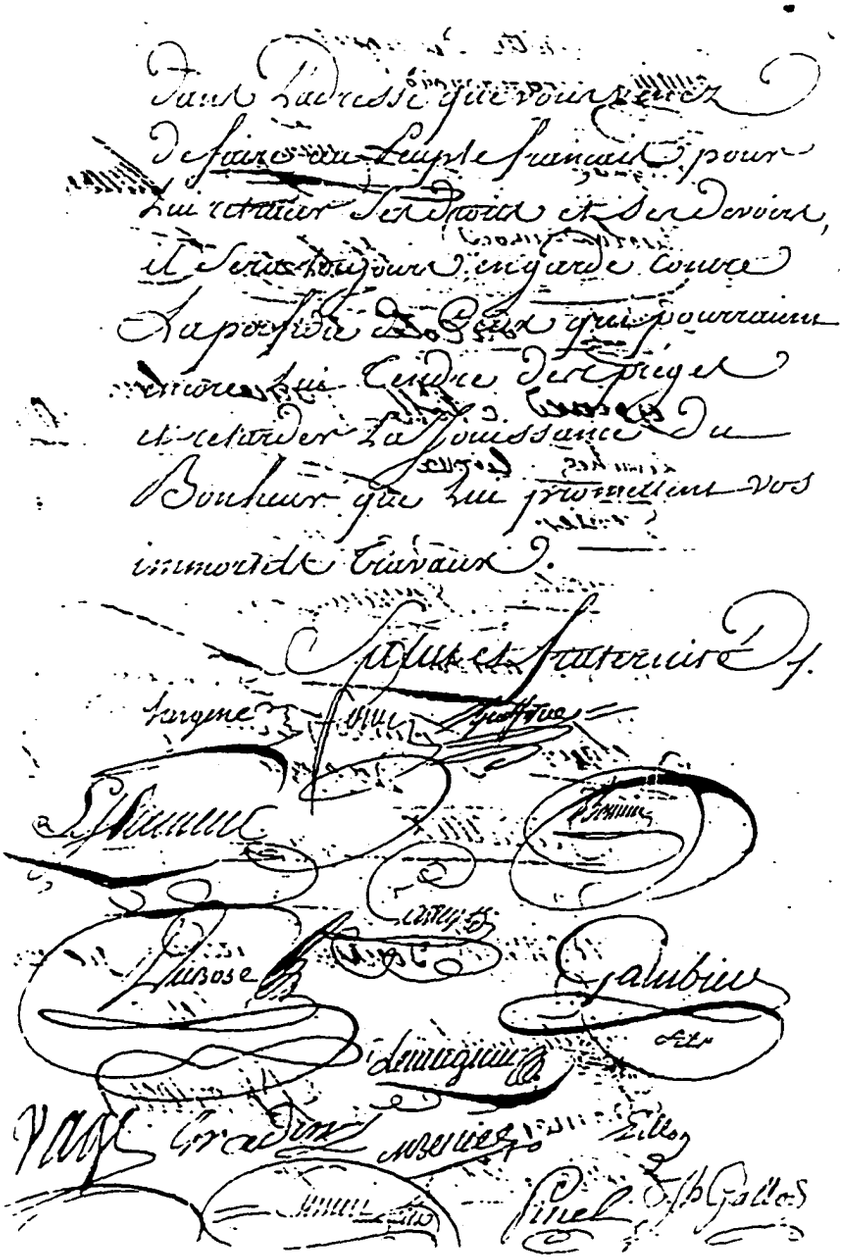
Pour Membres composant
la Société des amis de la république,
de la Commune de Vernon.

A la Convention Nationale.

Législateurs,

Citoyens l'unité et l'indivisibilité
de la république, soumission aux
lois et attachement inviolable à la
Représentation Nationale, telle
sont les vertus dont sont pénétrés les
Membres de la Société Populaire de la Commune
de Vernon. La Convention nationale
doit se féliciter d'une aussi heureuse
destinée, toutes les





C325 1411 25

C II
1411

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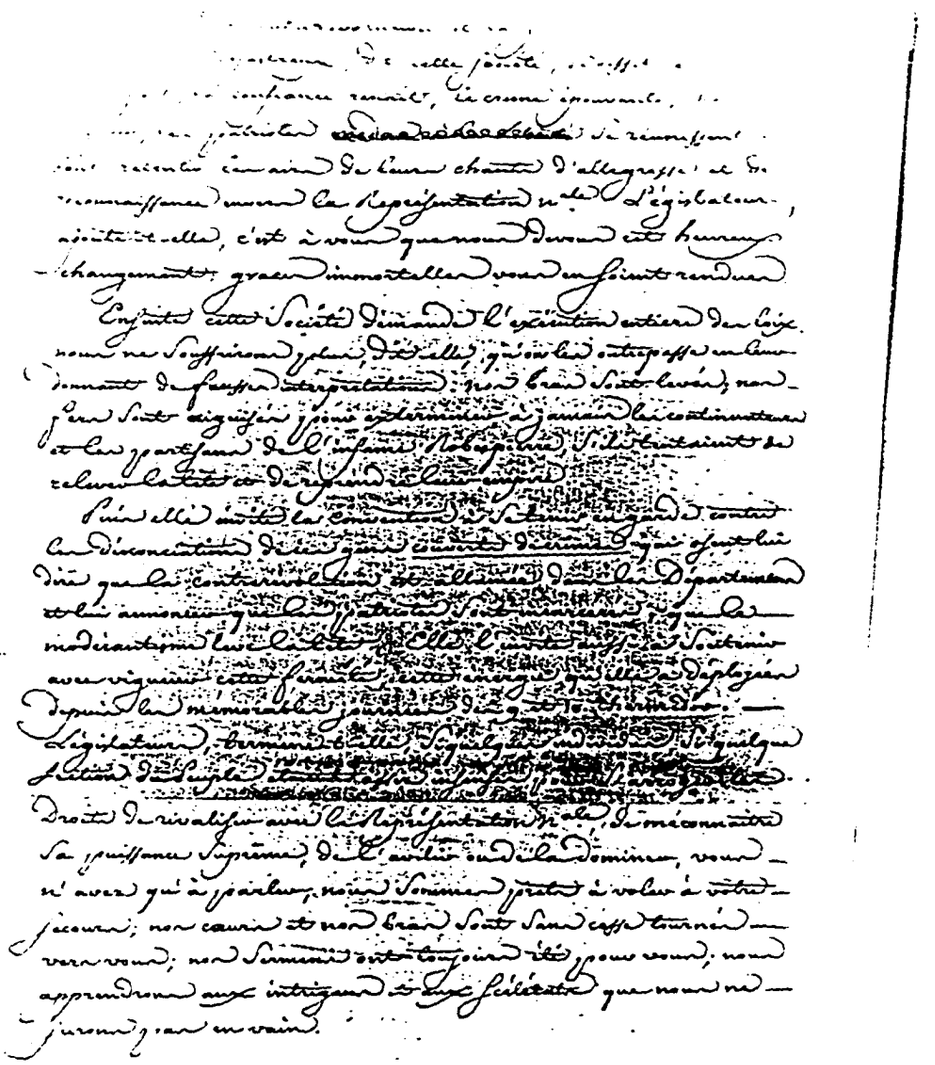

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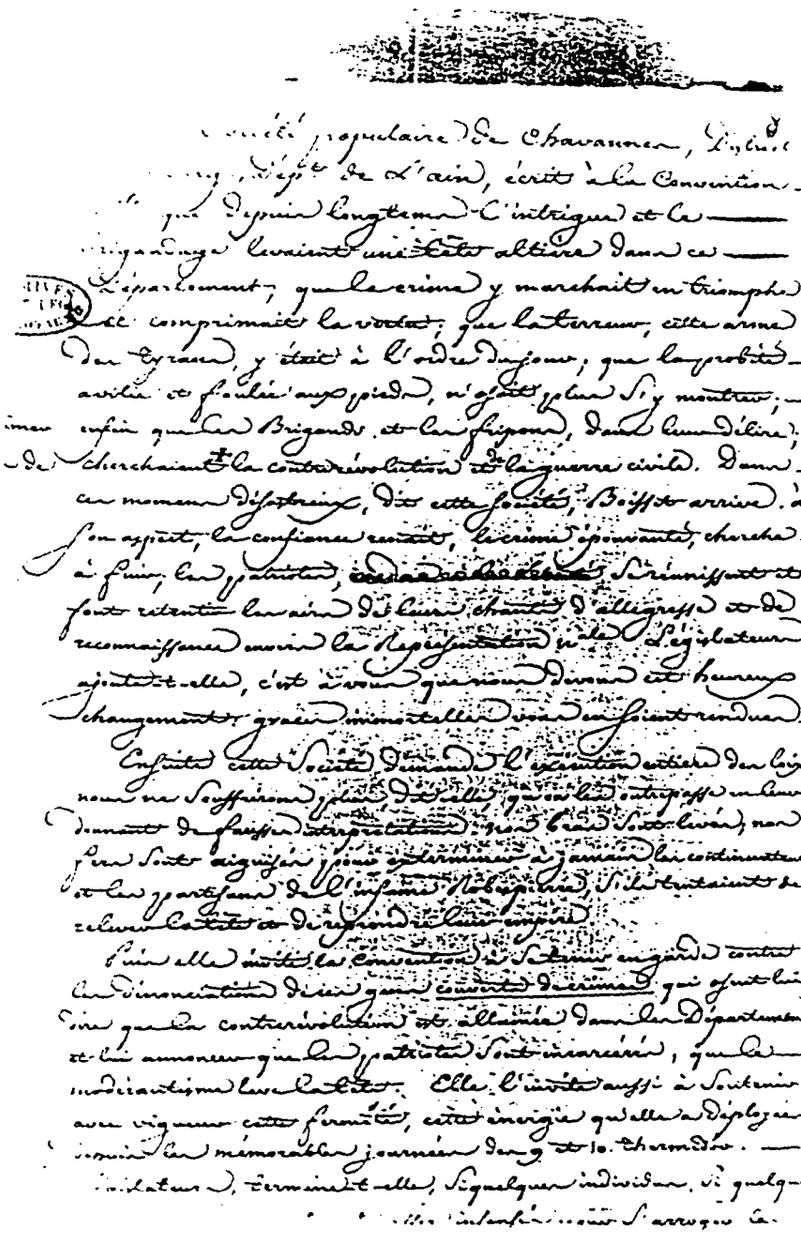

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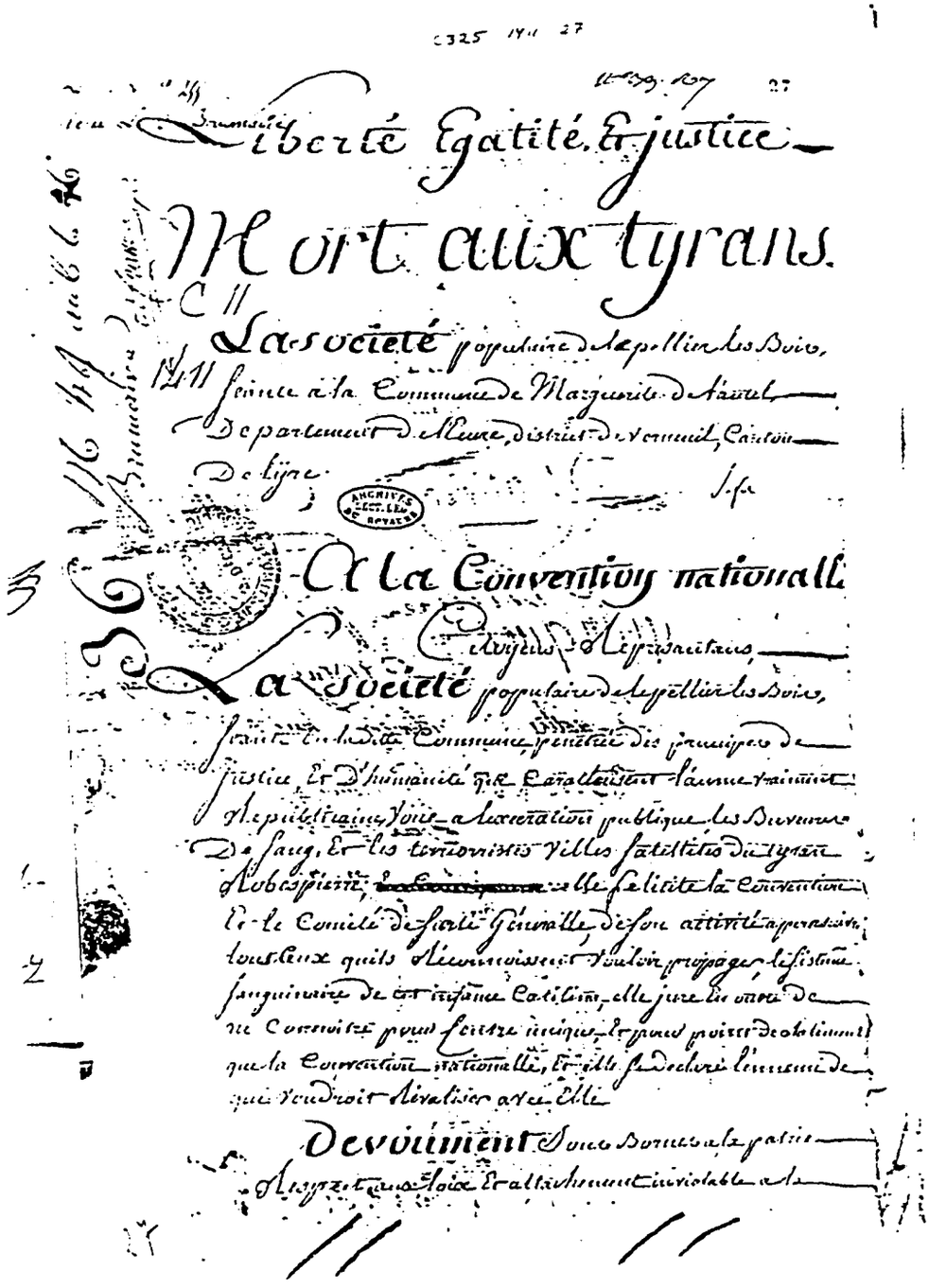


C325 1411 27

Liberté Egalité. Et justice

Mort aux tyrans.

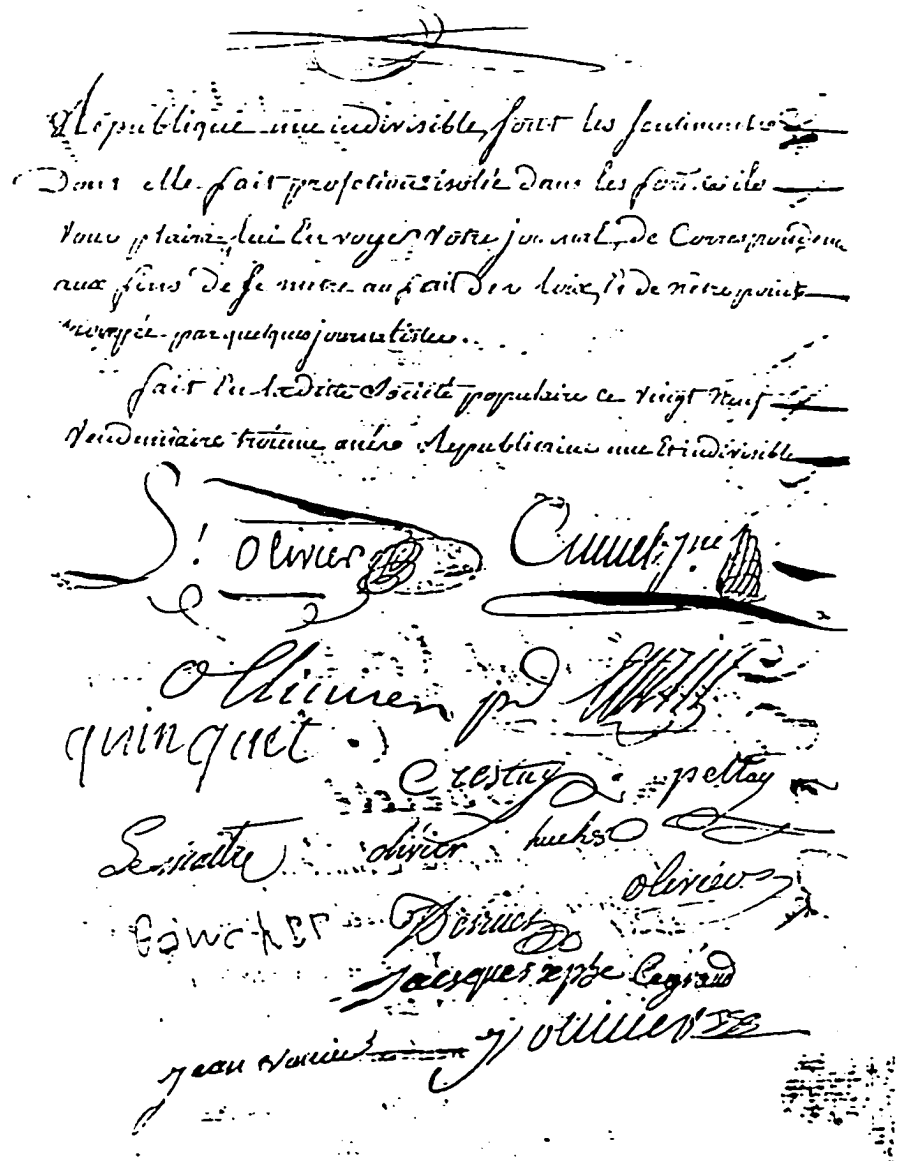
La societé populaire de Lapellier les Bois,
Seante a la Commune de Marguerite de Var,
Departement de Meure, district de Vermeil, Canton
de Tyre.

A la Convention nationalle

Citoyens Representans,

La Societé populaire de Lapellier les Bois,
Seante en ladite Commune, penetrée des principes de
justice Et d'humanité qui caracterisent l'immortel
Robespierre, vous a toujours publiquement les Brevanes
De sang, Et les terroristes Villes satellites du tyran
Robespierre, elle felicite la Convention
Et le Comité de Salut Général, de son activité a apprendre
tous ceux qui s'efforcoient de propager le système
sanguinaire de cet infame Catilina, elle jure la mort de
ne Connoitre pour Centre unique, Et pour point de ralliement
que la Convention nationalle, Et elle se declare l'ennemie de
quiconque voudroit Rivaliser avec Elle

Devouement Sans Bornes a la patrie
Respect pour la Loi Et attachement inviolable a la



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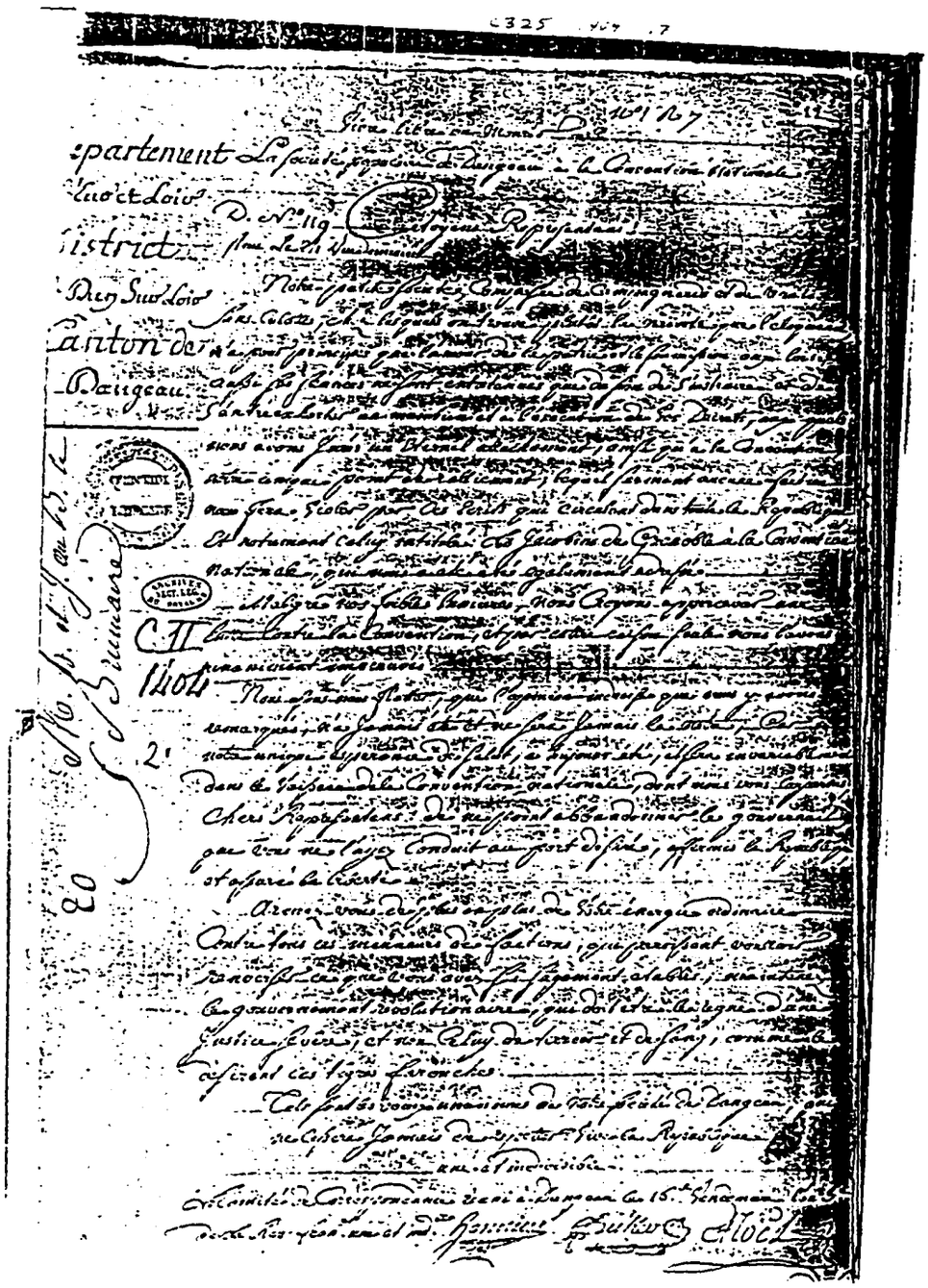
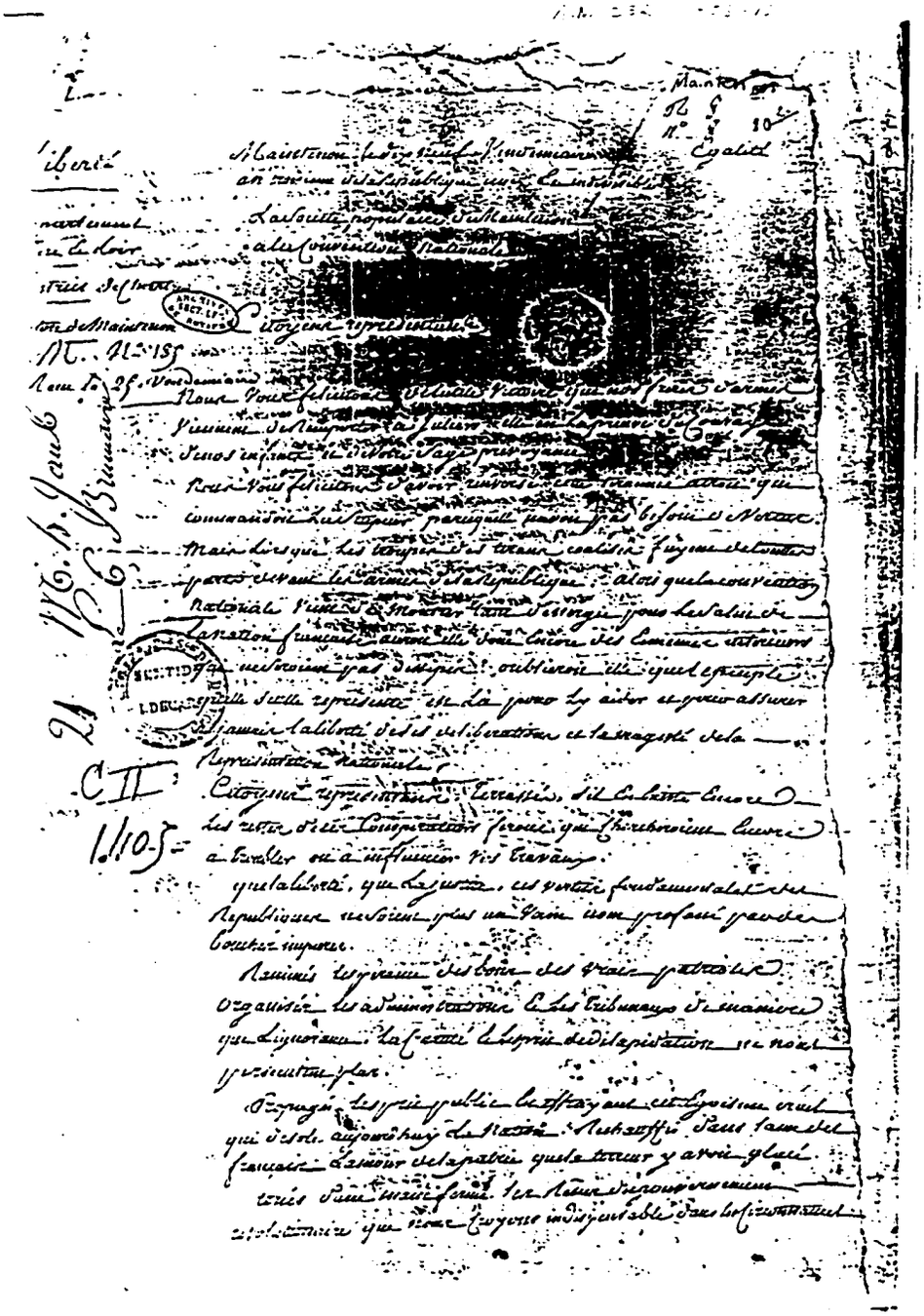




[redacted]

[redacted]

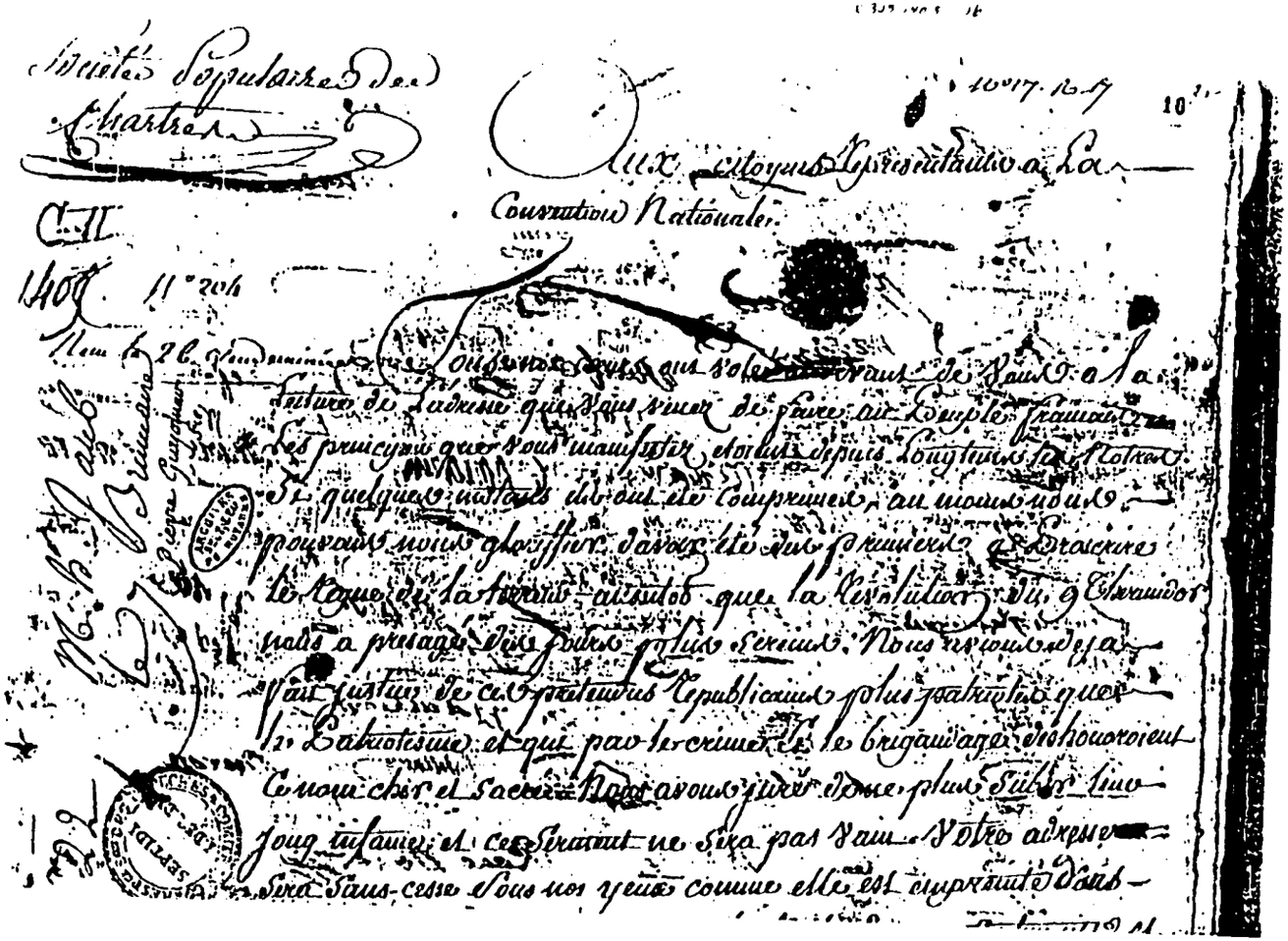
main qui soit renfermé dans de justes bornes que terrible
aux méchants, aux dilapidateurs, aux mauvais Citoyens
protege Ceux qui soumis aux Lois travaillent à maintenir
l'édification commune par la pratique des vertus Civiles et
Domestiques.

Nous vous avouons, peu docile par-dessus tout ce que
vous croyez utile au bien général de craindre de démasquer les
intrigants et les ambitieux, les plus fermes appuis et les
seules ressources de leurs nombreux Complices.

Citoyens représentants, Ce vous seuls que nous
avons delegués pour assurer notre Liberté et notre bonheur
faites un digne usage de notre Confiance. N'oubliés jamais
qu'aucun individu, qu'aucune Corporation n'en ont été honorés
ni souffert pas que personne porte atteinte à un dépot
que nous sommes venus qu'avoir remis entre vos mains. C'est
Nous vous avons placé pour y asseoir le grand ouvrage
que vous avez Commencé, Le doigt assurer à notre
Eternelle reconnoissance.

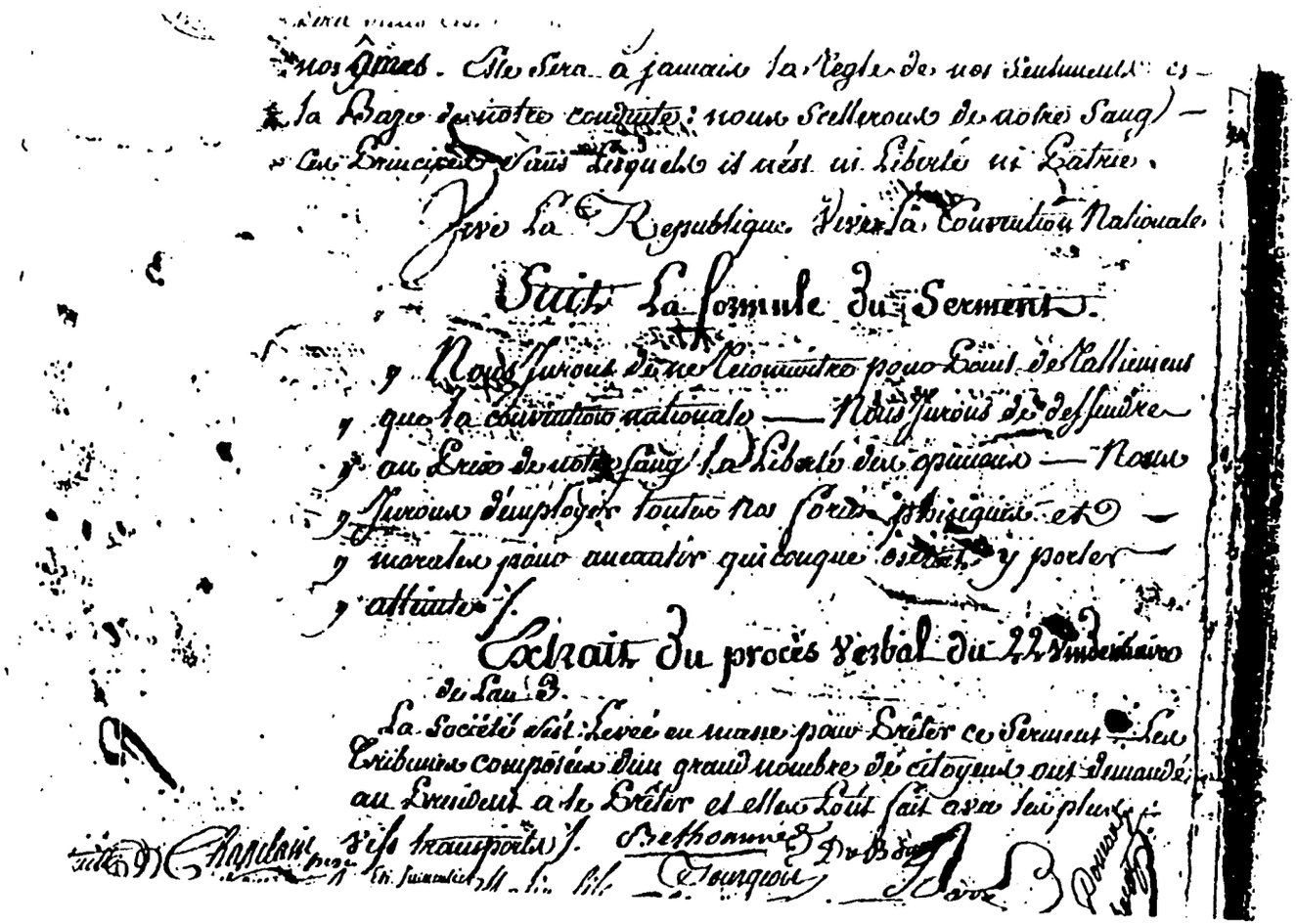
Les Présidents et Secrétaires de la Société /.

[redacted]



Aux citoyens Représentans de la
Convention Nationale.

Citoyens Représentans, qui vous êtes chargés de sauver de la
fureur de l'ennemi que vous venez de faire au Temple français
les principaux agens qui vous manifestoient depuis longtems la haine
si quelques instants doivent être comptés au nombre des
pour nous glorifier d'avoir été sur le point de
le sang de la tyrannie au lieu que la Révolution du 9 Thermidor
nous a présagé des jours plus sereins. Nous ne vous dirons
rien sur le compte de ces prétendus Républicains plus patriotes que
la Convention et qui par les crimes de le brigandage déshonoroient
ce nom cher et sacré. Nous avons juré d'être plus fidèles que
jamais à notre serment et il ne sera pas dit que votre adresse
sera sans cesse sous nos yeux comme elle est imprimée dans



nos âmes. Elle sera à jamais la Règle de nos Sentiments et
la Base de notre conduite: nous Scellerons de notre Sang
ces Principes sans lesquels il n'est ni Liberté ni Patrie.

Vive la République. Vive la Convention Nationale.

Suit la formule du Serment.

« Nous Jurons de ne Reconnaître pour Loix que les Actes émanés
« de la Convention nationale — Nous Jurons de défendre
« au Prix de notre Sang la Liberté des opinions — Nous
« Jurons d'employer toutes nos forces publiques et
« morales pour anéantir quiconque oserait y porter
« atteinte ».

Extrait du procès Verbal du 22 Nivôse
de l'an 3.

La Société dit: Levée en masse pour Prêter ce Serment — Les
Tribunes composées d'un grand nombre de citoyens ont demandé
au Président à le Prêter et elles l'ont fait avec les plus

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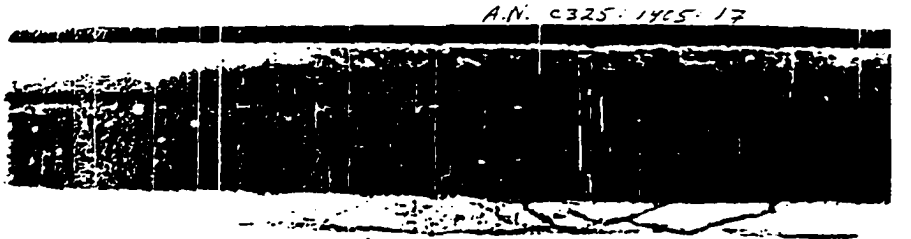


Chartres 24 Vendemiaire 3e année de la
République une & Indivisible 17

Liberté. Egalité Fraternité

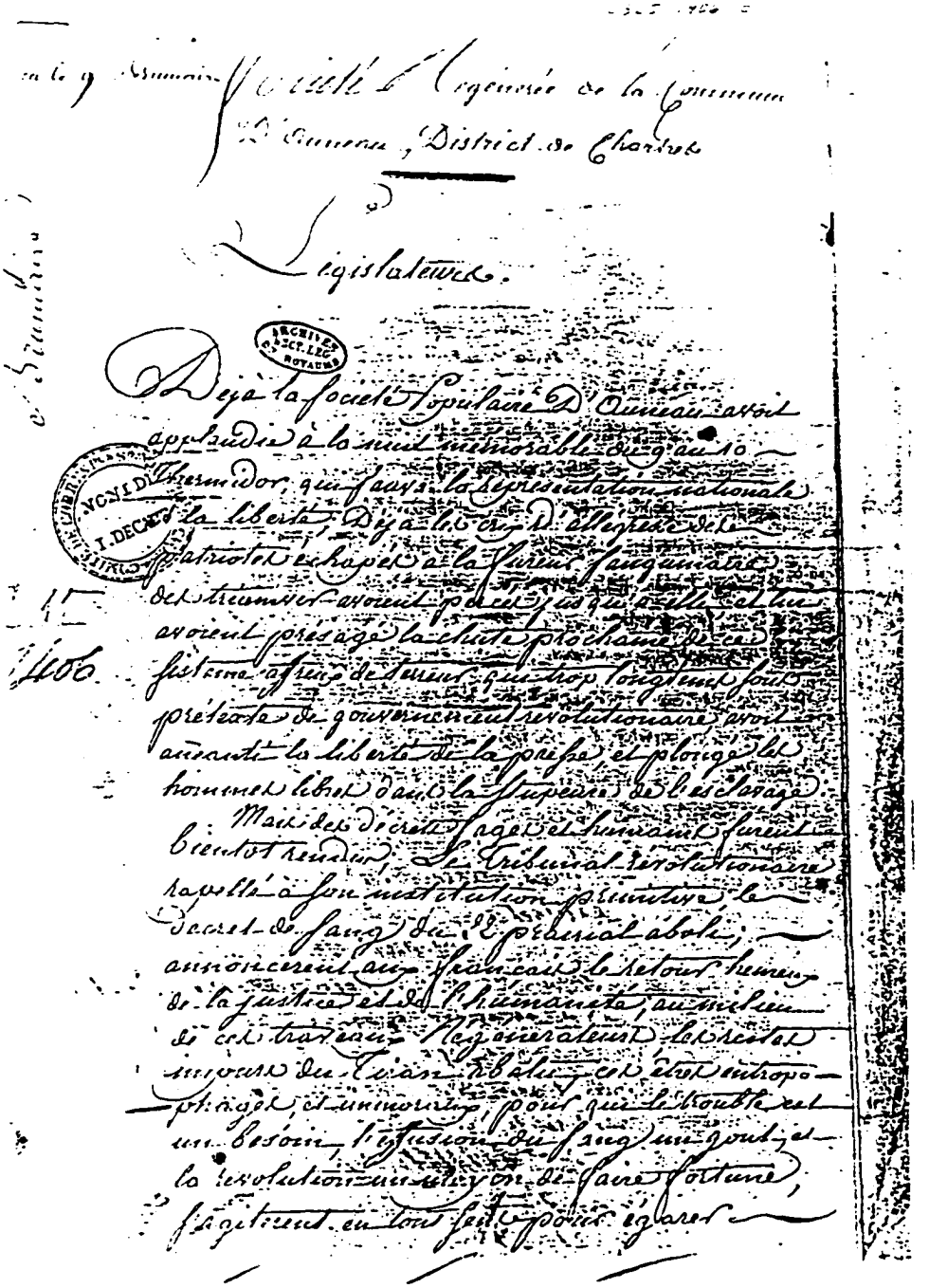
Le Président de la Société Populaire & Révolutionnaire
des Amis du Peuple séante à Chartres
Au Président de la Convention Nationale

Citoyen Président

La Société que je préside a voté dans sa
séance du 22 de ce mois l'adresse ci jointe
et je prie d'en donner lecture à la
Convention Nationale.

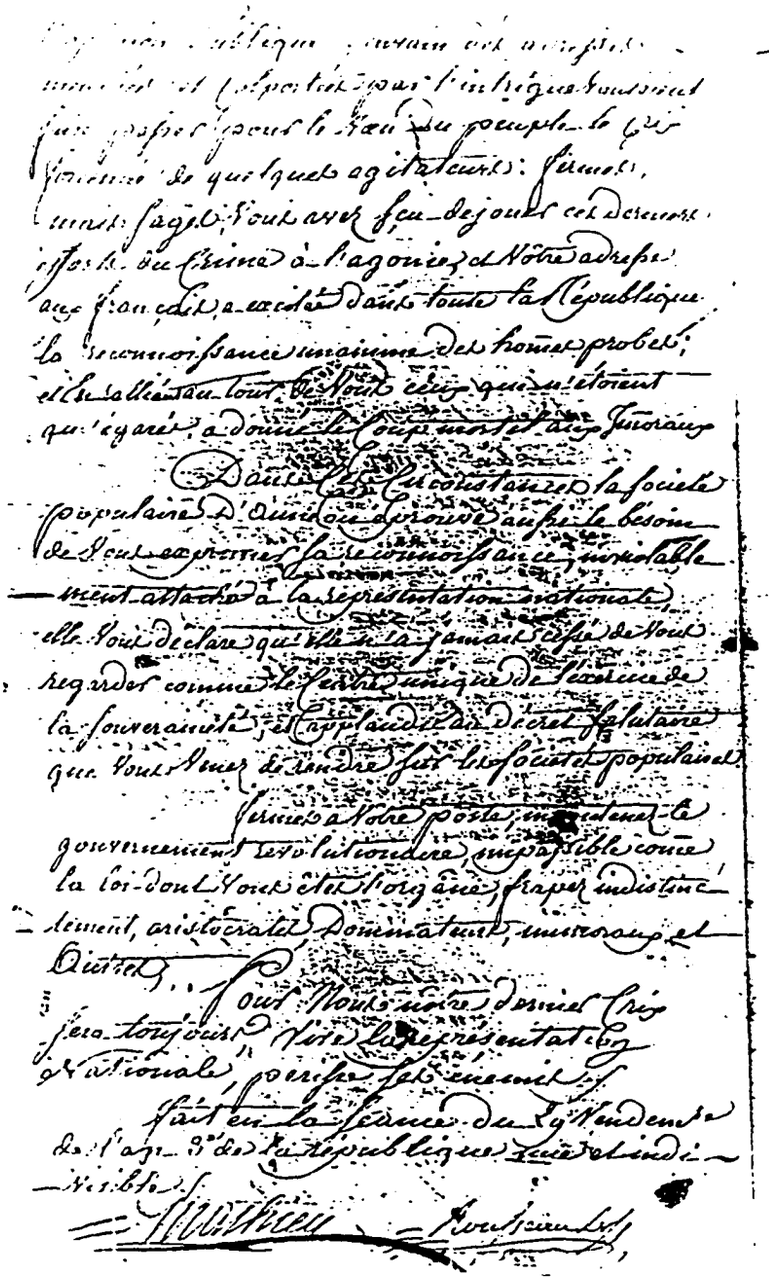
Salut & Fraternité. J.

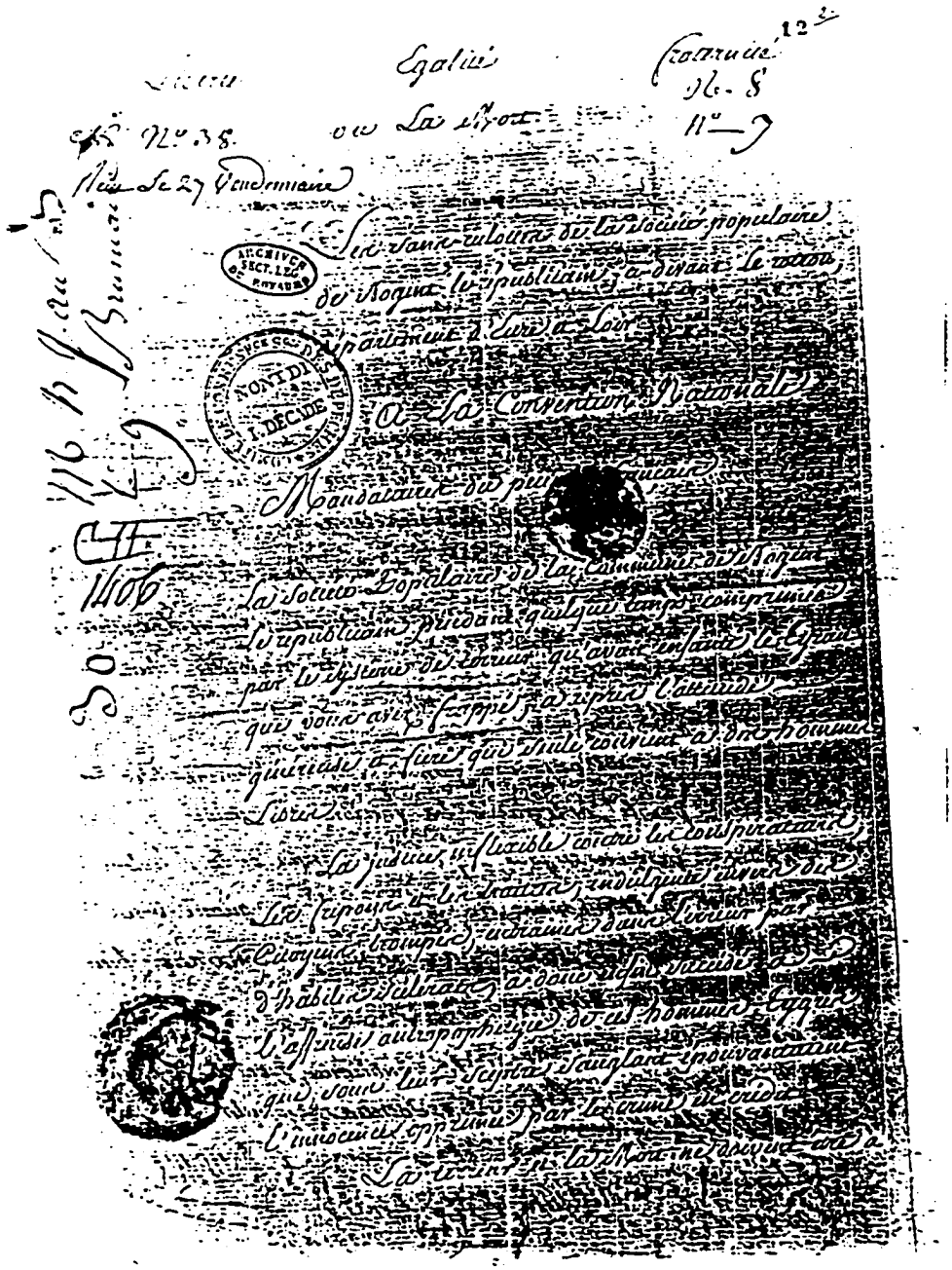
Carré



Législateurs.

Déjà la société populaire d'Ouzouer avait applaudi à la mémorable journée du 9 au 10 thermidor, qui sauva la représentation nationale et la liberté. Déjà elle s'était allégrée de la chute des patriotes échappés à la fureur sanguinaire des tyrans qui avaient pesé jusqu'à elle et leur avaient présagé la chute prochaine de ces fantômes affreux de tyrans qui trop longtemps pour la prétendue gouvernement révolutionnaire avaient anéanti la liberté de la presse et plongé les hommes libres dans la stupeur de l'esclavage. Mais des décrets sages et humains furent bientôt rendus. Le Tribunal révolutionnaire rappelé à son institution primitive, le Tocsin de sang du Tribunal abolis, annoncèrent aux français le retour heureux de la justice et de l'humanité, au milieu des cris douloureux des victimes immolées à l'atroce anthropophagie, et innombrables pour qui le trouble est un besoin, l'effusion du sang un goût et la révolution un moyen de faire fortune, s'agitèrent en tous sens pour égarer





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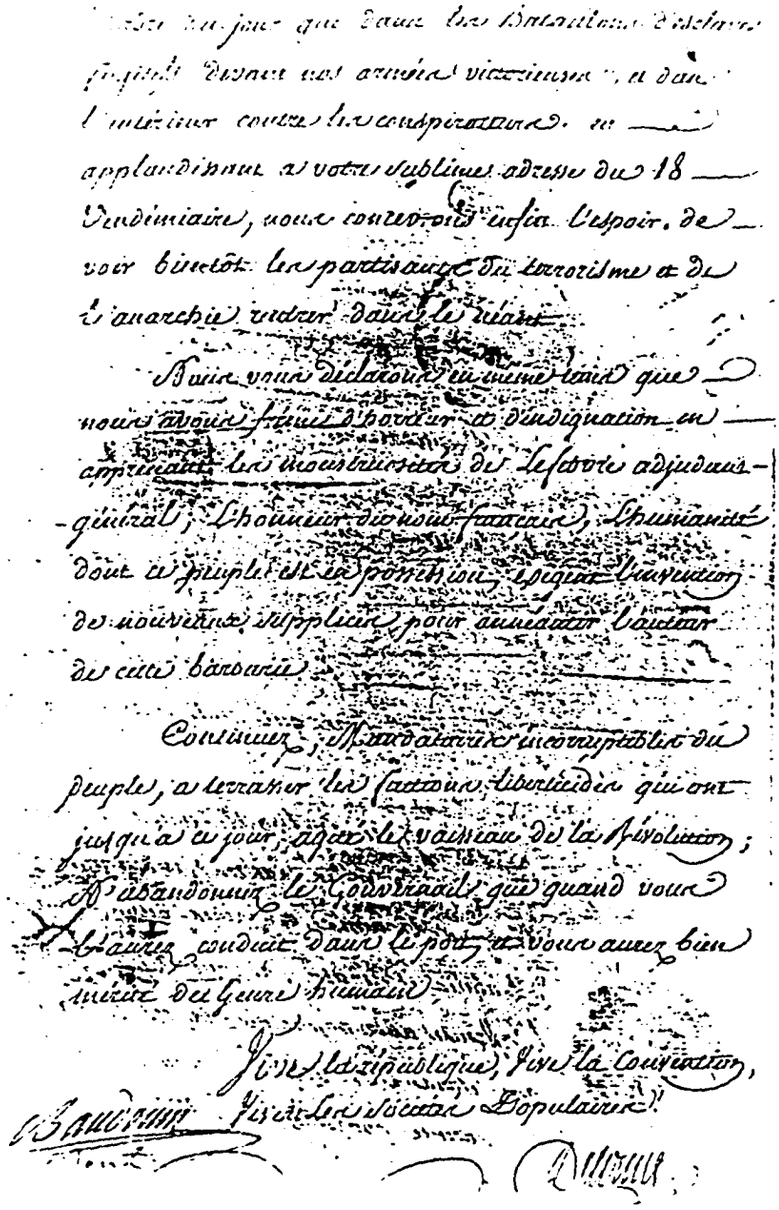
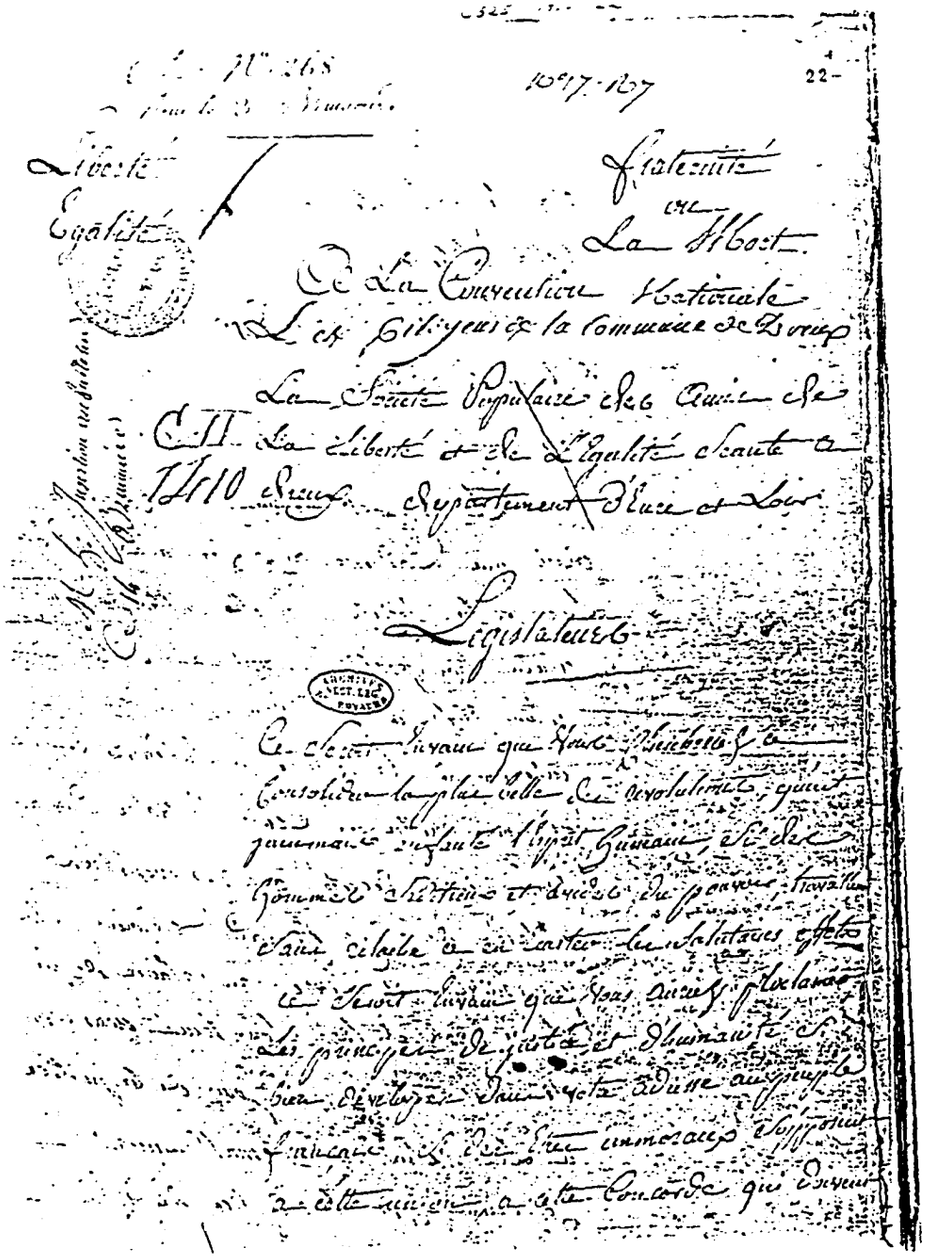




C325 1410 22

être à plus forte raison Ennemis de
notre Liberté!

Convaincu il est donc pour nous
Citoyens, Certain que les principes que
nous professons, Sont les vrais

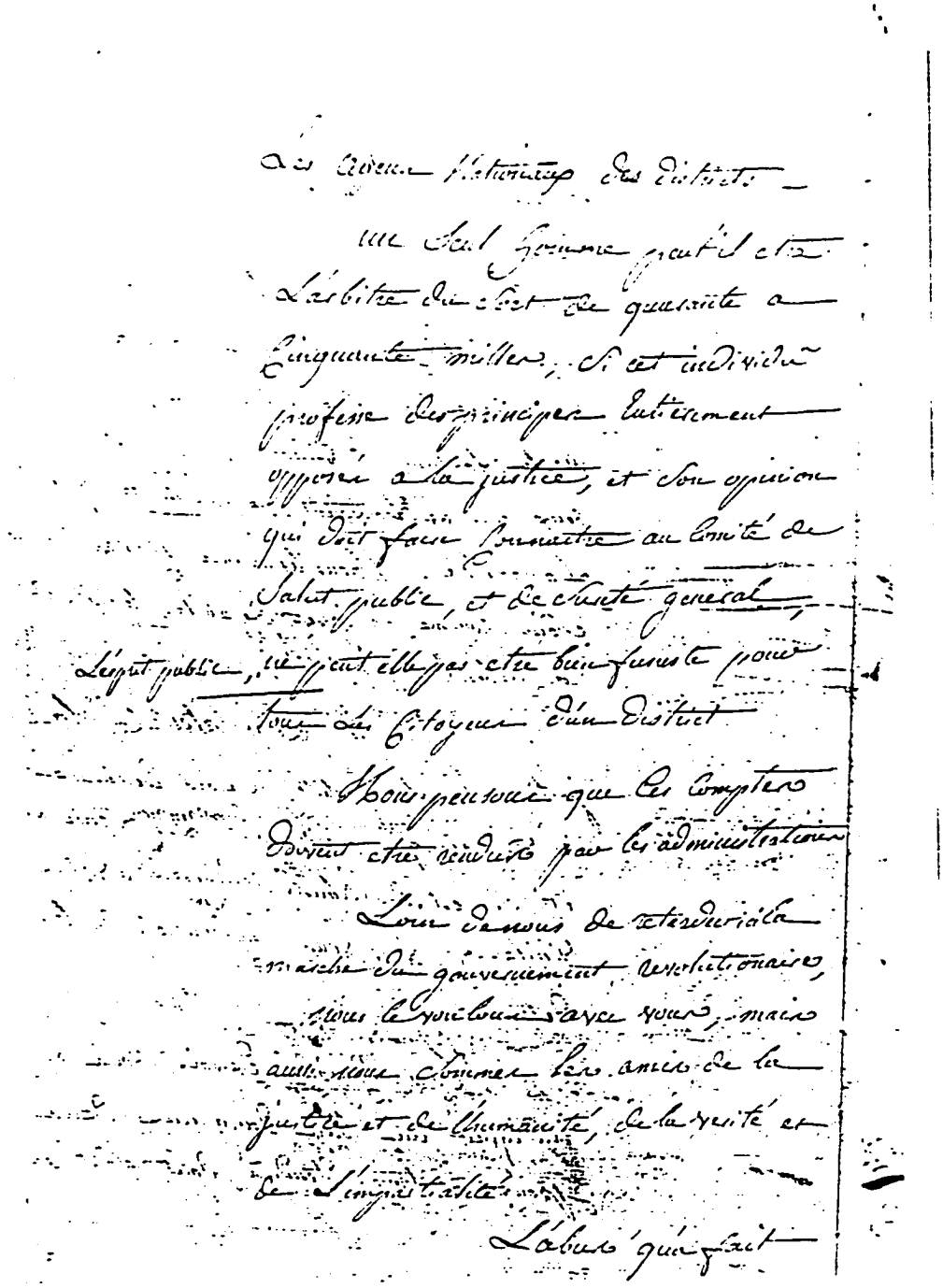
Le Rapport de vos trois Comités,
ainsi que l'Adresse aux Français, ont été
lus à la Société, quel enthousiasme,
quels transports, ils ont excités, les
plus Hideux applaudissements en ont
interrompu la lecture et plusieurs orateurs
et pour suite le Sieur a votre Ouvrage
Vous avez décrété que les monstres
altérés de sang humain, seroient partout
poursuivis, et livrés au glaive de la
Loy, avez vous tous ces mêmes
et bien Nouveaux, le jour de la justice
a Lui sur votre malheureuse
Patrie, et le Supplice du Tirant

C325 1410 22

et de la Constance, avec le Courage
de la guerre de mort que nous avons
déclarée à tous nos ennemis, aux intrigans,
aux factieux, aux traîtres, aux faux
= Dénonciateurs, aux tièdes, aux dilapidateurs
de la fortune Publique, en un mot à tous
ceux qui ne trouvoient de jouissance que dans
l'anarchie. Nous les avons chassés de notre
Sein comme indignes d'habiter le sol de
la Liberté.

Oui Législateurs, la
justice et la probité seront désormais
les vertus que auxiliaires constamment fidèles
et s'il est des abus échappés à votre
Vigilance, vous vous empresserez de les
détruire.

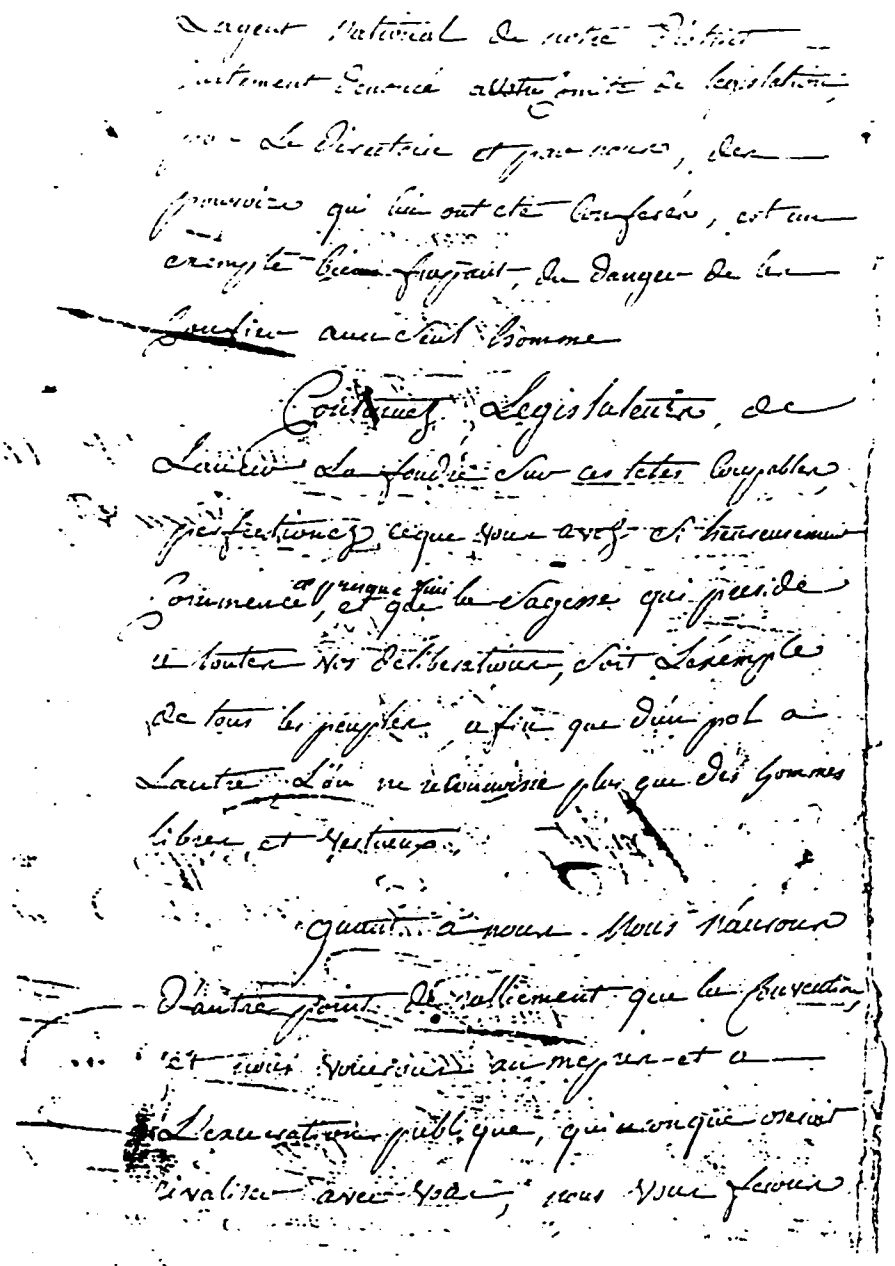
Nous Citoyens devons vous en
indiquer un bien dangereux, dans les
premiers jours Etendu, dont tout exercice

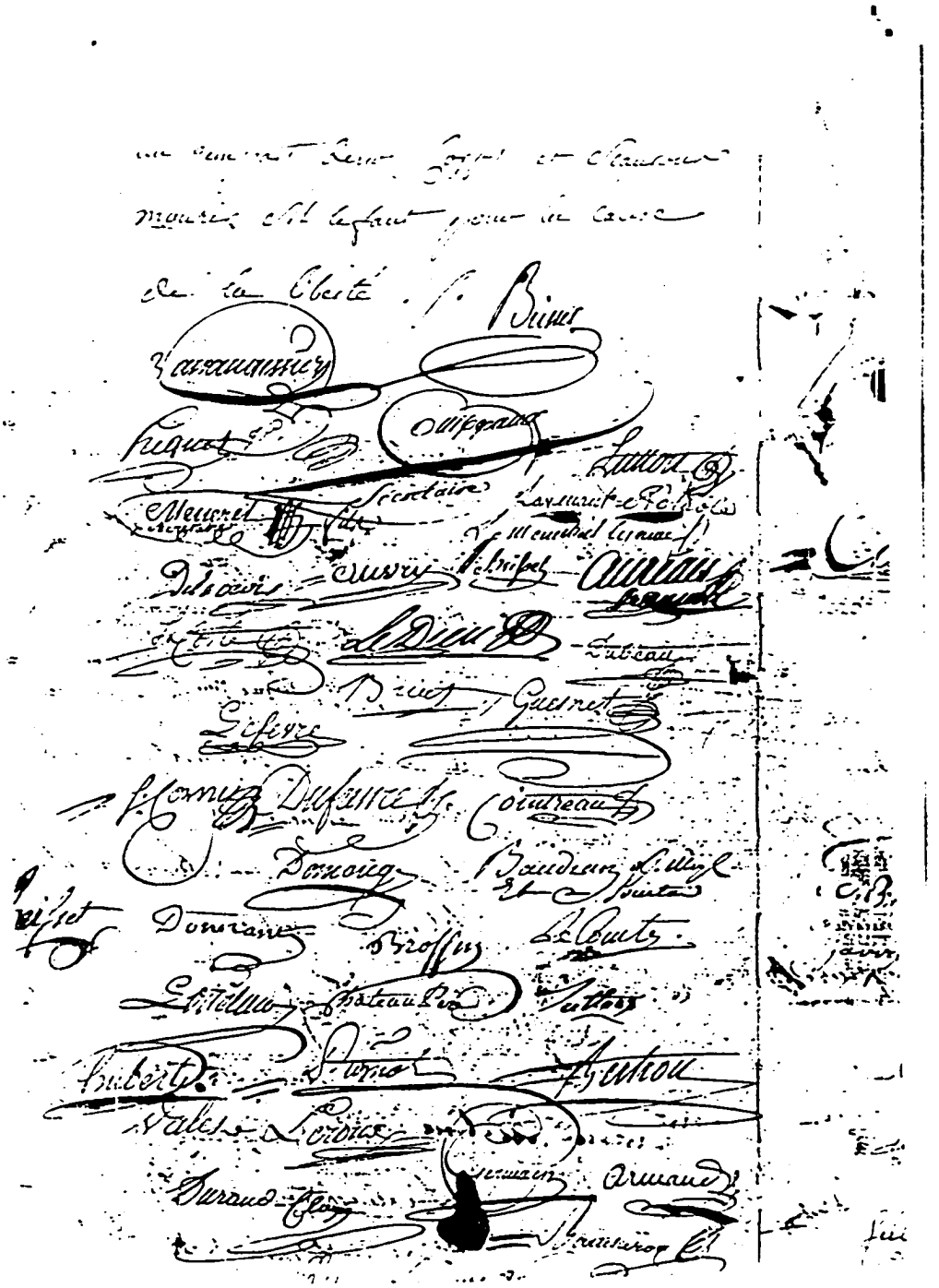


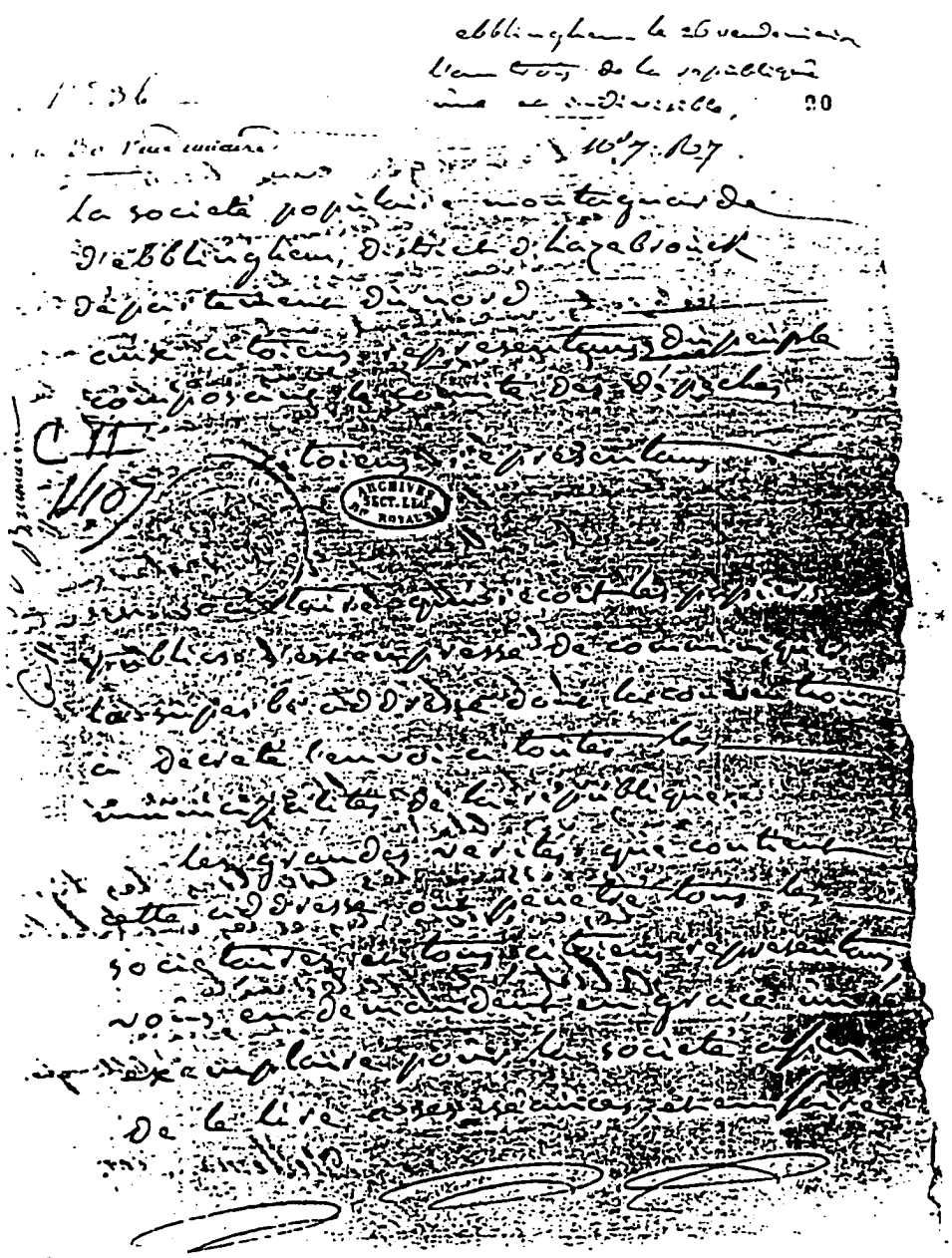
aux Citoyens Patriotes des districts —

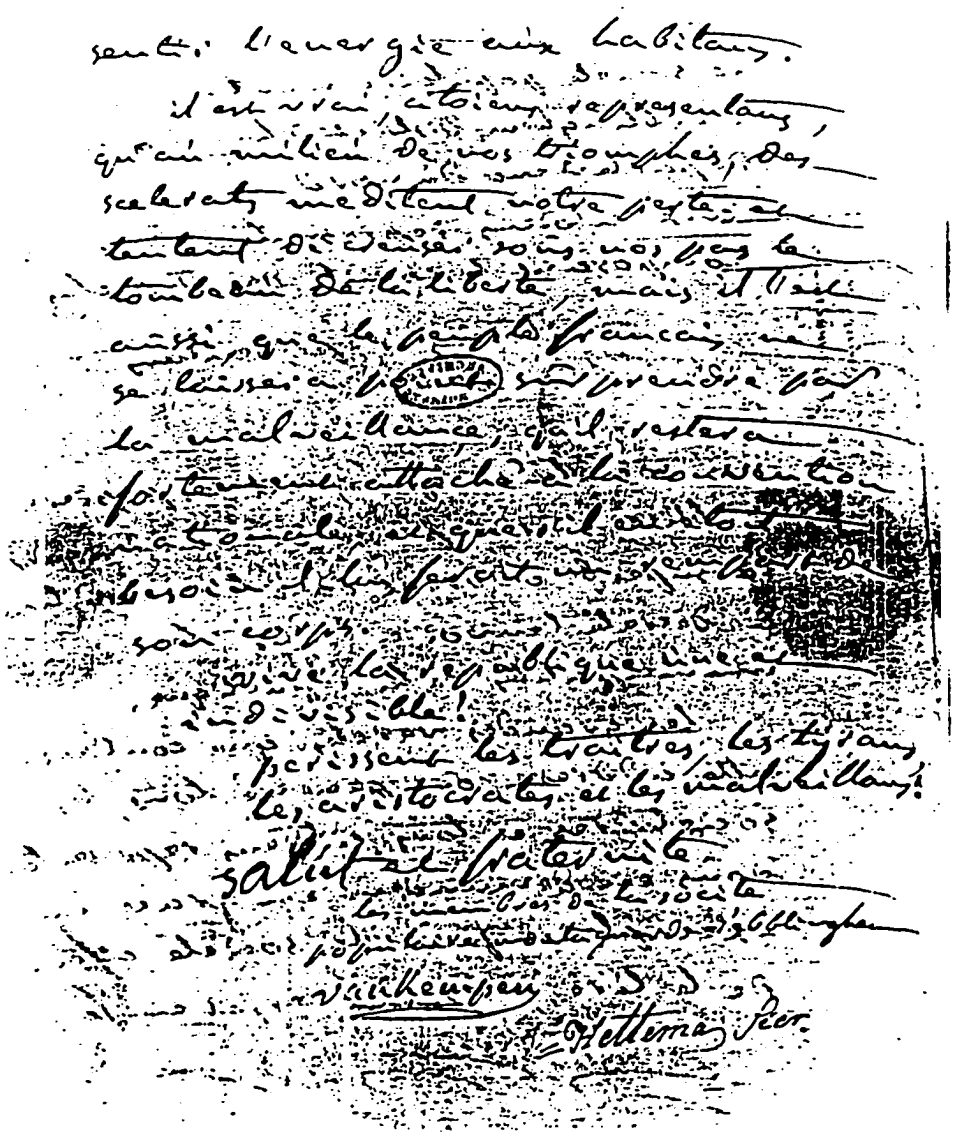
Un Seul homme peut il etre
l'arbitre du sort de quarante —
Cinquante Milles, Si cet individu
professe des principes Entierement —
opposés a la justice, et son opinion
qui doit faire Sommettre au Comité de
Salut public et de Sureté general,
Le Salut public, ne peut elle pas etre bien funeste pour
tous les Citoyens d'un District

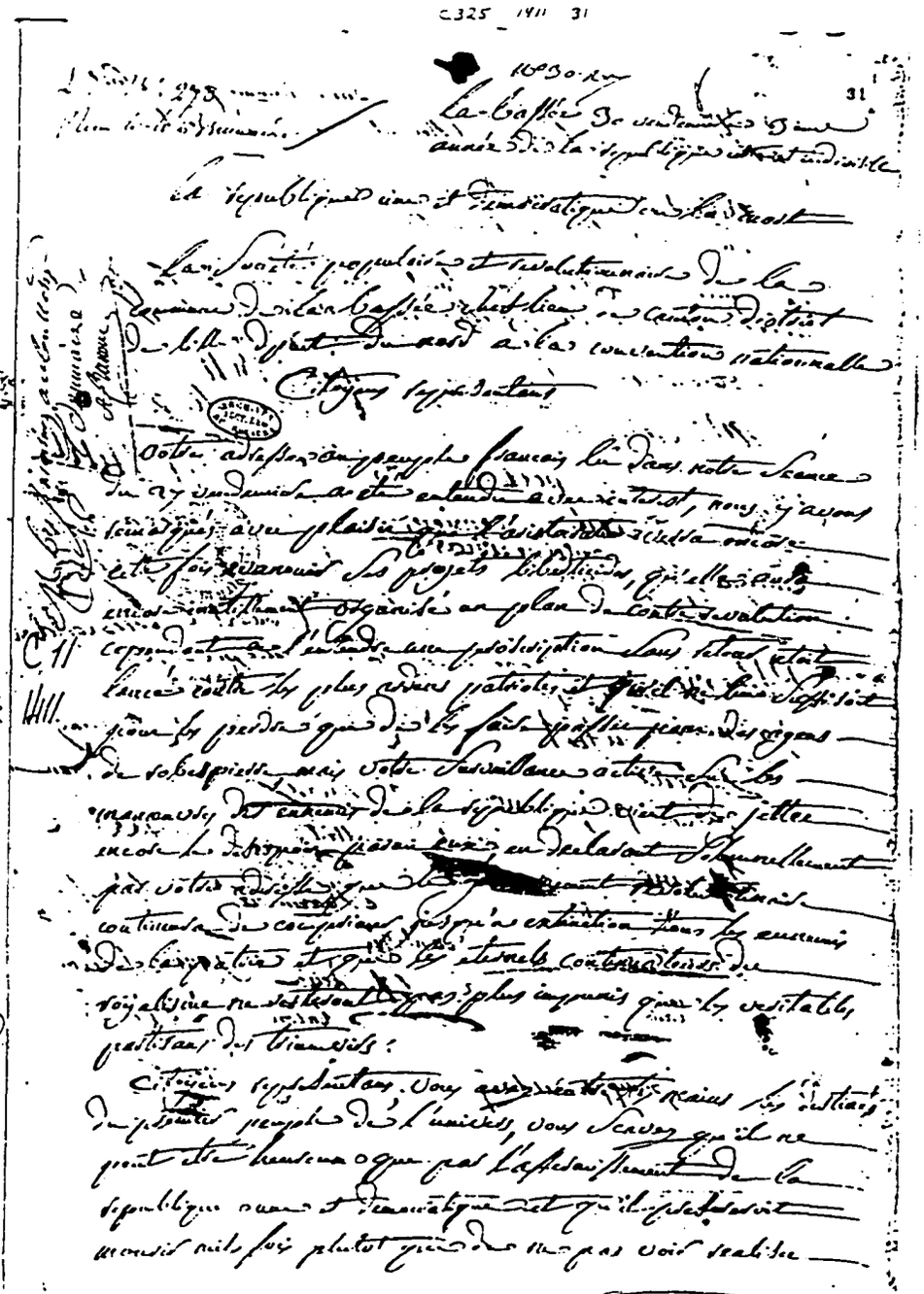
N'est il pas urgent que les Comptes
doivent etre rendus par les administrateurs
Sous le Serment de retarder la
marche du gouvernement Revolutionaire,
Sous le quelle nous vivons, mais
aussi afin de donner les armes de la
justice et de l'humanité, de la verité et
de l'integrité aux
Laboureurs qui font

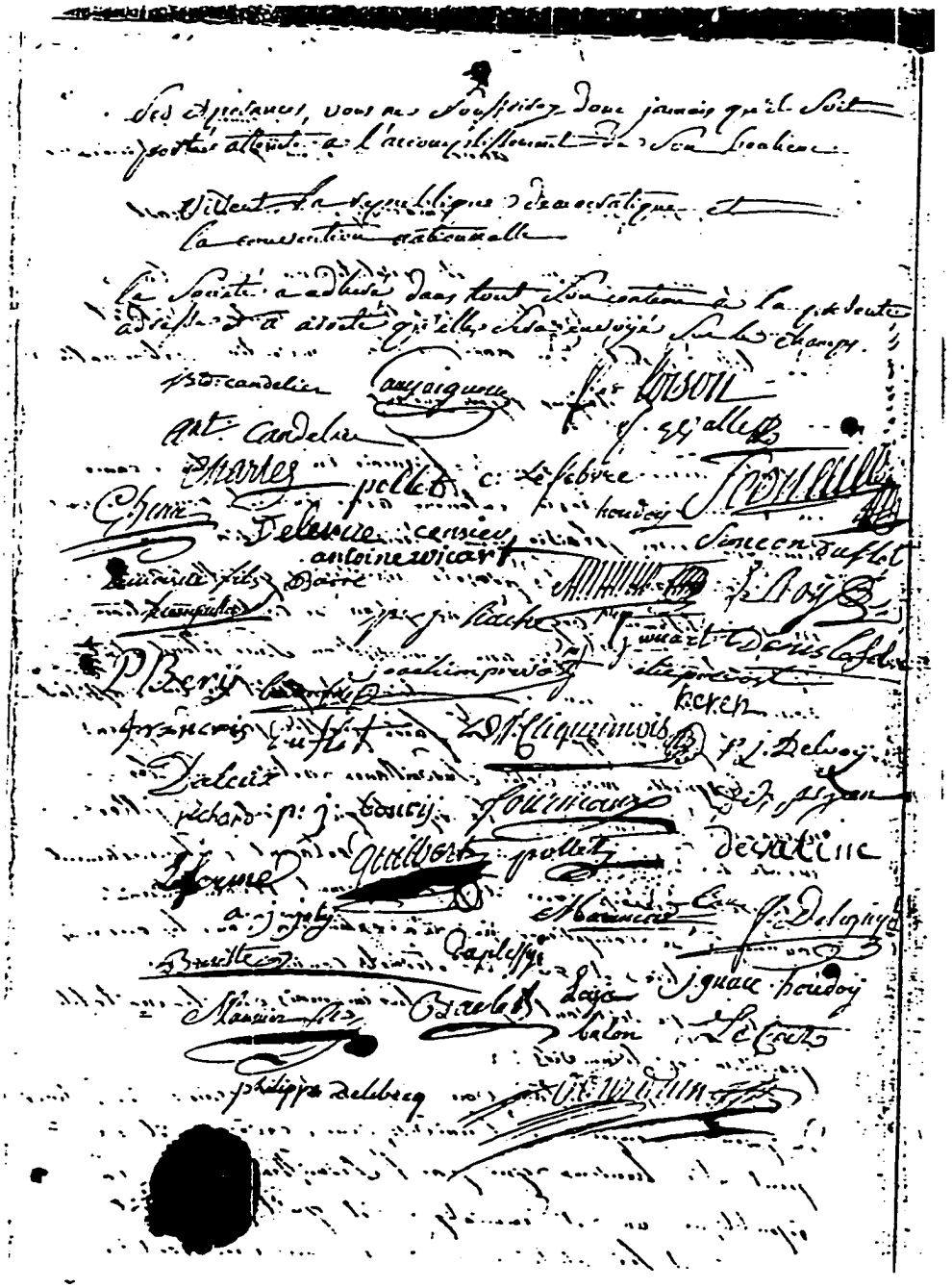





ARCHIVES
SECT. LEG.
ROYALES







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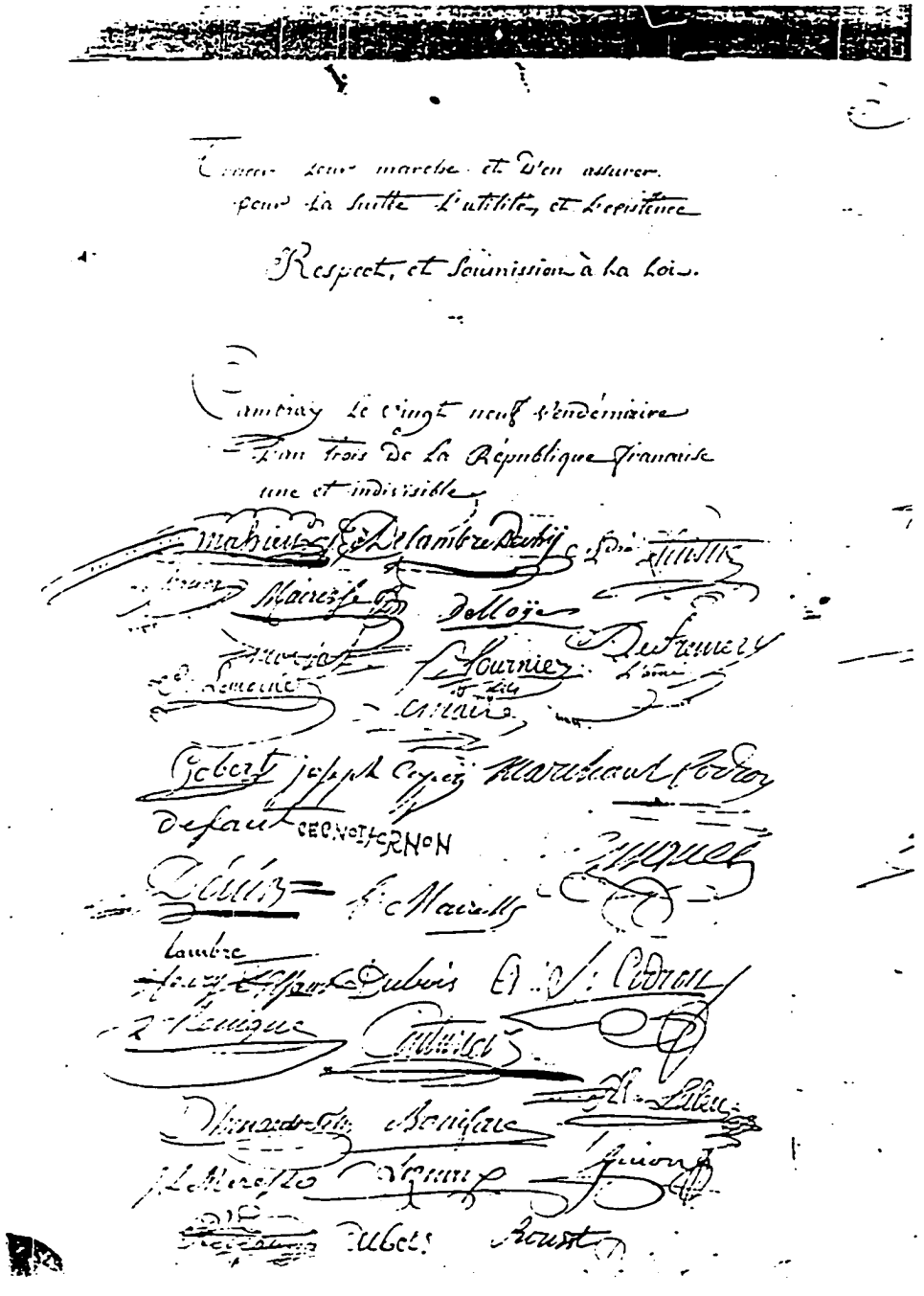
Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, humanité, unité indivisibilité De la République ou la mort

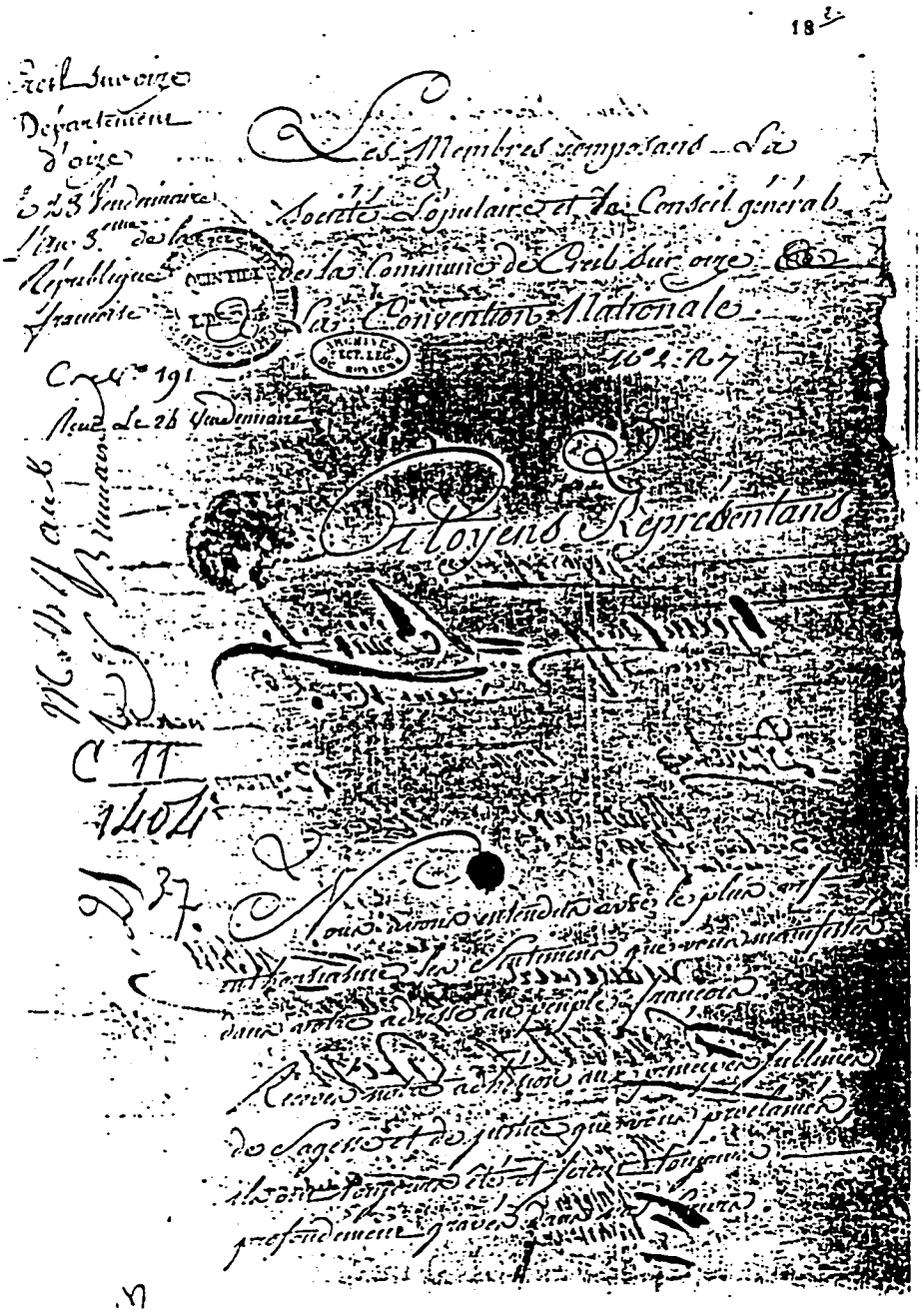
Les Citoyens Soussignés membres de la 11e Société populaire de Chambéry à la Convention Nationale

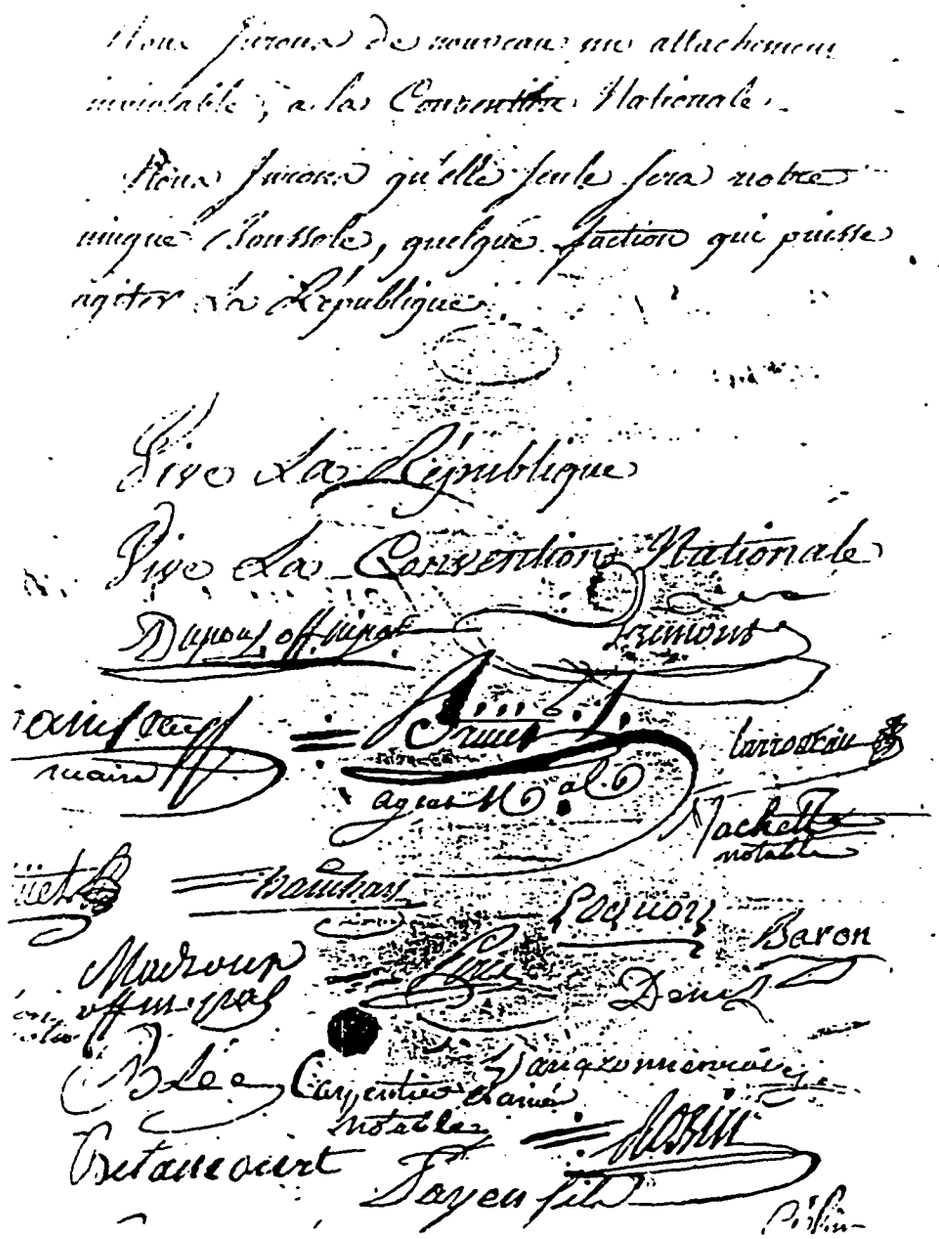
Législateurs,

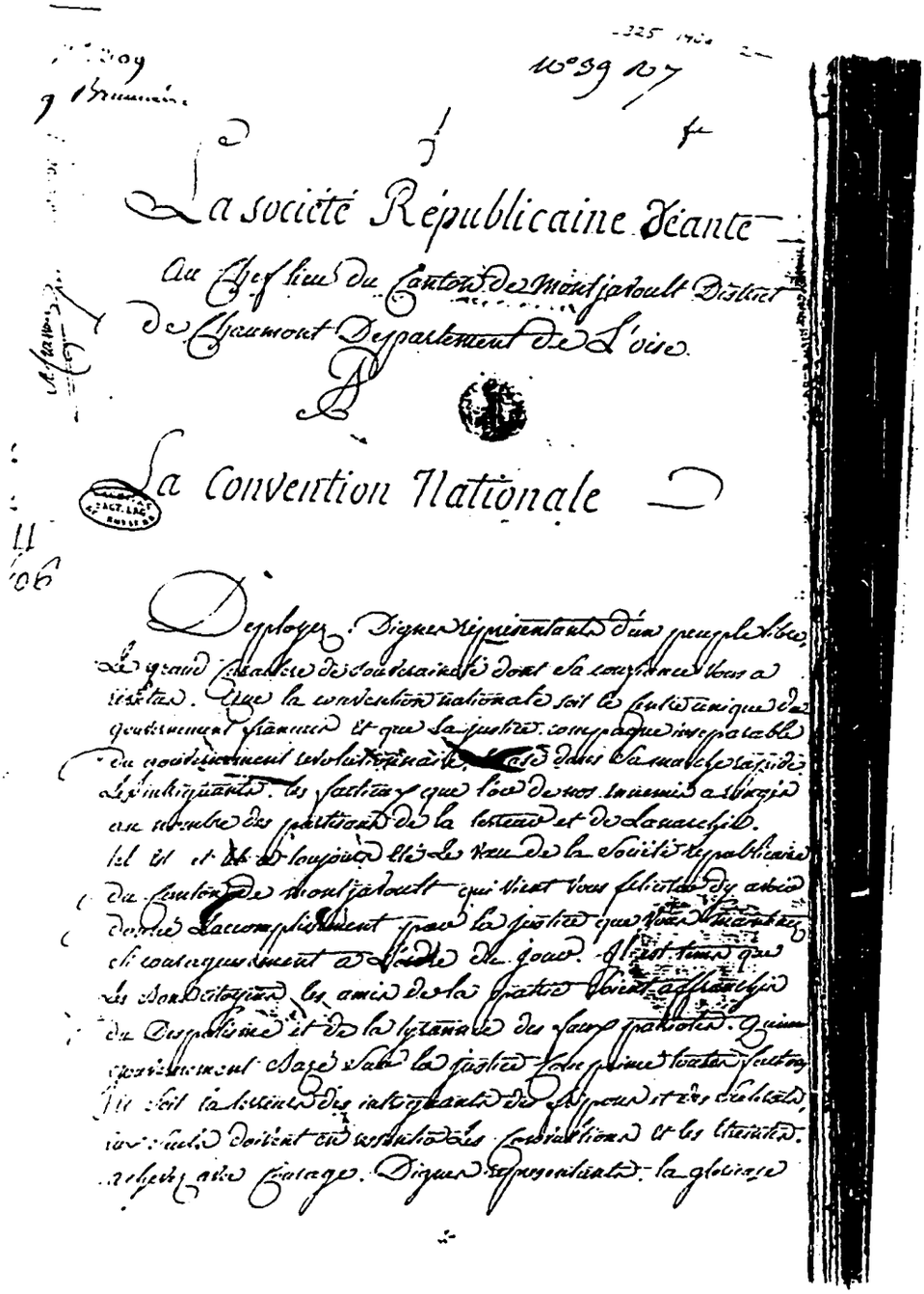
Représentans d'un peuple qui a juré De mourir ou De vivre Libre, Continués De bien mériter de la patrie. Législateurs, Votre amour immuable pour elle, Votre union, L'attitude Ferme Et imposante, que Vos Considérations, L'énergie que Vous avez fait paraître, L'humanité, la Sagesse, Les Vertus, qui guident Ses pas, assurent à ce peuple Sa Liberté Et Son Triomphe.

Investie de Votre entière Confiance, poursuis, Législateurs, Votre Révolutionnaire et glorieuse Carrière, Votre Sublime Ouvrage, et la Récompense, L'univers à jamais étonné, Vous Dévoile tout l'esprit De Domination, Dont Rome Se Servit pour asservir le monde, Elle adressa au peuple Français la Déesse La Perfidie, Elle Lui adressa la Tranquillité Des Sociétés populaires, Elle Sermais à l'abri De l'intrigue ambitieuse et Liberticide, qui trop Longtems les a Dominées, Elle Lui fournit Du Sage Decret qui vient De Les rendre à Leur Etat primitif, De Leur









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N°39 27

9 Brumaire

La société Républicaine séante
au Chef lieu du Canton de Montjavoult District
de Beaumont Département de l'Oise

La Convention Nationale

Législateurs. Dignes représentants d'un peuple libre,
le grand théâtre de coalitions dont la conservation vous a
été confiée. Que la convention nationale soit le point unique de
gouvernement français et que la justice, compagne inséparable
du gouvernement révolutionnaire, soit dans la main de ceux qui
l'administrent. Les satellites que l'or de nos ennemis a soudoyés
au nombre des patriotes de la Vendée et de la Bretagne.
Tel est le langage que le vœu de la société républicaine
du canton de Montjavoult qui vient vous féliciter de votre
dernier accomplissement pour la justice que vous avez rendue
à Custine. Législateurs, il est temps que
les Sans Culottes, les amis de la patrie soient affranchis
de l'oppression et de la tyrannie des faux patriotes. Qu'un
gouvernement sage et sage la justice soient toujours soutenus
par le glaive de la loi contre les intrigants de tous les pays et de tous les
rangs qui doivent être les satellites des coalitions et les ennemis
acharnés du peuple. Dignes représentants, la gloire

Citoyens que vous parcourez et visitez les Départements pour
connaître qui Vous a induit de vos fonctions et de vos
Sacrifices toutes les administrations de Vaucluse
de Canaveyre. Du Despotisme et de la Superstition dont
les avaient infectées les [illegible] que la loi seule Organe
de la Volonté Souveraine du peuple, Habitera sous les
auspices de la justice, son Temple chez toutes les Nations.
Le Spectacle du Bonheur de la France auquel vous
aurez contribué et la reconnaissance du peuple, seront
vos plus douces recompenses dont vous jouirez dans
Vos Foyers.

Fait [illegible] Leblanc

Saladin Saumier

Lefevre Thiard

Revert Bambois

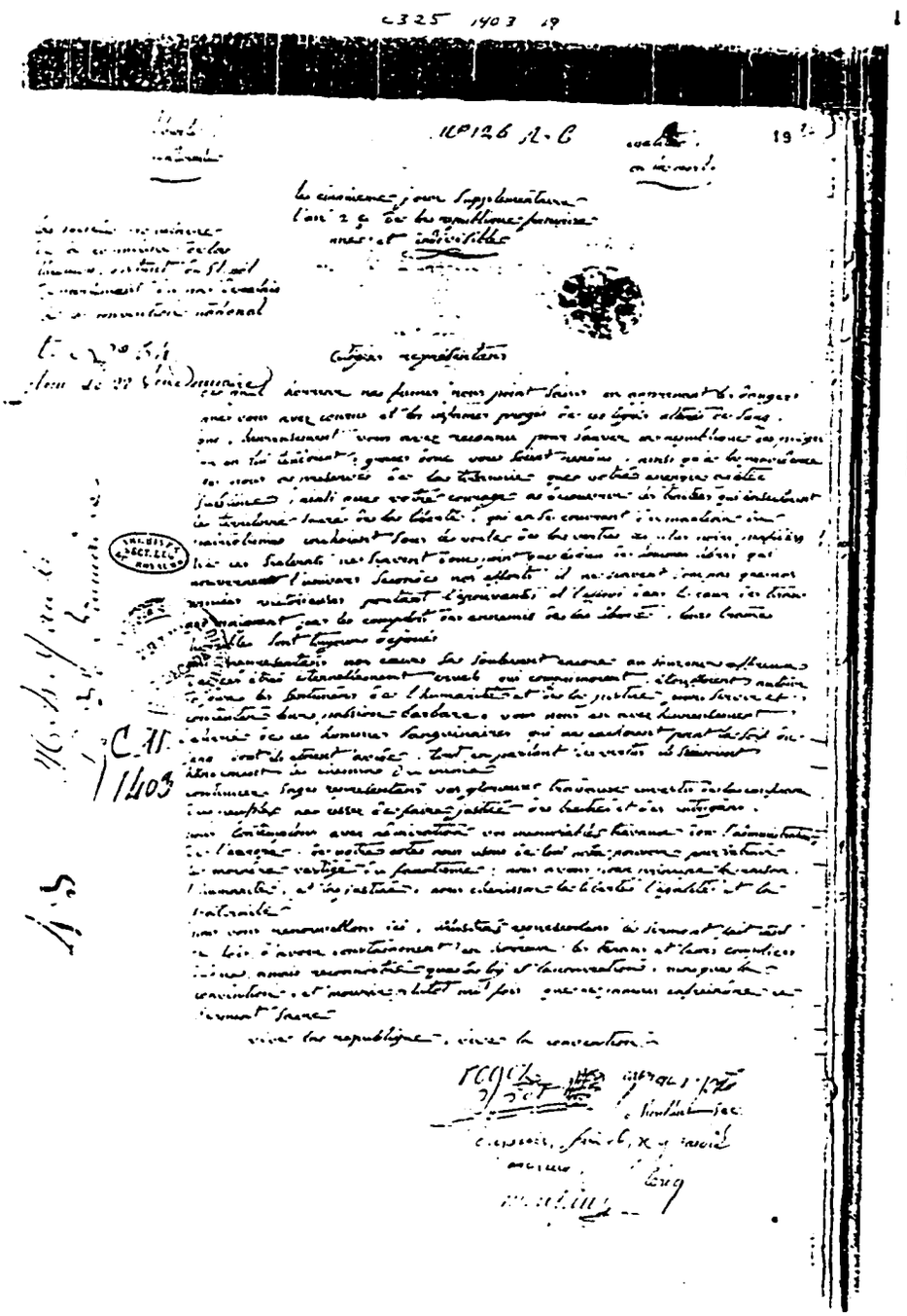
Procert

Martin prêtre

Jeandaux

Jeanne J.F. Crespel

Le Blanc maréchal



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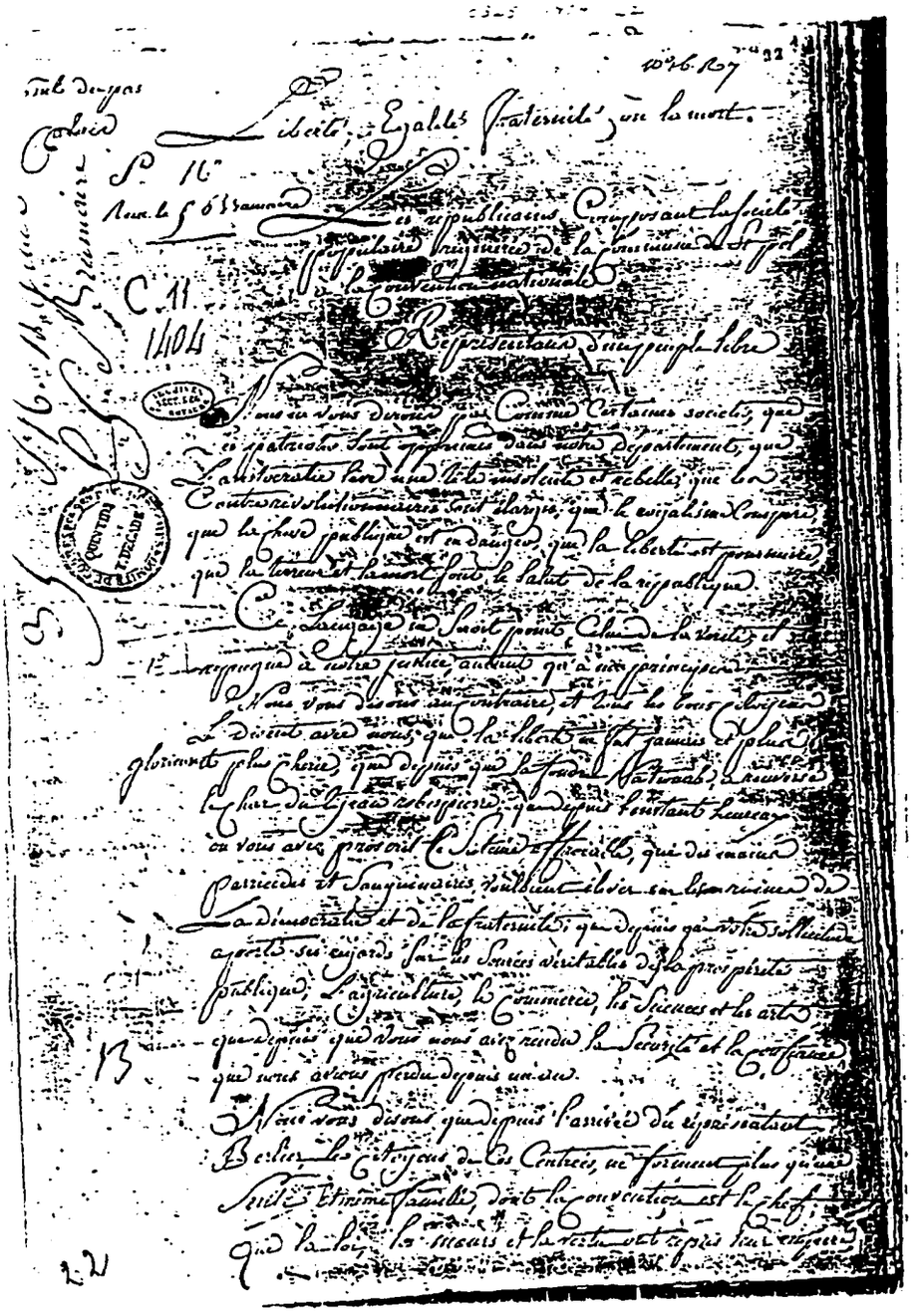
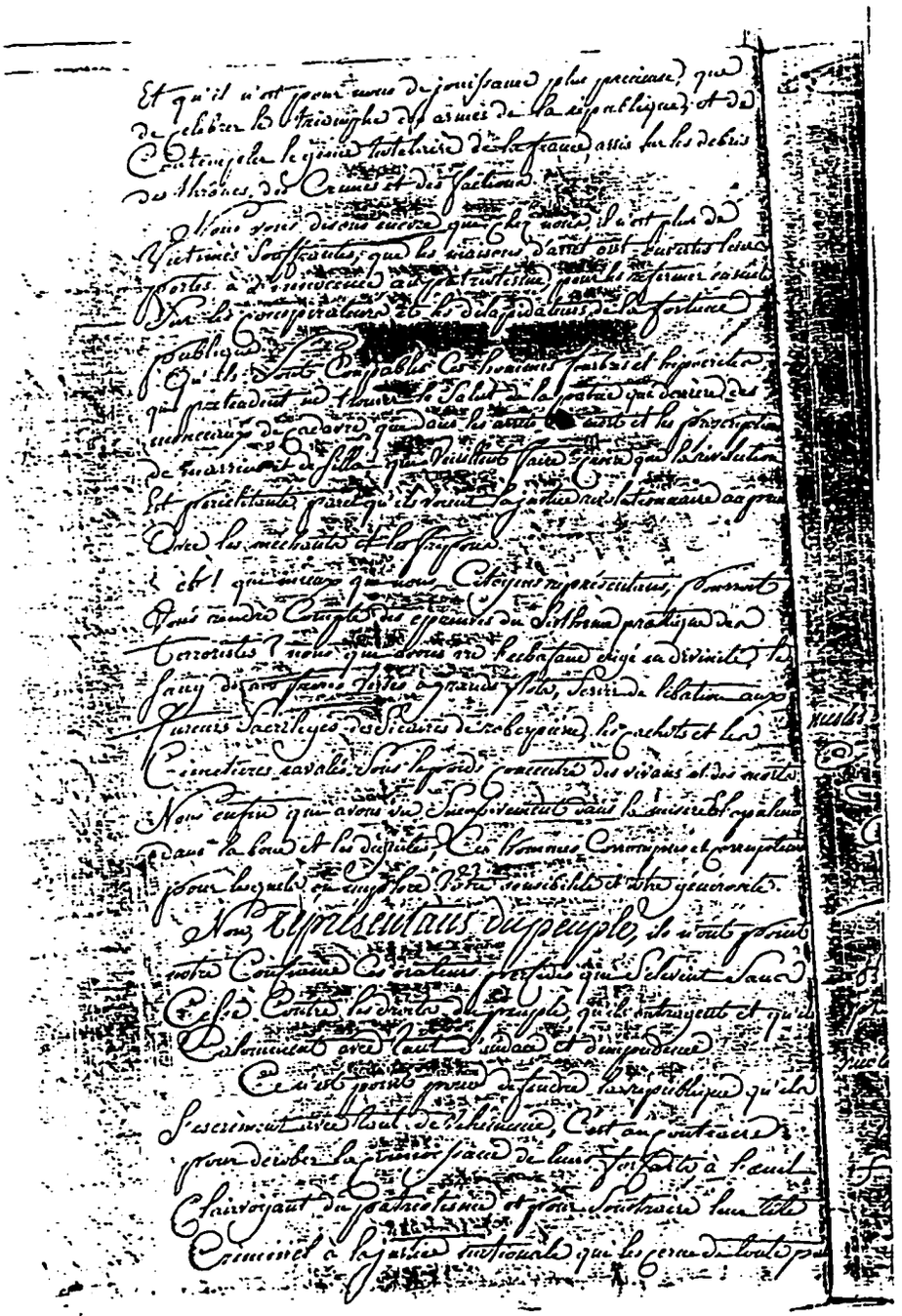
N° 126 A. C

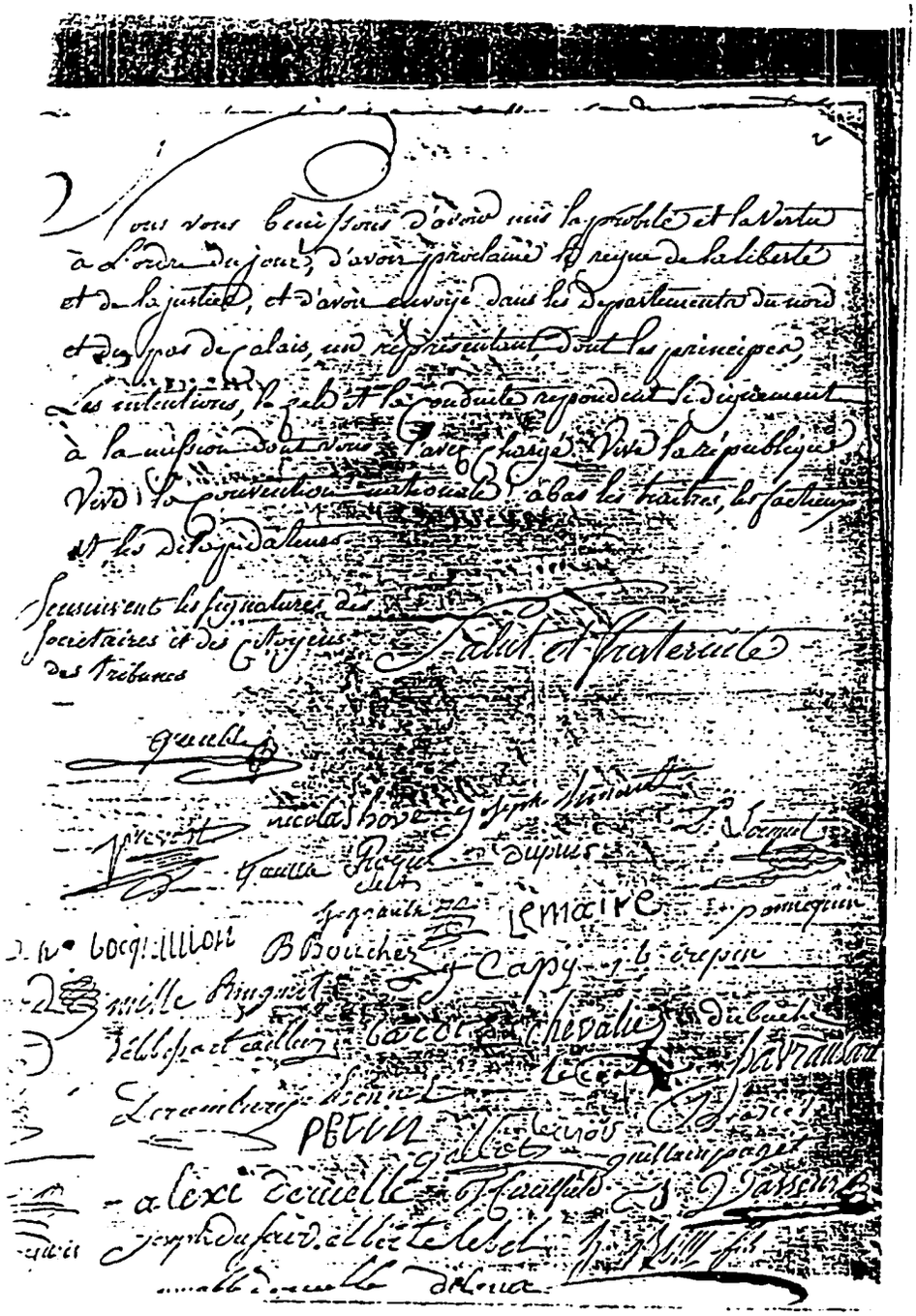
le cinquième jour supplémentaire
l'an 2e de la république française
une et indivisible

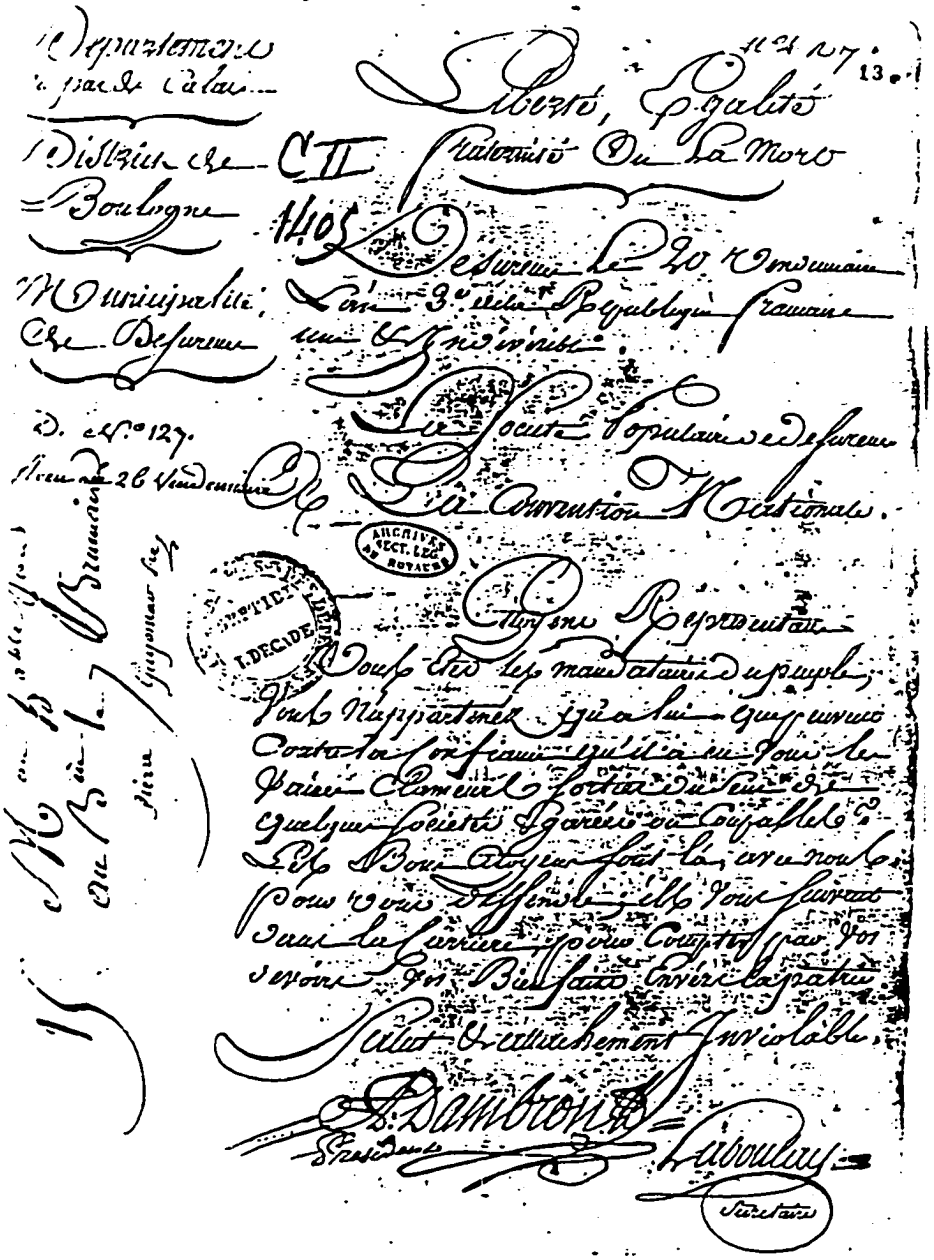
Citoyens représentans

vive la république, vive la convention









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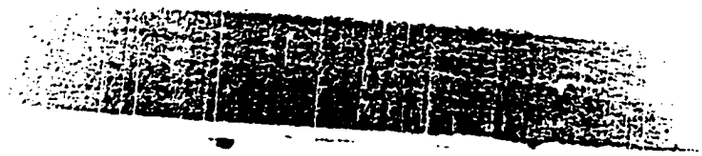
Archives Sect. Leg. du Rotsème

Législateurs du peuple français,

Ce n'est point pour vous dire que vous avez bien mérité de la patrie et de l'humanité; ce n'est point pour vous donner au nom du souverain dont nous faisons partie, de nouvelles à votre poste, jusqu'à ce que vous ayez rétabli au sein du calme et de l'union le dernier ennemi de la sainte égalité: non; ce n'est point pour cela que nous vous adressons la parole. Vous connaissez vos devoirs votre mérite: la majorité du peuple a émis son vœu: l'opinion publique, ce fanal lumineux de la législature, est manifestée si clairement que vous ne pouvez vous y égarer.

Législateurs! c'est pour vous dire à l'appui de tous les vrais citoyens français, c'est pour vous dire que nous voulons la liberté indéfinie de la presse ou la mort, allant que c'est un droit naturel, imprescriptible, inaliénable de l'homme: c'est pour vous



déclare que celui qui combattant le principe indestructible attaque à force ouverte la déclaration des droits, veut changer les formes sociales, et proscrire, comme dit le législateur, tout gouvernement.

La nécessité d'énoncer le droit de manifester sa pensée et ses opinions, en supposé ou la présence ou le souvenir récent du Despotisme ——

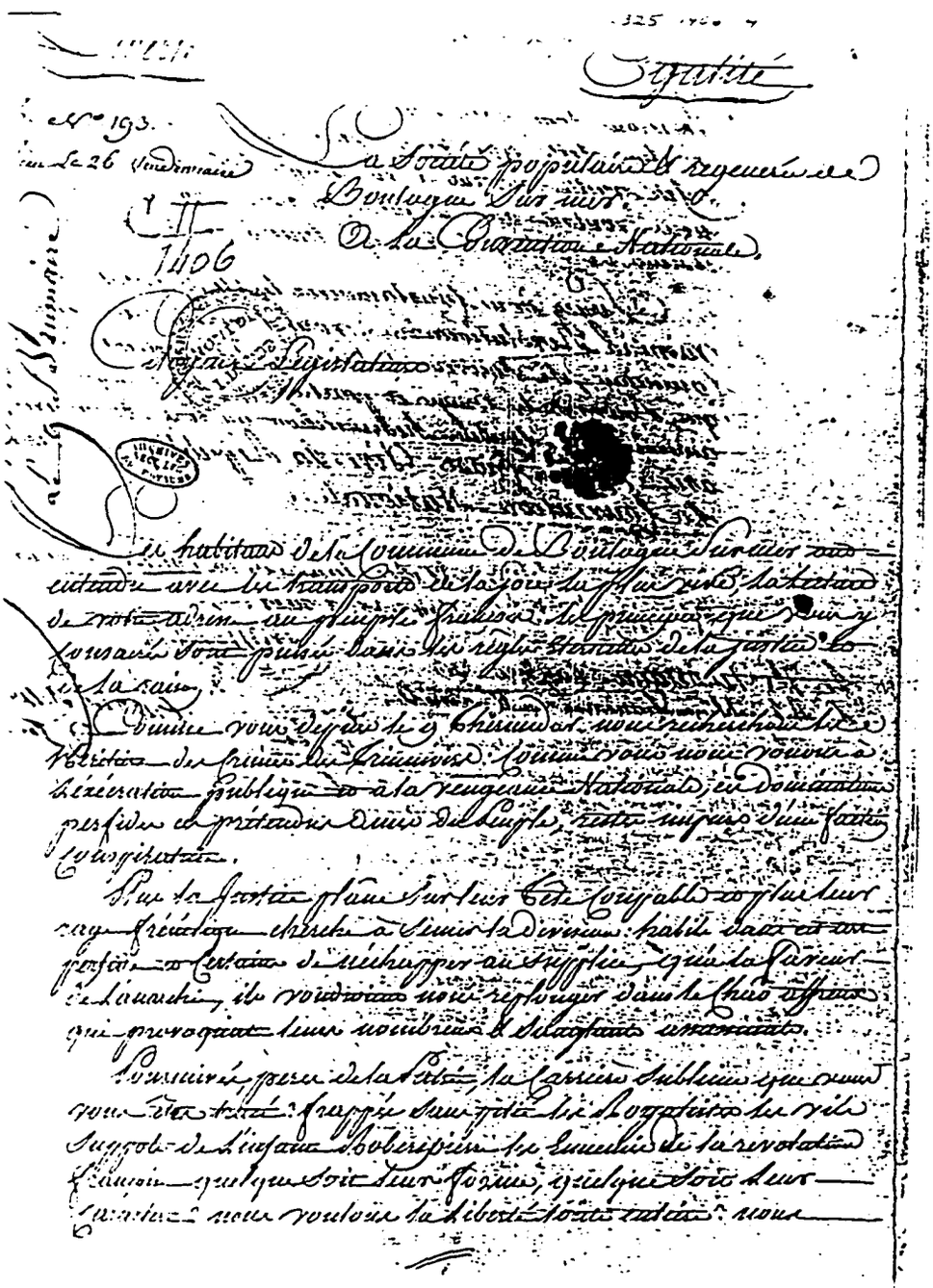
Hé ! Bien ! que celui qui attaque la déclaration des droits, que celui qui veut se mettre au dessus de la loi, qui est rappellé au delà de la volonté générale, que toute portion du peuple qui veut usurper la puissance du peuple entier, soit déclaré ennemi de la liberté, frappé d'anathème par la puissance indestructible du peuple et foudroyé ! Le peuple veille : tous les bons citoyens, les vrais républicains, les ennemis du despotisme, sont prêts, au premier signal, à écraser ces traîtres qui, fidèles à leur infâme conjuration, leur mandat, préludent à l'appel des premiers fondemens du pacte social des français. La foudre

[illegible] est prêt à [illegible]; que les représentans du [illegible] continuent en sûreté; leurs travaux immortels à la république française, en dépit des ennemis de la lumière, et félicite [illegible] majesté [illegible] à la glorieuse destinée qui la révolution déparera. Les conspirateurs, quoiqu'unis que l'Europe épouvantée du bruit de nos victoires et [illegible] ouvrent les yeux à la lumière, se préparent à embrasser [illegible] liberté, la sainte égalité, disparaîtront en patriotisme, des monstres dévoreront les assassins et avec eux tous leurs complices et la patrie!

Jamais usurpateur de pouvoir souverain ne fut plus insulté que l'infâme robespierre; plus mal adroit dans la scélérité de ses noirs desseins, que ces dignes partisans. Ils périssent donc, ces hommes impurs, que la république française n'a plus de citoyens! ah, les ennemis du genre humain! bientôt ils répondront à la justice! . . . . . .

[illegible] législateurs, les sections ont que ce moment décisif nous fait éprouver: et aucune force humaine ne peut nous en faire départir. — J. B. Delengaigne-picquet, président.

B. Bayard, secrétaire.



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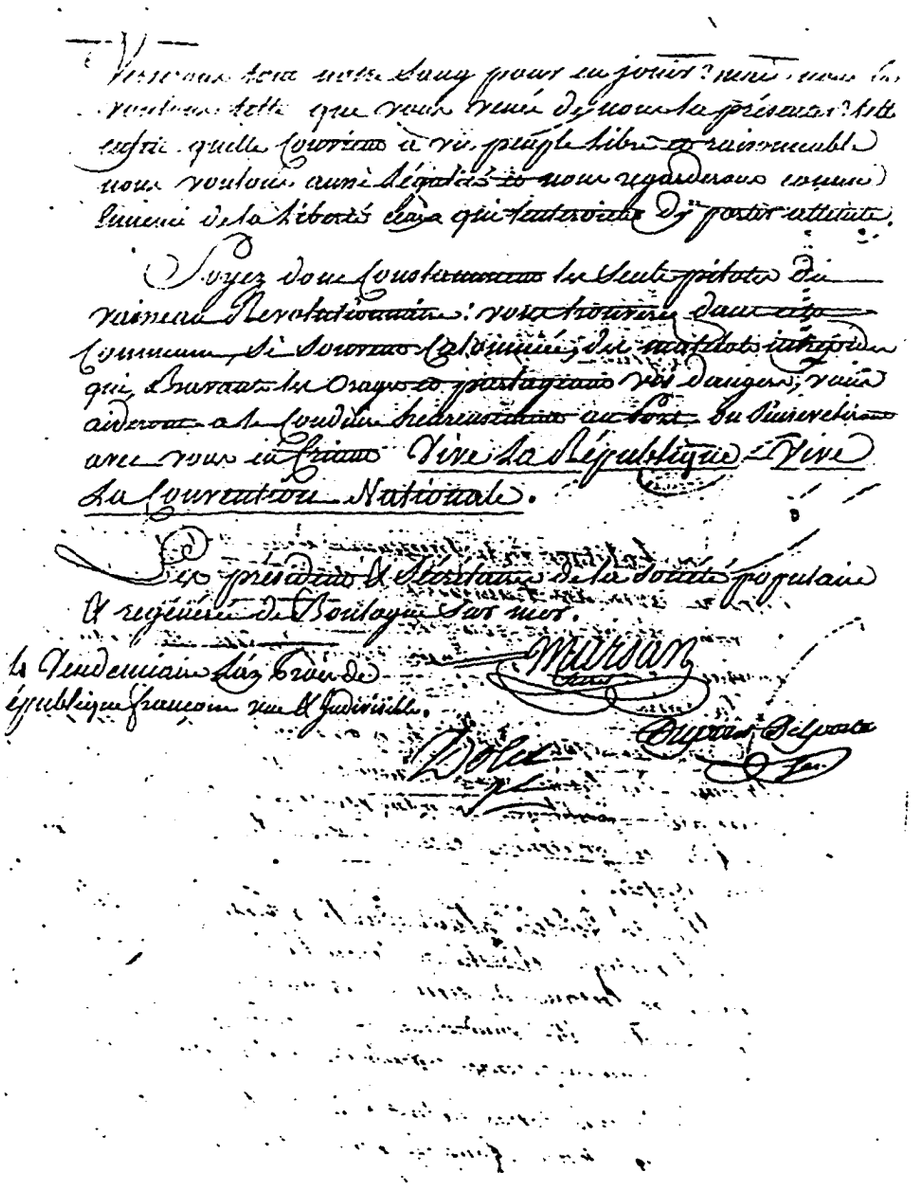

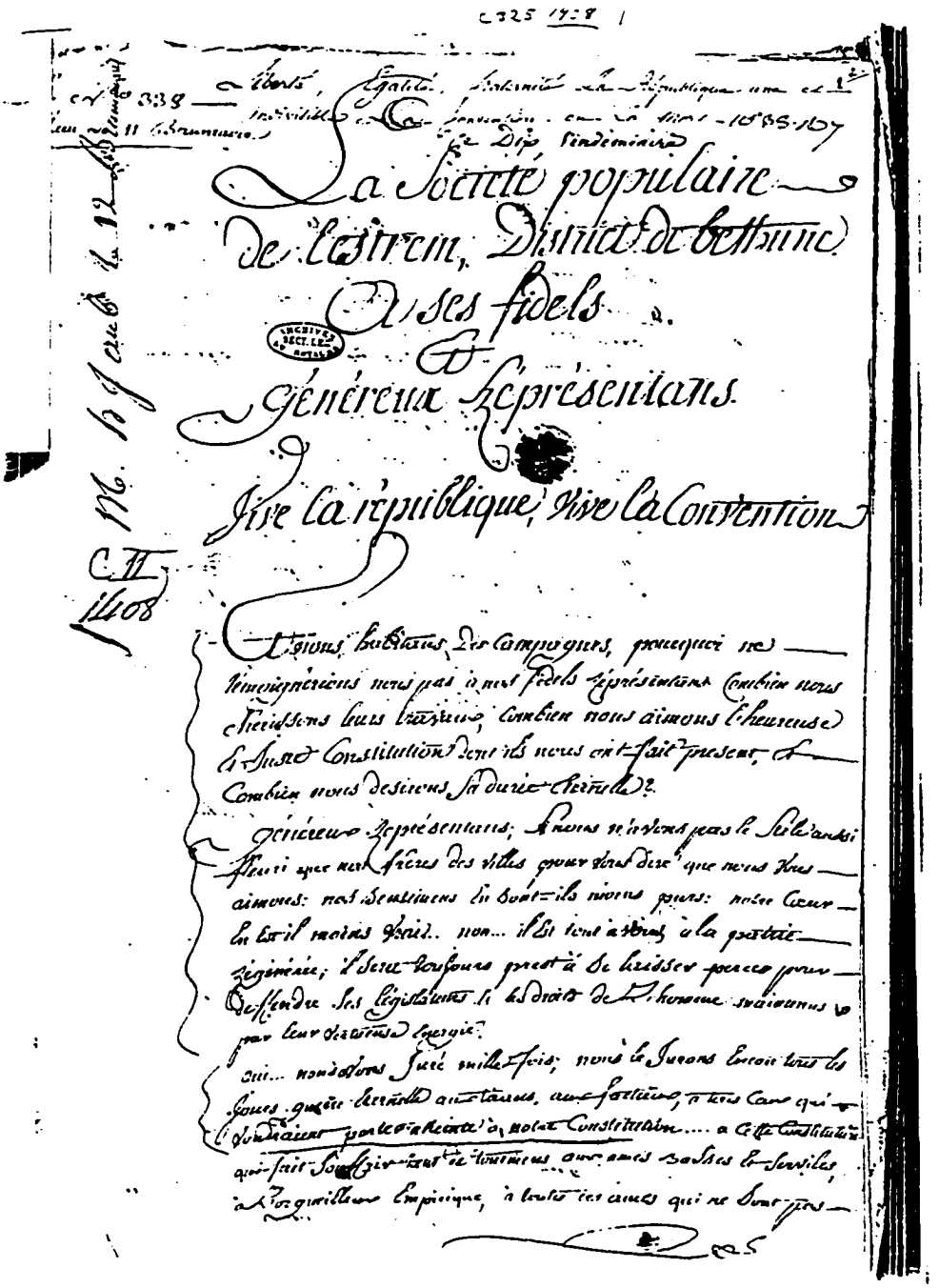

C 325 1408 1

La Société populaire
de Castrum, District de Bethune
A ses fidels
et
Généreux Représentans.

Vive la république, Vive la Convention

C II
1408

Législateurs, Républicains, Représentans, pouvions-nous ne pas vous reconnoître pour nos fidels représentans, combien nous chérissons vos travaux, combien nous aimons et heureuse et juste Constitution dont ils nous ont fait présent, et combien nous désirons sa durée éternelle.

Généreux Représentans; nous ne vous devons pas le Sol de ainsi fleuri que nos frères des villes pour vous dire que nous vous aimons: nos sentimens ne sont-ils pas pour: notre Cœur ne sait-il mieux dire... non... il est tout à vous, à la patrie législative; il sera toujours prêt à se briser pour défendre ses législateurs et le droit de l'homme que vous avez su pour leur désirer l'énergie.

Oui... nous jurons sur nos vieux foyers; nous le jurons encore tous les jours que Dieu nous donne à vivre, avec fierté, à tous ceux qui voudraient porter atteinte à notre Constitution.... à cette Constitution qui fait battre tous nos cœurs, nous ames basses et serviles, à l'orgueilleux Empirique, à toutes les ames qui ne sont pas

B. Roussell dissertation Appendix: A.N. C325 1408 1
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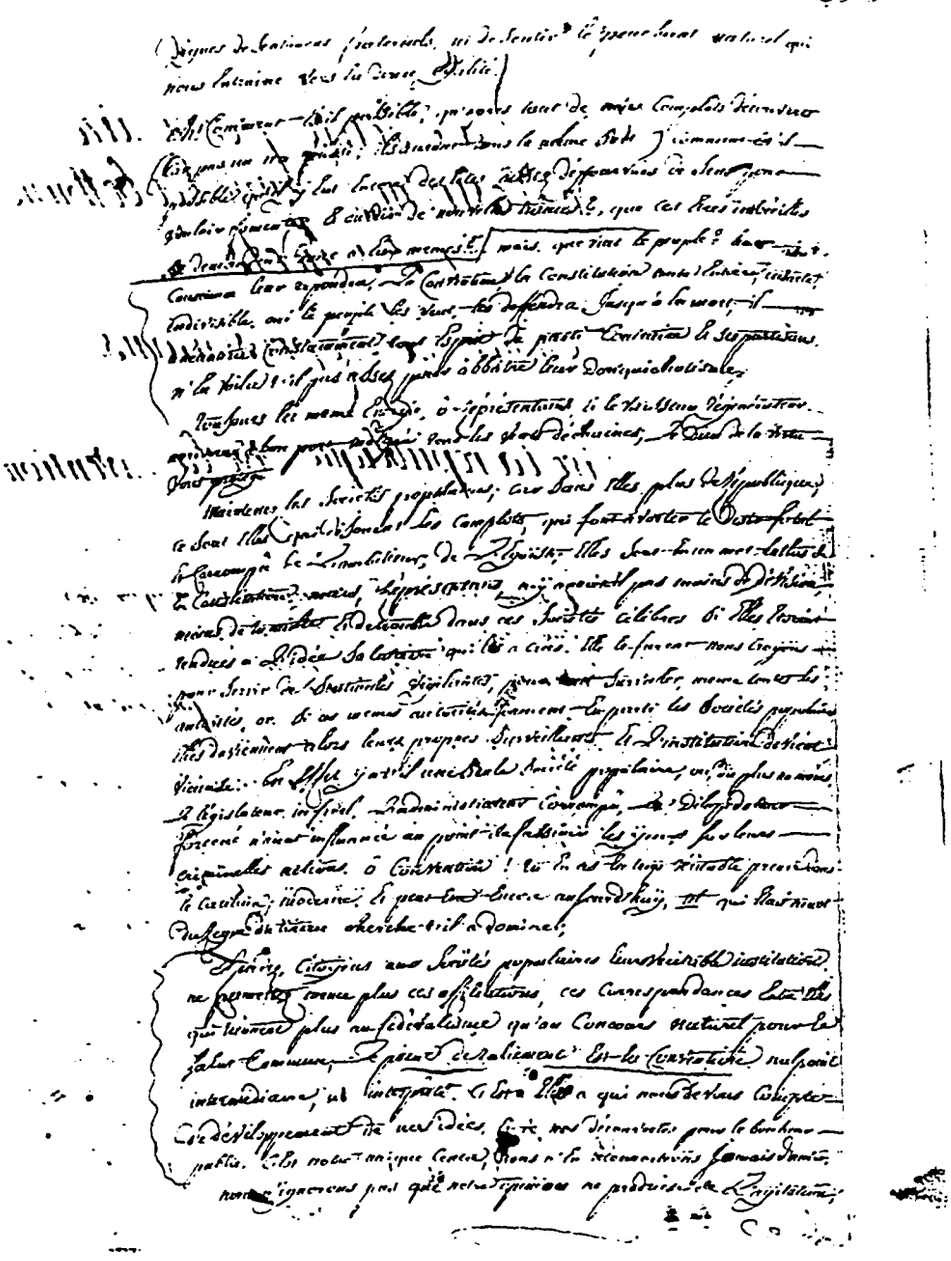

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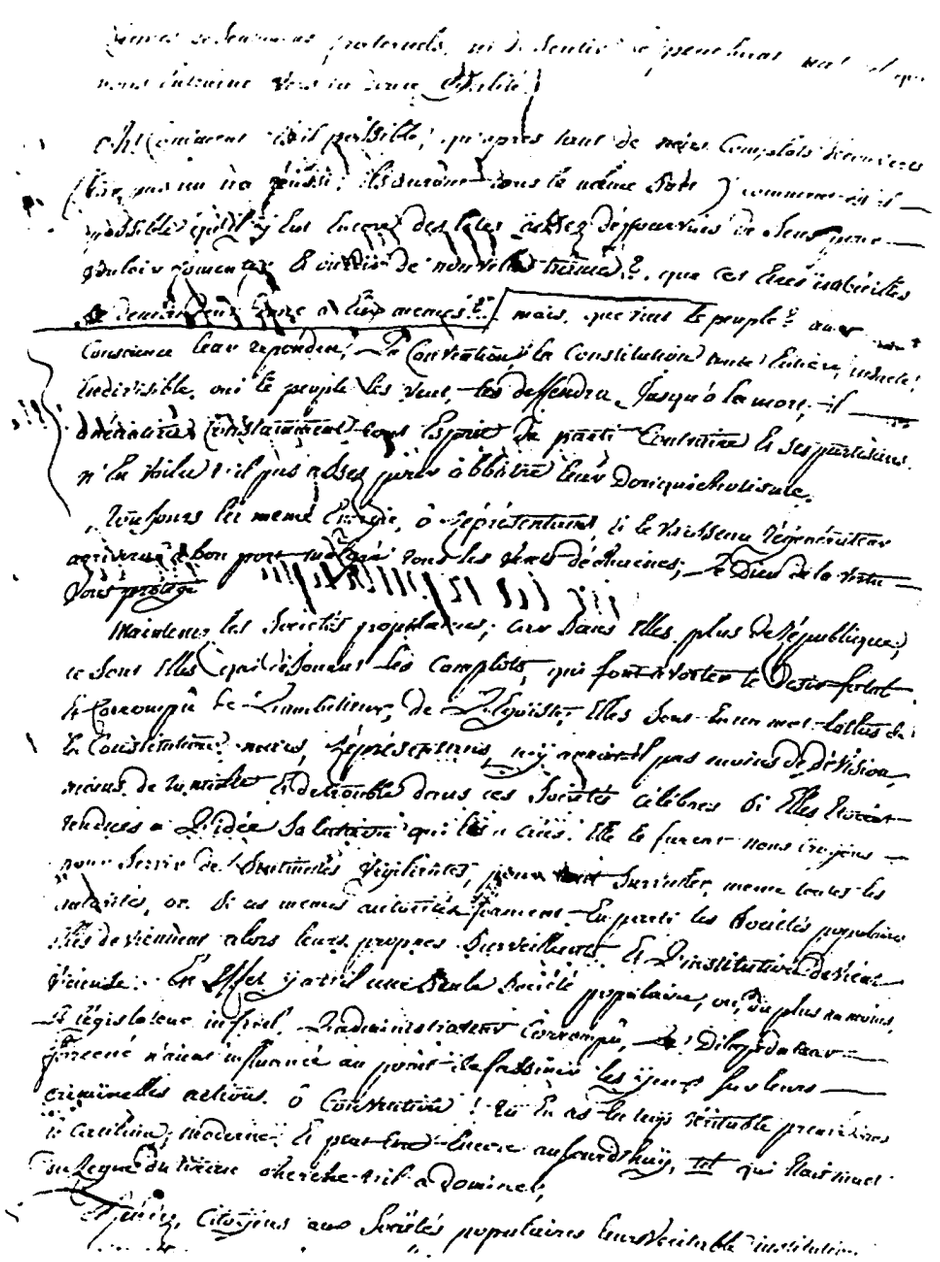
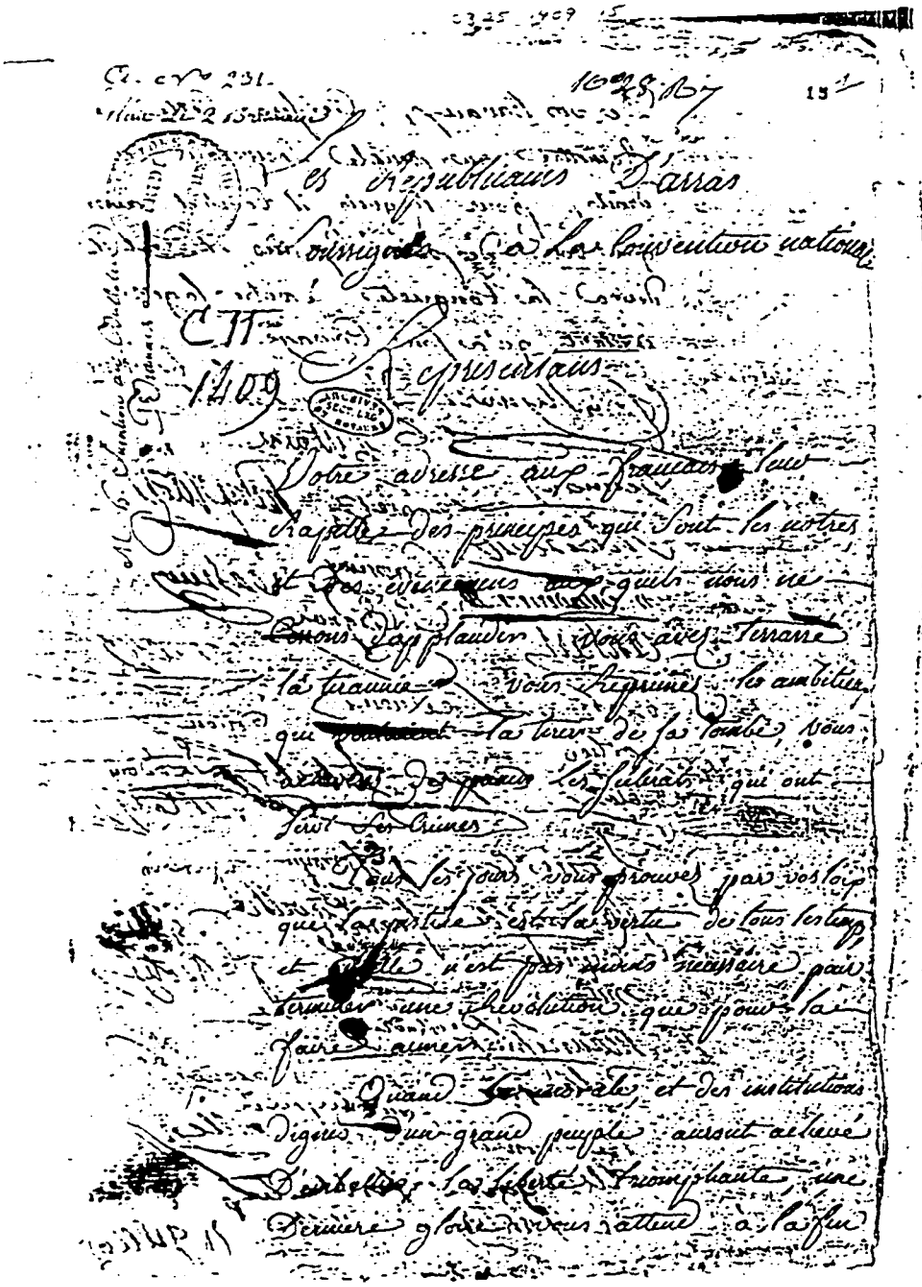
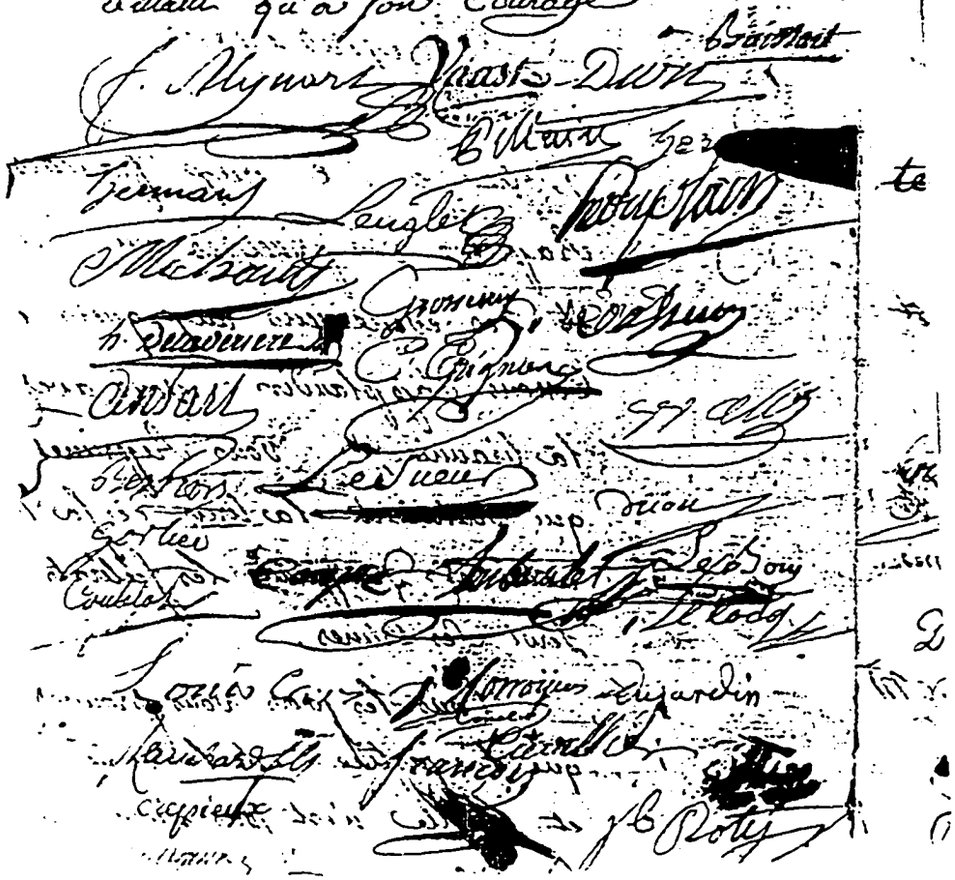




De vos travaux, Ce sera Celle de
remettre au peuple Souverain des
droits, pour lesquels il Combat ainsi
que Dans des siècles, et dont il
devra la Conquete à votre sagesse
autant qu'a son Courage



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9

Liberté Egalité ou la Mort

La Société populaire de S. Omer
à la Convention Nationale.

C II
1410

Représentans

SOCIÉTÉ SECT. DES BOTTES

une Société qui doit tirer avantage d'une révolution
Vivement Desirée des Républicains français, qui aux
Journées à jamais mémorables des 9 et 10 Thermidor, brisa
la Verge de fer qui la tenoit courbée, qui proscrivit de son
Sein le Système de Sang que la Tyrannie y avoit Organisé,
et replongea dans le sang tous les fils Suppôts de la
Terreur, qui reparoit point aujourd'hui pour renouveller ses
Serments, elle les juge inutiles, elle ne veut point de Nouveau
protester de son Dévouement à la Convention Nationale, elle
sait que nôtre Confiance en Elle n'a point de Bornes. une autre
Soin nous anime et nous occupe en ce moment, Justice
adressé au Peuple français a été lue 4 fois soit en notre
Concitoyens assemblés, et 4 fois cette Lecture a produit
sur les Esprits la plus vive Emotion : des Membres
applaudissements, les Démonstrations d'une joie pure nous

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Appendix: A.N. C325 1410 9

Vous Etes, faits Connoître, mais nous Essayerions encore de
Vous la rendre, nous ne pouvons, nous ne voulons rien que
Vous manifester la reconnoissance que nous partageons avec
Eux, et Vous Exprimer brièvement les motifs de nos Espérances.

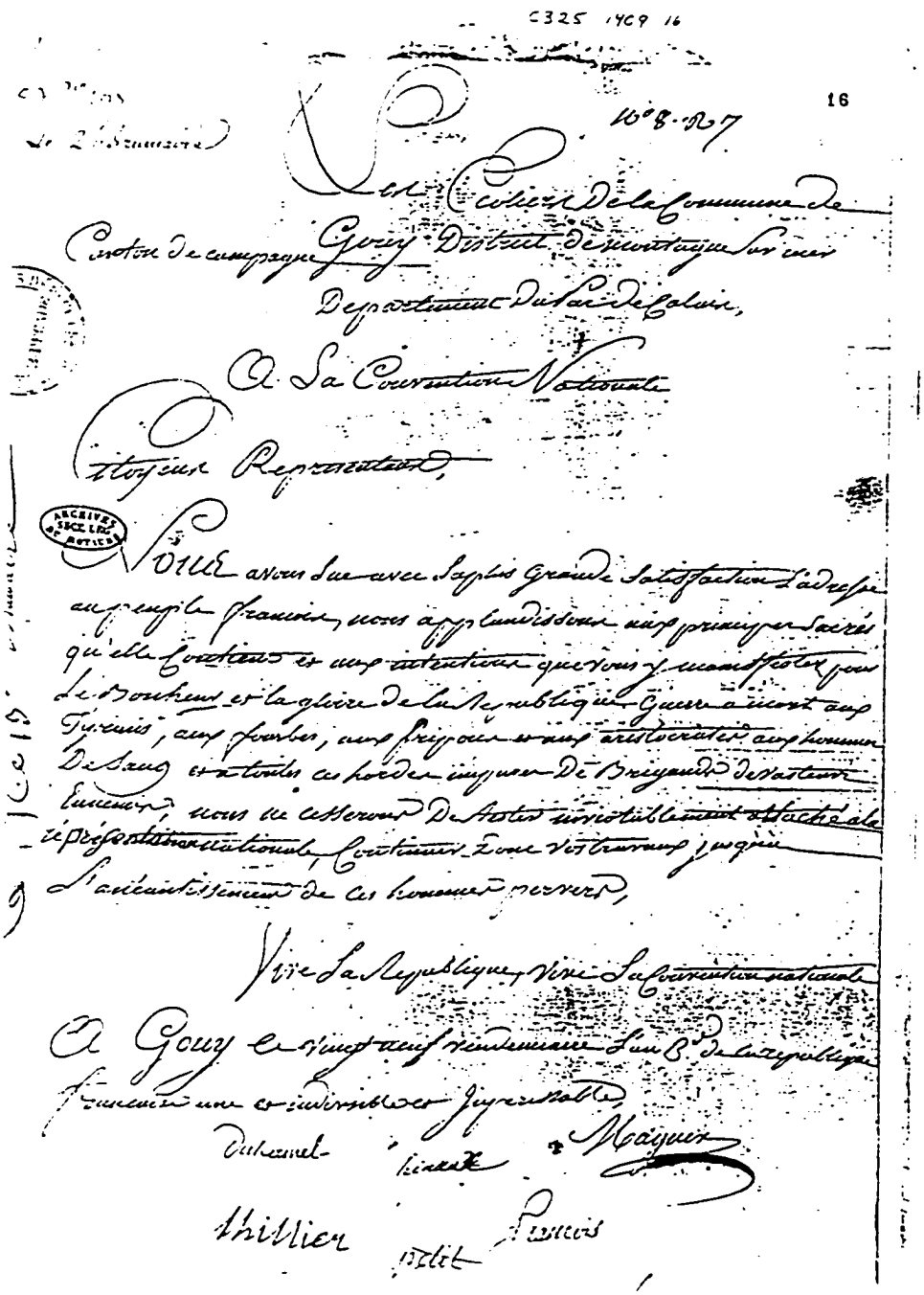
Les principes de justice et d'humanité rappellés
par Vous dans vos Sages, Votre intention Clairement prononcée
de ne laisser aucun asile au Crime, de rejetter à l'Ecart
l'Homme immoral qui corrompt ce qui l'approche, l'ambitieux
qui Sous l'apparence du bien public, ne travaille que pour
lui, et de gorge de la fortune et du Sang de Ses Semblables,
la Limite de pouvoir remise Sous tous les Yeux, et les
attentats à la Souveraineté du Peuple reprimés, l'Engagement
Solennel que Vous avez pris d'Entendre, d'accueillir les plaintes
et les reclamations de l'Homme persecuté ou malheureux, —
Votre attitude imposante et fière en présence de Nos
Ennemis et des Nôtres, la Confusion et le désespoir des
intrigants démasqués, telles sont, Citoyens Représentans,
les bases de notre bonheur, et de la prospérité publique,
nous les avons reconnuës et Voilà ce qui nous porte nos
Amis et moi à vous reconnoître et vous saluer.

Ah! Vous ne souffrirez donc plus que des
Scélérats et des Traîtres portent Sur Eux des noms
Vénérables et Sacrileges, Vous leur ferez respecter —
l'autorité Nationale dont Vous êtes revêtus, nous n'en-

Couleurs à toutes épreuves que Votre fermeté constante; que
Votre union Sincere, que Votre Amour pour la République
sera Votre devoir. Vous Etablirez La Liberté Et
l'Egalité Sur le Sol de la France, qui ne peut
maintenant exister Sans Elles, Vous consoliderez et Vous
acheverez la Révolution, nous nous paisibles Citoyens
nous cultiverons les Biens sociales, nous Chérirons
Ensemble et nos Droits et nos devoirs, nous nous en
pénétrerons Chaque jour davantage, nous les aimerons
pour mieux Exercer les uns et pratiquer les autres, nous en
instruirons nos Enfans qui recevront un jour de nos mains
le Dépôt précieux de la Constitution, nous serons Enfin toujours
soumis à Votre Voix et nous jouirons En fruits de vos
immortels Travaux !.

Vive la République, Vive la Convention
Nationale.

Fait à Omer le 26.e Vendemiaire
L'an 3.e de la République française une et
Indivisible. P. Blanchard Caron Wart
Berger



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108-207

Le Citoyen De la Commune de
Canton de campagne Gouy District de Montreuil sur mer
Departement Du Pas de Calais,
A La Convention Nationale
Citoyens Representans,

Voilà avons sur avec Saplis Grande Satisfaction Lidresse
au peuple Français, nous applaudissons aux principes sacrés
qu'elle contient et aux intentions que vous y manifestez pour
le Bonheur et la gloire de la Republique Guerre aux
Tyrans, aux fourbes, aux prêtres aux aristocrates aux hommes
De Sang et a tous ceux qui cherchent à Briguer De Nouveau
Empire, nous de Citerons De Rester inviolablement attaché a la
Représentation nationale, Continuer Votre travaux jusqu'a
L'anéantissement de ces hommes pervers,

Vive La Republique, Vive La Convention nationale

A Gouy Le vingt neuf Vendemiaire Lan 2. De La Republique
Française une et indivisible Signé avec Joie

Delhomel Lienard Maigret

Thillier Delet Lemaire

C325 14/1 11

11

Les soussignés,
l'assemblée des Membres de la Société Républicaine
d'Ardres, District de Calais, Département du Pas de Calais,
A la Convention Nationale ; Salut et Respect,

Représentans,

Nous ne vous exprimerons qu'imparfaitement l'impression qu'a produite sur nous
votre Adresse au Peuple Français : la Vertu, la Justice en sont les bases sublimes,
Et vous nous donnez une nouvelle preuve que si notre bonheur n'a pas commencé plutôt,
c'est qu'il était hors de votre puissance d'en fonder plutôt les vrais principes.
Le plus odieux
comme le plus sanguinaire des Tyrans enchaînoit vos vœux paternels. Votre coeur
en a jugé la Nature. L'affreuse terreur ne pouvant plus, que le mauvais citoyen
que l'âme criminelle, Partout l'homme probe, L'ange de la Paix respire en paix.
Augustes Représentans, pourriez-vous n'être pas flattés de notre affection la plus
chère ? Nos cœurs seroient donc fermés à la reconnoissance. Ah ! que ne vous
est-il donné, comme à ceux de vos Collègues répandus dans les Départemens, que ne
vous est-il donné d'être tous les heureux témoins du contentement & bénédictions dont
retentissent et que vous addressent déjà plusieurs millions de familles ! Trompettes
par ces cris de la félicité, en pouvant justement y contempler votre ouvrage, vous
recueillerez, dans toute la plénitude, la haute récompense qui vous est due.

Vive à jamais la République. Vive la Convention ; et par elle, l'empire
éternel de la justice et des autres vertus !

Ardres, le 28 Vendemiaire, l'an 3 de la Rép. Franç. une et indivisible.

C 11
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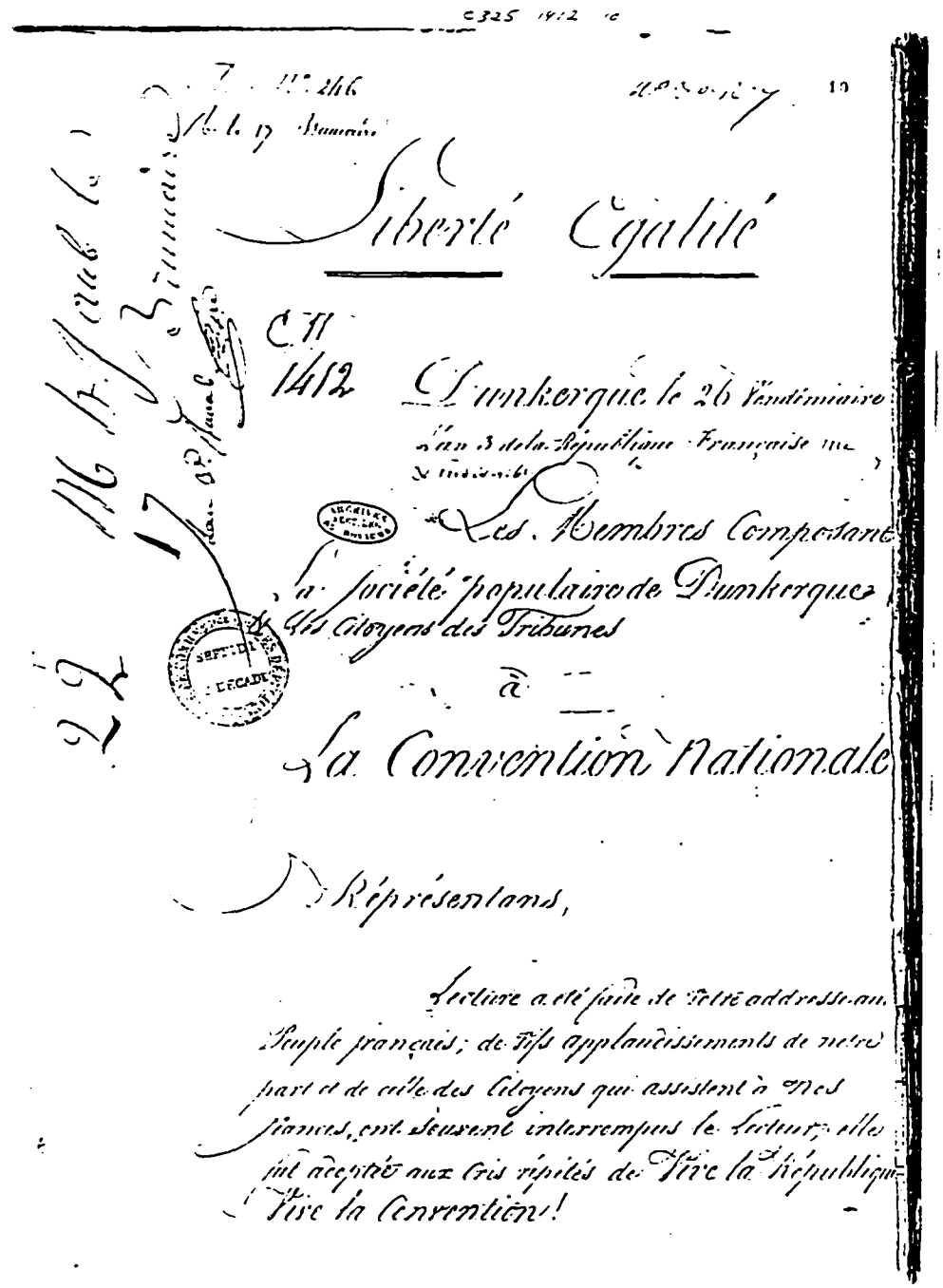

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Liberté Egalité

CII
1412

Dunkerque le 26 Vendémiaire
l'an 3 de la République Française une
et indivisible

Les Membres Composant
la Société populaire de Dunkerque
et les Citoyens des Tribunes

à

la Convention Nationale

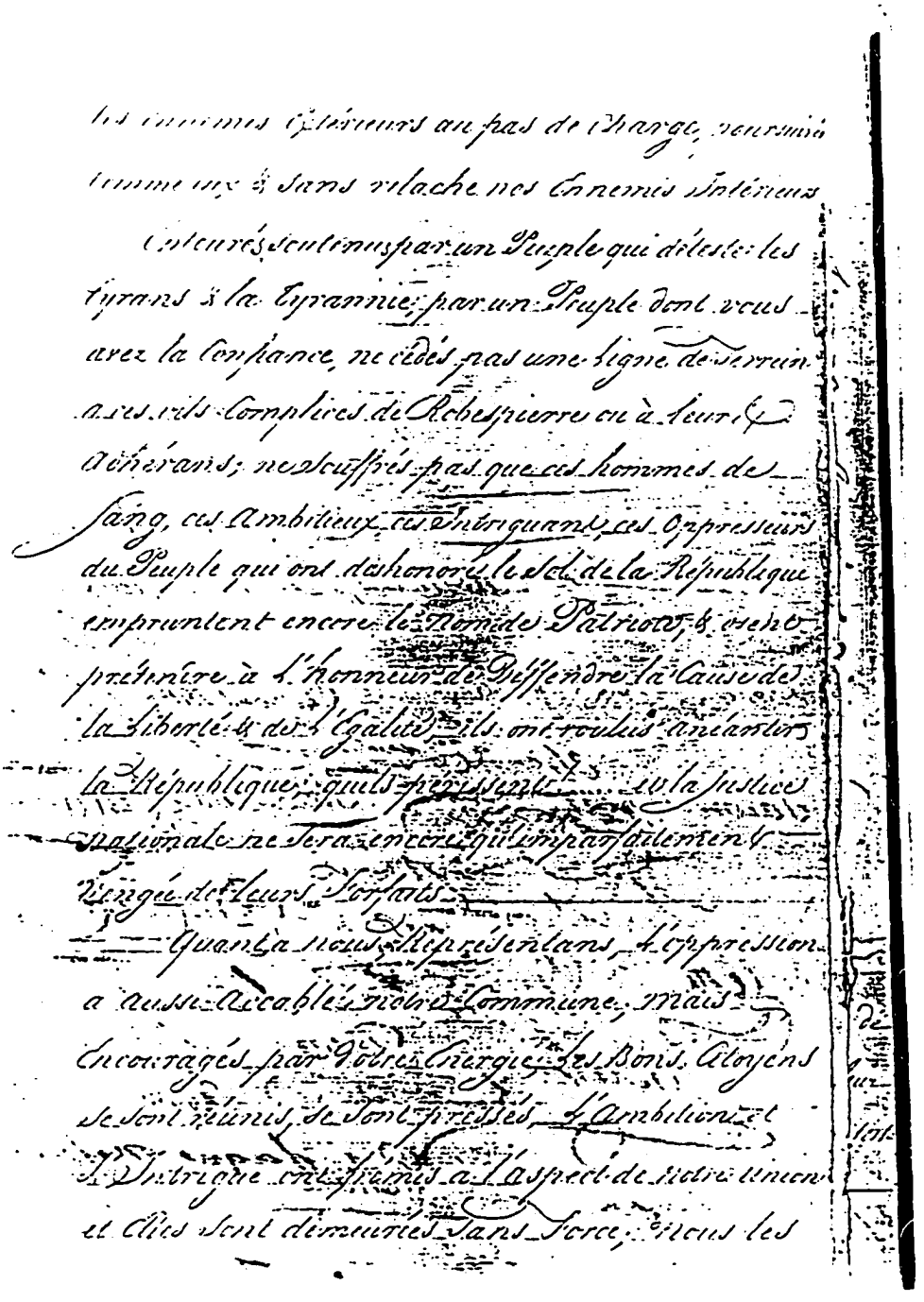
Représentans,

La lecture a été faite de votre adresse au Peuple français; de vos applaudissements de notre part et de celle des Citoyens qui assistent à vos Séances, ont souvent interrompus la lecture; elle a été accueillie aux cris répétés de Vive la République! Vive la Convention!

Les Principes que vous avez consacrés vous reconnaissons les vrais & purs Amis de la Liberté de l'Egalité et nous remarquons avec infiniment de Satisfaction que la Convention a repris cette imposante qui Caractérise les Représentans d'un Peuple libre.

Vous féliciter d'avoir parlé le langage de la Justice & de l'Humanité, seroit vous faire injure, Mais Oser vous parler en Républicains que de vous dire que ce Peuple qui frémit encore au souvenir affreux du règne des Robespierres, voit avec peine les Continuateurs de ce Tyran s'agiter pour ramener la Terreur à l'Ordre du jour, pour faire disparoître ces vils Agitateurs, il n'a d'Espoir que dans l'Application Sévère des Principes que vous venés de proclamer, la Sagesse les a dictés: C'est à Votre Energie à les maintenir.

Vous qui ne cessez d'encourager les braves défenseurs de la Patrie, vous qui etes les premiers Instruments de leurs glorieux Travaux, voyés comme eux prêts à Votre Poste, ils poursuivent



les hommes Esclaves au pas de Charge, vous avez
Comme un & sans relache nos Ennemis Intérieurs
Exterieurs soutenus par un Peuple qui déteste les
tyrans & la Tyrannie; par un Peuple dont vous
avez la Confiance, ne cédés pas une Ligne de terrain
a ces vils Complices de Robespierre ou à leurs
Défenseurs; ne soyez pas que ces hommes de
Sang, ces Ambitieux, ces Intrigants, ces Oppresseurs
du Peuple qui ont déshonoré le Sol de la République
emprunteront encore le Nom de Patriote, & osent
prétendre à l'honneur de défendre la Cause de
la Liberté & de l'Egalité, ils ont voulu anéantir
la République, quels pressentiments de la Justice
Nationale ne Seraient encore qu'imparfaitement
Vengé de leurs Forfaits.

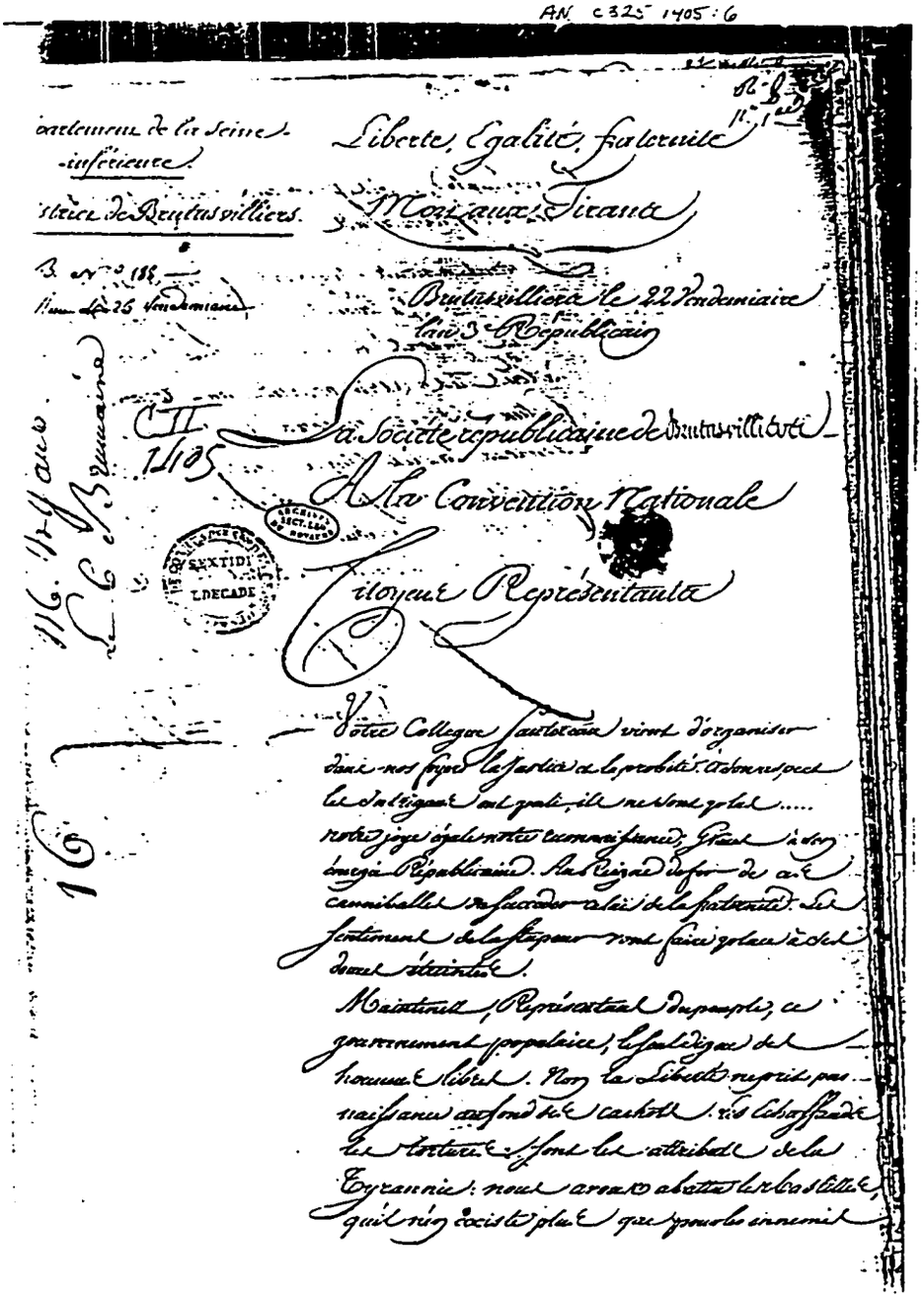
Quant à nous, Représentans, l'Oppression
a aussi accablé notre Commune, mais
Encouragés par votre Energie, les Bons Citoyens
se Sont réunis, se Sont pressés, l'Ambition et
l'Intrigue ont fuis à l'aspect de notre Union
et Elles Sont demeurées Sans Force, Vous les

[illegible] dans cet état d'oppression, nous jurons de
[illegible] dans tes travaux, pour l'affermissement
de la République une et Indivisible et de ne
reconnaître jamais d'autre point de ralliement
que la Représentation Nationale

Vive la République!

Vive la Convention!

Haine aux Tyrans & aux Oppresseurs
du Peuple.



AN C325 1405 : 6

Liberté, Egalité, fraternité

Montagnard Tirans

Bruxelles le 22 Vendemiaire
l'an 3 Republicain

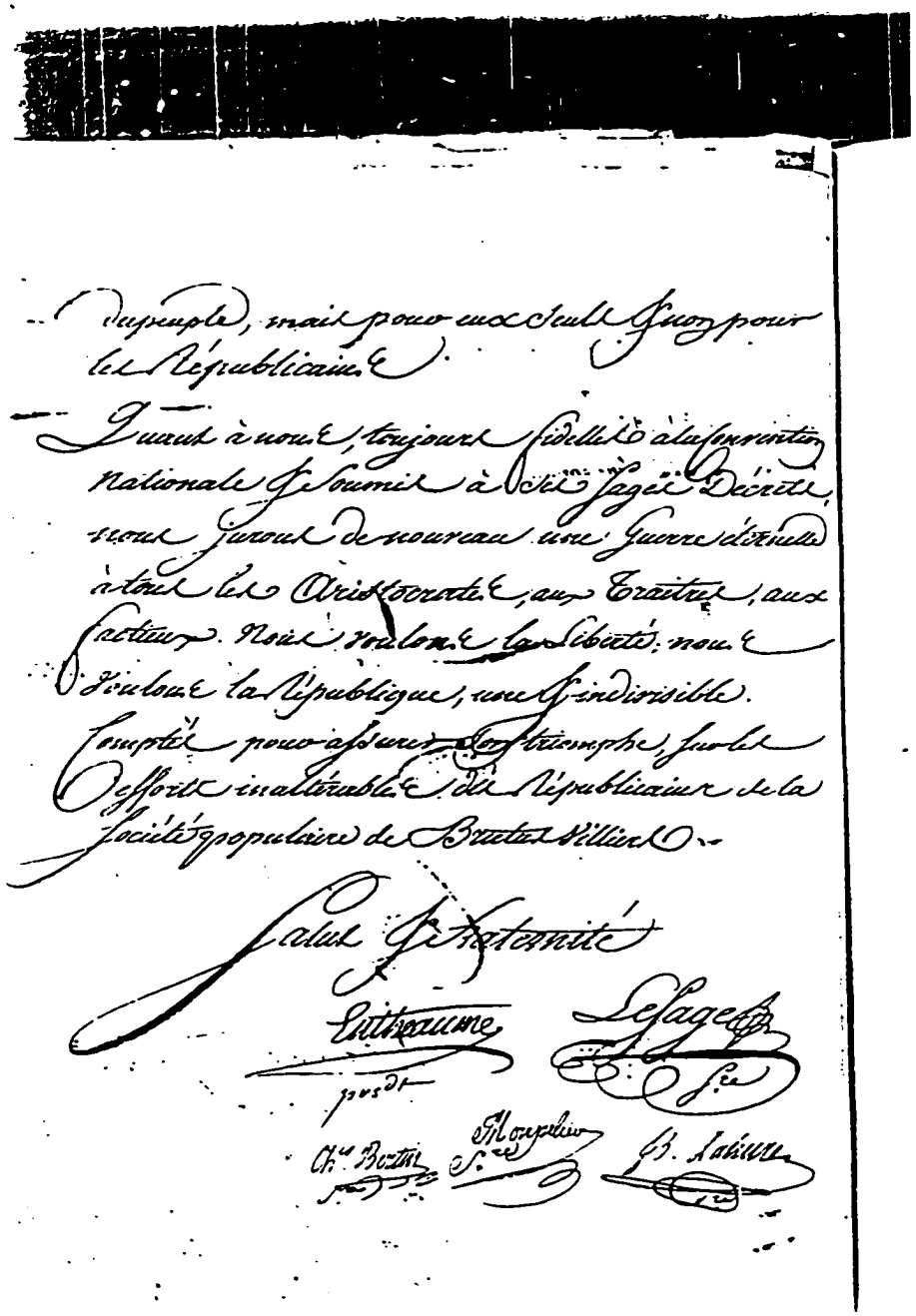
La Société republicaine de Bruxelles

A la Convention Nationale

Citoyens Representans

Votre Collegue [illegible] vient d'organiser dans nos foyers la fabrique de la probité. Ses moyens sont [illegible] ils ne tendent qu'à [illegible] rendre juges également tous les hommes [illegible] à notre immortelle République. Sous l'empire de ce code [illegible] le fanatisme [illegible] le sentiment de la pitié ne [illegible] à celui de l'humanité.

Maintenir le Représentant du peuple, ce gouvernement populaire, le fanatisme de la vertu et liberté. Non la Liberté ne périt pas [illegible] ses fondements sont [illegible] ses colonnes [illegible] ses attributs [illegible] la Tyrannie: nous avons abattu les bastilles, qu'il n'y existe plus que pour les ennemis



Du peuple, mais pour eux seuls que pour
les Républicains.

Jurons à nous, toujours fidélité à la Convention
nationale et soumis à ses sages Décrets,
nous Jurons de nouveau une Guerre éternelle
à tous les Aristocrates, aux Traîtres, aux
factieux. Nous voulons la Liberté, nous
voulons la République, une et indivisible.
Comptés pour assurer son triomphe, sur les
efforts inaltérables des Républicains de la
Société populaire de Bruxelles Villiers.

Salut et Fraternité

Lettbeaume
pres dt

Le Sage
Sec

Ch.u Bertin

Montpellier
Sec

G. Labille

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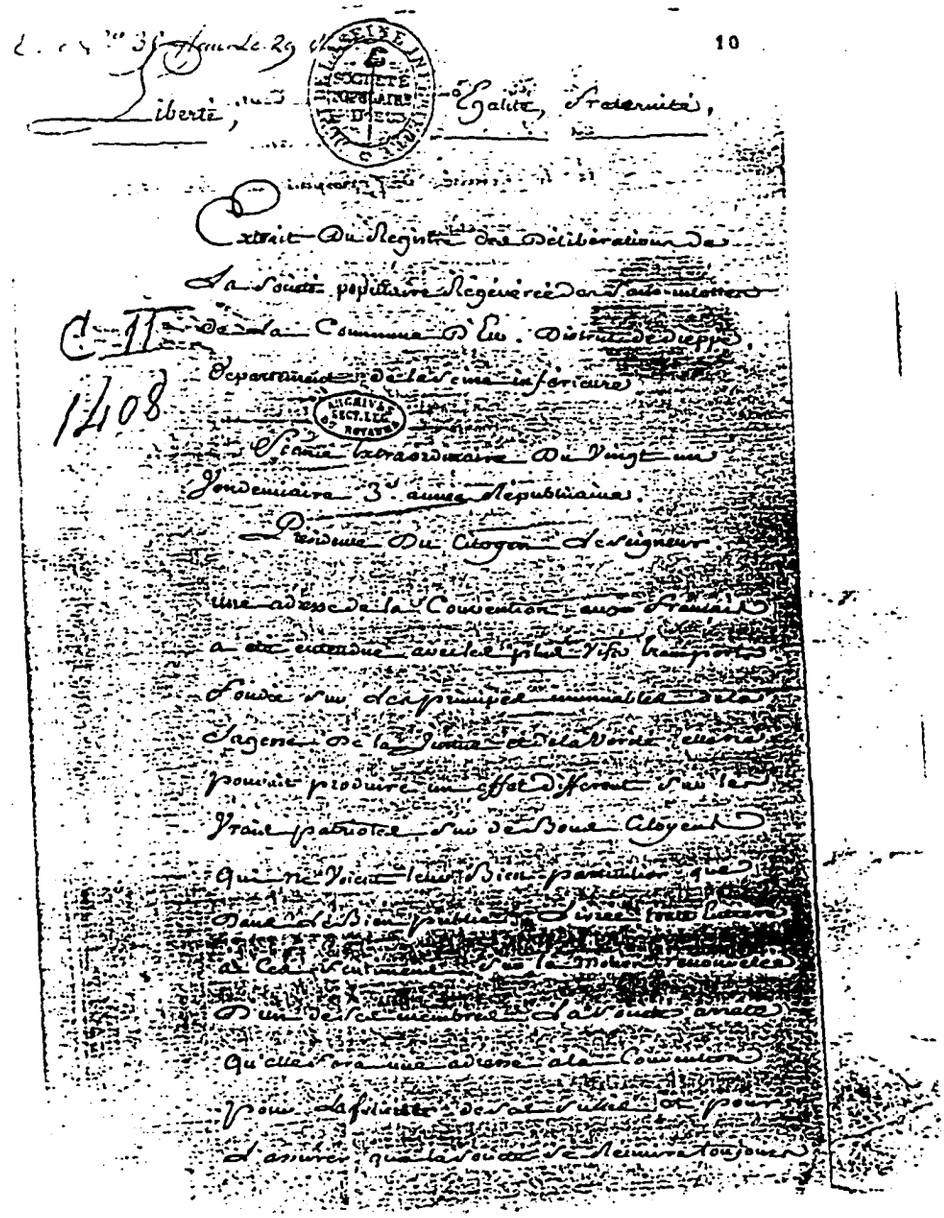


10

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,

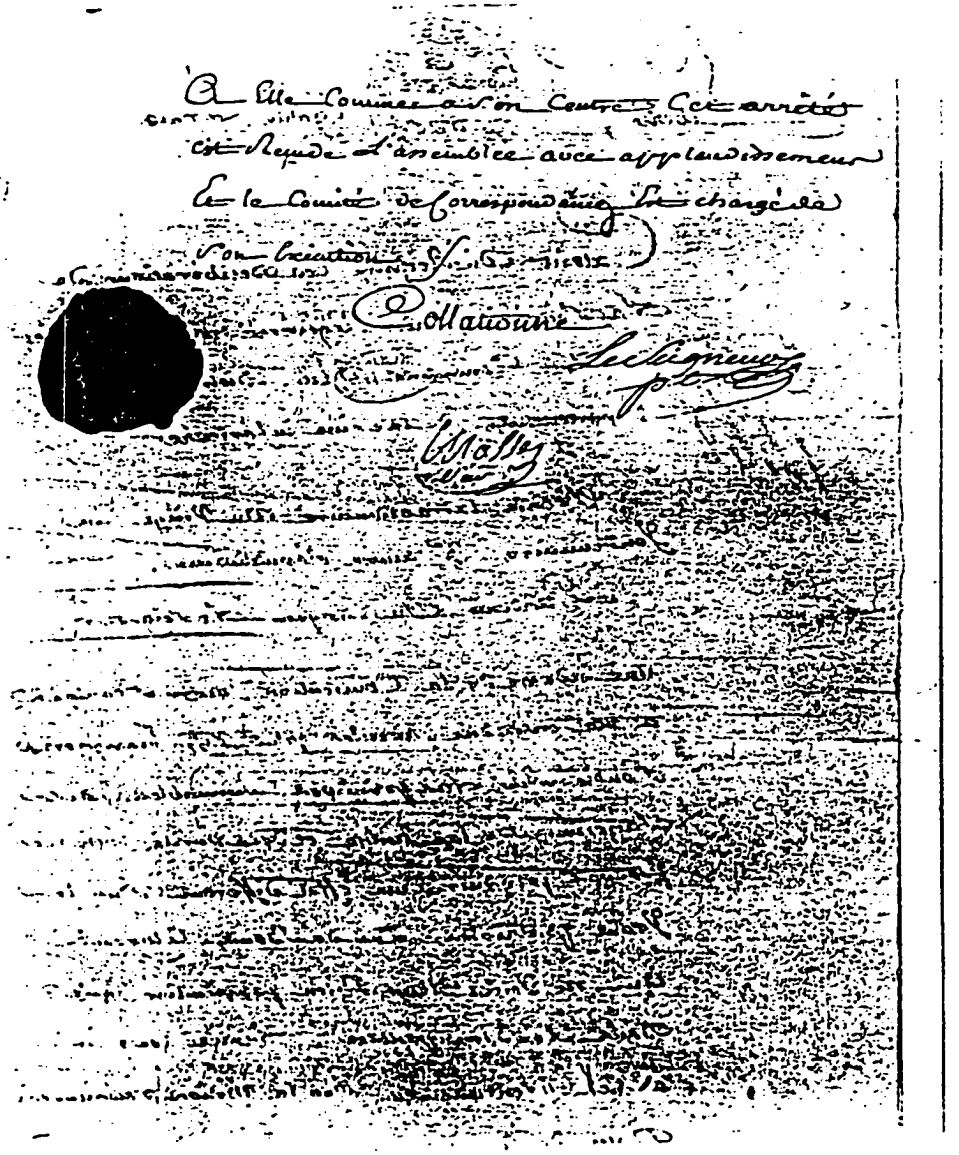
Extrait du Registre des Deliberations de
la Société populaire Regenerée dans tous ses membres
de la Commune d'Eu. District de Dieppe,
Département de la Seine inferieure

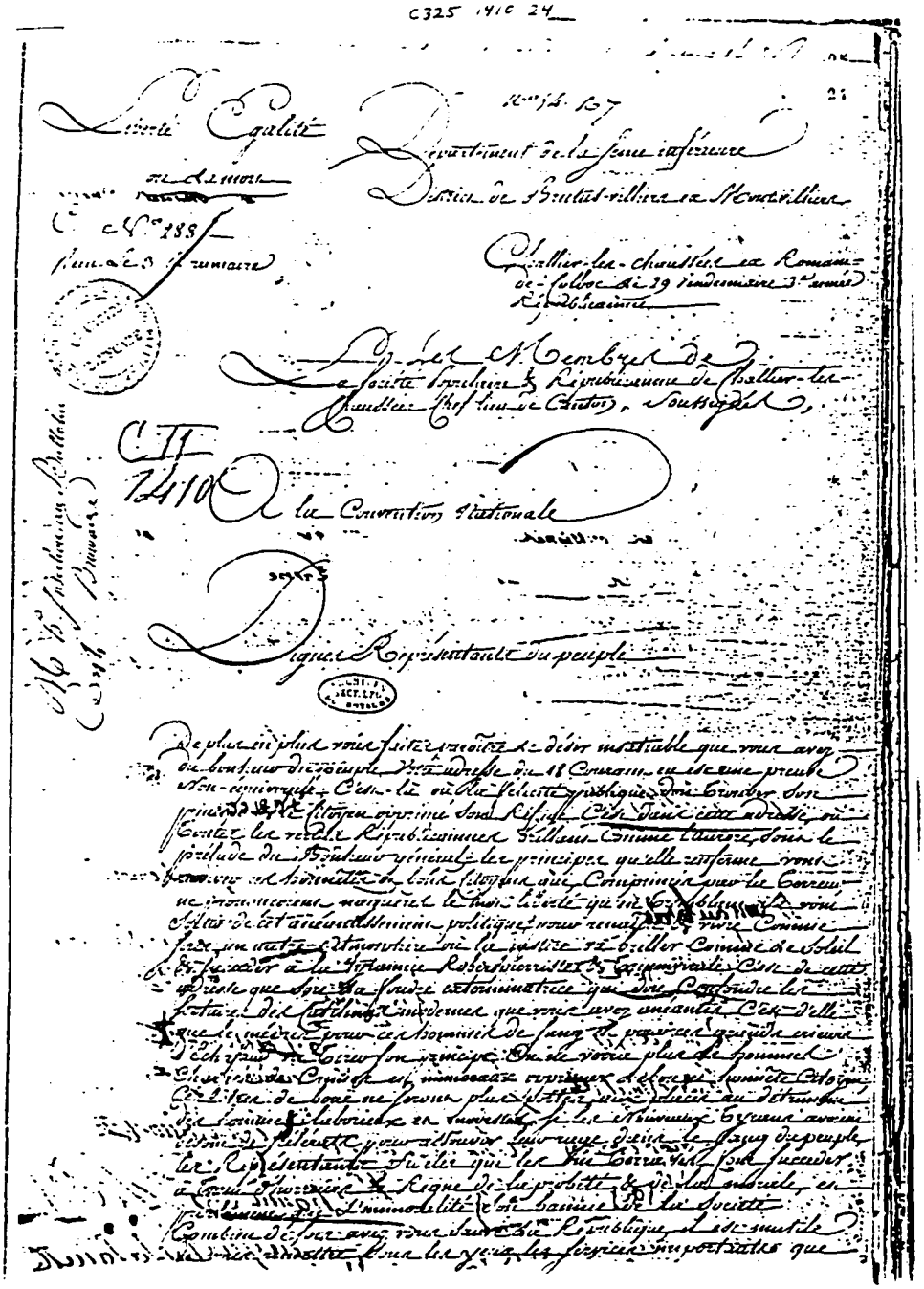
1408

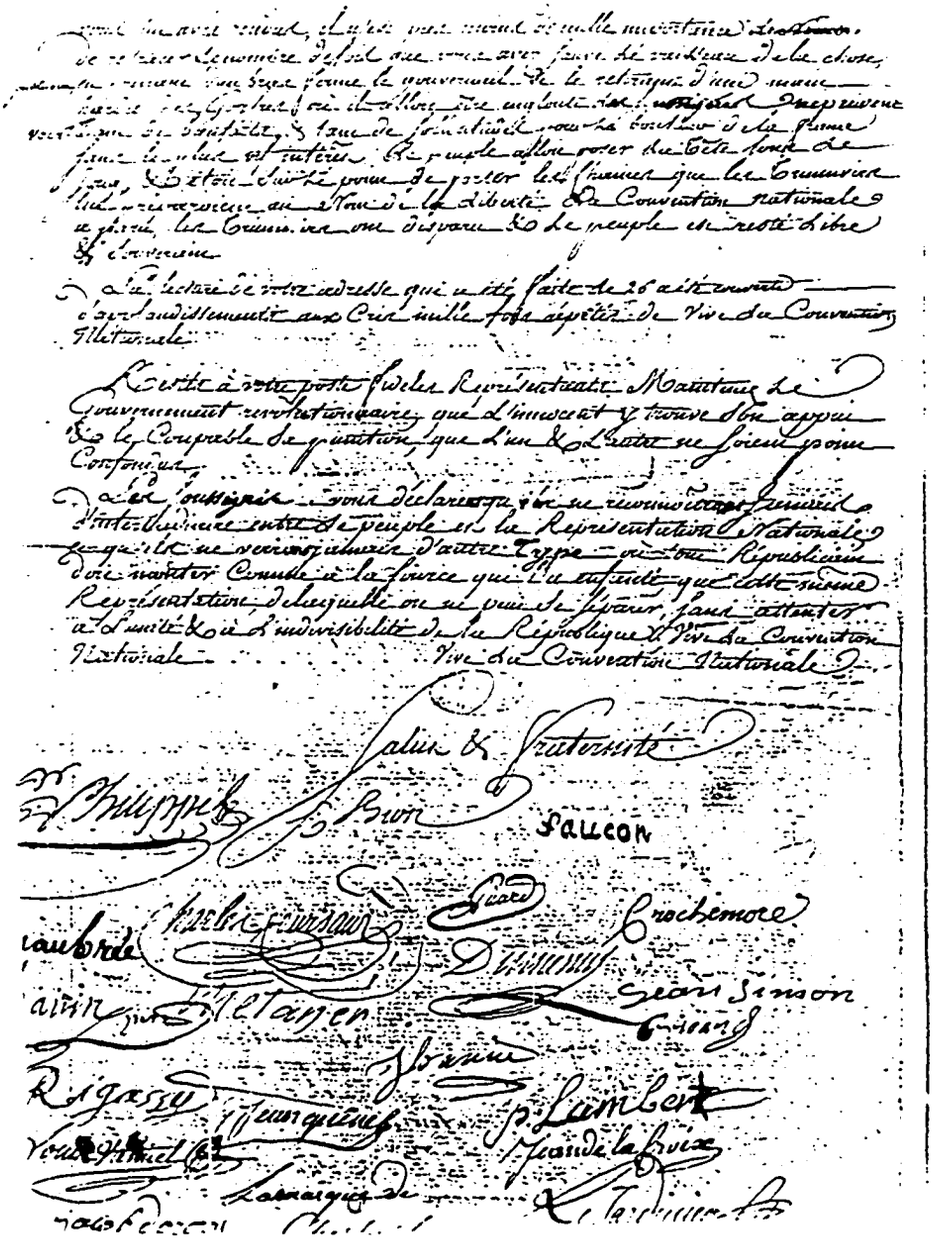
Séance extraordinaire du vingt un
Fondemaire 3e. année Republicaine.

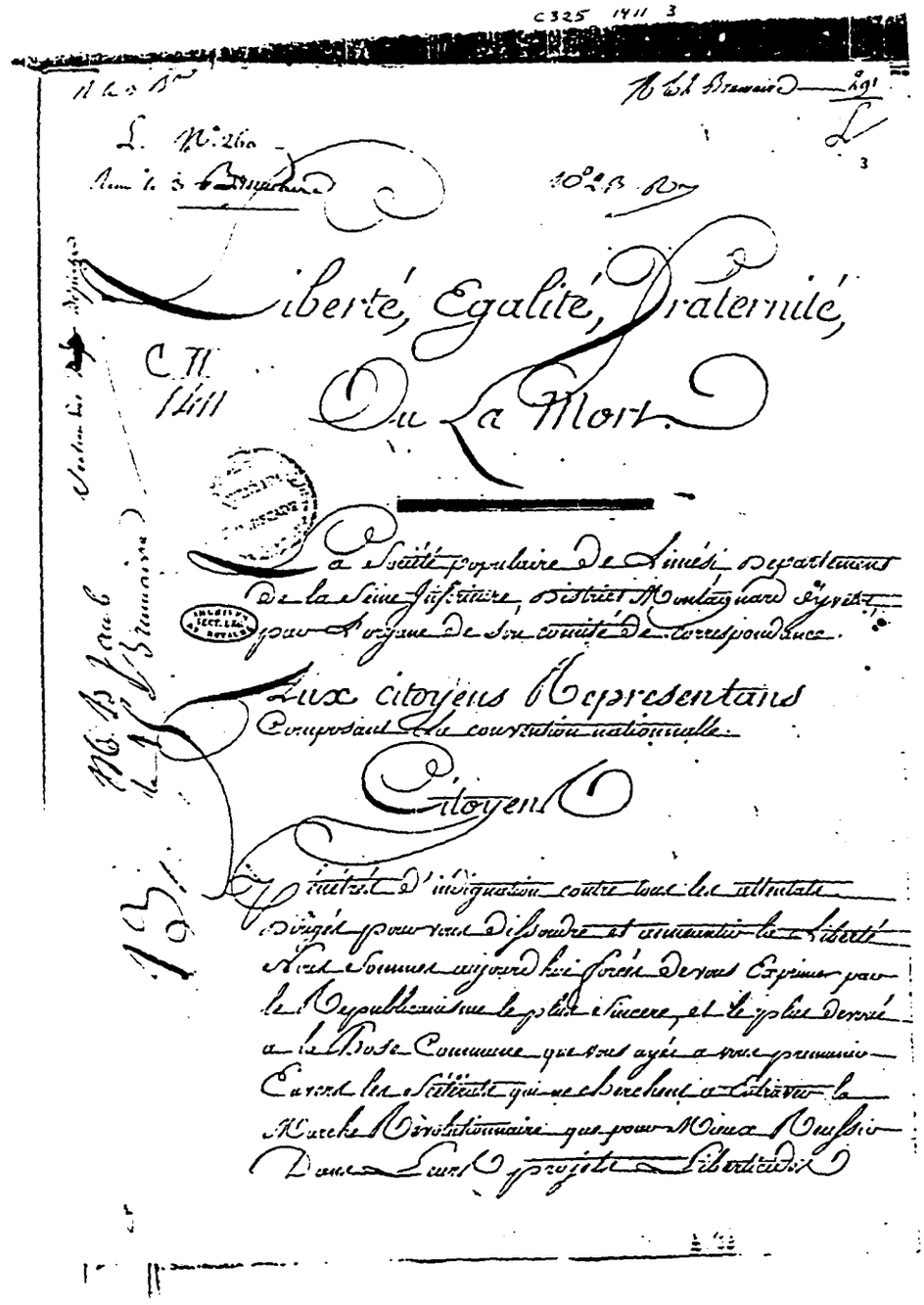
Présidée du Citoyen Lesueur

une adresse de la Convention aux Français
a été entendue avec le plus vif interêt
Fondée sur des principes immuables de
Sagesse de la Justice et de la Vérité, elle ne
pouvoit produire un effet different sur les
Vrais patriotes sur de bons Citoyens
qui ne voient dans le bien particulier que
Base du Bien public, suivre toujours
[illegible]
Un de ces membres a dit que
qu'elle seroit une adresse de la Convention
pour la fidelité de son Execution et pour
l'assurer que la Société se reunira toujours









C325 1411 3

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,
Ou La Mort.

La Société populaire de Suresnes, Département de la Seine Inférieure, District Montagnard séant pour l'organe de son comité de correspondance.

Aux citoyens Représentans
Composant la convention nationale.

Citoyens

Frémissons d'indignation contre tous les attentats dirigés pour vouloir dissoudre et anéantir la liberté. Nous sommes aujourd'hui forcés de vous exprimer par le républicanisme le plus sincère, et le plus dévoué à la Basse Commune que vous ayez à vous prémunir. Car nous la Société qui ne cherche à éclairer la Marche Révolutionnaire que pour mieux l'affermir. Donne Leurs projets liberticides

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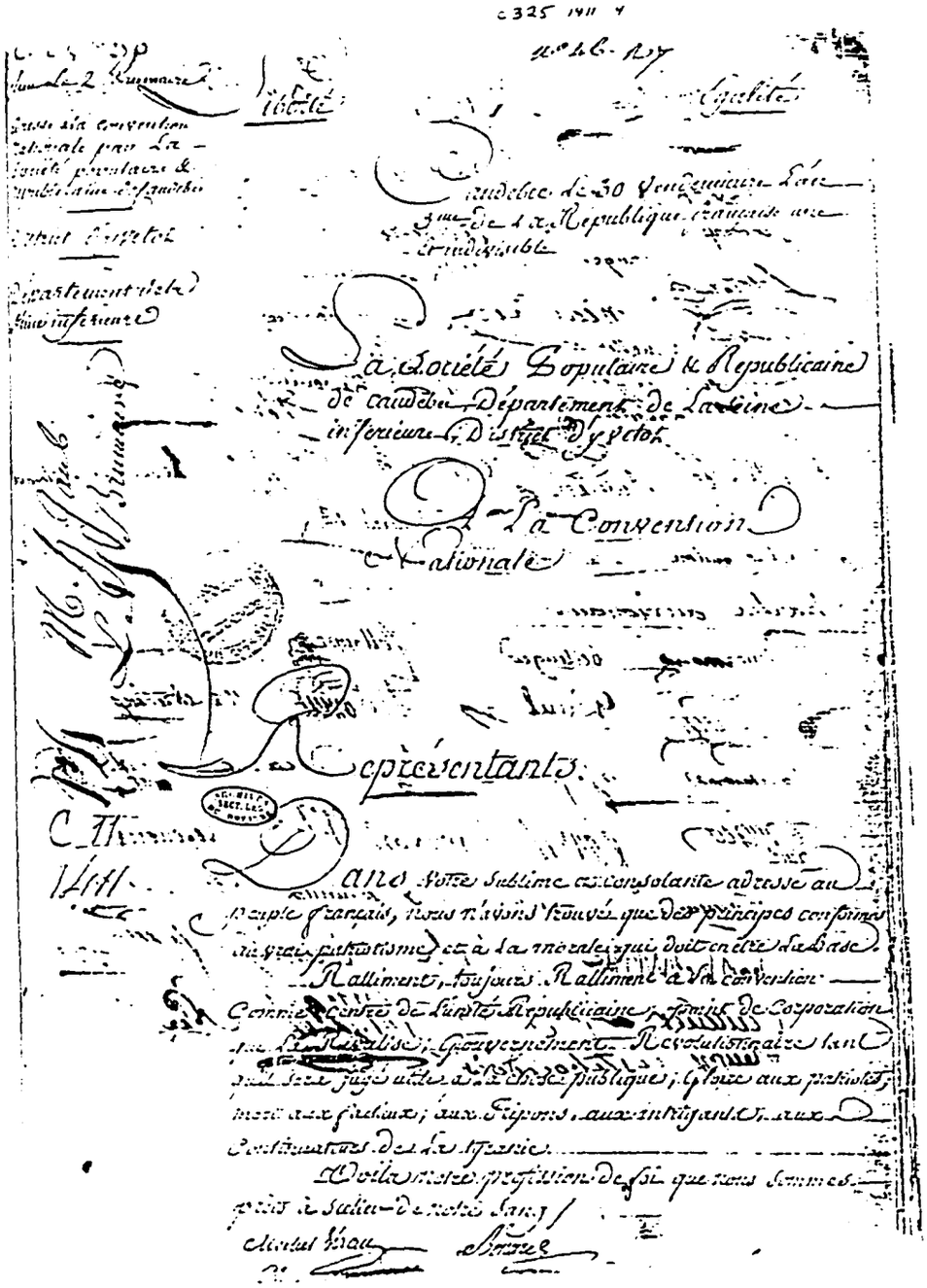
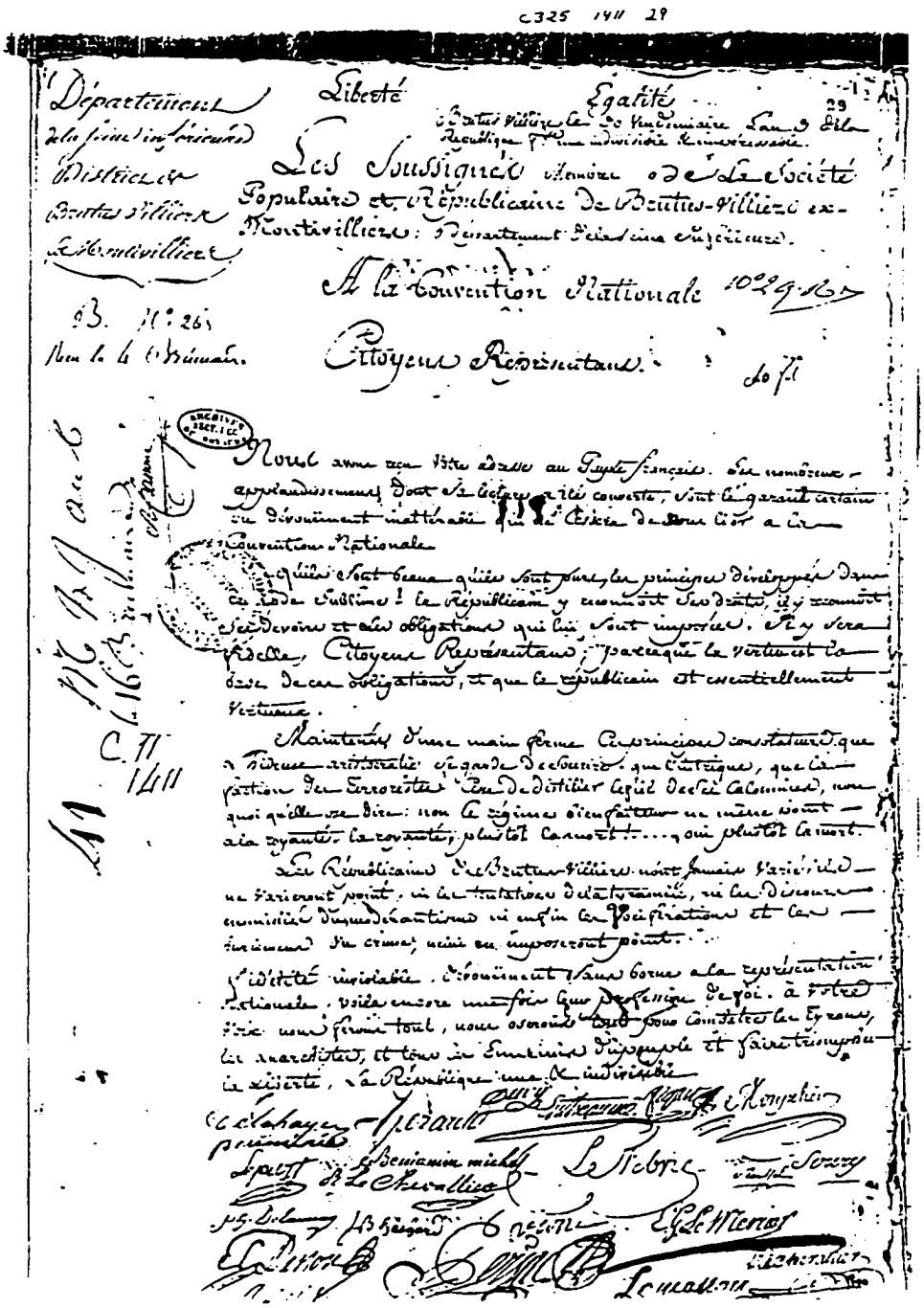
[redacted]

Le Commandement
Grace Nouvelles vous Sonne d'Union, Dignes
Representans, Encore une fois vos Proclamations
L'ennemi se sauve la Republique de la Belgique [redacted]
se trouve Encore une fois votre Energie pompare de
ses Travaux Triomphes pour les Cours Voyageant
Republicaines.
Ecoutez nous, Dignes Representans, voila
nos vœux [redacted] autre Sollicitude que de
Conserver a votre Surete d'autre Centre d'union que de nous
Rallier autour de vous, d'autre pouvoir a Reconnoitre
que ceux qui Emaneront de vos Decret & d'autre
Proclamation que de rester a votre parole Jusque la mort
Et [illegible] Solidaire avec la Republique, Et Enfin
D'autre Devise que De Mourir pour la Defense de notre
Sublime Constitution, Et de tout les Membres qui
Concourront a son la Maintenir Et Garantir voila nos
Vœux, voila nos Sentiments & Vive La republique.

[redacted]
Le Secretaire

28 Vendemiaire 3e annee Republicaine





C325 1411 29

Département
de la Seine inférieure
District de
Brutus-Villiers
ex-Montivilliers

93. N° 265
[illegible] le 6 brumaire.

Liberté Égalité

29

Brutus-Villiers le 20 Vendémiaire l'an 3 de la République française une indivisible et impérissable.

Les Soussignés Membres de la Société Populaire et Républicaine de Brutus-Villiers ex-Montivilliers : Département de la Seine inférieure.

À la Convention Nationale

Citoyens Représentans.

Nous avons vu votre adresse au Peuple français. Les nombreux applaudissemens dont sa lecture a été couverte, sont le garant certain du dévouement inaltérable [illegible] de tous côtés à la Convention Nationale.

Qu'ils sont beaux, qu'ils sont purs, les principes développés dans ce code sublime ! le Républicain y reconnaît ses droits, il y reconnaît ses devoirs et les obligations qui lui sont imposées. Il y sera fidelle, Citoyens Représentans ; parceque la vertu est la base de ces obligations, et que le républicain est essentiellement vertueux.

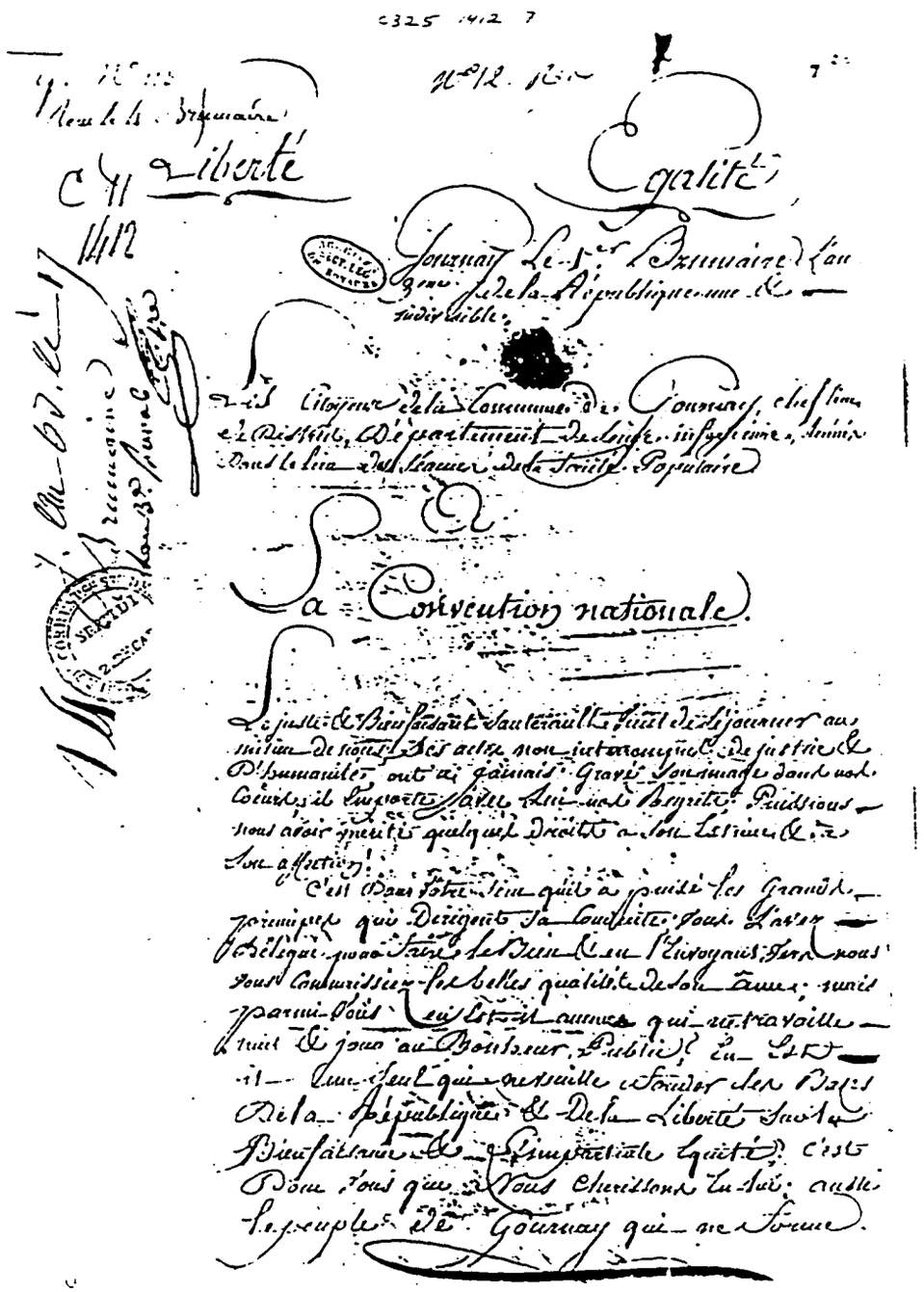
Maintenez d'une main ferme ces principes conservateurs, que la hideuse aristocratie regarde de [illegible], que l'intrigue, que la faction des Terroristes [illegible] de détruire par ses calomnies, non quoi qu'elle en dise : non le régime bienfaisant ne mène point à la royauté, la royauté, plutôt la mort !... oui plutôt la mort.

Les Républicains de Brutus-Villiers n'ont jamais varié, ils ne varieront point, ni les tentatives de la tyrannie, ni les discours emmiellés du modérantisme ni enfin les vociférations et les hurlemens du crime, rien ne leur en imposeront point.

Fidélité inviolable, dévouement sans bornes à la représentation nationale, voilà encore une fois leur profession de foi. À votre voix nous ferons tout, nous oserons tout pour combattre les tyrans, les anarchistes, et tous les ennemis du peuple et faire triompher la liberté, la République une & indivisible.

Delahaye président
Gérard
Benjamin michel
Le Chevallier
Le Febvre

C II 1411



C325 1412 7

1412

Liberté

Egalité

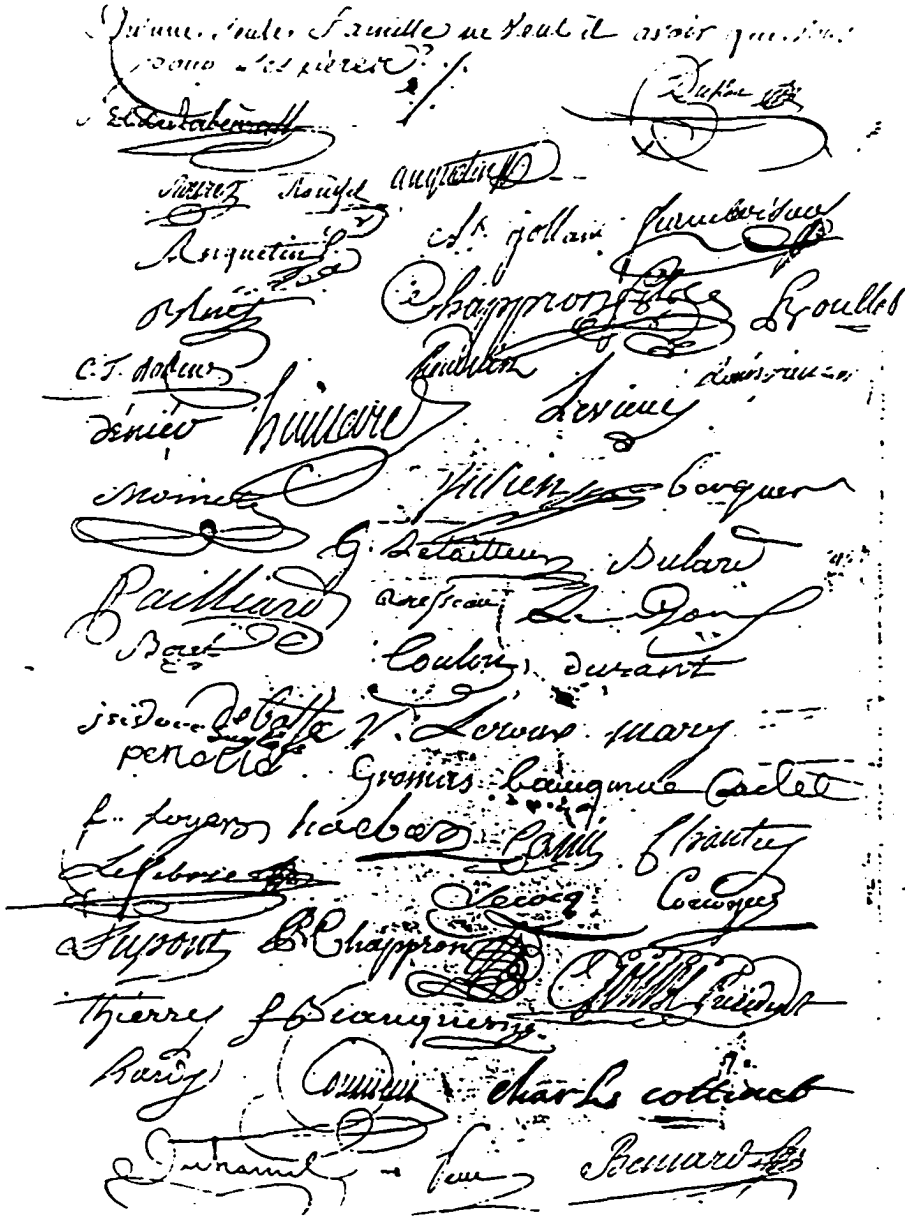
Journal Le 1er Décadaire de l'an
Une de la République une et
indivisible.

Les Citoyens de la Commune de Gournay chef lieu
de Canton, Département de Seine inférieure, Admi-
nistrés de la Section des Sans-culotte Populaire

A la Convention nationale.

Le juste et Bienfaisant Jean Jacques Rousseau disait de la jeunesse au
milieu de tous ses actes non intéressés de justice et
d'humanité, ont ai jamais Gravé Son image dans nos
Coeurs, il Engagerait Sans Doute nos Législateurs Républicains
nous avoir ménagé quelque Droits à son Estime et à
son affection.

C'est Donc Votre Sein qui a ouvert les Grands
Principes qui Dirigent la Conduite sous Laquelle
Législateurs nous Vivons, Pour nous
Vous Conserverez Ses belles qualités de son Ame; unis
parmi Vous Ceux et aucuns qui ne travaille
Nuit et jour au Bonheur Public, Ce Sera
Encore Ceux Seul qui ne Cesseront de Fonder les Bases
De la République et De la Liberté sur la
Bienfaisance et Simplicité Egalité. C'est
Donc tous que Nous Cherissons Tu Sais aussi
Le peuple de Gournay qui ne Cesse



C325 1413 6

Liberté Egalité Fraternité

6

N° 50-167

A la Société Populaire et Républicaine

D'Aumale

Aux Représentans du Peuple [illegible]

ARCHIVES SECT. LEG. NATIONALES

C. N° 174
Aumale
CII
Ville

Citoyens Représentans, trois fois votre sublime adresse au Peuple français a été lue dans notre Société; trois fois elle a été écoutée avec le recueillement respectueux, hommage pur et sacré de l'assentiment général donné aux principes qu'elle renferme; trois fois sa lecture a été suivie de mêmes cris attendrissants, gloire à la République, honneur à ses représentans! Augustes législateurs la Société populaire d'Aumale n'a jamais reconnu que la Convention, elle ne reconnoît que la Convention, elle ne reconnoîtra jamais que la Convention.

Salut et fraternité

Semichon, Sterling, Lyceux, Bunel, Lainé
président

Ce 5 Brumaire L'an trois de la Rep.ique
Les membres individuels de la Société populaire
de Boissettes District de Melun, à la Convention
Nationale.

ARCHIVES SOCIÉTÉS LITTÉRAIRES NUMÉRISÉES

W°37.67

Citoyens Représentans

Les principes que Vous venez de manifester au Peuple
Français, sont tellement gravés en Vrais, ils ont si
solidement fixé l'opinion publique, qu'il suffit
de les avoir sous vos Gouvernement de Justice, d'Egalité
et d'Humanité, que les Intrigants, les Usurpateurs
les Egoistes enfin Crimes qui doivent Trembler
à votre seul Egard de Salut, nous respirons
encore, et après Avoir Victorieusement remporté sur
les Ennemis du Dehors et du Dedans, grace à l'énergie
que vous avez déployé, nous n'allons heureusement
Ne Connoitre pour Seul Point de Ralliement
que la Convention Nationale

Salut et Fraternité

Bourlier

Le Fort Le Grand Cartault Dijon

Cartault

Dauvergne Bourlier

Vignat

C 325 1412 1

1

Bray sur Seine le 10 Brumaire
de l'an 3e de la République une et
indivisible.

16 9bre 1794

La Société Populaire de Bray sur Seine
à la Convention nationale.

Citoyens législateurs

La société populaire de Bray sur Seine,
toujours pure et immuable dans ses principes
républicains, comme dans ses sentimens de
respect et d'attachement pour la
représentation nationale s'félicite la Convention,
elle s'en adresse au peuple français qui a
été généralement accueillie au milieu des
transports de la joie la plus vive, et des
cris mil fois répétés, de vive la Convention
nationale

Conservez précieusement, Citoyens législateurs,
ce haut degré d'élévation [illegible]
où vous êtes parvenus le neuf thermidor,
jour à jamais mémorable, pour le salut de la
patrie, où vous avez délivré le peuple de ses
plus dangereux ennemis, et de ses plus cruels
oppresseurs:

anéantissez sans pitié tous les [illegible]

Conservateurs, des principes républicains et
fondateurs, qui, guidés de ces règles sacrées
sont sûr de triompher toujours.

Que notre horizon, dégagé des nuages
funestes qui le couvrent, ne nous présente
plus que des jours sereins, et ne soit
désormais gouverné que par la Convention
nationale, comme seule dépositaire de la
volonté nationale.

Que le peuple français, bénissant ses
illustres travaux, après tant de sacrifices et de
dangers, puisse jouir sous le règne de la
justice, et de ses lois salutaires, des bienfaits
de la révolution et des douceurs de la liberté
que tant de héros, se sont toujours
efforcés de lui ravir, et nous répétons
sans cesse: vive la République, vive
la justice, vive la Convention nationale.

Redigé a la dite Société a Sa Séance du
dimanche 10 Brumaire: Gondain Jury
Vadier Dagorn Billaud Varenne Collot
Vadier Amar Moyse Bayle
Vouland Berthelot Lavicomterie Lavaux

16

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,
Unité, indivisibilité, de la République
ou la mort.

C II
1403

Aux Citoyens Représentans du Peuple
Français à la convention nationale,

Les Sans culottes de la Société
populaire et Républicaine de la commune
de Méréville, District d'Etampes, Département
de Seine et Oise,

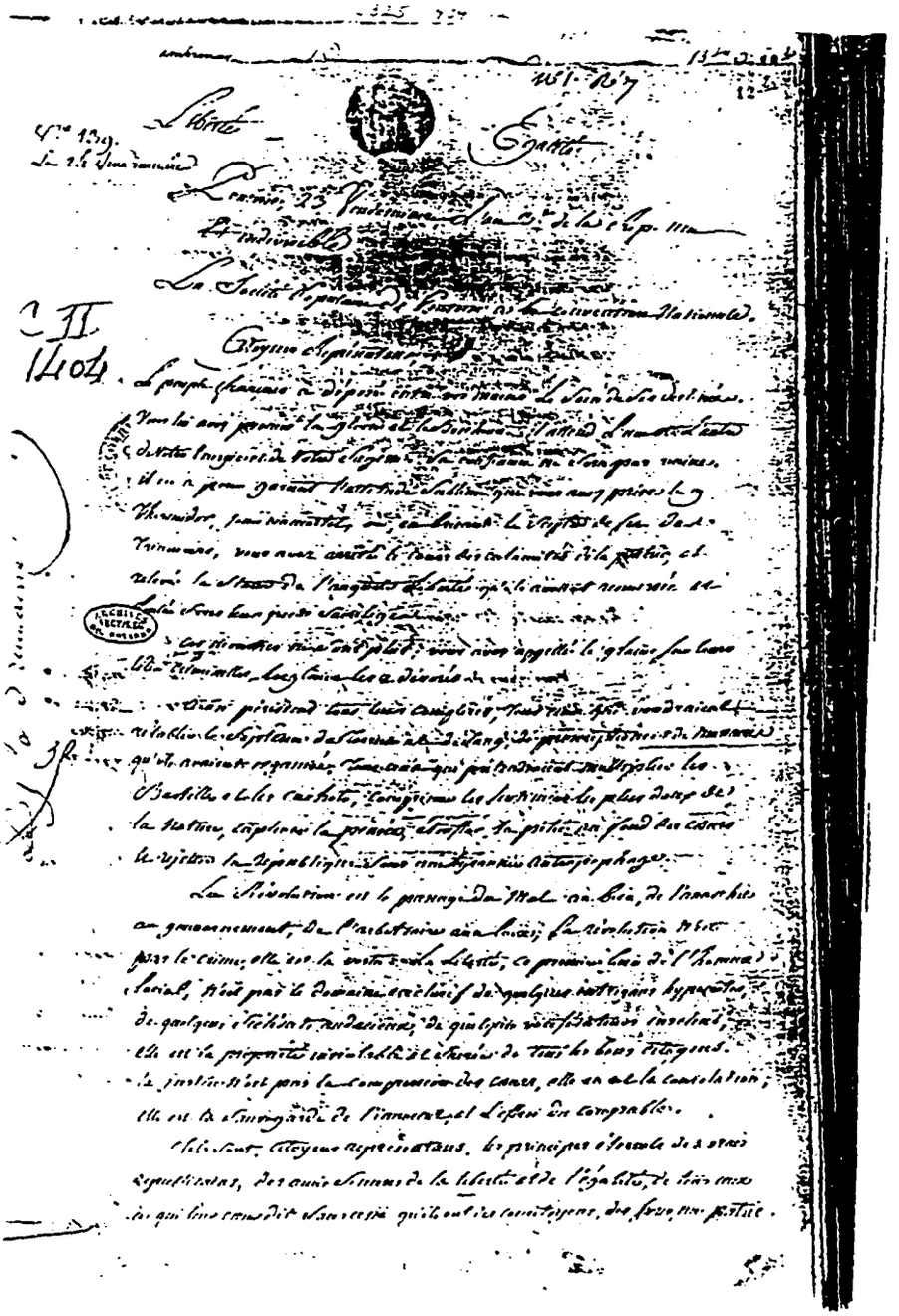
Il nous avait, Citoyens Représentans, coûté bien des sacrifices pour
des crises et des chocs violents opérés par les ennemis du Peuple, pour
subjuguer et tenir dans l'esclavage le souverain qui les a
toujours plus chers, qui les garantit de la tirannie, et nous avait
rendus à la dignité que Nous avons. Représentans du Peuple libre,
vous nous avez trouvés dignes de la liberté que nous avons conquis, et cependant la
main de Rome et Pitt nous ont porté coup à la République par la perte
de la confiance de ses vrais amis, confiance pour la quelle Nous devons
toujours Vigilance et Courage. Ce fut en vain que la justice et notre
courage; Votre énergie, la prudence et la sagesse des mesures que Vous

1

B. Roussell
p. 251

dissertation

Appendix: A.N. C325 1403 16



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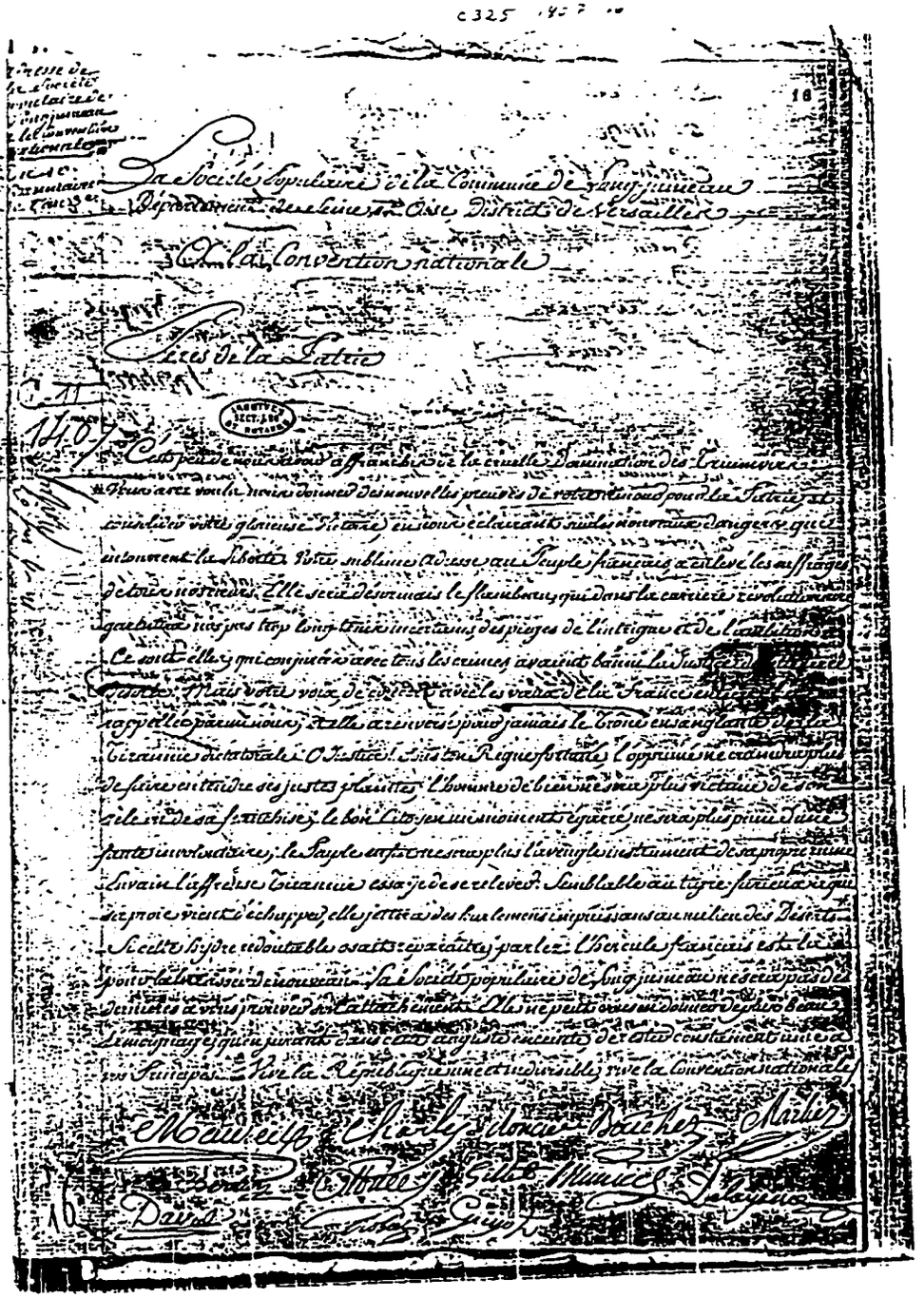


C325 1410 25

Liberté Egalité Fraternité ou la 25
Insécabilité de la république

Reçu le 25 Janvier

N°12 87

La Société Populaire de Fontainebleau à la Convention Nationale.

Citoyens Représentans

C II 1410

La Vertu, le Courage, la Sagesse et la justice qui ont dictés Votre Sublime Adresse au Peuple Français a pénétrés Nos Ames, Nos applaudissemens réitérés et unanimes dans le sein de Notre Société, ont — Exprimés les Sentimens de Nos Cœurs.

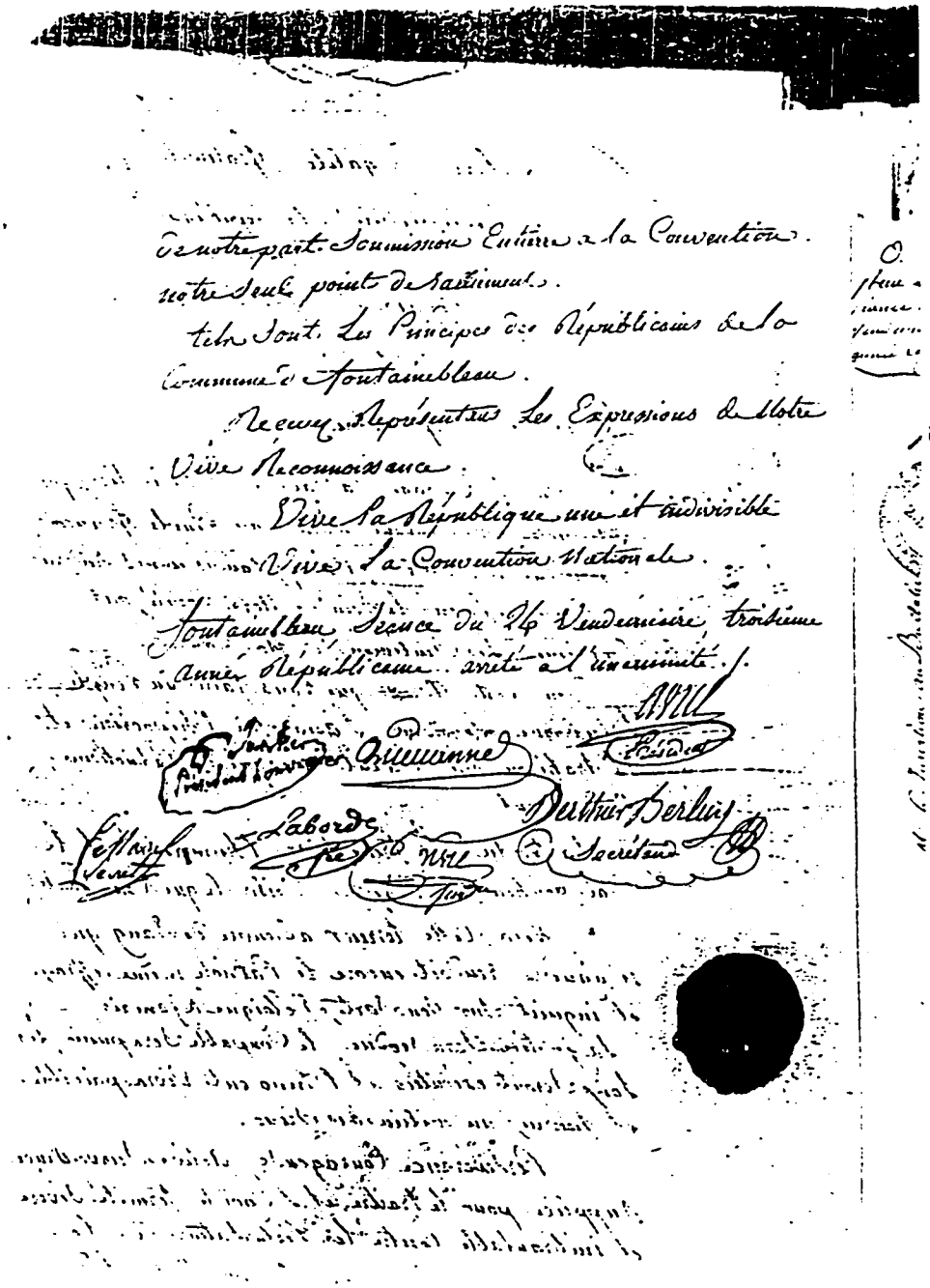
Dans Cette Adresse que Vous faites au Peuple, l'Intrigue, l'Egoisme, l'Anarchie, l'Hipocrisie et la trahison avec Cruauté [illegible] le Patriotisme [illegible] s'Eclipsent

La Vertu, la Fraternité, l'Humanité et le Vrai Bonheur du Peuple, Voila ce que Nous Voulons

Deja Cette terreur abreuvée de Sang, qui — la guerre rendoit encore le Patriote même effrayé et inquiet Sur Son Sort, s'éloigne à jamais, — la justice Sera rendue le Coupable Sera puni, les Loix Seront exécutées et l'Innocent Vivra paisible et heureux au milieu des Siens.

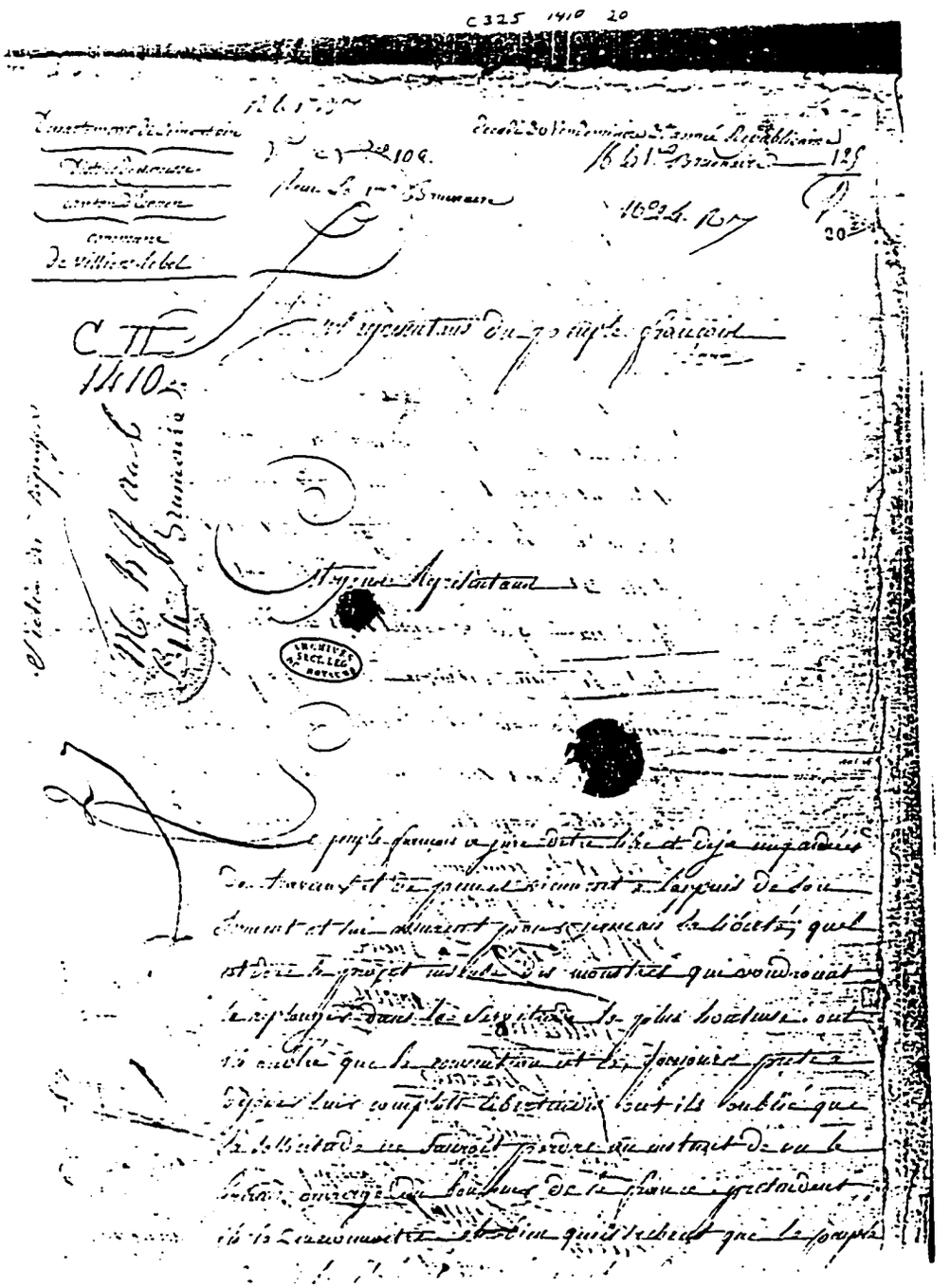
Persévérance Courageuse Active Surveillance Supplice pour le traître, et l'Egoïste, Fermeté Sévère et inébranlable Contre les Perturbateurs de la tranquillité, justice a qui il appartient, et de notre

La Convention Nationale



de notre part. Soumission Entière à la Convention.
notre seul point de Ralliement.
Tels Sont Les Principes des Républicains de la
Commune de Fontainebleau.
Recevez Représentans Les Expressions de Notre
Vive Reconnoissance.
Vive la République une et indivisible
Vive la Convention Nationale.
Fontainebleau Séance du 24 Vendemiaire, troisième
Année Républicaine. arrêté à l'unanimité. /.

Président
Secrétaire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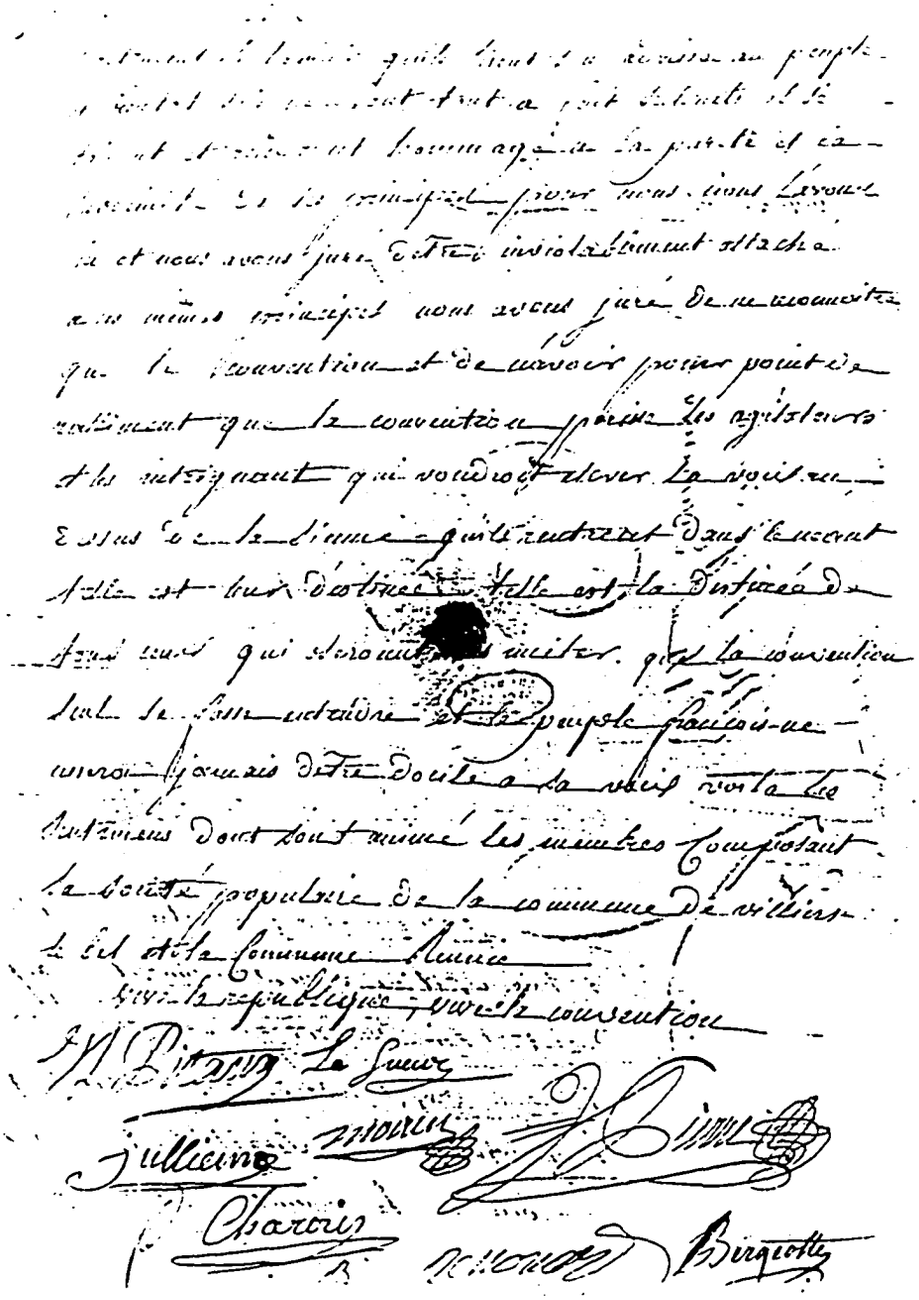

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C. cv 296 Adresse Individuelle f° 31

Section de Bonne-Nouvelle

Des Citoyens composants la Société populaire de Corbeil.

à la Convention nationale,

C 11
1411 Citoyens représentans

Nous avons entendu avec le plus vif enthousiasme la lecture de l'adresse de la Convention nationale au peuple français.

Comme vous nous aimons la vérité et la justice : notre vœu bien sincère est que vous maintenez ces principes et que vous banissiez à jamais le système de terreur par lequel on indigne du Peuple que vous représentez. Des Triumvirs seuls avoient pu l'imaginer et il ne peut y avoir que leurs complices que de vils ennemis du bien public qui osent le redemander.

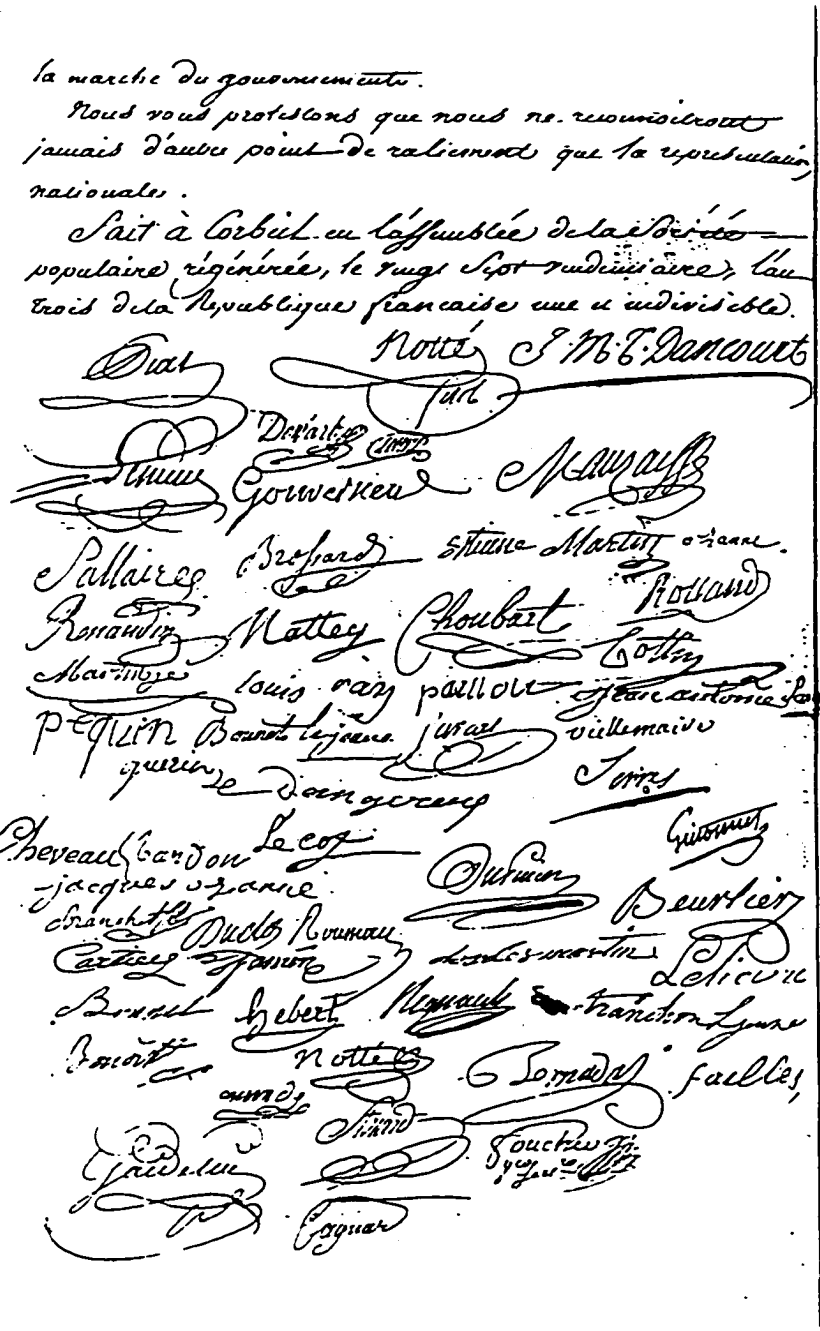
Continuez, Citoyens représentans, vos sublimes travaux ; n'oubliez pas que l'éducation publique est indispensable pour éclairer le peuple : elle lui servira à lui faire connoître, de plus en plus, sa dignité, à lui faire chérir la révolution et à le mettre en garde contre ceux qui voudroient encore le tromper.

Maintenez le gouvernement révolutionnaire, afin que nous puissions jouir promptement de la constitution Républicaine.

Des Bienfaits

Comptez sur l'amour du peuple : il est debout pour surveiller, pour démasquer et pour livrer à la justice nationale tous ceux qui voudroient entraver

54



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23

Égalité Fraternité

La Société Populaire de Beaumont-les-Beaumont, Département de Seine et Oise

À la Convention Nationale

Législature.

C II
1412

ARCHIVES SECT. LEG. NATIONALE

Nous vous félicitons de l'Ouvrage immortelle que vous venez de donner au peuple français. nous l'avons médité ... elle a raffermi notre courage et renforcé — nos principes. les principes qu'elle propage sont les seuls conformes aux principes d'hommes justes et libres. Sous toute les bases d'un gouvernement Républicain sont la fermeté, la Justice et l'humanité; et non de la Barbarie d'esclaves de tyrans qui opprimoit ... nous gémissons et bien souvent, le voeux d'égorger ... Représentans ou en aurons fait un exemple de Commandant ... français ont besoin et a besoin que l'on régularise

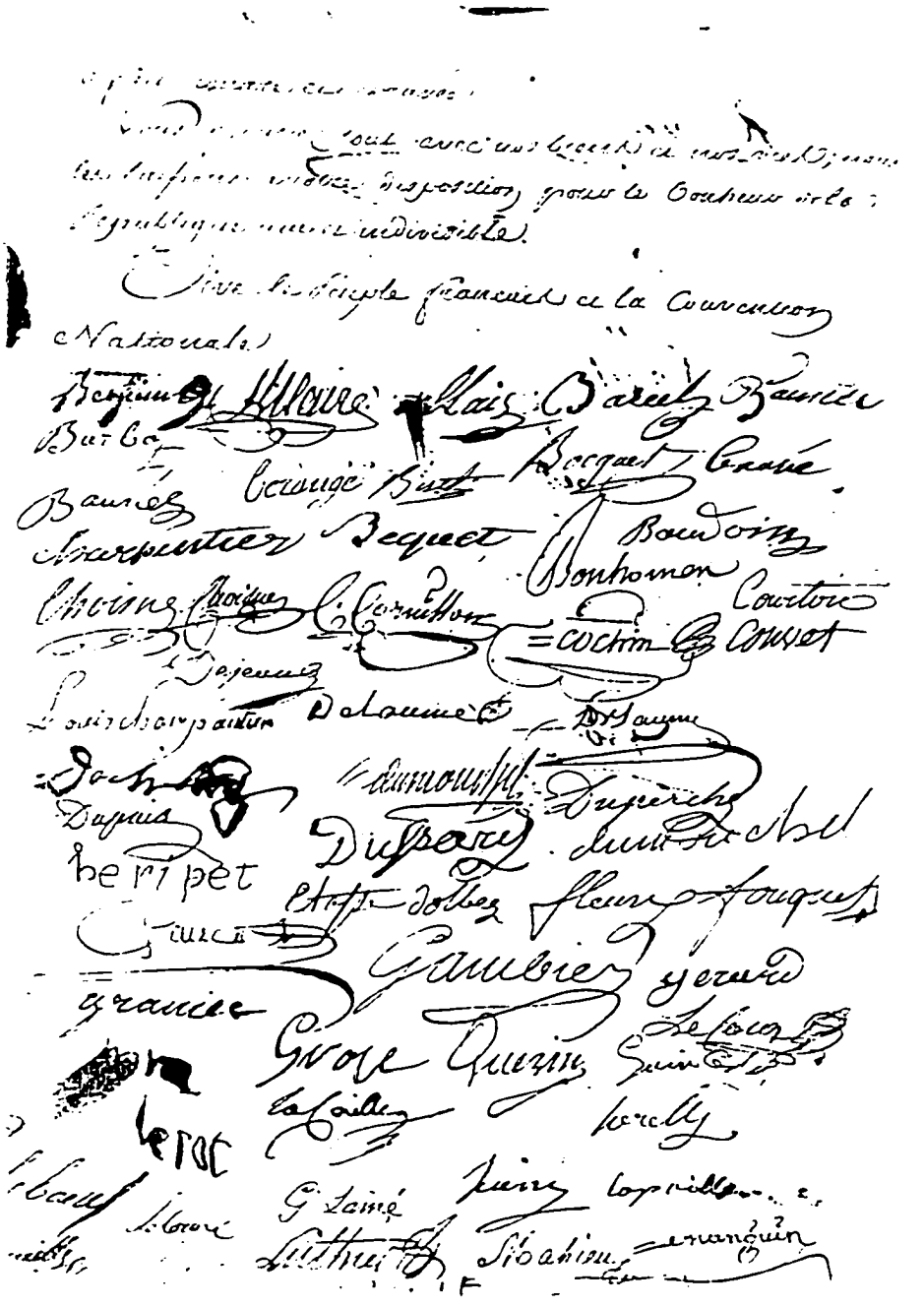
[illegible] vous êtes ce Législateur, [illegible]
[illegible] soutenez-le avec énergie; modérez-le avec
[illegible]; roidissez-le avec justice, et relâchez-le avec
[illegible]

Le Tems ne s'est plus où le vrai Salariat confondoit
[illegible] des mains des oisifs, quand [illegible]
[illegible] le moissonneur dans la campagne et [illegible]

Le vain fantôme infâme de Robespierre plane encore
sur la France, et cherche à rallumer les torches de la
discorde; le peuple verra [illegible] Représentants
il terrassera avec eux, pour ses ennemis; il dévoilera
les factieux; il punira les dépréd[illegible]; il anéantira
les corporations qui oseroient rivaliser le pouvoir —
Souverain

O, notre chere Patrie! qu'allois-tu devenir? une
terre de sauvages et d'hommes féroces! non, non! nous
vous sommes tous [illegible] et cimenter, parmi les Cris de
l'Egalité, l'Union, l'Amitié et la Fraternité.

Demeurez, Législateurs, Nation, armée prête —
jusqu'au moment où la République sera parfaitement
paisible: remplissez vos Devoirs avec activité:
achevez vos immenses travaux; maintenez vous
d'épurer les autorités constituées, le moindre
retard seroit funeste à la chose publique; —
organisez promptement l'instruction; regénérez les
mœurs, sans quoi la jeunesse deviendra [illegible]



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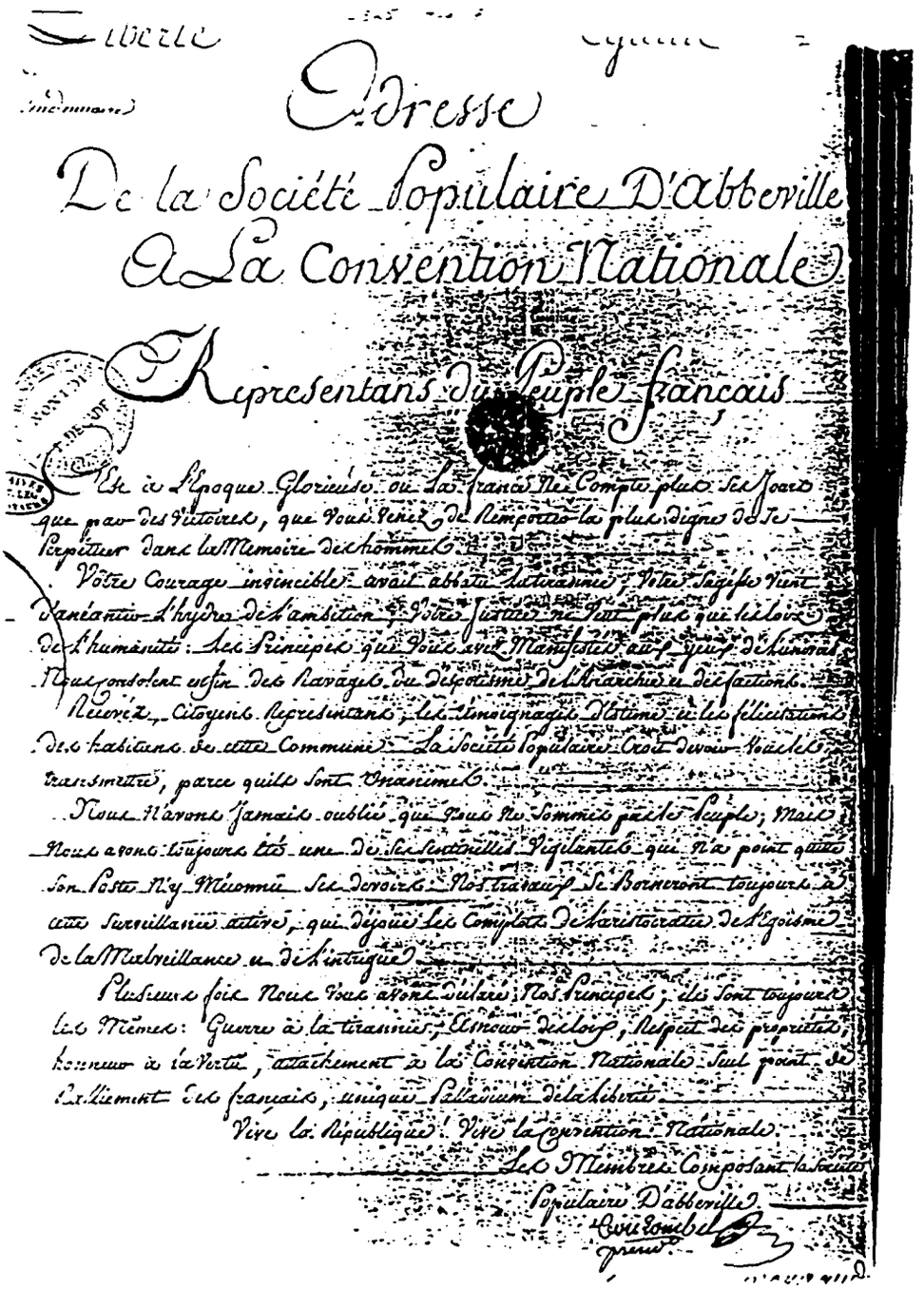

Liberté

Adresse

De la Société Populaire D'Abbeville

A La Convention Nationale

Représentans du Peuple français

Etc à l'Epoque Glorieuse où La France Nes Compte plus ses Jours que par des Victoires, que Vous venez de Remporter la plus digne de Se Perpétuer dans la Mémoire des hommes

Votre Courage invincible avait abbatu la tirannie; Votre Sagesse Vient d'anéantir l'hydre de l'ambition; Votre Justice ne Fait plus que Celebrer de L'humanité: Les Principes que Vous avez Manifestés aux yeux de L'Univers Nous consolent enfin des Ravages du Despotisme de L'Anarchie ou des factions

Recevez, Citoyens Representans, les Témoignages Sincères et les félicitations des habitans de cette Commune La Société Populaire Croit devoir Vous les transmettre, parce qu'ils Sont Unanimes.

Nous n'avons Jamais oublié que Nous Sommes Juges du Peuple; Mais Nous avons toujours été une de ses Sentinelles Vigilantes qui n'a point quitté Son Poste N'y Ménagé Ses Devoirs Nos travaux Se Borneront toujours à cette Surveillance active, qui déjoue les Complots de L'aristocratie de L'Egoisme de la Malveillance ou de L'intrigue

Plusieurs fois Nous Vous avons Soumis Nos Principes, ils Sont toujours les Mêmes: Guerre à la tirannie, Horreur du crime, Respect des propriétés, Honneur à la Vertu, attachement à la Convention Nationale Seul point de Ralliement des français, unique Palladium de la liberté

Vive la République! Vive la Convention Nationale

Les Membres Composant la Société Populaire D'Abbeville

Duquesnel
Président

B. Roussell
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dissertation

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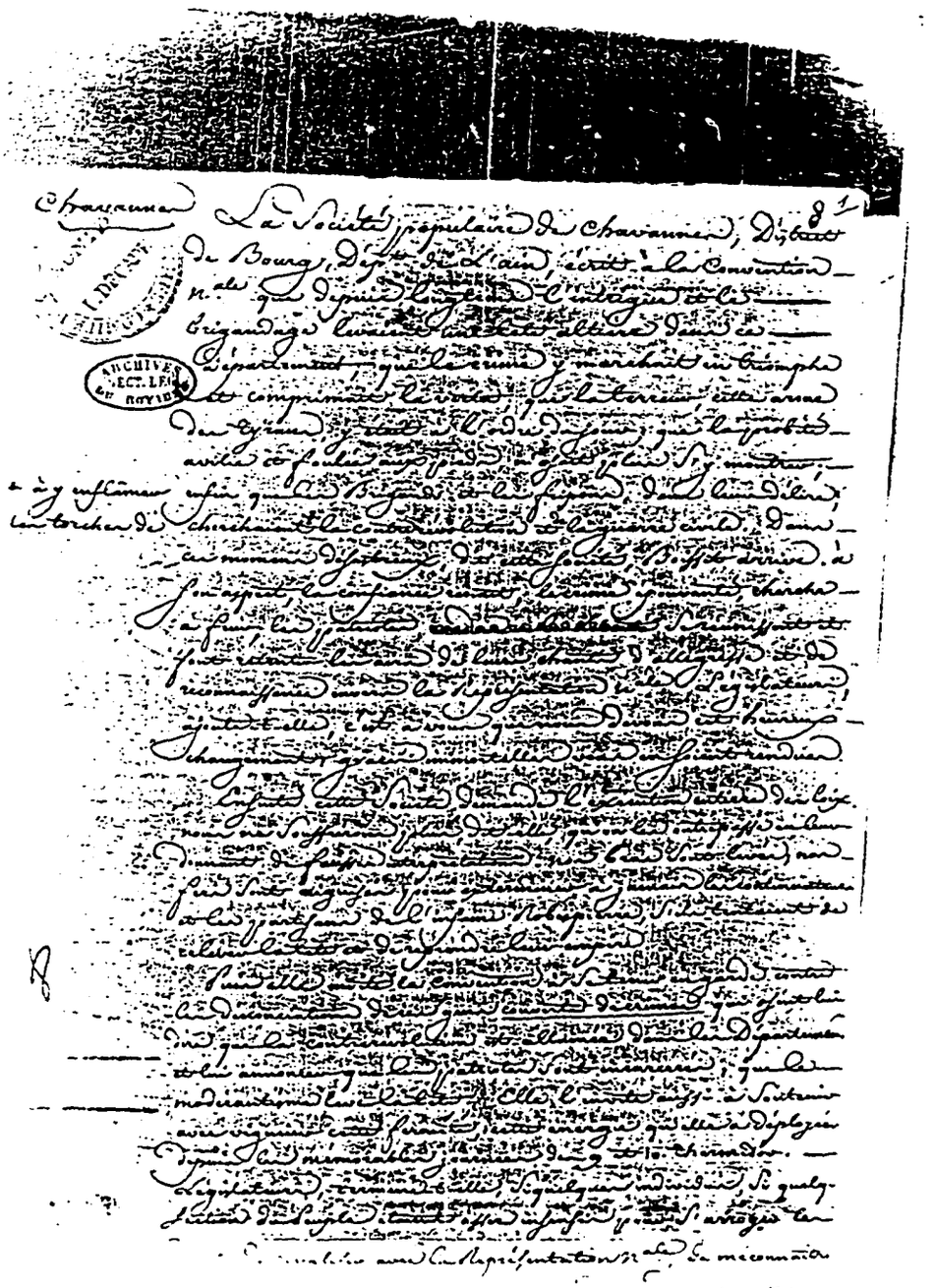


3

Surtout parmi ces gens qui désirent être tenus, se répandre parmi ces êtres dont l'Esprit toujours insatisfait recueille les objets les plus essentiels pour le plaisir de faire valoir une opinion souvent erronée, mais nous avons cru le devoir à cette opinion, parce que nous la croyons juste. ainsi nous vous proposons de mettre à l'ordre du jour, [illegible] que les affiliations dans les Sociétés soient défendues, et que nul membre de la Convention, de l'administration de District et de Comité révolutionnaire ne puissent être en même temps membre d'aucune Société populaire.

Tel sont nos réflexions, mais restons persuadé que vous ne verrez en nous que l'idée de concourir au bonheur commun

Vive la République

Législateurs,

2

Puissiez vous être toujours heureux, puissiez vous à l'exemple des Romains donner à votre Capitale, cette Sociabilité dont émanent les lois sages que les fastes de notre incomparable et Sienatorielle histoire ne soient plus souillés par les tristes excès des haines, des dissensions puissiez vous être toujours frères et vous estimer comme tels. Car vous le savez, de cette indivisibilité, dépend l'indivisibilité de notre glorieuse et à jamais triomphante République

Vive la Convention

Duval

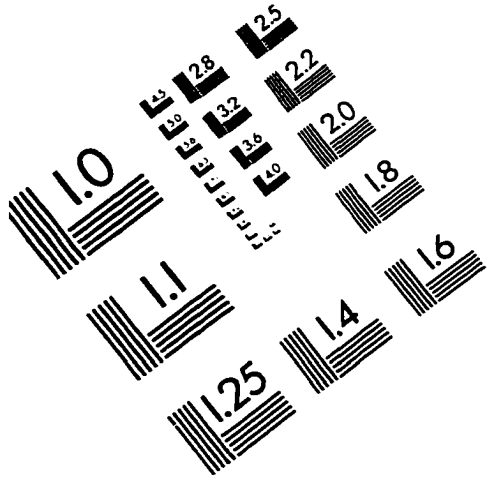
Chatel

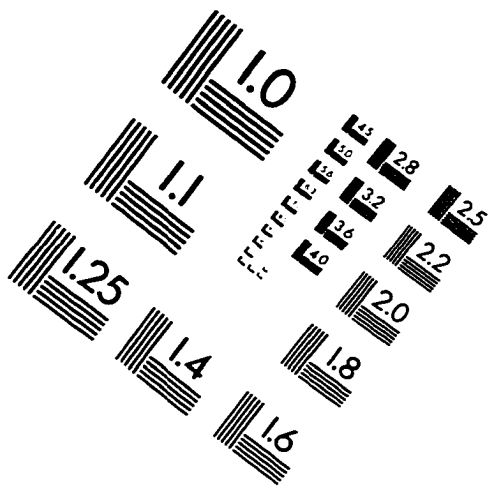
François Renault

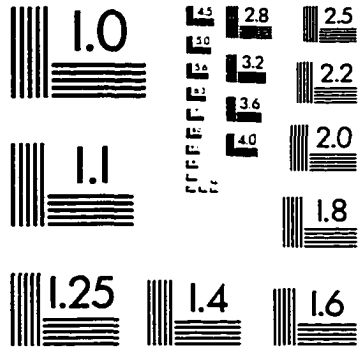
Fleuriot Lescot

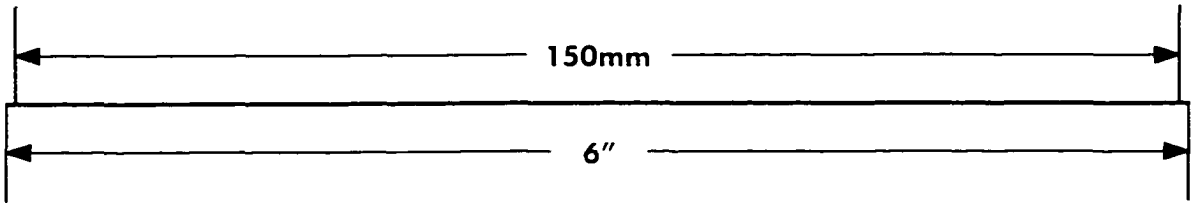
Appendix Index

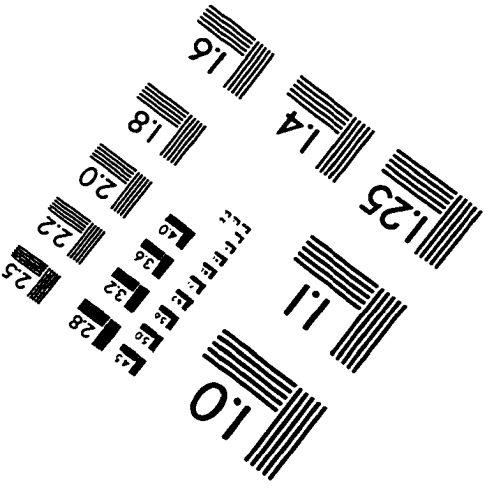
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

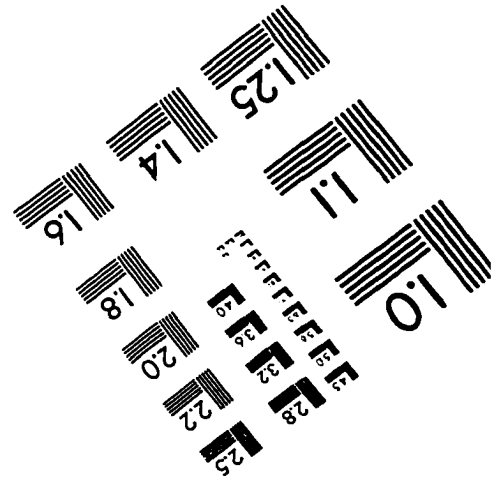












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