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The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda

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Chapter 3: The Emergence of the Grand Conspiracy Theory After the French Revolution

*"The obscurantists do not see in the French Revolution the consequence of easily traceable causes...but rather the work of a secret society headed by a very few men... that two truly super-human individuals...have in fact worked for the last decade upon the implementation of a plan which the tongues of men and of angels dare not utter, and the minds of men cannot comprehend. The most heterogeneous men, things, and events are all seen as machines in the hands of those two beings...a few hundred scholars who in fact frequently do not know one another; a few hundred court marshals, ambassadors, yes even princes; the Magic Flute, the armies in the Campagne; the generals of the coalition; the dysentery which caused the Prussians so much trouble ...the Duke of Orleans; the Temple of Reason in Paris; the Marseillaise; the bookseller Vollmer at Erfurt; Mirabeau ...Robespierre, ...etc."*¹

- G.F. Rebmann, 1796

*"The French Revolution is but the forerunner of a Revolution greater by far, and much more solemn."*²

- Barruel

*"This movement among the Jews is not new. From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxembourg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States)... this worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing."*³

- Winston Churchill, February 1920

The French Revolution was a surprising event, and it quickly became a shocking event for monarchists. It was hardly believable that one of the great ruling dynasties of Europe had

¹ G.F. Rebmann, *Die Wächter der Burg Zion*, (Hamburg 1796), p. 8-10, Quoted in Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 532.

² Abbe Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism Vol. 4*, (New York: Shepard Kollock for Cornelius Davis, 1799), p. 281.

³ "The Churchill you didn't know," *The Guardian*, 7 November, 2002, researched by Amy Iggulden, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2002/nov/28/features11.g21>

collapsed so suddenly, without an invasion. Also, if it could happen to the Bourbons, then it could happen to the Hapsburgs or the Hohenzollerns. In a response to this threat, groups of conservative propagandists supported by the Habsburg monarchy and some German princes took up a conspiracy theory that explained the French Revolution, and these propagandists molded it into a myth that became the Grand Conspiracy Theory. This first version was based on the myth of an Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy. The essential idea of this myth is that a small group of atheist plotters were trying to secretly usurp power, and that they were using Enlightenment ideas as cover to justify their usurpation -or even worse, that Enlightenment ideas themselves were tools in a plot by this group to soften-up unconquered states, subvert legitimate government and religion, and then spread their behind-the-scenes control to new countries. The French Revolution was pointed to as an egregious example of the success of this plot.

This chapter will first examine the origins of the use of an Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy theory to explain the French Revolution and chart the adaptation and use of this theory by reactionary propagandists. This chapter will then illustrate how two of the most well-known conspiracy theorists in history, Augustin Barruel and John Robison, were convinced by this propaganda and further spread the idea in their books, popularizing the Grand Conspiracy Theory among the European reading public. This chapter will then examine the main tenets of this conspiracy theory as presented by Barruel and Robison and its initial impact on European thought.

In the previous chapter, we examined the history of literature about court intrigue in a monarchy and the use of conspiratorial narratives about deception and usurpation-via-deception. These narratives and patterns of thought, indispensable to an understanding of the histories of many monarchies, did not melt away in France with the end of the monarchy. Just as a king could be deceived and manipulated by conspiracies among his servants, courtiers, wives, and mistresses, a democracy could be deceived and manipulated by manipulating the press and public rumor. In fact, compared to a monarch, who could purge his administration or establish an intelligence service to counteract these conspiracies, a paranoid mind familiar with the practices of the court could view a newly-sovereign voting public as a flock of sheep at the mercy of conspiratorial manipulators.

After the success of the revolutionaries, many royalists explained the success of the French Revolution by describing conspiracies that involved the French Philosophes, Freemasons, Jansenists, Protestants, or groups of usurping aristocrats.⁴ These conspiracy theories were rooted in ideas from before the French Revolution, like narratives drawn from the long traditions of court conspiracies and deceptive usurpations. The conspiracies described that involved the Freemasons had the most staying power. The Papacy had already published two bulls against Freemasonry in 1738 and 1786.⁵ The idea that Freemasons were involved in political subversion and in favor of democracy was nothing new in 1789, and the Freemasons had already been banned in several places because of their association with political mischief and free-thinking. A French pro-Masonic pamphlet from 1744 demonstrates that Freemasons themselves were sensitive to these fears. It begins with a woman trying to penetrate the society

⁴ James L. Osen, *Royalist Political Thought During the French Revolution*, (Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 51.

⁵ J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of Secret Societies*, p. 68.

believing they were working towards a universal democratic republic, but ends with her witnessing a meeting and seeing Freemasons drink to the health of the King.⁶

After the tremendous shock of the French Revolution some people turned back to these older rumors in search of an explanation. In 1791 a French clergyman named Lefranc published *The Veil Lifted for the Curious* which said that the French Revolution was a Masonic project, that the French National Assembly was in fact masonic,⁷ that the Freemasons had “provided the heroes of the French Revolution” and had “taught France to contemplate death in cold blood, to boldly wield the dagger, to eat the flesh of the dead, to drink from their skulls, and to surpass the savage peoples in barbarism and cruelty.”⁸ Lefranc explained that the Freemasons were anti-Roman Catholic atheists who represented “the quintessence of all the heresies that divided Germany in the 16th century”⁹ (the Reformation) and who were trying to found a new religion based on ancient Greek philosophy. They had plotted to start the French Revolution because they “want to overthrow the Throne, just as they have overthrown the Altar.”¹⁰

It was in the German lands, however, where the most powerful myth linking the Freemasons to the French Revolution was forged. The villain for the narrative was already well known: the Bavarian Illuminati. This organization, normally just called the “Illuminati” was a secret society founded in 1776 by a professor at the University of Ingolstadt Adam Weishaupt.¹¹ The society was dedicated to influencing society in favor of egalitarianism and rationalism, and after a few years the members of the organization deliberately infiltrated Freemasonry to recruit fresh members.¹² The leaders of the society had grand plans to influence all of Europe with its agents acting secretly in concert to advance rationalism and the ideals of the Enlightenment, but it never gained anything close to this influence. It was suppressed by the Bavarian state in 1785 and its surviving correspondence and documents were published, including very private documents full of scandal fodder, to the embarrassment of the founder Weishaupt. The sensational confessions of former members of the society published in 1786 shocked German public opinion.¹³

Rumors circulated that the order had gone underground, and several books were published illustrating the order’s continuing influence.¹⁴ In one of the many letters published by the Bavarian authorities the Illuminati founder Weishaupt bragged that “I have considered...every thing, and so prepared it, that if the Order should this day go to ruin, I shall in a year re-establish it more brilliant than ever.”¹⁵ A much-discussed 1786 epistolary novel *Exposure of the Cosmopolitan System* by a Weimar official named Ernst August Anton von

⁶ Roberts, pp. 86-87

⁷ Jacques-François Lefranc, *Le Voile levé pour les curieux, ou le Secret de la Révolution révélé, à l'aide de la Franc-Maçonnerie*, (Veuve Valade, 1791), p. 56.

⁸ Lefranc, p. 67.

⁹ Lefranc, p. 31.

¹⁰ Lefranc, p. 154.

¹¹ Roberts, p. 118.

¹² Roberts, pp. 118-123.

¹³ Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 102.

¹⁴ Roberts, pp. 127-130.

¹⁵ John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe*, Fourth edition, (New York: George Forman, 1798), p. 118.

Göschhausen claimed that the Illuminati had survived, totally infiltrated the Freemasons, and were now plotting to “advance deism and cosmopolitanism” and establish a “religion of reason” and dissolve all nations and states into one.¹⁶ However, the author then went on to assert that in fact the Jesuits were behind the grand plot, and that this was all a plan to destroy the Protestant states while keeping the Catholic states in ignorance: “In the nations which are still subject to Rome the Jesuits continue to foster superstition and seek desperately to prevent the introduction of *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment]; while in “enlightened” nations they vigorously promote *Aufklärung* with the deliberate purpose of blinding the people through an excess of light.”¹⁷

After the French Revolution two groups of state propagandists, one from the Austrian Empire and the other centered in the states of Germany, took up a version of this Illuminati conspiracy theory to explain the French Revolution. Unlike the examples previously mentioned in this chapter, the tone of this theory was neither Catholic nor Protestant (though the sectarian loyalties of individual authors usually shone through). In the end the adoption and development of the Freemason/Illuminati conspiracy theory of the French Revolution by state-sponsored propagandists was the critical step that refined and standardized the main themes of this conspiracy theory and gave it enough “intellectual” heft and publicity to keep the narrative alive for subsequent generations as the core of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. This will not be the only example of state propaganda adopting and spreading a conspiracy theory. State propaganda campaigns can provide consistency to a narrative and even produce fabricated or doctored evidence to support a conspiracy theory that would otherwise be forgotten or ignored.

“The Association” and the *Wiener Zeitschrift*

Leopold Alois Hoffmann (1760-1806) was a third-rate Austrian writer and editor who claimed to have been a Freemason and to have nearly joined the Illuminati in his youth. He got his start working as a kind of government spy in Vienna, where he was part of a team denouncing preachers who did not toe the Emperor’s line.¹⁸

Hoffmann wrote in his autobiography that when he was 27 he read the Illuminati documents published by the Bavarian government and became a staunch opponent of the society and the Enlightenment.¹⁹ He became a hack for Austrian imperial propaganda while working for the Emperor on Hungarian issues during unrest in Hungary in 1790.²⁰ Hoffmann’s propaganda in Hungary was directed against the Hungarian nobility, who were demanding privileges from the Emperor as conditions of their consent of his official coronation as king of Hungary. The Emperor had Hoffmann publish two books anonymously that attacked the Hungarian nobility, and one of them specifically attacking the new coronation oath that was to be imposed on Leopold II. These books were published without the permission of the official

¹⁶ Epstein, pp. 96-98.

¹⁷ Ernst August Anton von Göschhausen, *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republik*. (Rome, [Leipzig], 1786), p. 276, Quoted in Epstein, p. 99.

¹⁸ Denis Silagi, *Ungarn und der geheime Mitarbeiterkreis Kaiser Leopoldus II*, (Munich: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1961), p. 55.

¹⁹ Epstein, pp. 518-520.

²⁰ Epstein, p. 520.

Board of Censorship and were circulated by the Emperor's agents.²¹ An aspect of Leopold II's strategy in Hungary was to get the commoners to present their grievances to the Emperor and also to demand representation in the Hungarian diet (then dominated by the nobility) and also to reduce the privileges of the powerful Hungarian nobility. Hoffmann, among other agents, was instructed to get the people of Pest and Bratislava to petition the Emperor along these lines.²² This ploy by the Emperor evidently worked, and a new and less activist leadership of the Hungarian diet accepted the traditional coronation oath without the additions.²³

Having gained the favor of the Austrian emperor, Hoffmann moved back to Vienna with an appointment as professor of "practical eloquence"²⁴ where he continued to work directly for the Emperor as a propagandist and something of a spy. With the encouragement of Emperor Leopold II, Hoffmann created a secret society called simply "The Association"²⁵ that was supposed to be a pro-imperial version of the Illuminati project, with a secret, hierarchical membership with correspondents all over Europe.²⁶

The stated purpose of "The Association" was:

"To counteract French propaganda, demagogic principles, the heady wine of philanthropic libertarianism, irreligion and false Aufklärung (Enlightenment) as well as all secret orders, factions, and societies devoted to these goals. Furthermore: to define and spread true principles which lead to the planting of correct religious concepts in men's minds, the establishment of a proper equilibrium between moderate monarchy and democracy, and the security of unquestioned obedience to the laws of the state and the will of the prince."²⁷

The society was also to play a role in foreign espionage.²⁸ Hoffmann received permission from the emperor to proceed with its formation in July 1791.²⁹ The society began with a budget of 1000 florins, a sum that Hoffmann complained was inadequate.³⁰

"The Association" was an early example of two things that recur in the history of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. First, a hatred of the Enlightenment and a fear of a secret super-powerful society that is promoting these Enlightenment ideals behind the scenes. Second, people who believe in this imaginary enemy sometimes create their own kind of secret societies to fight back.³¹ "The Association" secret society had the Emperor at its head and was devoted to preserving the political order, but its plans involved a structure very similar to the conspiracy they wanted to defeat, including cover names, ciphers, a requirement to write reports about other people, and initiation ceremonies.³²

²¹ Ernst Wangermann, *From Joseph II to the Jacobin Trials*, (London: Oxford University Press 1959), pp. 86-87

²² Wangermann, pp. 87-88

²³ Wangermann, p. 88

²⁴ Silagi, p. 65.

²⁵ Roberts, p. 215.

²⁶ Silagi, p. 113.

²⁷ Silagi, p. 128, translated and quoted in Epstein p. 522.

²⁸ Silagi, p. 108.

²⁹ Silagi, p. 109.

³⁰ Silagi, p. 110.

³¹ Roberts, p. 215.

³² Epstein, p. 522.

The non-clandestine mouthpiece of this secret society was the *Wiener Zeitschrift*. This magazine was semi-official propaganda that spread the conspiracy theory that the French revolution was the work of the Illuminati, and that this secret society was intent on infiltrating other governments and spreading the false “enlightenment” throughout the world in order to establish a universal tyranny of the sect. According to one letter between the Prussian censor Wöllner and the Prussian King Frederick William II, the journal was financed by a 10,000 florin donation from Leopold.³³

The articles in the *Wiener Zeitschrift* show an obsession with propaganda and a fear of the all-pervasive Illuminati conspirators, who could use the tool of propaganda, calumny, and assassination to remove troublesome writers or manipulate sovereigns and popular opinion. The article introducing the new journal described enlightenment writers this way:

“These authors throw out their poison daily in every European country....Public opinion is completely in their hands. Their famous or rather infamous names, their brazen and unbridled loquaciousness, their flair for intrigue and manipulation, all combined with the terrifying omnipotence of secret societies, succeeds in giving their disastrous principles prestige, influence and tragic effectiveness everywhere... [Conservative] Authors must, therefore, take up combat against [subversive] authors...Nations must be instructed about their true interests, demagogues must be unmasked, and subversive political assassins must be exposed in the public arena with implacable determination...”³⁴

Through the articles of the *Wiener Zeitschrift*, Hoffmann and his compatriots also emphasized that the state itself could become infected with the grand conspiracy, potentially turning censorship into a tool of the Illuminati.³⁵ The conspiracy could even work by manipulating governments into making policy that would lead to uprisings: “[The Illuminati] have been known to poison the cabinets of princes and their policies, so that the people, angered by these wrong policies and incited to sacrifice their king, will fall to angry insurrection.”³⁶

The *Wiener Zeitschrift* began with only thirteen subscribers, but it sold out its first issue of five hundred copies. The journal’s circulation peaked at about 2000 but declined to around 1000 by the time the journal folded.³⁷ The journal denounced some well-known Europeans as being part of the grand conspiracy, and even viciously attacked the conservative journal the *Jenaische Allgemeine Litteratur Zeitung* because it had criticized the *Wiener Zeitschrift* for making false accusations against the innocent.³⁸

“The Association” itself fell into infighting, as other men close to the Emperor seized some power in the organization from Hoffmann, leaving him only in charge of recruiting authors and journalists (not clergy or officials.)³⁹ The Emperor did not seem to have bought into Hoffmann’s project entirely, despite his official sponsorship. He permitted an anti-Hoffmann

³³ Epstein, p. 524.

³⁴ Leopold Alois Hoffmann, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, Vol. 1, (Vienna, 1792) pp. 2-6, translated and quoted in Epstein, p. 525.

³⁵ Hoffmann, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, Vol. 1, p. 233.

³⁶ Hoffmann, *Wiener Zeitschrift*, Vol. 1, pp. 102-3.

³⁷ Epstein, p. 524.

³⁸ Epstein, p. 528.

³⁹ Epstein, p. 523.

pamphlet written by the liberal Franz X. Huber to be published with censor approval.⁴⁰ According to the scholar Robert Roswell Palmer, Emperor Leopold II saw “The Association” as a way to strengthen and influence his own bureaucracy which had failed his elder brother and predecessor Joseph II. Leopold could use “The Association” to build a parallel network of the ultra-loyal within his own bureaucracy, who would spy on other bureaucrats, follow secret orders, and make sure the Emperor’s policies were being carried out.⁴¹ The scholar Denis Silagi observed that many of Leopold II’s closest advisors were denounced as Illuminati, but they usually remained in office, which indicated the Emperor did not give that much credence to such slander.⁴²

Hoffmann, on the other hand, appeared to be a true believer that the Illuminati was everywhere. He continued to spread this idea even after “The Association” fell apart. He saw the agents of Weishaupt constantly frustrating his ambitions and manipulating politics. While “The Association” was secret, Hoffmann liked to drop hints that he had official backing for his projects, and in a later book he claimed that the emperor was personally involved in some of his earlier writings: “He gave me several specific assignments and often insisted that I bring him manuscript drafts so that he could personally revise them. He frequently suggested improvements which I immediately made in his own presence.”⁴³ The admiration was probably not mutual, and the Emperor is said to have once exclaimed “Hoffmann is as stupid as a donkey, but he nonetheless performs valuable services for me as a spy.”⁴⁴

The conspiratorial counter-conspiracy was stillborn when Leopold II died unexpectedly in early 1792 at the age of 44, just a few months after the first issue of the *Wiener Zeitschrift* was published. The government of the successor Francis II apparently did not have an interest in the continuation of “The Association” or the *Wiener Zeitschrift*, and Hoffmann could not attain the same close relationship with the new emperor that he had enjoyed under Leopold II.⁴⁵ The *Wiener Zeitschrift* ceased publication in 1793.⁴⁶

Eudämonia

This German conspiracist project was revived two years later, in 1794. The new group pushing the conspiracy theory was called the “Association A-M” but they became known as Eudämonists after the name of their propaganda journal: *Eudämonia*. The group was primarily Protestant, but Roman Catholics like Hoffmann also joined the group and contributed to *Eudämonia*.⁴⁷ The writers of *Eudämonia* and their opponents both claimed that the journal was

⁴⁰ Epstein, p. 532.

⁴¹ Robert Roswell Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 163.

⁴² Silagi, p. 101.

⁴³ Epstein, p. 542.

⁴⁴ F. X. Huber, *Beytrag zur Charakteristik und Regierungsgeschichte der Kaiser Joseph II, Leopold II, und Franz II* (Paris [?], 1800), p. 117, translated and quoted in Epstein p. 521.

⁴⁵ Epstein, p. 523.

⁴⁶ Epstein, p. 524.

⁴⁷ Palmer, p. 454.

a continuation of the *Wiener Zeitschrift*.⁴⁸ This mistaken idea may have been marketing on the one side and slander on the other, as Hoffmann only published a single article in the new journal.⁴⁹ Another member of this group was Ernst August Anton von Göschhausen,⁵⁰ who had written the earlier epistolary novel about the subversive plans of the illuminati in 1786.

While *Eudämonia* was not a continuation of the *Wiener Zeitschrift* they were both state-sponsored propaganda journals dedicated to spreading the idea of a malign grand conspiracy of the Illuminati. *Eudämonia*'s initial funders were Karl Friedrich, the Margrave of Baden and Ludwig X, the Landgrave of Hessen-Cassel, who agreed to subscribe to the new journal for a hundred copies each. One of Ludwig X's sons also got permission from his father to finance the journal.⁵¹

Eudämonia was certainly an anti-democratic publication, but it rarely had an article about the advantages of monarchy. Instead the publication fixated on pointing out the evil machinations of the Illuminati order.⁵² The magazine regularly offered evidence that the Illuminati order was just underground and still influencing events, and made regular attacks against supposed Illuminati members. It even published private correspondence to "prove" the existence a conspiracy.⁵³

This journal was published in the middle of the War of the First Coalition, but the journal was more concerned with ideology rather than the movements of armies. To the propagandists, unsurprisingly, the propaganda war was central, and even more important than the progress of arms against the French Revolutionaries:

"The Jacobins fight the war of opinions, and their weapons of war... are basically nothing other than a diversion in which one makes large-scale gains to help the secret war of opinions. But as they say again to the monarch: they should only put their whole strength in the war of weapons, and regard the war of opinions as not even worthy of attention. This is the quintessence of Jacobin politics."⁵⁴

The author of this quoted article emphasizes that the revolutionaries spent large sums on subsidizing their subversive publications while the monarchs did little.

Eudämonia changed publishers repeatedly during its short history, as its vituperative attacks against literary celebrities gained it influential enemies that attacked it in turn. The journal also managed to make enemies in the upper echelons of the anti-revolutionary establishment after they began denouncing the chief censor of Vienna⁵⁵ once calling him a

⁴⁸ Max Braubach, "Die 'Eudaimonia' (1795-1798). Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Publizistik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung und der Revolution," in *Historisches Jahrbuch* 47, (Munich: Herder, 1927), pp. 309-339, p. 314.

⁴⁹ Epstein, p. 538.

⁵⁰ Gustav Krüger, "Die Eudämonisten: Ein Beitrag zur Publizistik des Ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts," *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 143, H. 3 (1931), pp. 467-500, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27606592>, p. 468.

⁵¹ Epstein, pp. 539-40.

⁵² Braubach, p. 317.

⁵³ Braubach, p. 324.

⁵⁴ *Eudämonia oder Deutsches Volksglück: ein Journal für Freunde von Wahrheit und Recht*, Vol. 4, (Frankfurt: 1797), pp 199-200.

⁵⁵ Roberts, p. 545.

“salaried Illuminati, and a man who cannot even write correctly.”⁵⁶ As sometimes happens, the conspiracist propagandists outlived their usefulness to their backers. By 1798 the European political situation had changed and *Eudämonia*’s two initial aristocratic backers Karl Friedrich and Ludwig X were busy trying to move closer to revolutionary France after the French victory in the War of the First Coalition in 1797.⁵⁷ The publication was banned in the Austrian empire at the end of 1797. The imperial decree banning the journal stated that while the journal published “much that is good and useful, yet they do not effectively refute the dangerous and false principles which they attack....and thereby do more harm than good...”⁵⁸ This quarrel with a censor of the leading reactionary state was turned into a small stab-in-the-back legend by the arch-conspiracy theorist of the era, Abbé Augustin Barruel:

“A society of men of unblemished principles, (if we may judge by their publication, the Eudemonia, right genius) had consecrated their labors in that journal to the unmaking of the intrigues, cunning, and principles of the illuminees. Not a single prince encourages this publication; several have proscribed it in their state, while the most jacobinical publications are allowed a free circulation. The Eudemonia has just been forbidden in the Austrian States, under the specious pretext, that its object and views are good, but that it makes principles known that are not sufficiently refuted. As a proof, however, that they were much better refuted than the Illuminees could wish, we need only observe, that the Gazette Litteraire of Gotha, the leading paper of the Sect, announced the prohibition before it was even known in Vienna. - The reader will be less surprised at the artfulness of the pretext, when he learns, that two of the censors, who are to pronounce on the literary productions, are the well-known Illuminees Sonnenfels and Retzer, who, had it been for a journal of another stamp, would have reclaimed the liberty of the press in its favor.”⁵⁹

Analyzing The First Generation of modern Conspiracists

The writers of both *Eudämonia* and the *Wiener Zeitschrift* did not see their main task as the preservation of traditions and the status quo from the challenge of the Enlightenment. Instead, they were obsessed with exposing and combating the conspiracy that they believed was using the Enlightenment as a tool to usurp power. The writers of *Eudämonia* and the *Wiener Zeitschrift* did not really think they were ultimately fighting new ideas, but that they were fighting a group of usurpers. They believed their foes were of two kinds, dupes and liars. The ideas of representative government, freedom of the press, emancipation etc. were not really ideological threats in their own right but a smokescreen for a conspiracy.

For example, this first generation of Grand Conspiracy theorists not approach censorship as a tool to prevent decadence, as might be expected from traditional conservatives. To them censorship was primarily a defensive weapon to combat the scourge of Illuminati propaganda. They believed the Illuminati would craftily shapeshift and find new routes and arguments for propaganda undermining legitimate authority while its agents would worm its way into the very organs of censorship themselves. Therefore, a free press would not be a level playing field or a “marketplace of ideas” where defenders of the status quo could compete with

⁵⁶ *Eudämonia*, (Nuremberg: 1798) Vol. 6, p. 542.

⁵⁷ Epstein, p. 543.

⁵⁸ *Eudämonia*, (Nuremberg: 1798) Vol. 6, p. 281-287, translated and quoted in Epstein, p. 545.

⁵⁹ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 317.

the ideals of the Enlightenment, it was a fixed match. The other side was cheating and had nearly limitless power and resources to shape public opinion and slander its opponents.

If one believes one is fighting such a powerful enemy, all kinds of exceptions to rules of moral behavior are allowed, and a strong ruler with an all-pervasive secret police is necessary. Hoffmann decried the idea of secret societies, but he probably considered the clandestine nature of "The Association" as not hypocritical but as necessary to prevent its detection and infiltration by the nearly all-powerful Illuminati. Likewise *Eudämonia* while concealing the identity of its authors and publishers, repeatedly argued that anonymous authors or publishers should be strictly forbidden.⁶⁰ The Eudämonists would not have thought of this as hypocritical behavior, because they believed they were fighting a power that liberally used anonymity or pseudonyms. Before a state existed that could effectively oppose Illuminati propaganda, the Eudämonists would have regarded practicing what they preached as a kind of unilateral disarmament.

Barruel and Robison - the popularizers of the Grand Conspiracy

The two most famous writers of this first generation of modern conspiracy theories were Abbe Augustin Barruel (1741-1820) a French Jesuit and John Robison (1739-1805) a Scottish scientist and inventor. They wrote their first works independently, but came to similar conclusions. Both used the writings of Hoffmann and the Eudämonists as sources, believing them to be true. Both Barruel and Robison believed that a conspiracy infiltrated the French government to ease the path to revolution, manipulated the French king, and also controlled the French people with propaganda. They believed that this was not a one-off occurrence, but that the conspiracy was continuing its machinations throughout the world, and that it had to be exposed. The conspiracy they described used the powerful ideas of liberty and equality and the "tyranny of kings" to destroy the monarchy and the religion of France so that the conspirators could rule behind the scenes.

Barruel and Robison wrote the first great works of modern conspiracism. Their books injected belief in conspiracy theories into mainstream European thought. These ideas from Barruel and Robison were picked up and expanded on by propagandists and other conspiracy theorists. Their impact can still be seen today when present-day conspiracy theorists talk about the Illuminati or the "New World Order." Of the two authors, Barruel was the better known. As we have seen, Barruel was not the first person to claim that some kind of Freemason/Illuminati and/or Philosophe conspiracy was responsible for the French Revolution, but he was the most widely read author to promulgate these ideas. Before the Napoleonic era was over his *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* had been translated into English, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch,⁶¹ and Polish.⁶² The English conservative statesman Edmund Burke, sick and shortly before his death, wrote a letter to Barruel praising his first volume and offering to donate money to give the book "a great circulation in France."⁶³ This letter has been an embarrassment for non-conspiracist admirers of Burke ever since.

⁶⁰ Braubach, p. 328.

⁶¹ Roberts, p. 195.

⁶² See Barruel, *Historia Jakobinizmu Wyjęta z Dzieł Księdza Barruel*, Karol Surowiecki trans., 1812.

⁶³ Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke: Volume 10, Index*, (Cambridge University Press / University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 38-39.

An example of Barruel's lasting impact in the early 19th century is the article on Œconomists (Economists) in the 1801 edition supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The article begins: "Œconomists, a sect of philosophers in France, who have made a great noise in Europe, and are generally believed to have been unfriendly to religion."⁶⁴ This article quoted Barruel at length as he described the nefarious plot of the Œconomists to prepare the way for anti-Christian propaganda by spreading literacy in the French countryside, all under the guise of setting up state-funded schools to improve agriculture. The article was shortened in subsequent editions, but the pirating and plagiarism of this reference work in other encyclopedias ensured that Barruel's ideas were spread even further. By 1823 the sixth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* still kept the basics of the conspiracy theory intact in the much shorter entry on Œconomists:

"a sect of French philosophers who obtained this name in consequence of directing their attention and researches to objects of political economy, and in particular to the improvement of the departments of finance. The views of these philosophers, among whom are reckoned the celebrated names of Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, and Condorcet, have been variously represented; by some as directly hostile to all regular government, and by others as unfriendly to religion."⁶⁵

The idea of an evil conspiracy of French anti-Christians called Œconomists was apparently widespread enough that William Playfair, the editor of the 11th edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, included a section in that book excusing Smith's acquaintance and agreement with some French economists.⁶⁶ Without citing Barruel he uses several passages to illustrate the Œconomists role in the conspiracy, but explains that the French Œconomists had not started out with evil intentions, but the evil philosophers "formed the design of uniting themselves with the œconomists, and of assuming the appearance of being œconomists themselves. This was very unfortunate for the œconomists, who did not see into the design, and who were soon absorbed into that great regular body of the illuminati..."⁶⁷

In his first volume Barruel only focused on Voltaire's associates and the French Encyclopedists as the source of the French Revolution, and later in his second volume emphasized the Freemasons (though he did say he would address the Illuminati later in the introduction to his first volume.) Barruel read Robison's book, which was about the Illuminati, around when he published his first volume. Barruel was quite impressed with Robison's book, and the third and fourth volume of Barruel's work is an obvious attempt to splice much of what Robison wrote about the Illuminati into Barruel's earlier theory that involves the Philosophes and the Masons.

⁶⁴ George Gleig, "Œconomists," *Supplement to the Third Edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica: Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature*, Volume 2, Part 1, (Edinburgh: John Brown, 1801), p 307.

⁶⁵ "Œconomists," *Encyclopedia Britannica, Sixth Edition, Vol XV*, (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1823), p. 124.

⁶⁶ William Playfair is credited as the inventor of the line graph, the pie chart, and the bar chart. He had previously written a tract against the Jacobins in 1796. (See article on him in the *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, Neil J. Salkind ed., (SAGE Publications, 2010.)

⁶⁷ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 1, (Hartford: Peter B. Gleason & co., 1811), p. xv.

Both Barruel and Robison's books point to the tools of the conspiracy as revolutionary propaganda combined with court intrigue and other clandestine subterfuge. They claim that all kinds of people were part of the revolutionary web: courtiers, publishers, tutors, naturalists, even members of the clergy. The Illuminati used freemasonry to place their agents in influential positions all over Europe, so they could all rise in unison when the time is right in a particular country. They wrote that the Illuminati had a vast network of informers all throughout Europe. The Illuminati's main weapon against detractors was calumny, though they did not hesitate to also use poison or the dagger.

For anyone who believed just a small portion of the story told by Barruel and Robison the political implications would be enormous. Not only would the French Revolution be the result of a preconceived plan, but the plan had been carried out by a vast and powerful network of subversives commanded by tyrants-in-waiting. This vast organization had mostly managed to stay concealed.

It is important to point out here that these books were not antisemitic, at least, no more antisemitic than any other work of the early 19th century. The beginning of the age of the anti-Jewish version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory was still a few decades away.

As with the earlier post-Revolution conspiracy theorists, a key role in bringing the French Revolution about was supposedly played by the evil advisors to monarchs who were actually in on the conspiracy. This is a clear continuation of the kind of court intrigue and monarchical conspiracies that history abounds with in the pre-democratic age. (According to Barruel's first volume, Frederick the Great himself was in on part of the evil plot.) The innovation popularized by Barruel and Robison was the idea of a manipulation of politics by the manipulation of public opinion. The idea that a sovereign could be manipulated by controlling the information presented to him was very old, as the previous chapter demonstrated. Barruel and Robison applied this same idea to the manipulation of a supposedly sovereign people by presenting them false information via a secretly controlled press. A people lacks the wise advisors, the intelligence services, and the dread responsibility to protect the realm that a king has, so they are (in Barruel and Robison's opinion) more easily swayed by conspirators.

To reiterate an idea mentioned earlier: the application of this age-old idea to the democratic age necessitated a belief in a super-powerful and super-competent conspiracy. A conspiracy to merely manipulate a monarch is within the realm of normal human experience; it is feasible with enough plotters who are close to the king and a bit of cash to bribe others into silence. In a country where sovereign power is diffused the challenge gets much more difficult. The larger and more complex a society the larger and more well-resourced and coordinated the conspiracy to control it must be. If an incredibly complex event like the French Revolution had been planned and coordinated, then the group which planned and coordinated it must be incredibly powerful. Rather than avoiding such an idea, the conspiracy theorists insisted that:

"According to the plan contrived by the conspirators, we shall see that France was in the first place to be inundated with journals, all stimulating the people to complete the grand work of their liberty. By dint of libels and most odious calumnies against Lewis XVI and his queen; they were to eradicate every sentiment of affection from the heart of

the subject. They next bethought themselves of stirring up the foreign powers, that Lewis XVI being engaged in war without, might fall an easier prey to intrigue within. ..."⁶⁸

Barruel's first two volumes: not sourced from state propaganda

It is useful at this juncture to discuss Barruel's first two volumes written before he too became obsessed with the Illuminati. Barruel is best known today for the first volume of his conspiracy theory series. This book, makes hardly any mention of the Illuminati and was apparently not sourced from German-language propaganda. In this first volume Barruel blames the French Revolution on a conspiracy of Philosophes, with Voltaire as the ringleader. The main source for his first volume is the collected works of Voltaire published by Pierre Beaumarchais. From reading the letters included in this collection Barruel believed he could detect coded language and trace the first signs of the plots that became the French Revolution. Barruel believed this discovery of his was made possible by a blunder of the plotters: "either the adepts, blinded by their success, were persuaded that the publicity of this monstrous conspiracy, could only add new lustre to its chief, or that the Editors themselves were ignorant of the fact, or in fine, that being scattered and dispersed through forty large volumes of letters, to all sorts of persons, and on all sorts of subjects, no man could at once seize the thread of a conspiracy, the work of many long years."⁶⁹

The core of the conspiracy, according to Barruel, was the *Encyclopédie*, a massive work compiled between 1751 and 1772 which Barruel described as "a vast emporium of all the sophisms, errors or calumnies, which ever had been invented against religion, from the firsts schools of impiety, until the day of their enterprize; and these were to be artfully concealed, that the reader should insensibly imbibe the poison without the least suspicion."⁷⁰ Dennis Diderot, one of the most creative of the generation of Philosophes, was the chief editor of the *Encyclopédie*. The *Encyclopédie* was compiled to preserve knowledge of all kinds and make it accessible to any reader. It was full of contributions from intellectuals of many religious and philosophical backgrounds, and included many articles that were considered less than theologically sound. It was condemned by the Roman Catholic church, placed on the list of prohibited books, and suffered continuous censorship and threats of being totally shut down by elements of the French state. The last ten volumes of the first edition had to be published in Switzerland. The Encyclopedia used cross-references to skirt around censorship and send readers to articles with unexpected satirical asides or attacks on sacred cows, and identified the authors of articles in order to absolve Diderot and his co-editor Jean d'Alembert of responsibility for any literary subversion.⁷¹ ⁷² Barruel saw a sinister purpose behind this playful method of avoiding censorship. Behind the popularity of the *Encyclopédie*, reaching 25,000 subscribers,⁷³ Barruel saw evidence of a plan to spread apostasy through Europe.

⁶⁸ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 260.

⁶⁹ The Abbe Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, Vol. 1 (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1799), p. 16.

⁷⁰ Barruel, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33.

⁷¹ Walter E. Rex, "Diderot, Dennis" in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, Alan Charles Kors ed., (Oxford University Press, 2002), Online Edition, 2005.

⁷² Raymond Birn, "Encyclopédie," in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*.

⁷³ Ibid.

The plan of the Philosophes also involved the destruction of the Jesuits⁷⁴ the infiltration of the French academy⁷⁵ and then a coordinated plan to spread impious works throughout Europe.⁷⁶ Their plan involved spreading ideas about the earth's antiquity (to discredit scripture among the learned,)⁷⁷ surrounding the French king with atheistic and deistic advisors,⁷⁸ the assassination of Gustavus III of Sweden,⁷⁹ and duping and corrupting the public through scripted fake debates in coffee houses that ensured their side won⁸⁰ and impious propaganda spread by a supposedly "free" press that was actually under the conspiracy's control. The spread of literature "at first only impious, but latterly both impious and seditious."⁸¹ was the last and largest phase of the conspiracy, and culminated in the previously mentioned plot of the Economists to spread literacy and then bad literature into the French countryside.

Barruel alleged that this last part of the conspiracy was the most decisive: "it is an incontrovertible fact that France owes the misfortunes of the revolution to the great abuse of the press."⁸² Barruel was a firm believer in censorship, and saw it as an essential defense for true religion since "he who pleads for license and impiety, will carry more weight than the most eloquent orator, who vindicates the rights of virtue and morality. The religious apologist requires a serious and an attentive reading, with a steadfast desire of finding the truth, and such a study fatigues, whereas, depravity requires none..."⁸³ The French government did not censor this inundation of impious works because the censor Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes was a member of the conspiracy, or at least its protector.⁸⁴ The list of the conspirators Barruel believed were involved in Voltaire's conspiracy included almost every other luminary of the age whose work is read today by students of the French Enlightenment: Diderot, D'lambert, Rousseau, Condorcet, and Turgot.

Barruel did not come up with this idea of a Philosophe conspiracy on his own. The idea that a conspiracy of Philosophes was responsible for the revolution existed, in France in the first year of the Revolution,⁸⁵ and indeed the idea of a conspiracy of French Philosophes also predated the Revolution. The paranoid might have seen the merciless literary and social science of Paris, full of cliques and gossip, as a large conspiracy even before the Revolution. In fact a few years before his death an embittered Rousseau complained of an organized "philosophic sect" led by his enemies "who have become the arbiters of public opinion through

⁷⁴ Barruel, Vol. 1, p 57.

⁷⁵ Barruel, Vol. 1, p 77.

⁷⁶ Barruel, Vol. 1, p 79.

⁷⁷ Barruel, Vol. 1, pp. 79-80.

⁷⁸ Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 137.

⁷⁹ Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 123.

⁸⁰ Barruel, Vol. 1, pp. 101-102.

⁸¹ Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 139.

⁸² Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 139.

⁸³ Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 139.

⁸⁴ Barruel, Vol. 1, pp 139, 141.

⁸⁵ Nigel Aston, "Burke and the Conspiratorial Origins of the French Revolution: some Anglo-French Resemblances," in *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe*, Barry Coward and Julian Swann eds., (England: Ashgate, 2004), p. 215.

the art of intrigue.”⁸⁶ Rousseau, one of Barruel’s main bogeymen, complained bitterly that his enemies circulated fabricated writings under his name (while preventing him from seeing the documents)⁸⁷ He accused this “secret confederation” of deliberately manipulating the education of the young and turning them against Rousseau and his opinions. Just like the conspiracy Burrell describes, Rousseau wrote that the group masks the “blackness of their plot” with a “veneer of humanity”⁸⁸ and that they “kept the principal secret of it among a small number of conspirators. They let the remaining men see only what was necessary to get them to collaborate.”⁸⁹

“In my explanation, a small number of clever, powerful, conspiratorial people, united for a long time, deceiving some people by false appearances and stirring up others by passions to which they are already only too inclined, brings everyone together against an innocent person whom they have carefully accused of crimes while depriving him of every means to absolve himself. The other explanation requires that the most hateful of all generations suddenly transform itself completely and without exception into as many celestial angels for the sake of the lowest scoundrels whom they insist on protecting...Which of these two assumptions appears the more reasonable and the more admissible to you?”⁹⁰

In his second volume Barruel explained how and why this anti-Christian philosophe conspiracy managed to become an anti-monarchical conspiracy with coordinated cells and subversive activity all throughout France and indeed Europe: “the Occult Lodges of Freemasonry.”

Barruel, having himself been brought into a lower-order of Freemasonry at one point,⁹¹ was careful to avoid tarring the whole group as plotters. Instead he claimed that the Manicheans, a heretical and (according to Barruel) anti-monarchical movement from the 3rd century AD had cloaked its true origins with stories of the Mason’s spiritual descent from the Templars or the Druids⁹² and had spread Freemasonry through Europe to build a network to eventually accomplish their goal of destroying all monarchies and Christianity.

“They are that motley crew followers of Manes, who during many ages, spreading from the East into the West, inundated France, Germany, Italy and Spain at the time of Frederick the Second; they are that horde of sectaries known by the names of Albigeois, Cathares, Patarins, Bulgares, Begars, Brabanter, Navarese, Bearnese, Coteraux, Henriciens, Leonists, etc. etc.”⁹³ ...“It is to be met in every age. Crushed at first time in Italy, France, and Spain, it spreads anew from the East in the eleventh century. The Knights templars adopt its mysteries, and the dissolution of the order lends a pretense to new-model their games. ..The times and manner of the age may vary the forms or modify the opinions, but

⁸⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues (Collected Writings of Rousseau)*, Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly eds., (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2012), pp. 236-237.

⁸⁷ Rousseau, p. 177.

⁸⁸ Rousseau, p. 180.

⁸⁹ Rousseau, p. 181.

⁹⁰ Rousseau, p. 181.

⁹¹ The Abbe Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, Vol. 2, (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1799), p. 152-153.

⁹² Barruel, Vol. 2, p. 197.

⁹³ Barruel, Vol. 2, pp. 220-2.

the essence remains; it is always the pretended light of Liberty and Equality to be diffused' it is the Empire of pretended Tyrants, whether religious or political, of Pontiffs, of Priests, of Kings, of Christ himself, which are to be destroyed...The degrees and mysteries are multiplied and precautions are redoubled (p. 232) lest they should be betrayed; but their last oath is always hatred to the God who died on the cross - hatred to the Monarch seated on the Throne.⁹⁴

Using their connections all over Europe and America (Barruel calls Benjamin Franklin an “ancient adept” of the plot)⁹⁵ they coordinated insurrection and, having fused with the Philosophe conspiracy⁹⁶ (despite Voltaire’s attachment to monarchy)⁹⁷ managed to bring down France.

After one reads the first two volumes of Barruel, one might be a bit disappointed at the motivations he gives to the leaders of the plots. Barruel relates that Voltaire, the ringleader of the Philosophe plot, supposedly orchestrated a grand international conspiracy to smash Christianity because he was jealous of the fame of the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal and the French Bishop and preacher Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet.⁹⁸ In volume 2 Barruel says the plotting Freemason conspiracy was founded by an ancient slave who concocted the conspiracy to revenge himself on the world that had made him a slave.⁹⁹ Barruel asserts that the Freemasons are just the latest edition of a society of perennial revolutionaries “to be met in every age”¹⁰⁰ driven on by the abstract ideas of “Liberty and Equality;” but this does not sufficiently explain the sudden, coordinated subversive activities spanning a continent that brought down an empire.

If one accepts the premise that the French Revolution was brought about by a conspiracy, there ought to be a powerful centrally-coordinated group pulling the strings that emerged relatively recently, or at least something that motivated an older conspiratorial network to act suddenly after centuries of dormancy. Weishaupt’s Illuminati are the group fingered by both Barruel and Robison that fill this role. Barruel and Robison described Weishaupt’s Illuminati as driven by a very human lust for power. The illuminati are classic ruthless usurpers who make the dandy philosophes or Freemason idealists “appear like the faint imaginations of puerility.”¹⁰¹ Here one can clearly see the influence of the propaganda from Hoffmann and the Eudämonists on these two authors.

Sources for Barruel and Robison: Propaganda about the Illuminati

Robison only published one volume about his conspiracy theory of the French Revolution, and he placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Illuminati, working

⁹⁴ Barruel, Vol. 2, pp. 231-232.

⁹⁵ Barruel, Vol. 2, p. 236.

⁹⁶ Barruel, Vol. 2, p. 236.

⁹⁷ Barruel, Vol. 2, pp. 4-8.

⁹⁸ Barruel, Vol. 1, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Barruel, Vol. 2, pp. 224, 231.

¹⁰⁰ Barruel, Vol. 2, p. 231.

¹⁰¹ The Abbe Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, Vol. 3, (New York: Isaac Collins, 1799), p. 5.

through corrupted Freemason agents. Unlike the first two volumes of Barruel, Robison immediately presented a clear and compelling explanation behind the antics of the plotters:

“Their first and immediate aim is to get the possession of riches, power, and influence, without industry; and to accomplish this, they want to abolish Christianity; and then dissolute manners and universal profligacy will procure them the adherence of all the wicked, and enable them to overturn all the civil governments of Europe; after which they will extend their operations to the other quarters of the globe, till they have reduced mankind to the state of one undistinguishable chaotic mass.”¹⁰²

According to Robison, Weishaupt wanted to destroy religion because it was one of the main obstacles to their plan “to rule the world by the means of his Order.”¹⁰³ He wanted to destroy or subvert governments so he could rule unhindered, but always in secret: “By this plan we shall direct all mankind. In this manner, and by the simplest means, we shall set all in motion and in flames. The occupations must be so allotted and contrived, that we may, in secret, influence all political transactions.”¹⁰⁴ Robison re-produced a lot of the published writings of the Illuminati and dwelled on the mechanisms of the conspiracy: an international group of plotters, headed by Weishaupt, with agents and adepts all over Europe, most of them believing that they were trying to spread the ideals of the Enlightenment. Only the highest levels of the conspiracy would have any knowledge of the true materialistic, deceptive, and usurping aims of the order. Robison wrote that the republican propaganda spread throughout France because of the French support of the American Revolution created an opportunity for the Illuminati,¹⁰⁵ but the Illuminati ultimately caused the French Revolution. The Illuminati’s main link between their base in Germany and the land of their greatest revolutionary success was the Comte de Mirabeau,¹⁰⁶ the onetime ambassador of France to Prussia. (Ironically, we now know that the Comte de Mirabeau was in fact secretly an Austrian agent during the French Revolution.)¹⁰⁷

Robison claims to be greatly in the debt of Hoffmann for his ideas about the Illuminati¹⁰⁸ and he quotes long passages from Hoffmann’s autobiography to describe their plots. Robison claims that the first time he learned of the all-important link between the Illuminati and the Paris Freemason lodge and the Duke of Orleans (who Robison credits as the main Freemason operative who acted during the French Revolution¹⁰⁹) was when he read the book *Höchst wichtige Erinnerungen zur rechten Zeit über einige der allerernsthaftesten Angelegenheiten dieses Zeitalters* written by Hoffmann in 1795.¹¹⁰

As mentioned before, Robison’s book was read by Barruel¹¹¹ and evidently greatly influenced his third and fourth volumes of *Memoirs illustrating the history of Jacobinism*. In his

¹⁰² Robison, p. 165.

¹⁰³ Robison, p. 168.

¹⁰⁴ Robison, p. 117.

¹⁰⁵ Robison, p. 278.

¹⁰⁶ Robison, pp. 214, 284-5.

¹⁰⁷ Munro Price, “Mirabeau and the Court: Some New Evidence,” *French Historical Studies*, Winter, 2006, pp. 37-75.

¹⁰⁸ Robison, p. 316.

¹⁰⁹ Robison, pp. 291-292.

¹¹⁰ Robison, p. 316.

¹¹¹ Barruel, Vol. 3, p. x.

last two volumes Barruel also claimed to have used the works of Hoffmann as a source, along with other German anti-Illuminist propagandists who worked with Hoffmann like Johann Stark.¹¹² Under the influence of Robison, Hoffmann, and others pushing the Illuminati conspiracy theory, the plot that Barruel proposed in his last two volumes closely followed Robison's, which has the effect of downgrading the Philosophes and Freemasons he described earlier into mere tools of Weishaupt's Illuminati. Barruel recanted a few things he had written in the first two volumes based on new evidence. Barruel came to believe that the Illuminati conspiracy had initially thought that France would be the last country to be successfully infiltrated, but the situation in France changed and the Illuminati conspiracy gained two valuable agents at the heart of the kingdom: Mirabeau and Talleyrand.¹¹³ Barruel spent more time than Robison illustrating the extent and activities of the Illuminati conspiracy in Europe. For example, he claimed that they had enabled Napoleon's easy capture of Malta by infiltrating the Knights Hospitaller¹¹⁴ and that their numerous brethren located in Philadelphia and Boston were also menacing the nascent United States and were involved in supporting a rebellion in Ireland.¹¹⁵ ¹¹⁶ Barruel used the work of Hoffmann published in *Eudämonia* to claim that the Illuminati had stopped the anti-Illuminati work of Emperor Leopold II and a nascent alliance between the Prussians and the Austrians against the Illuminati by assassinating Leopold II.¹¹⁷

The birth of the Grand Conspiracy Theory:

The works of the post-French Revolution conspiracy theorists are a transitional stage away from the old historical narratives of conspiracies involving court intrigue and manipulating or replacing a king and into new, "democratic" conspiracy theories about ruling a country by manipulating a sovereign people. Monarchical deceptive-usurper narratives still play an important role in these theories, often as an early part of the plan of the conspirators to engineer a revolution. For example, Barruel highlighted a supposed statement by one Illuminee about old-style manipulation by a court:

"...there ought to be but two Princes in Germany - these Princes should be Illuminees, and so surrounded and led by our adepts, that none of the profane could approach their persons. The greater and lesser offices of the state should be solely entrusted to members of our Order; and the advantages of the order should be attended to, tho' in direct opposition to the interests of the Prince."

Barruel felt the need to answer a possible objection: if the Illuminati were interested in placing all of Germany under two monarchs and were interested in "normal" courtly intrigue, did that not make them some type of monarchists? Barruel answered with the accusation that the

¹¹² Barruel, Vol. 3, p. ix.

¹¹³ Barruel, Vol. 4, pp 209-210.

¹¹⁴ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 298.

¹¹⁵ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 301.

¹¹⁶ Leiden is among the places Barruel says were dominated by Illuminati: "Deputies from Leyden are delegated to the central committee; and the brotherhood at Leyden had made a greater progress in proportion, both in numbers and sedition, than it had at Amsterdam." (Barruel, Vol. 4 p. 291.)

¹¹⁷ Barruel, Vol. p. 307-308.

Illuminati are being deceptive, and that higher levels of the Illuminati would still eventually carry out the final, “democratic” revolution: “as a preparatory step the illuminees only seek to destroy all the lesser powers in order to form one or two great states in Germany; but that will not change the fate decreed in the higher mysteries for these greater Princes of the German nation, or for all Princes and nations in general.”¹¹⁸

If one believes in the existence of such a conspiracy, one that has superpowers of deception and has already managed to bring down one of the greatest states on earth, there is an obvious need for emergency measures to strengthen the state to resist them. The more powerful one’s supposed enemy, the more powerful and all-pervasive the organizations to combat the threat must be. Censorship would be essential. Of course, there is always the danger that a powerful police force or surveillance system or state censor would itself be infiltrated and subverted by this all-powerful conspiracy and turned against the legitimate order, which is why this first generation of conspiracy theorists would tend to support absolutist states. To reiterate, the enemy these believers in this first version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory believed they were fighting is reactive and possesses amazing powers of deception, so therefore (though Barruel and Robison did not make this step explicit) the head of state must himself be powerful and capable of reacting to counteract this enemy, and strictures of laws and due process that might delay a leader’s response would only help the conspiracy, which was not bound by laws.

An important consequence of a belief in the necessity of censorship and widespread surveillance is an aversion to republican government, as it lacks a strong center of authority to act with secrecy and dispatch to combat the grand conspiracy. An open government is an open invitation to secret conspiracies. Barruel made some nods towards the republics in the Netherlands and the United States and also tried to warn them about the Illuminati conspiracy, but he also advised that any country with a parliament should make sure its deliberations were always held in secret, lest they allow plotters to use the parliament as a propaganda tool by continually sending in petitions that bring up certain topics, which would then be printed in newspapers.¹¹⁹

Another important consequence of Barruel and Robison’s conclusions is an aversion to accommodation or reform to appease liberals or restive interest groups and partially move towards Enlightenment ideals. The post-French Revolution conspiracy theorists did not believe they were fighting ideas but rather that they were fighting an organized, powerful, and ruthless group, who could not be appeased. The enemy could in fact engineer the kinds and intensity of dissent and grievances in society in order to pressure the government to reach a “compromise” that is in fact in line with the conspiracy plans.

Barruel summed up his fear of demi-reforms along with his fear of a free press in a passage warning the UK:

“One species of illusion appears to be the favorite engine of Jacobinism, I mean that theory of essays in government, and those demi-reforms. No art has been more powerfully played off on the English nation than this; let the people be put on their guard against this illusion; let them be

¹¹⁸ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 158.

¹¹⁹ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 399-400.

taught, that France also began by essays and demi-reforms; I need not hint at their consequences."¹²⁰

Conclusion

The popular works of Barruel and Robison preserved a particular species of late 18th century German propaganda and spread it throughout the Western world. This chapter identified the narrative adopted by Barruel and Robison as the first generation of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. The patterns of thought for analyzing the politics of court intrigue were applied to the new democratic age, and while their conclusions were obviously untrue, the stories these conspiracy theorists told were attractive. At this early state the outlines what would become standard tropes of the Grand Conspiracy Theory emerge: seeing an enemy plot behind the French Revolution and any other manifestation of republican revolution, an aversion to enlightenment thought and republican government, and a penchant towards supporting censorship. In this case, Austrian and later German state-funded propaganda incubated and encouraged the development of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, funding publications which spread the idea and provided "evidence" to back up claims of its reality. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this was not be the last instance of state propaganda pushing (as was likely in the case of Leopold II, cynically) a version of the Grand Conspiracy theory that is taken up by a subsequent generation that truly and earnestly believes it to be true. The immediate political consequences of Barruel's and Robison's work were not very dramatic, but they laid the foundations for an ideology of conspiracism that eventually had an enormous impact on history.

The first signs of the decisive influence of this first generation of the Grand Conspiracy Theory on politics was not really evident until after the Napoleonic wars, when it was adapted to the new post-Napoleonic and post-French Revolutionary era, and when Metternich justified the expansion of police powers to fight what he believed was a nearly all-powerful international conspiracy that threatened civilization. This helped lay the ideological foundations for a style of the modern police state. These developments are the subject of the subsequent chapter.

¹²⁰ Barruel, Vol. 4, p. 384.