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The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda

Fink, A.H.

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Author: Fink, A.H.

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Chapter 4: Metternich, Paranoia, and the Police State

“I do not wish to imply that conspiracies never happen... They become important, for example, whenever people who believe in the conspiracy theory get into power.”¹ -Karl Popper

“The Assassins were, themselves, as we have seen, a branch of the Ismailites, the proper Illuminati of the east. The institution of their lodge at Cairo; the various grades of initiation; the appellations of master, companions, and novices; the public and the secret doctrine; the oath of unconditional obedience to unknown superiors, to serve the ends of the order; all agree completely with what we have heard and read, in our own days, concerning secret revolutionary societies...”²
- Hammer-Purgstall, 1818

Very little new was added to conspiracist narratives between 1800 and 1814.³ Perhaps this was the effect of the Napoleonic wars, which gave Europe real threats and real violence to worry the collective European mind. The myth of the Grand Conspiracy Theory that was propagated after the French Revolution did not die out, though, and it emerged with renewed vigor in a new form as soon as Europe was again at peace. In this form it influenced the thought and the policies of the most famous and possibly the most influential figure of the post-Napoleonic era, the Austrian diplomat and later chancellor Klemens von Metternich.

Metternich was chosen for an in-depth study in this chapter for three reasons: First, Metternich's life and correspondence has been meticulously documented. The Austrian archives from this period are open and much of his confidential correspondence has been published, allowing modern scholars to gain deep insight into his activities, motives, and beliefs. Second: Metternich played an important role in spreading the idea of the Grand Conspiracy Theory – specifically a Masonic plot against the throne and altar - by influencing the Roman Catholic church to adopt a version of it as an official belief. Finally, Metternich's life, particularly between the years 1819 and 1825, are an excellent case-study in the effects a leader's belief in a conspiracy theory can have on his decisions. Metternich's belief in the Grand Conspiracy Theory resulted in him trying to extend censorship, systematic police surveillance, and political repression into as many countries as he could, with varying degrees of success, and ensured

¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), Kindle Edition, pp 306-7.

² Joseph Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, Oswald Charles Wood trans., (London: Smith and Elder, 1935), p. 217.

³ Roberts, p. 248.

his permanent hostility to any change of government in Europe. His belief in the Grand Conspiracy Theory made his European system brittle, and probably contributed to its shattering by nationalism later in Metternich's career. Metternich did not invent the Austrian police force, which had existed before he came to power, nor did he invent modern censorship, which he considered an essential instrument of influencing the press. Metternich had considered state influence over the press necessary to prevent revolution at least since he had been Austrian ambassador to Paris. He thought that non-revolutionary European governments, and especially the Habsburg Monarchy, had erred in not constantly communicating their views to the public, because they thought it was useless or undignified.⁴

This chapter will begin with a brief sketch of the Austrian police system before and during the era of Metternich and examine the changing justifications for the police and censorship under the influence of a version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. The chapter will then examine the life and opinions of Metternich particularly between the years 1817 and 1830, to chart the transformation of Metternich into a true believer in the Grand Conspiracy Theory and the effect this transformation had on his policies. Metternich may have been influenced by conspiratorial propaganda, but not necessarily the conspiratorial propaganda produced by the Austrian Empire in Metternich's youth (discussed in the previous chapter) which he never appeared to endorse. There is some evidence that one of his key influences was conspiratorial propaganda from the Islamic world, which a subordinate of Metternich fused with the Grand Conspiracy Theory. This chapter will then further illustrate the linkage between propaganda and the spread of the Grand Conspiracy Theory by describing Metternich's success in getting the Roman Catholic Church to endorse a version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, which can be found in the 1821 papal bull *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo*. Finally, this chapter will examine the interesting case of the Salis-Soglio brothers, who under the influence of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, planned to start a revolution against the non-existent Illuminati, believing that the Austrian Empire was actually under their control.

Conspiracy theory and the Austrian police

Surveillance by state agents was not invented in 18th-19th century Europe. State surveillance organizations have existed since ancient times. The more paranoid a ruler, the more detail and reach he would demand of his agents. The innovation that took place in Europe around the time of the French Revolution was that the justification of a police surveillance network, censorship, and repression was no longer couched in terms of typical dynastic politics but instead as a defense against a kind of political/religious heresy, epitomized in the revolutionary French state. The development of this idea can be observed in the history of the Austrian police.

Even before the French Revolution, the Austrian Emperor Joseph II expanded the role of the police to include monitoring dissent and controlling public opinion, starting with the 1785 "Patent concerning Freemasons" which required all freemason lodges to be registered and enabled the police to supervise Masonic activities.⁵ The Austrian police chief Perglen at the time

⁴ Donald E. Emerson, *Metternich, and the Political Police*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), p. 137.

⁵ Wangermann, p. 37.

was agitating for the transformation of the Habsburg police forces from multiple bureaucracies aiming at general public order to a single organization whose main task was to defend the realm against internal enemies.⁶ Pergen once wrote that police activities properly consist of three main tasks: 1. To monitor public opinion and “take measures accordingly, 2. To discover the “hindrances which secretly lie in the way” of the police. 3. To discover and eradicate the “dangerous enemies of internal security which undermine it.”⁷

Censorship was an important part of the Austrian political apparatus after the French Revolution. An imperial Patent published in early 1790 by Joseph II stated: “It is generally recognised that books, the contents of which are calculated to undermine the principles of all religion, morality, and social order, to promote the disintegration of all ties uniting states and nations, are in fact dangerous in their effects, and it is therefore a duty towards humanity to prevent, as far as possible, the circulation of such books.”⁸ Censorship was established throughout the Austrian empire a few days later, with the Austrian chief of police instructing all governors to review the contents of the newspapers in their province before they were published.⁹ In 1798-99 all lending libraries and reading rooms were shut down in Austria.¹⁰

The subsequent wars with France elicited an understandable further police response from the Austrians as they attempted to monitor all French agents and stop French propaganda.¹¹ However, the reign of Leopold II actually witness a roll-back of the powers and centralization of the Austrian police.¹² The fact that the emperor who did a great deal to spread propaganda about the Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy also reduced the ability of his police to cope with this supposed threat is another piece of evidence that he cynically sponsored this propaganda without really believing in the massive imaginary threat.

However, after Leopold’s death in 1793 the police ministry was restored to its former power by his successor Francis I, who also gave it responsibility for censorship in 1801.¹³ In the meantime Pergen, who was once again head of the police, had become convinced that secret societies were responsible for European revolutions. He stepped up surveillance and harassment of Masonic organizations, all of which basically ceased to exist in Austria by late 1793.¹⁴ In March 1803, in the period of peace between the Treaty of Lunéville (1801) and The War of the Third Coalition (1805-1806) Pergen wrote to the Holy Roman Emperor: “...secret philanthropic societies are now pushing more than ever, they act according to certain plans, and, although scattered throughout Europe, but in close connection with one purpose, they change their tactics according to time and circumstance, direct all their efforts to shatter the foundations of the Christian religion and the monarchical constitution.”¹⁵

⁶ Clive Emsley, *Gendarmes and the State in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 153.

⁷ Alan Sked, *Metternich in Austria, An Evaluation*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 124.

⁸ Wangermann, p. 45.

⁹ Wangermann, p. 48.

¹⁰ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in 19th Century Europe*, (Routledge, 2010), p. 51.

¹¹ Wangermann, pp. 64-65, 125.

¹² Wangermann, pp. 94-95, 98.

¹³ Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918*, (Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

¹⁴ Wangermann, p. 126.

¹⁵ August Fournier, *Die Geheimpolizei auf dem Wiener Kongress*, (Leipzig and Vienna: F. Tempsky and G. Freytag, 1913) p. 7.

Here Pergen justified his repressive measures using the Grand Conspiracy Theory: that supposedly philanthropic secret societies were in fact deceptively planning to destroy legitimate authority. Pergen and those that agreed with him might have been influenced by Hoffman's propaganda campaign that spread conspiracy theories during the reign of Leopold II. As mentioned in the previous chapter, if one accepted the premise that this massive conspiracy existed, then a rational response would be the formation of a large police force to check this threat. However, the size of the Austrian force even under Pergen and later under the influence of Metternich was vanishingly small compared to modern police forces. In 1815 the size of the Austrian imperial police force was twelve men and thirteen censors. The ministry could call on a regular police department in Vienna that numbered about thirty five or on the district police forces throughout the empire, which around the capital numbered about 500. The basic structure of the Austrian police remained the same until 1848.¹⁶

Many scholars of the period have objected that this relatively small force hardly qualifies the Austrian empire as a "police state," and they have a point. Compared to the size of the police forces of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th and 21st century, the 19th century Austrian police force was miniscule, but this may simply have been because the techniques of police control and the systems of managing large bureaucracies had not yet been developed. The important change in policing during this period was a shift from justifying the control and surveillance of subjects as part of the "normal" defense against foreign agents or dynastic subversion to using the supposed existence of a hidden conspiratorial network trying to accomplish a usurpation-by-deception in order to justify inspecting and policing the political ideas of the populace and stepping up surveillance to ferret out this conspiracy. The realms of propaganda and of secret agents were seen as the main places of combat against a huge conspiracy (often associated with freemasonry) that was using modern political ideas as camouflage in its quest to seize power.

This conspiracy theorist justification of policing is different from a totalitarian-utopian justification for a police state, though both can be believed in and used alongside each other. The latter is concerned with reshaping society and totally controlling its population, the former is more a reaction to an emergency in the form of an immensely powerful and deceptive conspiracy. This does not immediately require total control, but as paranoia grows deeper and the conspiracy seemingly continues to persist even in the face of repression and censorship those who believe they are fighting a grand conspiracy require more and more police power and censorship to combat it, and possibly even police powers and censorship abroad to squelch the bases of the conspiracy that still lay beyond their reach.

One can observe this progression in the career of Metternich, particularly between 1815 and 1830. Metternich became convinced of an imminent threat to legitimate authority and supported increased repression and censorship to combat it. The conspiracy theory he believed in was in many ways an updated version of the version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory pushed by Barruel and Robison during the previous generation. In the rest of this chapter we will examine the origins of this post-Napoleonic conspiracy theory and observe the possible influence of conspiratorial propaganda on Metternich that may have catalyzed his belief in the

¹⁶ Alan Sked, *Decline and Fall*, p. 47.

Grand Conspiracy Theory, and then trace the effects of this belief on the policies Metternich endorsed.

Carbonari and Tugendbund: post-Napoleonic updates to the Grand Conspiracy Theory

Napoleon rose to power through the opportunities created by the French Revolution. One might expect him to play an important role in the conspiracy theories that succeeded those of Barruel and Robison. Instead, partly due to the propaganda he used during his reign and partly due to events after his reign, he was generally considered an enemy of the “Jacobin cabal.” Napoleon seized power in 1799 in the Coup of 18 Brumaire, and he justified his actions with the myth of a Jacobin conspiracy that was about to seize power again in Paris. Napoleon continued to play on fears of a Jacobin plot for the rest of his reign. In 1800 Napoleon blamed an assassination attempt on him on a Jacobin plot and deported 130 supposed plotters, even though it was known that the actual plotters against his life in this case were royalists.¹⁷ The perception that the “Jacobins” were anti-Napoleon was important to the subsequent development of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Europe, particularly regarding Germany and Italy.

After the Napoleonic wars myths surrounding two anti-Napoleonic conspiracies in Germany and Italy played an important role in European political history and transmitted the tradition of the Grand Conspiracy Theory to the next generation. Specifically, this was idea of a powerful and secretly anti-religious international conspiracy of usurpers that cloaked itself in liberalism and nationalism. The organizations identified as the main arms of the conspiracy in this second generation were the Carbonari (in Italy) and the Tugendbund (in Germany.) These two organizations were real, but the myths surrounding them may have had larger effect on European history than the actual organizations did. The Tugendbund no longer existed after the fall of Napoleon, but it served as an inspiration to one later secret society that played an important role in Russian history (the Decembrists) and would also be an important bogeyman for a generation of conspiracy theorists. The Carbonari by contrast was an actual secret network that existed after the Napoleonic wars, one that had some successes in Italy in the early 19th century. The Carbonari was an Italian quasi-Masonic secret society or movement (possibly lumping several different Italian societies together) that probably started around 1808, and whose numbers were estimated to have reached from between 4,000 to hundreds of thousands at the end of the Napoleonic era, depending on who was doing the estimation.¹⁸ Being a secret society, the precise aims and motivations of the early Carbonari were somewhat obscure, but the events of 1820, which will be discussed later in this chapter, revealed that the Carbonari had a liberal, pro-republican bent.¹⁹ While the recorded rituals of the Carbonari indicate that the organization either sprung from or imitated the freemasons, there are a number of other fanciful stories about their origins, ranging from surviving adherents of the Knights Templars or the ancient cult of Mithras, to simply an organization growing from a guild of charcoal-burners, the

¹⁷ David Nicholls, *Napoleon: A Biographical Companion*, (ABC-CLIO, 1999), p. 131.

¹⁸ Adam Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015), Kindle Edition, Location 2904.

¹⁹ Anthony H. Galt, “The Good Cousins' Domain of Belonging: Tropes in Southern Italian Secret Society Symbol and Ritual, 1810-1821,” *Man*, New Series, Vol. 29, No. 4, December 1994, p. 786.

origins of their name.²⁰ They were probably a conglomeration of patriotic Italian networks that resisted Napoleon when his forces occupied Italy, and that continued to exist in Italy after his defeat. The early 19th century Italian historian Carlo Botta explained their origins in this manner, drawing attention to the fact that the “kings” of southern Italy at this point were Joseph Napoleon, Napoleon Bonaparte’s elder brother, and Joachim Murat, Napoleon’s brother-in-law, which added an anti-monarchical tinge to the anti-French resistance:

“Some of the most zealous republicans having, during the persecution that raged against them, withdrawn themselves to the highest mountains and the deepest recesses of Abruzzo and Calabria, bore with them an extreme hatred to the Sovereign, not only because he had been their persecutor, but because he was likewise King: nor were they less inflamed with animosity against the French, as well because they had destroyed their own republic, and other similar governments... Thus, living amid steep rocks, hidden valleys, and wide solitudes, their hatred against kings and against the French continually augmented... The English, who kept possession of Sicily, were appraised of this angry spirit, and conjectured that it might serve to excite an insurrection against the French...”²¹

The Carbonari shared this anti-Napoleonic origin with the Tugendbund, the other supposed major “secret society” of the post-Napoleonic era. The stories about the Tugendbund after Napoleon were much more legendary than historical and even had an international flare that the Carbonari only acquired later. The German Tugendbund (“League of Virtue”) was founded in 1807 or 1808 in Prussia as a society of German officers who openly aimed at a revival of morals in Germany, but who also secretly worked against Napoleon and French influence after Prussia was defeated by Napoleon and forced into an alliance with France. The society was declared illegal by Prussia in 1809 under pressure from Napoleon, but it continued its secret work preparing Germany for revolt against the French. The Tugendbund may have been instrumental in several risings against the French in Germany during the Napoleonic era.²² ²³ While the secret society seems to have gone defunct by the end of the Napoleonic era, the idea of a secret society that was at the same time intensely patriotic and acting against the express wishes of the Prussian government lived on.

After Prussia switched sides in 1815 and started fighting Napoleon again, a Prussian scholar and advisor to the king named Theodor Schmalz was accused of having been a member of the Tugendbund. This was basically accusing him of having been secretly working against the king, who had been an ally of Napoleon until recently. Schmalz responded with conspiracy-theory laden pamphlet that not only denied any serious involvement with the

²⁰ Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, Location 2898.

²¹ Carlo Botta, *Italy During the Consulate and Empire of Napoleon Buonaparte*, (Philadelphia: Towar & Hogan, 1829), p. 199.

²² *The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. 9, A. W. Ward, G. W. Prothero, Stanley Leathers eds., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), p. 328.

²³ Thomas Frost, *The Secret Societies of the European Revolution, 1776-1876*, Vol. 1, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), pp. 182-208.

Tugendbund but also denounced the organization as a “secret vehmic police.”²⁴ ²⁵ Schmalz was referring to another semi-legendary secret society, the Vehmic courts, a.k.a the *Vehme* or *Fehm* or the “secret tribunals of Westphalia” which were courts that existed in some parts of Germany during the Middle Ages, particularly in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was said that these sometimes secret courts only dealt out the punishment of death. The members of these secret quasi-vigilante courts reportedly recognized each other by secret signs and the supposed penalty for stumbling upon a secret court session was death.²⁶ With these stories of vigilantism, secrecy, hidden signs, and swift death, legends of the Vehmic courts were easily attached to the same kinds of romantic and secret society narratives that were also attached to the Freemasons in the 18th and 19th centuries. The folklore scholar Thomas Keightley said that this organization “has been, by the magic arts of romancers, especially of the great archimage of the north, enveloped in darkness and mystery, and awe, far beyond the degree in which such a potential investiture can be bestowed upon it by the calm inquirer after truth.”²⁷ Schmalz compared the Tugendbund to the Vehmic courts to emphasize the Tugendbund’s independence from “actual” legitimate government. The Vehmic courts of the past could pass sentence against a noble who had abused his powers and punish him without recourse just as the Tugendbund could denounce a Prussian official for helping the French, even if the Prussian official was carrying out the king’s orders.²⁸

The most important and lasting impact of Schmalz’ 1815 Tugendbund pamphlet was his accusation that the organization had reconstituted itself, and was influencing Germany through conspiracy and fear and trying to move towards the unification of Germany and the introduction of representative government:

“The Bund was subsequently abolished by law... Other connections formed in silence afterwards, perhaps on the ruins of those mentioned earlier... But the existence of such connections spread fear among the citizens of all the Germans lands, and filled the legal citizens of the Prussian states with displeasure. Rabid propagandists [*Schmähreden*] against other governments go out from these groups and [also] those mad declamations of a union of all of Germany under one government (in one Representative-system as they call it)...”²⁹

The pamphlet further alleged that this network of German nationalists was trying to get their people into positions to influence the government (which is an echo of the old “usurpation-by-deception” theme from previous ages). The pamphlet drew a direct parallel between the propaganda of the supposed German Tugendbund with the propaganda from the French Jacobins, and portended Jacobinical violence in the future: “(the Tugendbund) teach that real particular duties should be heinously breached in the name of dreamt up universal duties. As

²⁴ C Edmund Maurice, *The Revolutionary Movement of 1848-9, in Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), p. 11.

²⁵ Theodor von Schmalz, *Berichtigung einer Stelle in der Bredow-Venturinischen Chronik für das Jahr 1808*, (Berlin: 1815), p. 7.

²⁶ Lynn Thorndike, *The History of Medieval Europe*, James Thomson Shotwell ed., (Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1917), pp. 534-535.

²⁷ Thomas Keightley, *Secret Societies of the Middle Ages*, (Charles Knight & Company, 1837), p. 332.

²⁸ Schmalz, p. 7.

²⁹ Schmalz, p. 11.

the Jacobins did earlier with 'humanity,' they conjure up 'Germanness' in order to make us forget the oath through which each of us is connected to his prince."³⁰

In an echo of Hoffman, Barruel, and Robison, possibly even directly inspired by them, Schmalz was re-treading the Jacobin conspiracy theories for the post-Napoleonic era, with a secret group trying to usurp and then seize power after an upheaval:

"These people want to bring German harmony into Germany by a German war; unite the government through bitter mutual hatred; and by means of murder, plunder, and rape (the latter even more plainly preached) of the old German honesty and breeding. They do not think of concord within the union, and of the endurance of the foundations of their constitutions. They want the new upheaval, they do not want a dormant state, they actually want nothing but themselves."³¹

The Prussian king agreed with the pamphlet and singled out Schmalz for honor. This pamphlet caused an angry response from some of the German writers implicated in Schmalz' smear campaign.³² A craze against the Tugendbund started and caused quite a stir in Prussia. Later General Genisenau commented on the propaganda value of this Tugendbund craze: "I suspect that those who have made it their business to spread this notion, with the exception of one or two, do not believe in such a secret society themselves but have merely been trying to arouse alarm as a tool for their persecutions..."³³

This idea spread beyond Germany. In France the police bureaucrat (and one-time secretary of Robespierre) Simone Duplay wrote a long report in 1823 describing his version of the history of anti-monarchical secret societies in France.³⁴ Duplay begins his history of these secret societies not with the Illuminati or the French Revolution (which he participated in) but with the patriotic reaction of groups of Germans to their legitimate monarchical governments allying with the "usurper" Napoleon. Duplay contrasts these anti-Napoleonic and anti-monarchy groups with French restorationist conspirators who fought against Napoleon in France. According to him, the former were responsible for the wave of secret societies.³⁵

Simone Duplay was likely referring to the idea that the Tugendbund or some kind of inter-state conspiracy born out of the resistance to Napoleon was plotting to start a revolution. This idea, combined with evidence of the actual existence of secret networks of patriots who had resisted Napoleon, took root in the minds of some European leaders and persuaded them that they were facing a new wave of Jacobinism, though this time in a different guise.

³⁰ Schmalz, p. 12, translated in George S. Williamson's, "'Thought Is in Itself a Dangerous Operation': The Campaign Against 'Revolutionary Machinations' in Germany, 1819-1828," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 38, no. 2, (May 2015), p. 293

³¹ Schmalz, p. 13.

³² Maurice, p. 11.

³³ Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, Location 3415.

³⁴ Alan B. Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes: The French Carbonari against the Bourbon Restoration*, (Harvard, 1971), p. 190.

³⁵ Léonce Grasilier and Simon Duplay, *Secrétaire de Robespierre. Simon Duplay (1774-1827) et son Mémoire sur les sociétés secrètes et les conspirations sous la Restauration*, (Paris, 1913). p. 18.

Metternich's initial non-paranoid response to the Carbonari/Tugendbund conspiracy theory

Metternich was undoubtedly aware of the Tugendbund scare in Prussia, and Austria's interest in Italian affairs and control of northern Italy made conflict with the Carbonari possible. The initial response of Metternich and other Austrian officials was guarded, in contrast to the claims of some officials from the Papal States. In mid-1816 a senior Papal official Ercole Consalvi warned Metternich about a malicious group of sectarians with extensive networks and numbers that is "most certainly directed against existing governments, especially in Italy, and that the independence of the peninsula is the goal of their maneuvers." Consalvi said that the group lacked sufficient resources to accomplish its plot, but that their numbers were growing.³⁶ Austrian officials were mostly unconcerned about this incipient post-war Carbonari movement. For example, in March 1817 the Papal secretary of State Cardinal Pacca told the Austrian diplomat Anton Apponyi that the Carbonari, along with the Masons and the Guelphs, were attempting to deceive the Austrians about the future succession of the Kingdom of the Two Sicily's. Apponyi told Metternich that the alarm of Pacca was premature, as they had insufficient real information about the state of this supposed Carbonari/Freemason conspiracy in Italy. Apponyi called the attention of Cardinal Pacca to a different problem that he required information about: the degree of British influence on the Italian revolutionaries, and whether any British involvement was a project of the British government or just of "a few exalted heads from the opposition."³⁷

Like his subordinate Apponyi, in 1816-17 Metternich, while keeping a careful eye on Italy, was dismissive of these reports of an incipient uprising. He called the reports from the Vatican "the spectres of a madman." His police minister Count Sedlnitzky was similarly sanguine about Italy.³⁸ Still, Metternich was interested in discovering connections between Freemasons and these reported societies in Italy, and the Austrians continued their communications about these matters and dispatched two secret agents to Italy to investigate further.³⁹ One of these agents set up an intelligence network of six people in Italy and Switzerland to watch for unrest.⁴⁰

The Austrians' stance of guarded vigilance combined with confidence seemed to have been justified in June of 1817. A group of Carbonari attempted to kick-off an uprising in the town of Macerata in the Papal States, but it was a total flop. Only some of the conspirators showed up for the revolt, and they scattered when they unexpectedly heard gunshots. The gunshots they heard had actually been fired by some members of the conspiracy. The authorities rounded up a large number of people believed to be involved in this failed revolt and ended up sentencing 10 to prison for life and 20 to the galleys.⁴¹

³⁶ Charles Van Duerm, *Correspondance du Cardinal Hercule Consalvi avec le Prince Clément de Metternich*, (Leuven and Brussels: Polleunis & Ceuterick and Louis Lagaert, 1899), pp. 138-139.

³⁷ Van Duerm, p. 176-77

³⁸ Emerson, p. 61.

³⁹ Emerson, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Emerson, p. 69.

⁴¹ Van Duerm, pp. 138-139.

Subsequently the idea that the ructions in Italy were part of a larger European conspiracy came to the attention of Metternich. In July 1817 Metternich forwarded to Sednitzky a report from the Dutch Police Minister that said a new secret society called “the League of Virtue” (in German: “*Tugendbund*”) was preparing to hold a meeting in Florence or Bologna in August 1817.⁴² However, Metternich still did not believe that this organization was a serious threat. At some point in 1817 Pacca proposed a joint operation between all the governments on the Italian peninsula to simultaneously arrest and try all the ringleaders of the secret societies in one joint operation. Metternich rejected this idea not only because it was likely to create more enemies than it captured, but also because he thought there was insufficient evidence to bring these ringleaders to trial: “What court would convict without adequate proofs?”⁴³

Metternich’s first conspiracy theory: a fear of the sects

In June 1816 Pope Pius VII issued a bull against Bible societies, organizations devoted to disseminating copies of the Bible all over the world. Responding to questions about them from the bishop of Poland (which had been partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria) the Pope called Bible societies “this most crafty device, by which the very foundations of religion are undermined...”⁴⁴ The Pope requested copies of the Polish Bibles distributed by the Bible societies so that “it may be ascertained, after mature investigation, that certain errors lie insidiously concealed therein...”⁴⁵ This bull suggested that the Bible societies were a conspiracy to corrupt the people using subtly doctored translations of the Bible without commentary approved by the Roman Catholic Church. With Austria occupying a large portion of Poland, the Roman Catholic Metternich certainly knew of this bull, and it may have influenced his own conspiratorial reaction to the Bible societies.

Metternich had an audience in August of 1816 with the Scottish missionary Rev. Robert Pinkerton, who was working for the British and Foreign Bible society. Pinkerton described the meeting as cordial and Metternich, while politely raising the objection that disseminating scripture was not the Roman Catholic way, asked for a more concrete plan of the future activities of the society in the Austrian Empire that he could present to the Emperor for his approval.⁴⁶ What followed was an Austrian ban on the activities of all foreign Bible societies.⁴⁷ This ban caught the attention of the Russian Emperor Alexander I, who was a patron of the Russian Bible society. He inquired via his foreign minister as to why these organizations had been banned in Austria.⁴⁸ Metternich’s saccharine and disingenuous reply told the Russian emperor that Bible societies could not be shut down in the Austrian domains because they

⁴² Emerson, p. 75.

⁴³ Emerson, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Verney Lovett, *Remarks on the Pope's Bull Against Bible Societies, by a Friend of the Bible*, (Belfast: 1817), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Lovett, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Thirteenth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, (London: Tilling and Hughes, 1817), pp. 87-88.

⁴⁷ Roger Steer, *Good News for the World*, (Monarch Books, 2004), p. 119.

⁴⁸ Nathan Feinberg, “The Jewish Question at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1818,” in *The Progression of International Law, Four Decades of the Israel Yearbook on Human Rights*, Yoram Dinstein and Dr. Fania Domb eds., (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011), p. 139.

never existed, and then explained that anyway the careless dissemination of scripture was contrary to Roman Catholic practice.⁴⁹

At the same time that he sent this, Metternich penned a long letter to his representative in St. Petersburg revealing a very different set of reasons for his actions. This letter demonstrates that Metternich was thinking about the Bible societies as another aspect of the larger emerging problem of religious “sects which are beginning to threaten the peace of many countries, especially in Central Europe” and declared them “an object worthy to occupy the attention of Cabinets.”⁵⁰

“The human mind generally revels in extremes. A period of irreligion, a period in which pretended philosophers and their false doctrines have tried to overturn all which human wisdom has recognized as intimately connected with the eternal principles of morality, has been necessarily followed by an epoch of moral and religious reaction. Now, every kind of reaction is false and unjust, and it is only given to wise and consequently strong men to be neither the dupes of false philosophers nor the sport of false religions. If anyone doubted the intimate connection which exists between the moral and material world, proofs would be found in the march and progress of certain maladies of the mind, which present all the symptoms of true epidemics. For some time the Methodists have made great progress in England and America; and this sect, by following the track of all the others, is now beginning to extend its proselytism to other parts of Europe. There are at the present moment, principally in Upper Germany and Switzerland, hundreds of thousands of individuals morally affected by mysticism... Some of these sects have an exclusively moral and religious object. Others betray decided tendencies towards a political malady, and as Jacobinism, even extreme as it is, still admits of further extremes...”⁵¹

This letter indicates that Metternich was already familiar with elements of the Grand Conspiracy Theory created during the French Revolution. He saw the Bible societies as a part of a larger movement that could potentially re-invigorate the revolutionary tendencies that had erupted with the French Revolution. This was in spite of the fact that this new movement was one of piety rather than revolutionary impiety. One of the most extreme examples Metternich wrote about in this letter were the Poeschlians, a cult that preached that Napoleon was the forerunner of the antichrist and that the end of the world was at hand. They were said to have engaged in human sacrifice on one occasion and were subsequently suppressed by the government in the same year that Metternich wrote this letter.⁵² Metternich described them as attracting “young men, and especially young women, [who] have given themselves up to the most frightful torments, and even to death, in order to render themselves worthy of Paradise.”⁵³

Metternich regarded these sects as a growing problem, and he even suggested that revolutionaries, indeed the same French revolutionaries that had overthrown the French kingdom not long before, would soon use these new movements to re-start the era of revolution:

“It is doubtless, worthy of the wisdom of the great Powers, to take into consideration an evil which it is possible, and perhaps even easy, to stifle in its beginning, but which can only gain in intensity in

⁴⁹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, Prince Richard Metternich ed., Alexander Napier trans., (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1881), p. 65-70.

⁵⁰ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 58.

⁵¹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, pp. 58-59.

⁵² Rev. Dr. John Alzog, *Manual of Universal Church History*, Vol. III, Thos. S. Byrne trans., (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co. 1878), p. 910.

⁵³ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 59.

proportion as it spreads. The Courts must not forget that there exist in Europe disturbers of the public repose... These men, desperate, and forced from their last intrenchments, regard as their own property all questions of disorder whatever, and it is perhaps reserved for us to see the editors of the '*Nain Jaune*'⁵⁴ and the '*Vrai Liberal*'⁵⁵ [two journals associated with revolutionaries] preach against the vanities of this world, and to see Carnot and Barere make themselves the apostles of the New Jerusalem. [NB: Lazare Carnot and Bertrand Barère were two former members of the infamous French Committee of Public Safety,⁵⁶ one of whom {Barere} was also a Freemason⁵⁷ and an associate of the Duc d'Orleans,⁵⁸ and the other {Carnot} was accused of being a Freemason, a charge his son felt compelled to refute in Carnot's biography.⁵⁹] This subject deserves the most serious attention; it is connected with the well-being of society and the tranquility of States more closely than is supposed, and the great Courts should not be slow to take into consideration the means of checking the designs of these fomenters of a new kind of revolution."⁶⁰

Metternich urged his representative to the Russian court to "sound the Russian Cabinet on this subject, and to inform us of its ideas" and reflected that police cooperation between states was necessary to stem this threat as "...Governments of small States...can only expel a dangerous individual from so small a territory, and who, if they endeavor to save their own people from the contagion, can only pass it on to their neighbors."⁶¹

In this letter one can observe Metternich's paranoia about these new religious movements, his belief that his old enemies the revolutionaries could use these new movements to their advantage, and his emphasis on international cooperation to shut down what he saw as a global threat, extending even to America. Metternich's mixing of themes from the Grand Conspiracy Theory with his own sectarian hatreds and fears was nothing new. Recall the 1791 *The Veil Lifted for the Curious* briefly discussed in the previous chapter that described the post-Revolutionary French National Assembly as Freemason-controlled, and the Freemasons as secret anti-Roman Catholic atheists who represented the quintessence of the Reformation,⁶² or the pre-revolutionary 1786 novel *Exposure of the Cosmopolitan System* that described the Illuminati plot to destroy states as part of the long-term machinations of the Jesuits to destroy the more enlightened nations of northern Europe.⁶³ Metternich's fears illustrated in his 1817 letter shows that he was not primarily afraid that a sectarian enemy was at the core of a supposedly secular conspiracy, quite the reverse. He feared that these pietistic movements could be used by secular, even atheistic revolutionaries to accomplish their revolutionary ends.

⁵⁴ This influential journal specialized in caricatures. See Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of political caricature in nineteenth-century France*, (Kent State University Press, 1989), pp. 101-102.

⁵⁵ This Brussels-based journal was in fact edited by the Swedish Count Adolph Ribbing, who participated in the plot to kill Gustav III of Sweden. See Hildor Arnold Barton, *Scandinavia in the Revolutionary Era: 1760 - 1815*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 366.

⁵⁶ R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of Terror in the French Revolution*, (Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁷ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 192.

⁵⁸ Otto J. Scott, *Robespierre: The Voice of Virtue*, (Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 254.

⁵⁹ Hippolyte Lazare Carnot, *Memories Sur Carnot Par Son Fils*, Vol. 1., (Paris: Pagnerre, 1861), p. 98.

⁶⁰ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 60.

⁶¹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, pp. 60-61.

⁶² Lefranc, *Le Voile levé pour les curieux*, p. 31.

⁶³ von Göschen, *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republik*, p. 276, Quoted in Epstein, p. 99.

Propaganda as history becomes a conspiracy theory: the case of Hammer-Purgstall

Metternich would have been aware of the work of Robison and Barruel, as their books were popular at the time. There is no evidence that he put much stock in their theories. Metternich was stationed in Paris as a diplomat during the reign of Napoleon, and his memoirs give no indication that he believed in a sinister conspiracy that was responsible for starting and/or directing the French Revolution, be it Illuminati, Freemason, philosophe, or otherwise. However, as the letter to his subordinate in Russia about the danger of sects as well as other evidence indicates, by 1819 he had begun to think along the lines of what Barruel and Robison had written: that a coordinated international conspiracy of subversives working in secret societies were attempting to usurp legitimate authority. His restraint before 1819 in Italy indicates he had not given himself over to total paranoia, and while he believed there were Italian “subversives” possibly communicating with elements abroad there was no threat of imminent conflagration. By the early 1820s he was more paranoid and given to the belief that coordinated secret societies and their liberal propaganda were on the verge of destroying Europe’s hard-won peace and stability. This change in attitude may be partly due to his exposure to a fusion of the Grand Conspiracy Theory with a different one, one that was hundreds of years old and from the Islamic world.

In 1819 the incredibly busy Metternich wrote that he had a “bad habit” of reading before going to sleep, and that this reading was strictly for pleasure “as a rule I read nothing that touches on my work. My spare time is taken up with scientific literature, discoveries, travel and even simple narratives.”⁶⁴ On at least one occasion, however, we know that he read a historical book for pleasure, one that appears to have had an impact on the way he thought about the conspiracies he believed he was fighting. This book was the 1818 *Die Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen*⁶⁵ - “The History of the Assassins. Derived from Oriental Sources.” The author of the book was Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, a diplomat who worked directly for Metternich in the Austrian diplomatic service. This work was written as history, but unfortunately it mainly regurgitated Middle Eastern conspiratorial propaganda from hundreds of years earlier. Perhaps partly under the influence of Metternich, or even attempting to please him, or perhaps merely under the influence of Barruel and other popular conspiracy theorists of the early 19th century, Hammer-Purgstall integrated the history of the Assassins, a.k.a the medieval Nizari Ismaili sect of Islam, into the Illuminati/Freemason/Jacobin conspiracy theory propagated by Hoffman and popularized by Barruel and Robison. This section will examine Hammer-Purgstall’s biography and his connection to Metternich and then summarize medieval Muslim anti-Ismaili propaganda and analyze Hammer-Purgstall’s text as a conspiracy theory, one created by interpreting medieval propaganda as history.

In addition to his work for the Austrian government, Hammer-Purgstall was a pathbreaking orientalist, one of the first European scholars dedicated to studying the languages, history, and culture of the Islamic world. He founded the first orientalist periodical the *Fundgruben des Orients*. His greatest scholarly work was a history of the Ottoman Empire

⁶⁴ G. De Bertier De Sauvigny, *Metternich and His Times*, Peter Ryde trans., (London: Darton, Logman & Todd, 1962), p. 7.

⁶⁵ Joseph Von Hammer, *Die Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen*, (Stuttgart, J. G. Cottaschen, 1818.)

which remained a standard text in the subject up to the mid-20th century.⁶⁶ Hammer-Purgstall was a popular historian, and he was able to independently get private financing to publish some of his works.⁶⁷ The historian Paula Sutter Fichtner has examined Hammer-Purgstall's relationship with Metternich in detail and her research shows a tense working relationship marred by personal friction as well as policy differences about how to approach the Ottomans.⁶⁸ According to his autobiography, Hammer-Purgstall was under the impression that Metternich was not a fan of his work. This is despite the fact that their views about the dangers of Freemasonry and liberalism became quite close. The historian Robert Irwin believes Hammer-Purgstall's negative take on the Freemasons might have been influenced by Metternich.⁶⁹

According to Hammer-Purgstall's autobiography, Metternich read his history of the Assassins while traveling to the Metternich family estate in Bohemia in May 1818. Hammer-Purgstall recorded his surprise when Metternich praised his work when they met after this, and that Metternich even demonstrated that he had actually read it: "This is the only one of my works, about which he has ever said something obliging to me, but it is also, I believe, the only thing he has ever read from me... he praised both the treatment and the style..."⁷⁰

Metternich may have enjoyed *The History of the Assassins* not only because the work is entertaining and exotic, but also because it tied together several different things that Metternich worried about, and suggested that they were all working in concert. It provided historical backing for the idea of an atheistic international revolutionary conspiracy capable of infiltrating governments, spreading seductive anti-state propaganda, coordinating disruptions over long distances, and even cynically using religious fanatics to accomplish their ends. The texts that Hammer-Purgstall used were part of a counter-Isma'ili propaganda campaign that was hundreds of years old.

The ideological challenge of the Ismailis to medieval Islamic regimes was discussed in chapter 2. The core of the Isma'ili argument against the various Islamic regimes in the Middle Ages was that they were all usurpers, and that the Isma'ili imam was the only true leader of Islam. They developed a well-resourced propaganda effort to spread this message. In response to the ideological threat from the well-oiled Isma'ili propaganda machine, Sunni scholars and the Abbasid caliphate began an anti-Isma'ili propaganda campaign. In addition to attacking the claims of descent of the Isma'ili imams, the counter-campaign criticized their supposed libertinism and disregard for Islamic law, and eventually created a "black legend" that accused the Isma'ilis of being secret atheists who were infiltrating Islam in order to destroy it.⁷¹ In 1095 AD the great Sunni scholar Al-Ghazali wrote about a secret, graded initiation system of the

⁶⁶ Robert Irwin, "An Orientalist Mythology of Secret Societies," in *Orientalism and Conspiracy Theory*, Arndt Graf, Schirin Fathi, and Ludwig Paul eds., (I.B. Tauris, 2011), Kindle Edition, Location 1589.

⁶⁷ Paula Sutter Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526-1850*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 146.

⁶⁸ Fichtner, p. 134.

⁶⁹ Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004), p. 20.

⁷⁰ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Erinnerungen und Briefe*, Herausgegeben von Walter Höflechner and Alexandra Wagner eds., (Online resource, University of Graz, 2011, version 1) available at http://gams.uni-graz.at/hp/pdf/5_Exzerpt.pdf, p. 123.

⁷¹ Farhad Daftary, "The 'Order of the Assassins:' J. von Hammer and the Orientalist Misrepresentations of the Nizari Ismailis," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 39, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), p. 72

Isma'ilis, the last stage being atheist.⁷² This legend appears to have been believed by many prominent non-Isma'ili Muslims, and the charge of secret atheism was regularly leveled against Isma'ilis for centuries. The most famous political writer of medieval Iran, Nizam al-Mulk, devoted the second part of his *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* to describing the menace of the secretly-materialist Isma'ilis. (He was himself probably assassinated by one in 1092 AD.) He traced their ideological origin all the way back to the pre-Islamic Mazdakians⁷³ (a heretical sect of Zoroastrianism, c. 520 AD.)

“From the foregoing it has been shown that the religions of Mazdak, the Khurrama-dins and the Batinis [Isma'ilis] all have a common origin; the constant object of them all is to overthrow Islam. At first, in order to lure the Muslims, they display themselves as truthful, virtuous, abstemious and faithful to The Prophet's family (upon him be peace); having gained power and acquired followers, they try to overthrow and destroy Muhammad's people and Muhammad's religion. Even infidels show greater mercy to Muhammad's people (upon him be peace) than they do.”⁷⁴

It is important to point out that there is no real evidence outside of Sunni and Shi'a propaganda that this charge of secret atheism was true. Even the fiercely anti-Isma'ili historian Ata-Malik Juvaii (1226-1283 AD) who had access to the complete library and archives of the Nizari Isma'ili citadel at Alamut, Iran, did not back up this black legend, which he believed in, with an Isma'ili source, even though he evidently based most of his history of the Isma'ilis on authentic Isma'ili sources.⁷⁵

This extended anti-Isma'ili propaganda campaign initially made its way into European history through stories brought back by the Crusaders and through the “Old man in the Mountain” legend related by Marco Polo. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall revived this propaganda, and unwittingly published it as history. The story told by the Medieval anti-Isma'ilis of secret atheism, graded initiations, coordinated deceptive propaganda, all leading to an international plot against religion and legitimate rulers is already uncannily close the first generation of the Grand Conspiracy Theory spread by Hoffman, Barruel, and Robison.⁷⁶ Hammer-Purgstall saw this similarity as evidence that the medieval Isma'ilis were the ideological ancestors of the Illuminati, the Freemasons, and the whole revolutionary movement in Europe.⁷⁷ Hammer-Purgstall also said that the Jesuits themselves “trode in the footsteps of the

⁷² Daftary, p. 73.

⁷³ Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al Muluk or Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk*, Hubert Drake trans., (Routledge, 2002), p. 190.

⁷⁴ Nizam al-Mulk, p. 237.

⁷⁵ See Juvaini, *Genghis Khan*.

⁷⁶ Hammer-Purgstall's book on the Assassins was not even the most direct link he made between slanderous propaganda of the past and the troubles of his present age. Among modern day occultists, Hammer-Purgstall is mainly known for his even more fanciful article of 1818: “Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum.” Echoing the accusation Barruel's made two decades earlier, he pointed to the Ophites, an ancient Gnostic sect, as the origins of the Templars (and therefore, the Freemasons). See Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall, *Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum*, (Vindobonae [Vienna]: Antoni Schmid, 1818,) p. 37.

⁷⁷ Irwin, Location 1642.

Assassins”⁷⁸ but that the real parallel was with the Freemasons and the Revolutionaries: “...they (the Isma’ilis) were a kind of Freemasons, whose native country, as we have seen, may really be sought and found in Egypt...As in the west, revolutionary societies arose from the bosom of the Freemasons, so in the east, did the Assassins spring from the Ismailites.”⁷⁹ He called the Assassins “the Illuminati of the East”⁸⁰ and even referred to the Isma’ili headquarters (under the Fatimids) in Cairo as a “lodge” (in German *loge*, as in *Freimaurerloge*.)⁸¹ According to Hammer-Purgstall, the chiefs of the secret Ismaili sect believed “nothing was sacred and all was permitted”⁸² like the atheist core of the Illuminati. Just in case the analogy was not clear Hammer-Purgstall spelled it out in a description of Europe’s age of revolution:

“The insanity of the enlighteners, who thought that by mere preaching, they could emancipate nations from the protecting care of princes, and the leading-strings of practical religion, has shown itself in the most terrible manner by the effects of the French revolution, as it did in Asia, in the reign of Hassan II; and as, at that period, the doctrine of assassination and treason openly proceeded from Alamut [*the headquarters of the Nizari Ismailis*], so did the doctrine of regicide produce from the French National Convention, in Jean de Brie, a legion of regicides...The dominion of the Assassins sank under the iron tramp of Hulaku [*the grandson of Genghis Khan*]... After him, the remains of the hydra of Assassination quivered in the remnant of the sect of the Ismailities, but powerless and venomless; held down by the preponderance of the government in Persia and Syria; politically harmless, somewhat like the juggling of the Templars of the present day [likely a reference to the Freemasons], and other secret societies watched by the vigilant eye of the police in France.”⁸³

While he never stated it explicitly (in this work) Hammer-Purgstall strongly suggests that the Templars were allied with the Assassins or even followers of their doctrine⁸⁴ and certainly that they carried on the “eastern” tradition of the Assassins to Europe:

“We have, more than once, briefly pointed out the analogy which the constitution of the order of the Assassins presents with contemporary or more modern orders; but, although so many points of similarity are found, which can neither be accidental nor yet spring from the same cause, but which, probably, through the medium of the Crusades, passed from the spirit of the east into that of the west, they are still insufficient to make a perfect companion to the order of the Assassins, which, thank Heaven, has hitherto been without parallel. The Templars, incontrovertibly, stand in the next rank to them; their secret maxims, particularly in so far as relates to the renunciation of positive religion, and the extension of their power by the acquisition of castles and strong places, seem to have been the same as those of the order of the Assassins.”⁸⁵

Hammer-Purgstall even suggested that “traces of retribution immediately executed which fulfilled the sentence of the order...” could “be found in the proceedings of the Vehme, or

⁷⁸ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 216.

⁷⁹ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 217.

⁸⁰ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 217.

⁸¹ See the original 1818 German edition: Joseph Von Hammer, *Die Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen*, (Stuttgart, J. G. Cottaschen, 1818) pp. 52, 61, and 72 for example.

⁸² Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 33.

⁸³ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, pp. 217-218.

⁸⁴ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, pp. 129.

⁸⁵ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, pp. 216.

secret tribunal, although its existence only commenced two hundred years after the extermination of the order of murderers in Asia.”⁸⁶ This is a reference to the Vehmic courts, which were also mentioned by Theodore Schmaltz in his attack on the Tugendbund in 1815.

In his history of the Assassins Hammer-Purgstall took centuries-old conspiracy-theory propaganda which he believed to be history and merged it with the Grand Conspiracy Theory. Hammer-Purgstall’s tale was of atheistic manipulators using free-thinkers and religious fanatics to threaten a whole region. It held out the possibility that a similar thing might have been happening in Europe with their ideological descendants - that the Freemasons, the Jacobins, the religious fanatics, the “philanthropic” philosophers could in fact all be operating together, coordinated by a single, central group of cynical conspirators. Their main weapon was propaganda, but they could resort to assassination and open rebellion when they had to, drawing from a reserve of fanatics to serve as willing executioners. Purgstall even wrote that the “Old man in the mountain” myth of Marco Polo was given weight by the medieval Islamic sources. This myth related that in some castles in the medieval Middle East there were secret gardens full of all the delights of paradise, where the leaders of the sect would fool youths that they were actually visiting paradise and promise to return them there again if they carried out a suicide mission. Hammer-Purgstall writes that these fanatical killers were given the name “hashishin” (from which we derive the word “assassin”) because they would take hashish to either enable the deception by their higher-grade master that they had entered paradise or to drive them on to “undertake anything or everything” due to the effects of hashish on the “fiery imagination of the Arab.”⁸⁷

As with all major conspiracy theories, the core of this medieval conspiracy theory related by Hammer-Purgstall was deception. The higher grades of the Isma’ilis were supposedly able to deceive their own followers about their true purpose and even secretly worm their way into influential positions in governments and religious orders. There was really only one remedy against them, they must be smashed and then “held down by the preponderance of the government...”⁸⁸ To Metternich and any other anti-revolutionary contemporaries who read and believed Hammer-Purgstall’s work, Europe must have looked like a mirror image of the medieval Islamic world during the initial rise of the Assassins. Subversive free-thinkers abounded, propaganda against legitimate governments was everywhere, fanatical religious sects proliferated. There was everything but actual assassins working for a central conspiracy. This exception seemed to disappear in 1819.

The murder of Kotzebue and the Carlsbad Decrees.

Metternich’s belief in Hammer-Purgstall’s version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory and revolutionary history is most clearly demonstrated in his reaction to the murder of Kotzebue, a conservative German writer who was also working for the Russian government. Kotzebue’s writings were popular in Germany, but he was also an outspoken opponent of the German nationalists and the Teutonic antics of students at universities. On March 23rd 1819 a German theology student named Karl Ludwig Sand called on Kotzebue at his home, and after speaking

⁸⁶ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 217.

⁸⁷ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, pp. 136-138.

⁸⁸ Von Hammer, *The History of the Assassins*, p. 218.

with him stabbed him to death before also stabbing himself several times. When the authorities searched Sand they found a proclamation he wrote justifying the murder and calling on the German people to rise up and also a warrant for the murder that had supposedly been issued by a fraternity at the University of Jena.⁸⁹

Metternich's close aid Friedrich Von Gentz wrote to Metternich that the murder produced a sensation in Vienna.⁹⁰ Gentz forwarded to Metternich a report on the murder from Varnhagen von Ense, a Prussian minister-resident at Karlsruhe that evidenced the likely influence of the popular work of Hammer-Purgstall: "This statement leads to the supposition that there is some conspiracy and fraternity, which fills all hearts with horror and fear. What can be done against a man who kills himself? Shall the Order of the Assassins be reproduced in the West?"⁹¹

On April 9th 1819 Metternich, replied to Gentz and asserted: "I have, for my part, no doubt that the murderer did not act simply from motives of his own, but in consequence of a secret league. Here we find great evil and some good, for poor Kotzebue now appears as an argumentum ad hominem which even the liberal Duke of Weimar cannot defend. It will be my care to draw from the affair the best possible results..."⁹²

Metternich then made an assertion that clearly indicates the influence of Von Hammer-Purgstall's version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, combining the myths of the Assassins with the idea of the Vehmic courts: "It appears to be quite certain that the murderer of Kotzebue has been the emissary of the vehmic court of Jena, that is to say, a veritable 'haschischin'"⁹³ Metternich continues, describing the way he believed the murder was carried out, "The University which was to carry out the plan may have been chosen by lot, and which of the fraternity was to follow up the deed by sacrifice of his own life may also have been chosen by lot; and there is no doubt that it was followed out. Many data go to establish this view."⁹⁴

Metternich's aide Gentz saw political promise in the fallout from this assassination. Writing to Metternich in that April 1st letter he remarked how "When we lifted the first warning voice against the excesses at the Wartburg our mouths were stopped with allusions to 'the innocent virtuous efforts of German youth' and their 'meritorious teachers;' and this is what they have come to!" He added that he hoped a result of this "dreadful occurrence" would be that:

"we shall for some years escape the debates on the freedom of the press in Germany. For I can hardly believe that any State of the Bund would be shameless enough now to expect the carrying out of the freedom of the press by those Governments who have not hitherto sanctioned it. And it is my firm conviction that Austria must seize the first occasion when such a word is uttered in the Bundestag to declare emphatically that she considers the article of the Bund (an article never to be pardoned) that speaks or dreams of uniform arrangements in this matter - which concerns the duties and rights of supremacy and sovereignty - once and for all impracticable and abolished..."⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, Location 3524-3558.

⁹⁰ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 256.

⁹¹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 259

⁹² *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 260-261

⁹³ *Memoires Documents et Ecrits Divers Laisses par le Prince de Metternich*, Vol. 3., edited by Prince Rrichard Metternich, (Paris: E. Plon, 1881), p. 235. (Translated separately to highlight Metternich's use of the term "haschischin.")

⁹⁴ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 261.

⁹⁵ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 255.

Gentz was referring to Article XVIII section D of the 1815 constitution of the German Confederation, which reads “Upon its first meeting, the Diet shall frame laws for the liberty of the press in general...”⁹⁶ This document had been signed by Metternich himself just a few years earlier, but according to Gentz the new emergency situation made manifest by the murder of Kotzebue abrogated Metternich’s and Austria’s consent. Like Hoffman and the Eudaimonists of the previous generation, Gentz and Metternich viewed permitting freedom of the press in the face of an enormous conspiracy of skilled propagandists as a kind of unilateral disarmament. Censorship would be essential to keep subversive propaganda at bay, and the censorship had to be thorough and able to respond to new shifts in the conspirator’s propaganda strategy. For example, if the Jacobins switched to pietistic religious preaching to destroy legitimate authority after open revolution had failed one would have to censor pietistic in addition to “liberal” tracts. Even good works that might have connotations useful to a conspiracy would have to be censored. (In 1830 Hammer-Purgstall was prevented from showing a play based on his history of the Assassins, even though Metternich said he saw nothing wrong with it, because the police chief Sednitzky objected to the mention of secret societies.)⁹⁷

According to a report from Metternich’s to the Austrian Emperor, in late July 1819 Metternich had an audience with the Prussian king in Teplitz, where he pushed him to support more repressive policies in response to the murder of Kotzebue and the attempted murder of another German official by a radical student earlier that month. At that meeting Metternich made a likely reference to the Tugendbund conspiracy theory when he chastened the Prussian king for partial responsibility for this conspiracy that resulted in the assassination:

“Either the counsel which your Majesty receives is not good or it is badly carried out. The discovered conspiracy is nothing but the action which always follows the teaching. This conspiracy has its origin and its abode in Prussia; the subordinate conspirators are now known, the superiors are still undiscovered, but they are without doubt to be found in the highest region of your own servants.”⁹⁸

This accusation apparently linking the Tugendbund to the spate of assassinations, whether it was only a clever ploy by Metternich to make the Prussian King more pliant or represented Metternich’s true beliefs, appeared to have worked. This meeting resulted in a joint plan of action where Austria and Prussia agreed to hold two conferences to deal with pressing security problem by rolling back the freedom of the press, supervising the universities, and establishing a central body to investigate the growing revolutionary conspiracy.⁹⁹ These conferences eventually resulted in the Carlsbad Decrees, which bound the entire German Confederation to a repressive set of laws designed to combat the clandestine revolutionary menace.

Metternich called delegates from all over Germany to meet at Carlsbad, now the Czech city of Karlovy Vary. This was outside the normal procedure for the German Confederation,

⁹⁶ Douglas M. Gibling, *International Military Alliances, 1648-2008*, (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2009), p. 122.

⁹⁷ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Erinnerungen und Briefe*, p. 209.

⁹⁸ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 297.

⁹⁹ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22*, (Odyssey Editions, 2013), Kindle edition, p. 242.

which would have met at the Federal Assembly at Frankfurt. These delegates wrote the Carlsbad Decrees, which were then adopted with no dissent by the Diet.¹⁰⁰ This might have been irregular, but Metternich and his allies believed they were dealing with an emergency situation.

The Carlsbad Decrees included sections on a German-wide press censorship system to suppress any work ““contrary to the dignity of the Confederation, the security of its individual states, or the maintenance of peace and tranquility in Germany” and a section requiring that Universities submit to state surveillance and increased state control.¹⁰¹ The section on universities specifically prohibited anyone who was a member of a secret society from holding any public office.¹⁰²

The “emergency” nature of the decrees is most evident in the section on press censorship. Section 3 of the “Provisional regulations regarding freedom of the press” reads:

“Since the current resolution was occasioned by the necessity of preventive measures against the abuse of the press recognized by the Federal Governments under current circumstances, the laws intended for judicial prosecution and punishment of abuses and offenses already committed, to the extent that they should be applicable to the classes of published writings designated in (section) 1, cannot be regarded as sufficient in any Confederal state as long as this resolution remains in force.”¹⁰³

These new censorship laws required that all books under 320 pages in length had to be reviewed by government censors before being published.¹⁰⁴ University professors, who were sometimes exempt from censorship in Germany previously, had to now abide by the same rules as everyone else.¹⁰⁵

The core of the Carlsbad Decrees was the provision for a Central Investigative Committee headquartered in Mainz to investigate the “revolutionary intrigues and demagogic groups.”¹⁰⁶ Article 6 stated that the Central Commission could order the immediate arrest of anyone in the German Confederation.¹⁰⁷ These decrees and associated laws extended police surveillance and political repression over all of Germany that hemmed in German political and intellectual development until 1848.¹⁰⁸ At a stroke Austrian-style police surveillance was

¹⁰⁰ Paul W. Schroeder, *Metternich's Diplomacy at Its Zenith 1820-1823*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp 17-18.

¹⁰¹ George S. Williamson, “‘Thought Is in Itself a Dangerous Operation’: The Campaign Against ‘Revolutionary Machinations’ in Germany, 1819-1828, *German Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No., 2, (May 2015): p. 286.

¹⁰² *Volk, Reich und Nation 1806-1918*, Gilbert Krebs and Bernard Poloni eds., (Asnieres: Institut d'Allemand d'Asnieres, 1994), p. 55.

¹⁰³ German Historical Institute, “Carlsbad Decrees: Confederal Press Law (September 20, 1819)”, from *German History in Documents and Images*, available at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/1_C_NS3_Confederal_Press_Law.pdf, pp. 1-2, accessed Jan 11, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Goldstein, p. 123.

¹⁰⁵ T.M. Knox “Hegel and Prussianism,” in *Debating the Political Philosophy of Hegel*, Walter Kaufmann ed., (AldineTransaction, 2010), p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Faculty of Law, Heidelberg University, “Die Karlsbader Beschlüsse vom 20.09.1819,” available at <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/institute/fak2/mussgnug/Karlsbad.doc>, accessed January 11, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Williamson, p. 286.

required for all of Germany. The Carlsbad Decrees were followed by a “demagogue hunt” which saw 66 convictions and jail terms stemming from the Mainz Commission between 1819 and 1827. Liberals were purged from the Prussian government and several prominent German professors lost their jobs.¹⁰⁹

The Carlsbad Decrees have been mainly interpreted as a strong blow by monarchical conservatism against liberalism, but the beliefs of Metternich and the text of the decrees themselves evidence the actual fears of the drafters and the promoters of the law. They feared not democracy or liberalism per se, but that these could serve as tools of a new revolution, bringing murder and chaos.¹¹⁰

From secret societies to the *Comité Directeur*

A leader’s belief in a large powerful conspiracy can have international implications that go beyond constitutional ones. Even if Metternich believed that the Carlsbad Decrees had been effective enough to stifle any revolutionary rumblings in German lands, it stands to reason that such a large and effective conspiracy would have bases of operation outside of the German-speaking world, and redoubts where they could coordinate activity beyond the reach of police and sovereigns who were wise to them. After all, the Assassins still could contest power in Iran from their famous castle at Alamut even after the destruction of the old Fatimid base in Egypt. The concerns of the Austrians in Italy had already been linked to the murder of Kotzebue by Metternich. In his letter to Gentz after learning of Kotzebue’s murder, Metternich wrote that he saw an opportunity to influence the liberal-leaning Russian Tsar’s attitude towards Italy: “We shall now very soon see what the emperor of Russia will say... While in Germany Russian agents *propter obscuritatem* are murdered, in Italy the Russian agents preside over the clubs of the Carbonari. This abomination will soon be checked.”¹¹¹ The potential usefulness of this fictional connection between nationalist students in Germany and anti-Austrian subversives in Italy would have been a further reason for Metternich to push the idea, even if he did not initially believe in it himself.

Italy gave Metternich and the other Austrian officials further matters for concern while they were working on instituting the Carlsbad decrees. In contrast to their abortive attempt in 1817, in July 1820 the Carbonari managed to actually create a successful revolution in Naples and Sicily that forced the king of Southern Italy to become a constitutional monarch under a copy of the 1812 Spanish constitution. Metternich was surprised at how quickly the Carbonari succeeded in overthrowing the government in Naples, which showed that the Carbonari were more dangerous than he had previously believed.¹¹² This uprising happened hot on the heels of another revolution in Spain (starting in January 1820) and other unrest elsewhere in Europe. A conference between Russia, Austria, and Prussia convened at Opava in late 1820 resulted in a joint declaration that these powers “bind themselves, by peaceful means, or if need be by arms” to return any state undergoing a revolution back to “legal order and stability.” Another

¹⁰⁹ Goldstein, p. 125.

¹¹⁰ Williamson, p. 287.

¹¹¹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 26.

¹¹² Alan Reinerman, “Metternich and the Papal Condemnation of the ‘Carbonari’ 1821”, *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1, (April, 1968), p. 57.

conference in Ljubljana between these same powers authorized Austria to intervene militarily against the revolt in Naples.¹¹³

Metternich's initial attitude towards this revolution in Italy was different from his reaction to the revolution in Spain, which had started just months earlier. When the Spanish revolution broke out the Austrians sided with the British in discouraging the Russian Tsar from organizing an international intervention to restore the old Spanish regime. Metternich did not think that the revolution in Spain was a good thing, but he believed that foreign intervention would make the problem worse and distract the post-Napoleonic European alliance. He also was suspicious of Russia's true motives in militating for intervention, as the Tsar had been a proponent of liberalism for the last five years.¹¹⁴ In addition to these diplomatic considerations, Metternich may have initially believed that the revolution in Italy was actually orchestrated by a secret society, unlike the one in Spain which was merely a military revolt that happened to have politically liberal results.

In August 1820 Metternich circulated a memorandum from the Austrian cabinet about the upheavals in Italy to all the courts in Italy. This remarkable document demonstrates that, at least as far as official statements were concerned, the Austrian government had not given itself over to Barruelian conspiracy theories that secret societies had been responsible for the French Revolution, nor that some international conspiracy had been responsible for the revolution in Spain earlier that year, but that they were convinced that the Carbonari-led revolution in Italy was the work of a secret society:

"It is possible to admit that the French Revolution was the work of a large majority of the nation, that of Spain was the result of a military conspiracy, and that of Naples finally is the work of a secret society... The degree of perfection that this art (of revolution) has reached, unless energetic measures are taken, is even of a nature to make all governments unreliable and problematic, whether they be absolute, monarchical, constitutional, republican, or even radical. The means of calculating their duration of existence has a 'delta' of one day."¹¹⁵

It follows that, if a secret society had set off the insurrection in Italy, then similar tactics could be used by the same or similar organizations elsewhere, and it would be imperative not to allow them to have a safe-haven to plan their plots without interference or give other subversives an example to copy. The memorandum goes on to state that this new Naples revolution has a "particular character and is unquestionably the most threatening of all for any government, since the sect has prepared and designed this disaster in the shadows..."¹¹⁶ The nature of this revolution meant that its success could not be allowed, for the good of all governments. "The triumph of a revolution, conceived and directed by a secret society, would be a death sentence to all governments."¹¹⁷ The memorandum also states that this secret society threatened the settlement of 1814-15, the crowning achievement of Metternich's diplomatic career.

¹¹³ Goldstein, pp. 123-124.

¹¹⁴ Schroeder, pp. 38-41.

¹¹⁵ Van Duerm, p. 391.

¹¹⁶ Van Duerm, p. 391.

¹¹⁷ Van Duerm, p. 393.

By the time of this memorandum Metternich had certainly become paranoid about the specter of secret societies but he had not yet gone over to regarding nearly all major events around the world as part of a grand plot, and the corresponding belief in a central body or bodies that coordinate this grand plot. By the time he disseminated the August 1820 memorandum about Italy, Metternich's ideas about "secret societies" could be interpreted as a belief that multiple secret societies might exist, and that they are dangerous, but that their international connections mainly consisted of the ideas that linked them together: belief in constitutions, freedom of the press, nationalism, etc.

Starting around 1820 after bouts of unrest in Paris and the assassination of the heir to the French throne, an idea began circulating that there was a single coordinating committee that was orchestrating all the revolutionary unrest, a "*Comité Directeur*."¹¹⁸ According to his foreign minister Ioannis Kapodistrias, the Russian Emperor Alexander I was an early convert to this idea.¹¹⁹ Metternich appears to have also bought into this theory a bit later. When the Austrian armies marched into Naples to crush the revolt in early 1821 there was another liberal revolution in northern Italy, in Piedmont in the kingdom of Sardinia. To Metternich's mind (and it appears also to Alexander I's) this was not a coincidence. The revolt in the north was designed to distract attention or divert resources from the fight against the revolution in Naples. Metternich learned of the revolt in Piedmont on the 12th of March 1821, while he was still in Ljubljana along with the Emperors of Austria and Russia, after the conclusion of the congress there that had justified the Austrian invasion of Naples to suppress the revolution. Seven days later, according to a letter Metternich sent to one of his subordinates, Russian couriers arrived with the news of the Greek revolt on March 19th, 1821.¹²⁰ These two events, separated by nearly 1000 miles and with no actual link to each other were evidently interpreted as responses to the Austrian invasion of southern Italy, and Metternich began to use the phrase "*Comité Directeur*" to describe the imagined enemy that was coordinating this response. By March 24th he was writing about how the "people of the Directional committee [*Comité Directeur*] in Paris will be unpleasantly surprised"¹²¹ by Austrian success against the revolutionaries in Piedmont and Naples. On the 26th he wrote to another senior Austrian official that "...this revolution (in Piedmont) is nothing but a sudden blow on the part of some hot-headed men, supported by the Committee of Paris with the intention of helping Naples."¹²² The fact that the Greek rebels were organized by a quasi-Masonic secret society called the "Philiki Eteria" may have contributed to Metternich's opinion that these were linked. On March 25th he wrote to the Bavarian minister of foreign affairs about the Greek revolt, pointing out the Greek leaders' self-declared membership of a secret society and asserting "This society is the same as that of the Carbonari..."¹²³

In a memorandum written sometime after the conference at Ljubljana to the Russian Emperor Alexander I, who had become a kindred spirit to Metternich on matters of the *Comité*

¹¹⁸ Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, Locations 4044-4051.

¹¹⁹ Ioannis Kapodistrias, "Записка графа Иоанна каподистриа о его служебной дѣятельности" (Notes from count Ioannis Kapodistrias on his official activities), from *Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического Общества* (Digest of the Imperial Russian Historical Society), Vol. 3, (St. Petersburg, 1868), p. 251.

¹²⁰ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 523.

¹²¹ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 491.

¹²² *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 525.

¹²³ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 523.

Directeur, Metternich wove the Tugendbund conspiracy theory together with the ructions in Italy and came out with a story that looked like an updated version of the Illuminati myth. He wrote that a central group was orchestrating global revolution, sometimes using quasi-Masonic organizations and intending to usurp power under the guise of liberal principles:

“The organisation of secret societies in France, such as exist now, does not seem to go further back than 1820... It was only after the measures taken at Carlsbad had forced the principal heads of the secret associations in Germany to seek a refuge in France, that many of them betook themselves to Paris, where they found little opportunity of coming to an understanding with the French Liberals... It was only after the year 1821 that direct relations could be established between the German and French revolutionists, and at the head of the former were the German Bonapartists.... The very secrecy of associations of this kind assists their rapid progress... If the Governments do not take vigorous measures not only to prevent its ultimate progress, but to restrain it within manageable limits, Europe runs the risk of falling under the ever-renewed attacks of these associations...The factions at present employ two means. One is the formation of secret societies and all kinds of sects; of these the most practical is that of Carbonarism... [they have] One end in view, and that clearly set forth in the higher grades of the association; simple means and plans, free from the metaphysical rubbish of Masonry; a government really reserved for its leaders; a certain number of grades to classify individuals; disobedience and indiscretion punished by the poignard as well as enemies - such is Carbonarism, which of all the political sects seems to have approached the most nearly to perfection in its practical organization. The factions have found a second means in the fusion of their interests and the establishment of a central point of direction. Nationality, political limits, everything disappears with the sect. The committee which leads the Radicals throughout Europe is, no doubt, at Paris, and every day will show this more and more.”¹²⁴

(Metternich also said in this memo that he now believed the Spanish revolution of 1820 had been the work of a secret society.) To use the analogy of the Assassins, Paris had become the Alamut or the Cairo of the new clandestine revolutionaries. The idea that this conspiracy could maintain a headquarters in restoration-era Paris, despite the anti-revolutionary government of the Bourbon king Charles X, smacks of Barruel’s accusations of clandestine subversive headquarters and schools located in pre-revolutionary Paris that managed to bring about the French Revolution and pull strings all over Europe.

Metternich wrote that the remedy to this danger was unity and the establishment of a “central focus for information and direction” between Prussia, Russia, and Austria - that is, a central intelligence-collecting organ. Of course, such an organ would be based in Vienna. Metternich was proposing the extension of the police and surveillance system set up at Carlsbad over the whole of Christian Eastern Europe.¹²⁵ This proposal was never taken up.

In reality, the “revolution” in Northern Italy was not an attempt to distract the Austrians from their invasion of Southern Italy but an attempt by local nobles and artisans to force the abdication of the reigning king in favor of his young and (they thought) more nationalistic son Charles Albert. The revolutionaries managed to get the king to abdicate and declared the adoption of the Spanish constitution of 1812, which was a system of constitutional monarchy that had come to symbolize vague notions of “liberty” to liberals and vague notions of subversion to conservatives.¹²⁶ The Greek revolt was the fruit of planning by patriotic Greeks

¹²⁴ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, pp. 668-673.

¹²⁵ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, pp. 672-674.

¹²⁶ Zamoyksi, *Phantom Terror*, Location 4581.

that went back to 1809 when three Greeks living in Odesa founded the secret society the Philiki Eteria - dedicated to freeing Greece from Ottoman domination. One of the founders, a Freemason and clerk named Emmanuel Xanthos, decided to model this organization on the Freemasons.¹²⁷ The coincidental timing of these two uprisings combined with the likely Carbonari connections of the revolutionaries in southern Italy and the quasi-Masonic structure of the Greek revolutionaries seemed to Metternich and others, such as Alexander I of Russia, to point to a grand Europe-wide coordinating conspiracy.

A belief in the existence of this group that had managed to secretly prepare sudden, simultaneous revolutions in three different locations opens the way for a belief that this organization was highly skilled in the art of deception and secret propaganda, able to enact far-flung and effective campaigns to prepare populations for revolution right under the noses of the legitimate powers of Europe. It appears that Metternich made a common error among conspiracy theorists: the less evidence there is for a conspiracy, the more it seems to point to the conspiracy's supreme powers of concealment and deception. In 1824 Metternich personally interrogated Count Federico Confalonieri, a captured leader of the Piedmontese rebels. The interrogation of the emaciated Confalonieri took place in Vienna during his transport from Milan, where he had been convicted, to his prison at the Spielberg fortress in what is today the Czech republic.¹²⁸ According to Confalonieri's memoirs, during the interrogation Metternich was supremely interested in the "Federation of Carbonari" or a "final grade" which coordinated activities internationally. Metternich insisted that they had already received information from other captured Carbonari, and he pressed the idea that the revolt of Northern Italy was part of a great pan-European plot, headquartered in Paris:

"On the very even of the Revolution in Piedmont, in the documents that were taken to Prince Cisterna (a leader of the revolutionaries), and coming from the main center [*centro dirigente* a.k.a. *Comité Directeur*] in Pairs, together with revolutionary plans, a mountain of proposed reforms to the constitutions, with beautiful proclamations already finished, to light Lombard and the rest of Italy on fire."¹²⁹

Confalonieri related that when he told Metternich that all these ideas of some grand deeper conspiracy were false, Metternich replied "You would be very clever if you succeed in persuading me of this."¹³⁰

The interview went on for 11 hours, with Metternich continually offering Confalonieri clemency, reduced punishment, and the strictest secrecy of any information he could provide, presumably about the secret "higher grades" of the vast revolutionary conspiracy. Confalonieri continually insisted he had nothing further to reveal. At one point, perhaps as Metternich grew comfortable when talking to his prisoner or more likely in an attempt to give the prisoner some idea of the kind of people Metternich wanted information on, Metternich said that the revolutionaries like Confalonieri or even more radical people were not really a problem anymore

¹²⁷ David Brewer, *The Greek War of Independence: The Struggle for Freedom and the Birth of Modern Greece*, (Overlook Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, Locations 628-645.

¹²⁸ Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror*, Location 5396.

¹²⁹ Federico Confalonieri, *Memorie e Lettere*, Vol. 1, (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1889), p. 165.

¹³⁰ Confalonieri, p. 167.

outside South America. The real challenge Metternich was worried about (according to Confalonieri) were:

“...so called moderates, the pure so-called liberals, the doctrinal philanthropists, associations for the progress of enlightenment [*associati pel progresso de' lumi*] of universal civilization... These are the men, the opinions, the propaganda that are harmful to governments in quiet times;... Their opinions are golden, and they are listened to and slowly creep, seduce, persuade, and corrupt even those people who abhor the most revolutionary ideas... And so are states secretly and silently mined, and prepared to desire change, new rearrangements, and vaunted regeneration... You have thought of making your apology, and you could help your sentence, if you could teach us something that we do not know already...”¹³¹

This strange interrogation does not seem to be an isolated occurrence. One of the ringleaders of the Russian Decembrist uprising of 1825 Nikolai Turgenev reported a similar incident in his memoirs. According to him after the Decembrist revolt Austrian authorities interrogated Italian prisoners in Spielberg about the uprising, even though they had been in prison for years.¹³²

Metternich's fear of the *Comité Directeur* lasted beyond the 1820s, In 1833 Metternich sent official instructions to the Austrian diplomat stationed in Milan in which he clearly stated the idea of a central, organizing conspiracy that was directing all the agents of “Revolution” throughout Europe, and most obviously in Italy:

“For many years, those who spoke about a *Comité Directeur* working secretly towards universal revolution were met everywhere with incredulity. Today it is demonstrated that this infernal propaganda exists; that it has its center in Paris, and that it is divided into as many sections as there are nations to regenerate. We have seen the works of the Spanish, Belgian, Polish, and German committees; last of all we have discovered the traces of an Oriental section; As to the actions of the Italian committee, it has revealed itself so many times that it cannot be ignored, unless one is blind.”¹³³

The ideology of paranoia

A belief in the Grand Conspiracy Theory explains several of Metternich's positions and his continuing penchant for repression and censorship. He saw himself as leading the defense of civilization against a revolutionary conspiracy that sought to usurp all power via chaos and revolution, cloaked in the rhetoric of liberty or piety. Metternich spelled out who he believed the enemy was and what action was needed in a memo to the Tsar in May 1821 after the congress at Ljubljana: “The clear and precise aim of the factious is one and uniform. It is the overthrow of everything legally existing... The principle which the monarchs must oppose to this plan of universal destruction is the preservation of everything legally existing. The only way to arrive at this end is by allowing no innovations.”¹³⁴ As he moved to the top of the political ladder in Austria, becoming Chancellor of Austria in May of 1821 and then the de-facto leader of the

¹³¹ Confalonieri, p. 174.

¹³² N. Tourgueneff, *Le Russie et les Russes*, Vol. 1, (Paris: Guiraudet and Jouaust, 1847), p. 524.

¹³³ F. A. Gualterio, *Gli Ultimi Rivolgimenti Italiani*, Vol. 2, second edition, (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1852), p. 286.

¹³⁴ *Memoirs of Prince Metternich*, Vol 3, p. 538.

Austrian Empire in many matters and especially foreign policy after the mentally disabled Ferdinand I became emperor in 1835, Metternich consistently opposed constitutionalism in Germany, continued to keep the universities under the threat of state repression, and ensured that the censorship regime was maintained.¹³⁵

Despite his council to the Tsar of “no innovations” Metternich was actually not against reform per-se, only against reforms that could give an advantage to the imaginary *Comité Directeur* or other revolutionaries. He seemed most worried about political reform or any reform of press regulations that would make censorship less effective. He was not like a worried parent who will keep a gate locked because he fears that his child might wander off and get injured, or because he believes the outside world is inherently evil and dangerous. He was like one that imagines that there is a group of men outside the gate who are constantly trying to get in and set the house on fire. This kind of thinking can combine even highly educated and enlightened views with the kind of paranoia that produces a near-permanent state of emergency. This paranoia can eventually lead to a police state, and will prevent the believer from seeing the world as it actually is or making needed reforms that, to the paranoid, appear as opportunities for the conspiracy.

Metternich was in fact a proponent of reforms that improved government administration and that would rob the revolutionary conspiracy of willing followers. He believed that the actual revolutionary agitators were a relatively small group (though incredibly well-resourced and skilled in propaganda) who could only gain a real foothold and effect a regional usurpation if the legitimate rulers alienated the people through poor governance. Rulers should make reforms to actually improve the lives of their subjects, but not in response to popular demands.¹³⁶

In the Papal States, for example, Metternich was a strong supporter of the reform efforts of Cardinal Consalvi to balance the budget of the Papal States, reorganize the police and the army, and adopt new measures in the fields of education and public health, all in the face of strong opposition from more reactionary Papal officials. In fact in mid-1821 after the collapse of the Italian revolutions under Austrian attack the Austrian ambassador to the Papal states told Consalvi that he was “authorized to insist” on reforms that would prevent future upheavals, and that the powers reserved the right to intervene and impose reforms if they believed there was insufficient progress.¹³⁷

In this sense Metternich was not a “reactionary” like the hard-liners in the Vatican, but as a conspiracy theorist he could never allow an opening for the *Comité Directeur*. His behavior may have looked like that of a hyper-reactionary to a contemporary liberal, but it would have been a mistake to think that Metternich deliberately “sabotaged for half a century the onward march of progress.”¹³⁸ Metternich even came up with the phrase “conservative socialist” towards the end of his career to describe his own combination of “conservative” political policies with spending on social welfare (such as in Lombardy in 1814-18) and to contrast his own class-

¹³⁵ Mike Rapport, *1848, Year of Revolution*, (Basic Books, 2009), Kindle Edition, Locations 208, 261-266, 461

¹³⁶ Alan Reinerman, “Metternich and Reform: The Case of the Papal State, 1814-1848,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 42, no. 4, (Dec., 1970) p. 526.

¹³⁷ Reinerman, pp. 537 - 539.

¹³⁸ Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers: From John Adams to Winston Churchill*, (Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 76.

harmonizing “social” values rooted in the organic legitimate relationships between, for example, the king and his subjects with the rapacious, anti-social individualism that he believed would eventually provide an opportunity for revolution.¹³⁹ Metternich dabbled a bit in supporting the establishment of regional representative bodies in the provinces. However, these bodies were never to be granted real power, and were mainly intended, as the scholar Alan Sked wrote, to “delude the provincial nobles that they still had some part to play in local affairs.”¹⁴⁰

In addition to preventing political liberalization in many countries, Metternich’s policies also bankrupted the state. Between 1815 and 1848 40% of Austrian imperial expenditures went to the military and 30% to service state debts, to say nothing of expenditures on the police force and the systems of mail and physical surveillance. One of Metternich’s chief rivals was the Austrian finance minister Franz Anton Kolowrat, who criticized his policies as using the wrong means: “I am an aristocrat by birth and by convictions and completely agree with you that people must strive for conservatism and do everything to achieve it. Yet we differ about means. Your means consist of a forest of bayonets and a fixed adherence to things as they are; to my mind, by following these lines we are playing into the hands of the revolutionaries... Your ways will lead us... not tomorrow or next year - but soon enough - to our ruin.”¹⁴¹ As far as we know Kolowrat never put forward an alternative security policy,¹⁴² but perhaps Franz Kolowrat did not understand Metternich’s belief in the real existence of a massive conspiracy, one that could not be diffused by concessions. Like Barruel or Robison, Metternich would have been extremely wary of playing into the hands of a revolutionary conspiracy by granting political reforms. Metternich believed he was facing an emergency created by a coordinated clandestine enemy, and so he acted in ways that, in the end, may have squandered the Austrian empire’s chances at political reform, not to mention a great deal of money.

The Roman Catholic Church embraces the Grand Conspiracy Theory

Metternich made a major contribution to the spread of his version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, a Europe-wide plot against altar and throne, by influencing the Vatican to spread this idea. At the end of the previous century the support of the Austrian government for Hoffman’s *Wiener Zeitschrift* and German princes to the Eudamonists in the late 18th century demonstrated how a state can spread conspiracy theories through the use of propaganda by funding publications. Metternich’s pressure on the Pope is an example of how a state can also spread these kinds of ideas through influence, as opposed to just expending resources and direct propaganda campaigns. Barruel and Robison had already popularized and spread the Grand Conspiracy Theory across Europe. This section will describe how Metternich pressured the Roman Church to join in and spread it further, specifically through Papal bull *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* that committed the Roman Catholic church to a version of Metternich’s conspiracy theory about the *Comité Directeur*. Metternich ensured that this version of the Grand Conspiracy

¹³⁹ Viereck, pp. 65-67.

¹⁴⁰ Alan Sked, “Explaining the Habsburg Empire, 1830-90,” in *Themes in Modern European History 1830-1890*, Bruce Waller ed. (Routledge, 1990). P. 139.

¹⁴¹ Sked, *Metternich in Austria, An Evaluation*, p. 117

¹⁴² Sked, *Metternich in Austria, An Evaluation*, p. 117

Theory spread through one of the main arteries of Western Civilization and gave it the official sanction of Europe's largest religion.

In 1820 in order to arrange a spiritual attack to accompany the military attack that the Austrians were preparing against the revolution in Naples, Metternich reached out to the Papacy and pressured the Roman Catholic hierarchy to anathematize the Carbonari. This time, in contrast to the communications between them before 1820, Metternich was now the paranoid one while the Papacy was relatively restrained and skeptical. Rome was hesitant to attack the Carbonari and the Neapolitan revolution as heretics, not only because they feared armed retaliation from the Neapolitans, but also because there was no substantial evidence that the Neapolitan revolutionaries were actually heretics, rather than just political opponents of the Vatican's allies.¹⁴³ As the Papal secretary of State Cardinal Consalvi explained to Austrian officials: "as a spiritual ruler, the Holy Father can pronounce ecclesiastical penalties only against those societies whose institution is evidently contrary to the Catholic religion and which openly attack its principles."¹⁴⁴

After Austrian armies marched into Naples to crush the revolt in March 1821 he pressed his case for the anathematization of the Carbonari with renewed vigor, this time getting support from the Prussian, French, and Russian ambassadors to the Holy See. The Vatican still resisted. Finally in early May 1821, after a diligent search, the Austrian diplomat Anton Apponyi presented the Papal Secretary of State with a book that supposedly contained the initiation ceremonies of the Carbonari which "enact the mysteries of the passion of Our Lord in the most impious way... in sum, the whole ceremony is no more than a tissue of blasphemes and insults against all that is most sacred in our religion."¹⁴⁵

Apponyi's presentation of this document had the desired effect. He worked with the Papal secretary of State and the police throughout Italy to find further evidence of blasphemy among the Carbonari. The Austrian government and the Vatican tried to make sure their collaboration in preparing a Papal bull condemning the Carbonari stayed secret, partly to avoid weakening the effect of the denunciation and partly for fear of political reprisals against Roman Catholic officials.¹⁴⁶

Pope Pius VII denounced the Carbonari as a clandestine anti-religious organization on September 13, 1821 in his bull *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo*. He proclaimed anyone associated with the Carbonari, including those who merely read or possessed any "catechisms and books of the Carbonari" automatically excommunicated. Pope Pius VII warned his flock that the Carbonari were merely the latest incarnation of a string of sects, the core of which being the Freemasons, that had plans:

"which had been devised secretly by them against Religion, indeed against civil society... [the Carbonari] simulate a singular respect and a certain extraordinary zeal toward the Catholic Religion and toward the Person and Doctrine of Jesus Christ Our Savior, Whom at times they also impiously dare to call the Rector and great Teacher of this society. But these ways of speaking, which are seen to be more slippery than oil, are nothing other than darts employed by crafty men, who come

¹⁴³ Alan Reinerman, "Metternich and the Papal Condemnation of the 'Carbonari', 1821," in *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 54, no. 1 (April, 1968) pp. 58-59.

¹⁴⁴ Reinerman pp. 58-59.

¹⁴⁵ Reinerman pp. 58-59.

¹⁴⁶ Reinerman pp. 63-64.

in sheep's clothing but are ravenous wolves inside, for more securely wounding the too little cautious."¹⁴⁷

The bull was clearly a form of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. It alleged that the conspirators were secretly anti-religious, and were actively plotting against the Church and all governments, indeed against society itself. The Carbonari was just this old anti-Christian anti-society anti-legitimate government Freemasonry in a new disguise. Any signs to the contrary were just camouflage.

The two previous papal bulls condemning Freemasonry by Clement XII (1738) and Benedict XIV (1751) mainly objected to the secrecy of Masonic organizations and the "strong suspicion" that these organizations were involved in depravity, as well as the fact that men of different faiths mixed freely during Masonic meetings. The 1738 bull alluded in passing to "serious damages, which generally are inflicted not only on the tranquility of the temporal State, but also on the spiritual health of souls from societies and associations of this kind..."¹⁴⁸ but did not specify what the Freemasons were up to under their veil of secrecy. The 1751 bull *Providas Romanorum Pontificum* said that these societies could be damaging to the "tranquility of the temporal Republic"¹⁴⁹ but the Pope again left open the question of to what exactly the Masons were up to by citing "other just and reasonable causes known to ourselves," that merited the denunciation. However, even after these bans Roman Catholics over most of Europe and America continued to join lodges, and the ban was mostly ignored or considered not "received" by local churches.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, these bulls were both specifically aimed at Freemasons, and not a more explicitly political organization like the Carbonari. Neither of them used the Grand Conspiracy Theory to justify the denunciation of the Freemasons. After *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* the Roman Catholic Church was officially spreading the idea of a clandestine anti-Christian network that masqueraded as patriotic or liberal.

The main charge leveled against the Carbonari in *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* was that they secretly taught vice while pretending to teach virtue, and above all that they sanctioned disobedience to governing authorities and even killing kings as a form of tyrannicide: "...that society teaches that it is allowed, once revolts have been provoked, to deprive of their power kings and other rulers, whom most unjustly it dares indiscriminately to call tyrants."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Translation from *The Catholic Mass*, "Infallible Papal Apostolic Constitution "Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo" Condemnation of the Carbonari The Offspring of the Freemasons Automatic Excommunication Of Those Who Join the Carbonari Thursday, September 13, 1821," available at <http://www.traditionalcatholicmass.com/home-m-423.html> accessed January 15, 2017. Original document published as Pius VII Papa, *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo*, This quote at pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁸ Papal Encyclicals Online, *Quo Graviora, Apostolic Constitution of Pope Leo XII*, March 12, 1826, available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo12/l12quogr.htm>, accessed January 17, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, *Providas Romanorum ON FREEMASONRY Benedetto XIV*, available at <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/anti-masonry/papal/providas.html>, accessed January 17, 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism, Poland, 1933 - 1939*, (Routledge, 2004) p. 47

¹⁵¹ Translation from *The Catholic Mass*, "Infallible Papal Apostolic Constitution "Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo" Condemnation of the Carbonari The Offspring of the Freemasons Automatic Excommunication Of Those Who Join the Carbonari Thursday, September 13, 1821," available at <http://www.traditionalcatholicmass.com/home-m-423.html> accessed January 15, 2017. Original document published as Pius VII Papa, *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo*, This quote at p. 8.

The Vatican sent a version of *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* to Metternich in advance for his approval. Metternich was very pleased with the document saying it was “perfectly suited to the purpose for which it is intended” and “it will make a profound impression everywhere, but above all in Italy, where this is most desirable... It will not, I hope, be less useful to the Temporal Power, which can henceforth act with still greater severity against a class of criminals so dangerous that the Church itself has expelled them...”¹⁵² The Austrian government made sure the bull was well-publicized in Italy. Metternich had initially planned to have Austrian diplomats inform each court in Italy about the new bull. In the end it was decided that this would make the influence of the Austrian government on the bull too obvious. Instead papal legates made the presentation instead, supported by their Austrian colleagues.¹⁵³ Rumors that the Austrians had been behind the bull quickly followed its publication, and Italian patriots were embittered by the seeming pliancy of the Papacy in favor of a foreign emperor.¹⁵⁴

Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo was the first of a series of Roman Catholic pronouncements against the “sects” (Masonic and associated movements) which were believed to be clandestinely plotting the overthrow of the Church and civil society. The accusations in *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* were reiterated in the 1826 apostolic constitution *Quo Graviora*, which also added a mention that the universities were the chief recruiting ground of one branch of this sect.¹⁵⁵ Mirroring Metternich’s hatred of Bible societies and echoing the 1816 bull against Bible societies, the subsequent encyclical issued against the coalition of anti-religious and anti-social secret societies *Traditi Humiliati* (1829) added a section decrying those who “...print the Bibles in the vernacular and, absorbing an incredible expense, offer them free even to the uneducated. Furthermore, the Bibles are rarely without perverse little inserts to insure that the reader imbibes their lethal poison instead of the saving water of salvation.”¹⁵⁶ This version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory has survived up to the present day, with many devout Roman Catholics still believing in this clandestine, Masonic, multi-generational plot that works to usurp kings and tear down the Church under the cover of promoting freedom and the values of the Enlightenment.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Metternich’s belief that he was combating a massive conspiracy influenced his own policies, which in turn influenced German law and even the course of European diplomatic history. He was probably influenced by the stories about the Tugendbund as well as by

¹⁵² Reinerman p. 65.

¹⁵³ Reinerman p. 66.

¹⁵⁴ Reinerman p. 66.

¹⁵⁵ Papal Encyclicals Online, *Quo Graviora, Apostolic Constitution of Pope Leo XII*, March 12, 1826, available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo12/l12quogr.htm>, accessed January 15, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ EWTN, “TRADITI HUMILITATI (On His Program For The Pontificate) Pope Pius VIII Encyclical Promulgated 24 May 1829” available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20030201235606/http://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/p8tradit.htm>, accessed January 15, 2017

¹⁵⁷ For a recent example of the persistence of this grand conspiracy theory of the Freemasons spreading apostasy see the online video “FBI Freemasonry” (posted September 26, 2013) produced by the US Roman Catholic news outlet “Church Militant” which regurgitates the accusations of Barruel and subsequent Roman Catholic conspiracy theorists. Available at <https://youtu.be/86GrvQRThSk>. Accessed April 8, 2019.

medieval Islamic conspiracy-theory propaganda, which had been fused by Metternich's subordinate Hammer-Purgstall onto the Grand Conspiracy Theory earlier spread by Hoffman, Barruel, and Robison.

Metternich's change between 1817 and 1830 offers a very well-documented case of the effect that a belief in the Grand Conspiracy theory can have on policy when it is believed by the powerful. Metternich extended the reach of the police, stepped up censorship, tamped down on universities, and centralized power as much as he could in order to combat the *Comité Directeur* but still supported "enlightened" non-political reforms which he saw as depriving the conspiracy of opportunities.

In addition to the policies he supported and his decisions concerning war and diplomacy in Europe, Metternich also affected history by pressuring the Papacy to endorse his version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory - of the Carbonari/Freemason plot. If the propaganda and conspiracy-theorists of the previous generation had popularized the idea across Europe of a Grand Conspiracy Theory, a cabal of secret atheists plotting to usurp power using enlightenment ideas as weapons and camouflage, by getting the Roman Catholic Church to publicly endorse these ideas Metternich injected this conspiracy theory into the bloodstream of Western Civilization.

Coda: The Salais-Soglio case - the first conspiracist counter-conspiracy?

While Metternich stood at the pinnacle of the Austrian government constantly warning against revolutionaries infiltrating governments and planning usurpations, he never actually accused another "legitimate" government of being under the control of the conspiracy, certainly not the Austrian government. However, if one accepts the idea of a powerful conspiracy with amazing powers of influence and deception, why would such a conspiracy not try to usurp a state via "traditional" courtly deception, manipulating a king or an emperor by infiltrating his court and his bureaucracy, a usurpation by proxy like the one portrayed in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. If one believes that a massive conspiracy has taken control of the government and the security services in addition to the press, then one way to deal with it is to organize clandestine networks to fight back, using propaganda and violence. The belief in the Grand Conspiracy Theory resulted in the formation of a conspiratorial counter-conspiracy during the time of Metternich. It is briefly dealt with here for the sake of chronological consistency.

In early 1817 the Austrian police detected a plot to start a rebellion in the Austrian Alpine provinces of Tyrol and Vorarlberg and join them to Switzerland. The plotters were based out of the neighboring Swiss canton of Grisons and led by a leader of the Canton, the Count Johann von Salis-Soglio. However, this was not a liberal plot against a monarchy, but an attempt by conspiracy theorists to conduct a counter-revolution against what they believed was a secret usurpation. The Count Salis-Soglio was deeply anti-Enlightenment, but he had also become convinced that the Austrian government had been infiltrated by the Illuminati. His brother the Anglo-swiss British officer Jerome, the 4th Count of Salis-Soglio was also involved in the plot.¹⁵⁸

Metternich was probably surprised by his police reports of a plot from the Salis-Soglio brothers, and he initially disbelieved them and suggested that the police continue their

¹⁵⁸ Emerson, p. 103.

investigation discreetly.¹⁵⁹ Metternich had been involved with Johann von Salis-Soglio in 1813, when Johann had organized a group of Swiss patricians in communication with Metternich called the “Waldshut committee” that had supported the Austrian invasion of Switzerland during the war of the 6th coalition, the conflict that ended with the first fall of Napoleon.¹⁶⁰ The 1817 Salis-Soglio plot was probably partially inspired by another event during the Napoleonic wars: the Tyrolian uprising of 1809, when groups of Alpine patriots loyal to the Austrian Emperor and in contact with the Austrian government rose up behind Napoleon’s army and managed to hold out against Bavarian troops for several months (at this time Bavaria was an ally of Napoleon.)¹⁶¹ The fate of the rebels was sealed by Napoleon’s victory over Austria at the battle of Wagram (July 5th and 6th, 1809) which forced Austria to sue for peace.

In early 1819 the Austrian police intercepted letters indicating that Jerome von Salis-Soglio was soon to return to Grisons and put the plot into action. Wisely, Metternich had an Austrian Field Marshal discreetly approach the Salis-Soglio brothers and tell them that the Austrians knew everything. Jerome confessed and promised to never dabble in inciting rebellion again. Metternich forgave the brothers and even suggested that they be recruited once more to work for the Austrian Empire.¹⁶²

We only know about this curious event through the Austrian archives, as the conspirators never were able to do anything other than plan. It took merely a warning and some kindness to return them to the fold. However, this is the first incidence of what will become a pattern in the histories examined in this thesis: a group of believers in the Grand Conspiracy Theory begins to believe that a state, even a “reactionary” or very conservative state, has in fact been secretly usurped by the conspiracy, and that the state in question is therefore illegitimate and evil. The more “reactionary” a state seems, the more all-controlling the police are, and the more personal politics are, the more this might add to the fears of true believers that their government has been secretly usurped.

To add to the historical irony, the conspiracy theory that the Salis-Soglio brothers believed in had been clandestinely spread earlier by the government they were planning to attack - in Hoffman’s *Wiener Zeitschrift* sponsored by Emperor Leopold II. This will be seen again most directly in the late 20th and early 21st century, when conservative Sunni or Arab Nationalist governments were challenged by groups of Islamic extremists who believed their rulers were secretly illegitimate puppets of the “Zionists and imperialists.” Many of these governments had pushed conspiratorial propaganda about the all-pervasiveness of a global Zionist conspiracy capable of amazing feats of deception and organization. We shall examine this phenomenon more in chapter 12.

¹⁵⁹ Emerson, p. 103.

¹⁶⁰ Wilhelm Oechsli, *History of Switzerland, 1499-1914*, Eden and Cedar Paul trans., (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 362.

¹⁶¹ John H. Gill, *With Eagles to Glory: Napoleon and his German Allies in the 1809 Campaign*, (Frontline Books, 2011), Second Edition, pp. 60 - 61, 323-326.

¹⁶² Emerson, pp, 116-117.