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# Paris and Helen by Jacques Louis David: Choice and Judgment on the Eve of the French Revolution

Yvonne Korshak

*David's Paris and Helen has received little attention, largely because it seems anomalously unphilosophical and "feminine" in the context of the artist's other stoic, "virile," prerevolutionary paintings. This study identifies a moralizing point of view in Paris and Helen congruent with David's other prerevolutionary works and argues that it includes specific, antimonarchical references and is concerned with ideas of bondage and freedom. The imagery and themes of the painting, viewed in the context of the period, support the view of political and protorevolutionary content in the work.*

In the years leading to the outbreak of the French Revolution, Jacques-Louis David painted a series of austere, "masculine" paintings: *The Oath of the Horatii* (Fig. 1), *The Death of Socrates* (Fig. 2) and *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (Fig. 3). In the context of such works, *Paris and Helen* (Fig. 4), with its amorous subject and voluptuous mood and setting, has seemed in every way an anomaly. Although the precise meanings and political significance of the "austere" paintings are controversial,<sup>1</sup> their moralizing content has not been questioned. The *Horatii*, *Socrates*, and *Brutus* deal with masculine heroes engaged in high-minded self-sacrifice for transcendent values of patriotism and conscience, and they have been taken to represent the true spirit of David in those years of political unrest. *Paris and Helen*, by contrast, depicts a scene of erotic self-indulgence; because the painting has seemed incongruous with the main body of David's work, it has been largely ignored, dismissed as "residual rococo," or relegated to the level of an archaeologizing curiosity.<sup>2</sup> *Paris and Helen*, however, is as rich in ideas and moral content as David's other great paintings. The representa-

tion of the Judgment of Paris on the sound box of the lyre (Fig. 5) states its moral theme: choice and judgment. In Paris' choice of love over wisdom and power, David found a metaphor for the French monarchy's narcissism and evasion of duty on the eve of the French Revolution; and in his representation of the myth, he expressed ideas of liberty symbolically.

*Paris and Helen* has not figured in the controversy over David's prerevolutionary politics, but a recent commentary has established a pertinent ironic content for the painting. Citing its commission by the Comte d'Artois, the libertine younger brother of Louis XVI, Regis Michel suggests that the adulterous pair alludes to the count and his lover, the Vicomtesse de Polastron, of Marie Antoinette's circle.<sup>3</sup> In Michel's view, the discarded weapons of Paris may refer to an aristocracy no longer fulfilling its military role, and the luxurious setting may reflect d'Artois' scandalously expensive pleasure retreat, Bagatelle.

David may have taken up the commission of *Paris and Helen* as a mildly ironic *sujet galant*, but he did not finish the work in that spirit. Had the painting been completed,

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<sup>1</sup> Attributing antimonarchical content to *Paris and Helen* is consistent with the prevailing view of David's early progressivism. Guided by the importance of *Brutus* as a republican symbol during the Revolution, and by David's involvement in revolutionary events, critics have often viewed that work as a political statement and even, at times, as the "coup d'état" that the de Goncourts saw in it (Edmund and Jules de Goncourt, *Histoire de la société française pendant la Révolution*, Paris, 1864, 44). L.D. Ettlinger's challenge to this position ("Jacques Louis David and Roman Virtue," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, cxv, 1967, 105-23) led to several reassessments that dismissed the importance of politics in David's prerevolutionary paintings. See Hugh Honour, *Neo-classicism*, Harmondsworth, 1968, 71-75, 82; Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David*, New York, 1980, 87-98; and cf. Philippe Bordes, *Le serment du Jeu de Paume de Jacques Louis David*, Paris, 1983, 17-26. Herbert, 49-65, 135f., n. 31, meticulously analyzes parallels between the Brutus legend and contemporary political concerns, and reserves judgment on the artist's purpose.

Recently, T.E. Crow located the artist's radicalism in "the defiance of

convention, the asperities, tenseness, austerity, and awkwardness" of the *Horatii* ("The Oath of the Horatii in 1785," *Art History*, 1, 1978, 424-71, and *idem*, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven, 1985, chap. 7). Also see Albert Boime, "Marmontel's *Bélisaire* and the Pre-Revolutionary Progressivism of David," *Art History*, 111, 1980, 81-101; and Thomas Puttfarcken, "David's *Brutus* and Theories of Pictorial Unity in France," *Art History*, 1v, 1981, 290-304. D.L. Dowd describes David's activities during the revolution: *Pageant Master of the Republic. Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution*, Lincoln, NE, 1948; also see Claude Cosneau, "Un grand projet de J.-L. David (1789-1790), L'art et la Révolution à Nantes," *La revue du Louvre et des Musées de France*, xxxiii, 1983, 255-63.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Saunier, *Louis David*, Paris, 1928, 36. Antoine Schnapper, *David*, transl. Helga Harrison, New York, 1980, 86.

<sup>3</sup> *David e Roma*, 144f., 152f. The terms of the commission have not survived; d'Artois' patronage of the painting is known from correspondence about its exhibition at the Salon of 1789 and the embarrassment that the association with the count's name had become by that time. Cf. David, 637f.

as anticipated, for the Salon of 1787, it would have hung as a pendant, and moral antithesis, to the stoic *Death of Socrates*.<sup>4</sup> But the two years in which *Paris and Helen* was delayed saw the crystallization of political discontents that gave rise to the early revolutionary events of the spring and summer of 1789. By the time the painting was completed and exhibited in the Salon of 1789, the oath of the Jeu de Paume had been sworn, the Bastille had fallen, the National Assembly had elected a mayor of Paris, Lafayette had organized the National Guard, the king had donned the cockade, and d'Artois had fled. It was judged safe to exhibit *Paris and Helen* only with all indications suppressed of the hated count's patronage.

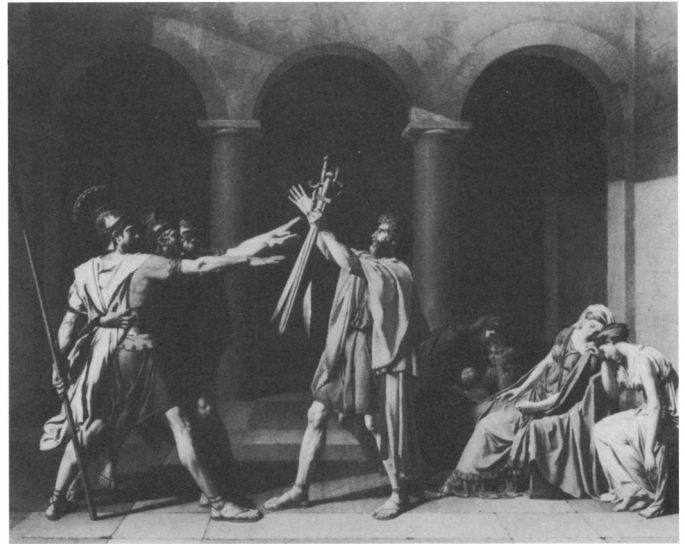
Against the background of these developments, the monarchy was mired in its private, self-indulgent world, seemingly indifferent to the financial and sexual scandals that threatened it. The opposition had learned not merely to bemoan those scandals, but to politicize them: the sins, particularly those real and supposed of Marie Antoinette, had become part of the arsenal of freedom. As a parliamentary opponent remarked about *l'affaire du collier*, the criminal intrigue involving the queen, Cardinal Rohan, and a diamond necklace: "Grande et heureuse affaire! Un cardinal escroc, la reine impliquée dans une affaire de faux! . . . quel triomphe pour les idées de la liberté! Quelle importance pour le parlement!"<sup>5</sup>

Public opinion accused the queen and the Comte d'Artois of bleeding the treasury to pay for their personal extravagances,<sup>6</sup> and of sexual debauchery, most often with one another, in an ignoble adulterous royal triangle that formed the subject of numerous widely circulated scandal sheets. One of the best known was *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette* (1779), a pornographic poem recounting the sexual relationship of d'Artois and the queen and describing the king's cuckolded impotence. The pamphlet was con-

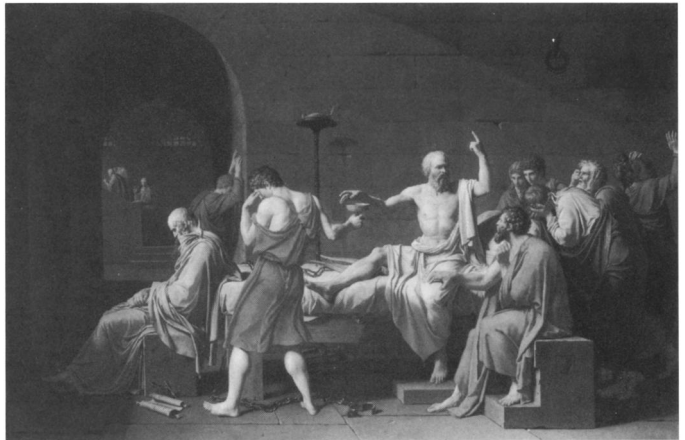
<sup>4</sup> The absence of *Paris and Helen* from the Salon of 1787, where it was anticipated, was attributed at the time to an ailment David suffered: "Le public apprendra avec bien des regrets, qu'une longue maladie de ce grand Artiste, l'a empêché de finir un autre Tableau, dont la composition gracieuse et galante auroit contrasté avec la sévérité de celui de Socrate; c'est *Pâris et Hélène*" (*L'ami des artistes*, Paris, 1787, 37, Deloynes, xv, no. 379; D. and G. Wildenstein, *Documents complémentaires au catalogue de l'oeuvre de Louis David*, Paris, 1973, 189). Also see David, 45f.

<sup>5</sup> "A big and lucky case! A swindler of a cardinal, the queen involved in a fraudulent business . . . what a triumph for the ideas of liberty! . . . What importance for the parliament!"; Freteau de Saint-Just, a member of the parliamentary opposition to the king, quoted in Frantz Funck-Brentano, *L'affaire du collier, d'après de nouveaux documents*, Paris, 1901, 245.

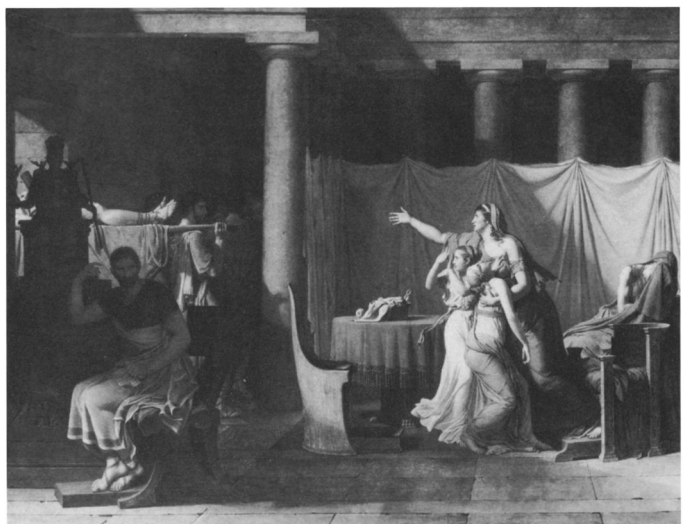
<sup>6</sup> In addition to spending vast amounts on the well-known parties, theatricals, jewels, and clothes, both Marie Antoinette and the Comte d'Artois were heavily involved in lavish architectural and decorative projects, d'Artois at Bagatelle and Marie Antoinette at the Trianons and at her new palace of St.-Cloud. Jeanne Louise Henriette Campan, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1823, 1, 273ff., describes the immediate, hostile reaction in the populace to the queen's obtaining ownership of St.-Cloud, a royal palace given to her by Louis XVI, and to her assumption of the king's prerogative by affixing there the words "De par la Reine."



1 David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, Salon of 1787. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Lauros-Giraudon/Art Resource)



2 David, *The Death of Socrates*, Salon of 1787. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wolfe Fund, 1931 (photo: Museum)



3 David, *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, Salon of 1789. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Musées Nationaux)



4 David, *Paris and Helen*, Salon of 1789. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Alinari/Art Resource)

tinually confiscated by the king and continually reprinted.<sup>7</sup> In an illustration for the bitter and satirical supplement to the *Mémoires de Mme de la Motte* (Fig. 6), the queen is pictured in a royal setting, identified by the *fleur de lys*, welcoming the advanced erotic play of the Comte d'Artois, while the king's minister, Maurepas, spies on them from

<sup>7</sup> *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette précédés de l'Autrichienne en goquettes*, pièces révolutionnaires réimprimées textuellement sur les éditions originales de 1779 et de 1789 avec une note bibliographe, Strasbourg, 1871. The king tried repeatedly to confiscate *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette*; he finally succeeded in destroying all but two copies that survived the Revolution, at a cost to himself of more than 17,400 livres. The two surviving examples are listed in *Catalogue de la Collection Révolutionnaire formée par seu M. Le Marquis d'A\*\*\** [Albon], no. 323 (with two illustrations) and no. 324; one illustration is of Marie Antoinette tête-à-tête with the Comte d'Artois, the other of Louis XVI before the Faculty of Medicine, presumably for his impotence. Cf. Maurice Tourneux, *Marie-Antoinette devant l'histoire*, Paris, 1895, no. 76.



5 David, *Paris and Helen*, detail of lyre and of Cupid and Psyche

the half-open door.<sup>8</sup> Like that other foreign princess, Helen of Troy, Marie Antoinette was the perceived cause of current woes; the French, while lamenting the weakness of the king, attributed their miseries to the queen. These sentiments found expression in such works as the *Ode à la Reine* (1789):

Monstre échappé de Germanie  
Le désastre de nos climats,  
Jusqu'à quand contre ma patrie  
Commetras-tu tes attentats?  
Approche, femme détestable,  
Regarde l'abîme effroyable  
Où tes crimes nous ont plongés.<sup>9</sup>

While the Judgment of Paris had often been a subject of art, David is unique in representing Paris and Helen together in their bedroom. The intimate scene probably reflects the painting's origin as a celebration of d'Artois' love affair, but the choice of this episode, from the later unfolding of the myth, allowed David to go beyond the depiction of bad judgment to an exploration of its consequences. Paris had taken Helen from her husband, Menelaus, and eloped with her to Troy, precipitating the Trojan War. The sequence of pertinent events, in which Paris is characterized as a weakling and a coward, is described in Homer's *Iliad* (III. 369-83) and illustrated in a suite of engravings contemporary with David's painting (Fig. 7).<sup>10</sup> Paris is losing in hand-to-hand combat with Menelaus, who drags him ignominiously by his helmet's crest. Venus miraculously appears to rescue her favorite from the fray, and she transports him to his "perfumed" bedcham-

ber, where Helen awaits him.<sup>11</sup> It is this amorous tête-à-tête that David depicts in the painting. In considering *Paris and Helen*, it is worth keeping in mind that, while Paris was enjoying himself erotically inside the palace, his countrymen were engaged in a bitter conflict outside.

### The Setting

Specific elements of the painting support the view that it includes antimonarchical reference and libertarian content. In David's works, the architecture is congruent with the theme, as in the *Horatii*, where the virile action is set against the "masculine" Doric order. In *Paris and Helen*, a painting about love, the background architecture is in the Ionic order, which, in the Vitruvian tradition, was thought of as feminine,<sup>12</sup> a quality underlined by the four caryatids. These, with their entablature, are a direct quotation from the Tribune des Caryatides from the Salle des Cents Suisses (Fig. 8), designed by Jean Goujon for the Louvre Palace in the sixteenth century and known today as the Salle des Caryatides.<sup>13</sup> The use of a Renaissance architectural background in a *mise-en-scène* otherwise based on classical antiquity is a "singulier anachronisme"<sup>14</sup> that offers an insight into the artist's purpose. By furnishing the lovers with the caryatid tribune for their bedroom, David provides them with a French royal palace as a background for their affair.<sup>15</sup>

While maintaining an approximately authentic classical decor, David subtly introduces further references to royalty. Helen is dressed in a Greek manner: over a white gown of thin material, like a chiton, she wears a heavier red cloak, a himation. The red cloak is bordered by a well-known classical pattern, the lotus and palmette. The border on the underdress, however, is not found among classical deco-

<sup>8</sup> From *La Reine dévoilée ou Supplément aux mémoires de Mme. de la comtesse de valois de la Motte*, first published in 1788, here illustrated after Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection de Vinck, [vii], no. 1131, from the reprinted London edition of 1793. Madame de la Motte, punished by branding and imprisonment for her conspiratorial role in *l'affaire du collier*, escaped to London. The engraving illustrates the account on p. 55: "Un jour qu'il [Maurepas] se rendoit chez la Reine pour lui rendre compte d'une grace qu'il avoit accordée à sa sollicitation, il entra dans l'appartement sans se faire annoncer. Il recule d'horreur et d'effroi: il voit la fille de Césars, la Reine de France dans les bras incestueux de son frère, du corrompu d'Artois."

<sup>9</sup> "Monster escaped from Germany, the disaster of our region, for how long will you be perpetrating your outrages against my country? Come close, hateful woman, behold the dreadful abyss into which your crimes have plunged us"; first lines of *Ode à la Reine*, Villefranche, Imprimerie de la Liberté, 1789, quoted in Hector Fleischmann, *Marie-Antoinette libertine*, Paris, 1911, 329. The poem was also published as *La Harpé*; see Henri d'Almeras, *Marie-Antoinette et les pamphlets royalistes et révolutionnaires*, Paris, n.d., 342f.

The perception of a wicked Marie Antoinette controlling the king is expressed succinctly in the following quatrain from *L'Autrichienne en gouquettes* (as in n. 7):

Sur le dos d'un monarque humain,  
Je vois la mère des vices,  
Plonger dans d'affreuses délices  
Un Prince polisson, une reine catin.

<sup>10</sup> *Suite de cinquantes Estampes destinées à orner les Editions d'Homère, gravée d'après les Dessins de M. Mariller, par les soins de M. Ponce, graveur ordinaire du Cabinet de Msr. Comte d'Artois*, Paris, 1786, now

in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Réserve des Estampes. The publication was announced in the *Mercure de France*, Saturday, 30 December 1786, 238.

<sup>11</sup> In her commentary accompanying her translation of the *Iliad*, Anne Lefèvre Dacier notes, "[Toute parfumée des parfums les plus exquis]. . . C'est ainsi qu'Homère peint la chambre d'un prince moins propre à la guerre qu'à l'amour. On ne sent point ces parfums dans la tente d'Achille" (*L'Iliade d'Homère*, Paris, 1756, 175, notes on Book III). The invidious comparison with the heroic Achilles is often made; the incense burner on the right of David's painting may refer to the perfuming of the room. Horace, *Odes*, I. 15. 13-16, gives Paris a cithara in his bedroom.

<sup>12</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, transl. Frank Granger, London, 1970, Book IV, chap. 1, 206ff.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Aulanier, *La Salle des Caryatides*, Paris, 1957, 14-20.

<sup>14</sup> P.J.B. Chaussard, *Pausanias français, État des arts du dessin en France à l'ouverture du XIX siècle, Salon de 1806*, Paris, 1806, 157. Charles Picard, noting the "Exactitude archéologique très poussée" in *Paris and Helen*, comments, "Mais qui se fût attendu à voir les Caryatides de J. Goujon utilisées au fond du thalamos troyen de Pâris et d'Hélène?" (*Revue archéologique*, VII, 1936, 247). Cf. René Verbraken, *Jacques-Louis David jugé par ses contemporains et par la postérité*, Paris, 1973, 86, n. 1, and 189, n. 273.

<sup>15</sup> The Caryatid Tribune was used by Ingres, David's pupil, in his painting *Don Pedro, ambassadeur d'Espagne en France, rencontre dans la galerie de Fontainebleau l'épée de Henry IV* (Hajdan Mustad Collection, Oslo, exhibited Salon of 1814, illustrated in Aulanier, as in n. 13, pl. 14) to set the scene at Fontainebleau.



6 Satirical aquatint of Marie Antoinette and the Comte d'Artois with Maurepas looking on, from *La Reine dévoilée ou Supplément aux Mémoires de Mme de la comtesse de valois de la Motte*, 1788, repr. 1793. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, De Vinck 1131 (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)



7 *Menelaus, Paris and Venus*, from a suite of engravings of Homer's *Iliad* by N. Ponce after C.P. Mariller, 1786. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)

rative motifs. Along the upper and lower edges of the garment, painted in gold on white, is a series of *fleurs de lys* (Fig. 9). The same pattern can also be seen on the upper and lower edges of Helen's undergarment in the close studio copy of the *Paris and Helen* (Figs. 10, 11). Through the *fleur de lys* border of Helen's gown, David forges a symbolic link between the French queen and the mythic paradigm of adultery and moral laxity.

The *fleur de lys* also appears in *Brutus*, as the border pattern of the fabric in the women's sewing basket (Fig. 12). Here again the motif is in a central and highly lit passage of the painting, but, simply decorating the edge of a piece of cloth, it has escaped observation.<sup>16</sup> Its meaning also derives from an ancient story. Brutus was a republican, but his wife and her family were royalists, and it was they who had drawn the sons of Brutus into the antirepublican con-

spiracy. The mother and her daughters portray feminine grief, but their sewing basket, with its royalist emblem, conveys their complicity. In both *Brutus* and *Paris and Helen*, David uses the *fleur de lys* as a signifying motif, to link an ancient royalist conspiracy in the former, and an ancient debauchery in the latter, with analogous events and persons of his contemporary world.

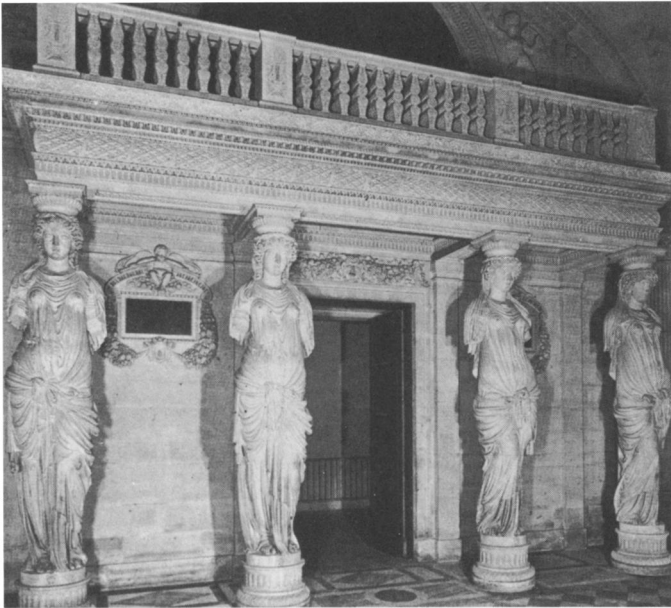
The archaeological references in *Paris and Helen*<sup>17</sup> not only create the ambiance of an ancient setting, but also represent a wanton and adulterous love within the context of other kinds of love and other choices. The lyre of Paris had a legendary history as a vile object: in the *Iliad* it is the target of Hector's mockery (*Iliad* III. 54f.); Alexander the Great held it in such disdain that, while touring Troy, he refused to look at it, admiring instead the lyre of the heroic Achilles.<sup>18</sup> David decorated Paris' lyre with a vi-

<sup>16</sup> I am very grateful to Irma Jaffe who first pointed out to me the *fleurs de lys* in *Brutus*.

<sup>17</sup> The archaeological references are analyzed in Coche de la Ferté and Guey; also see B.H. Polak, "De Invloed van enige Monumenten der Oudheid op het Classicisme van David, Ingres en Delacroix," *Nederlandsch Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, II, 1948-49, 287-315.

<sup>18</sup> Dacier in her commentary on *Iliad* III (as in n. 11), 223: "Achille n'avoit

une lyre que pour chanter les grands actions des héros, & Pâris ne chantoit que les amours sur la sienne . . . l'histoire nous apprend qu'Alexandre étant à Ilion . . . refusa de voir la lyre de Pâris qu'on lui présentait. . . . Il préféreroit avec raison la lyre sur laquelle ce héros [Achilles] chantoit les exploits des grands capitaines, à cette lyre molle sur laquelle cet efféminé [Paris] ne chantoit . . . que des chansons de débauches & propres à prendre les femmes, & à les chaumer."



8 Jean Goujon, Caryatid Tribune. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: Musées Nationaux)



10 Atelier of David, *Paris and Helen*, 1789. Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs (photo: museum)

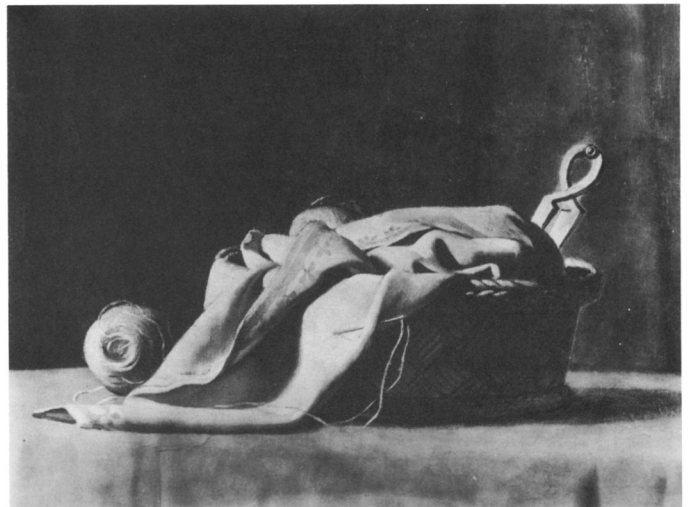


9 *Paris and Helen*, detail of drapery



11 Detail of Fig. 10.

gnette of the Judgment of Paris, for which a pseudo-antique cameo has been suggested as a source.<sup>19</sup> At the left of the scene is a statue of Venus, holding the apple won through Paris' judgment,<sup>20</sup> and modeled on an antique sculpture type that alludes to Victorious Venus. Paris' bow and arrows in a quiver, hung trophy-like on the column beneath her, serve a double function: they recall the arrows of love shot by Cupid, as well as Paris' ignominious return from the battle. In David's early masterpiece *Andromache Mourning Hector* (Fig. 13), the weapons set aside remind one that Hector died dutifully in battle; here they emphasize that Paris is



12 David, *Brutus*, detail of sewing basket. (photo: Giraudon/Art Resource)

<sup>19</sup> The cameo is discussed and illustrated by Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 151f. and n. 1, fig. 15. Among many antique figures that resemble Paris, Polak (as in n. 17), 294ff., followed by Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 135ff., notes the plausible model of a male seated like Paris and wearing a Phrygian cap (but not holding a lyre) on a vase from the Hamilton Collection that David would have known.

<sup>20</sup> Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 144ff., figs. 8-9.



13 David, *Andromache Mourning Hector*, Salon of 1783. Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts, on loan to the Musée du Louvre (photo: Ecole des Beaux-Arts)

<sup>21</sup> In *Andromache*, the dark back curtain rises into four knots, giving the impression of four draped mourning women like a silent grieving chorus, congruent with the funereal scene. One wonders whether David saw in the four caryatids a sensual antithesis. Three of the caryatids are covered up to the neck, almost like women in bed covered by blankets, and the fourth is uncovered to reveal her voluptuous form. The sensually suggestive knot designed by Jean Goujon is over the pubic area. The visual antithesis is interesting, but it is difficult to ascertain the artist's intention; however, the fact that in *Paris and Helen* the background drapery dips as if to point to Helen's breast, emphasized by the slipping gown, suggests that the artist may have been thinking along these lines.

<sup>22</sup> Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 147-50, related the woman in David's painting to the veiled bride on the Campana plaque in Fig. 15, which David could have seen illustrated in Marchese G. Pietro Campana, *Antiche opere in plastica*, Rome, 1851, II, pl. 60, "Nozze di Peleo e Teti."

<sup>23</sup> Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 142ff. and figs. 6-7. Bernard Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, Paris, 1722, I, Pt. 1, 192, takes up the spiritual meaning of winged Psyche and illustrates winged Cupid and Psyche, pl. cxx, as does Joseph Spence, *Polymetis: or, an enquiry concerning the agreement between the works of the Roman poets, and the remains of the antient [sic] artists*, London, 1747, pl. 6, no. 5. Contemporary with David, winged Cupid and Psyche, probably derived from Montfaucon, appear in an illustration by Mariller for *La Reine Fantasque*, Paris, 1782, I, 43.

<sup>24</sup> The untidy bed for Paris and Helen was probably derived from representations of the adulterous Mars and Venus, as in *Parnassus* by Mantegna, acquired by Cardinal de Richelieu for his Chateau de Plessis, and

evading his duty.<sup>21</sup>

On the base of the column of Venus' statue, illusionistically depicted as if in low relief, is a figure of a woman who, touching the veil that covers her head (Fig. 14), is an image of chaste conjugal love (cf. Fig. 15).<sup>22</sup> At the right side of the picture, on a pedestal with a triumphal wreath, is a pair of embracing lovers, Cupid and Psyche (Fig. 5), probably derived from the well-known sculpture in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, which does not, however, show them winged.<sup>23</sup> The love of Cupid and Psyche is traditionally an expression of spiritual love, and the addition of wings on the pair heightens the spiritual connotation. Thus, David has flanked Paris and Helen with two kinds of "good" love, chaste and spiritual. The image of love that is carved on their untidy bed,<sup>24</sup> on the other hand, is that of Leda and the Swan (Fig. 16; cf. Fig. 17), the union between a woman and the disguised Jupiter that has often connoted animal love, or lust.<sup>25</sup> The fruit of their union was Helen, as well as the Dioscuri, whose double-star symbol appears on the bed frame beneath Leda, flanking Jupiter's thunderbolt. By identifying Paris and Helen with the lustful and adulterous union carved on their bed and by giving visual expression to the more elevated possibilities available to them, David has stressed the self-indulgent, unpatriotic choices that the lovers have made.

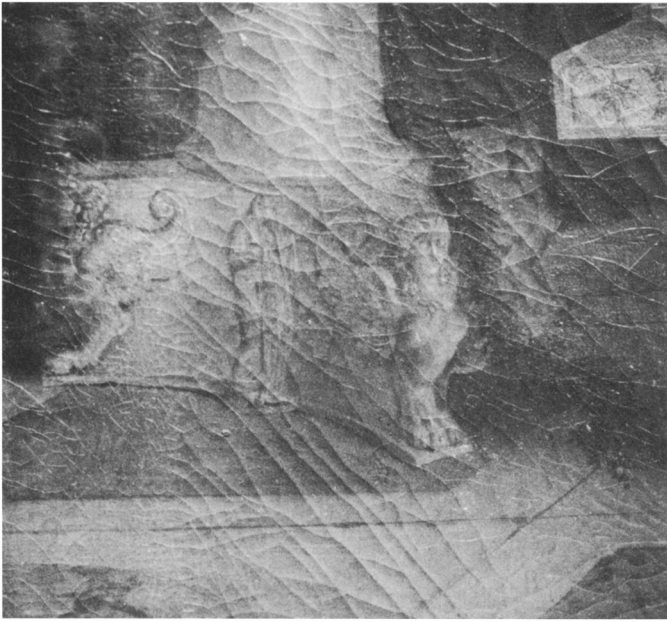
### Love and Politics

In a drawing for the painting (Fig. 18), David presents a conventional erotic scene — a lovely couple with the child Cupid. There are no implied alternatives in the drawing, no works of art expressing variations on the theme of love

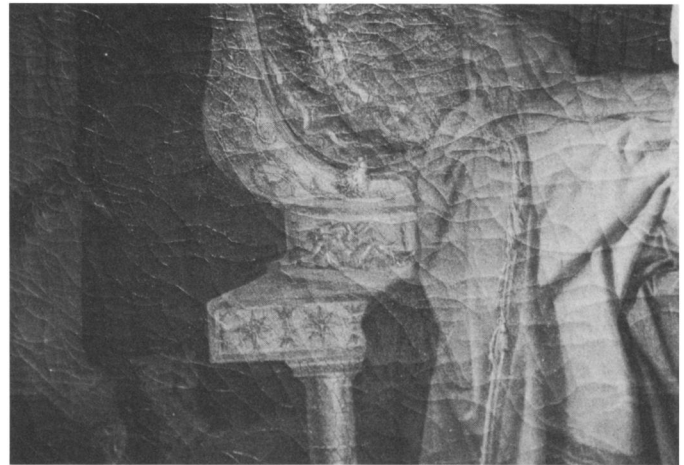
now in the Louvre; see E. Tietze-Conrat, *Mantegna*, London, 1955, pls. 137-38. David's initial conception of Paris and Helen can be traced to a drawing he made of Mars, seated on the left, and Venus, standing with legs crossed, leaning on a column, and with her hand reaching toward Mars and grasping his spear; see *Dessins originaux anciens exposés chez Paul Prouté, Dessins de maîtres des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, Catalog centenaire*, Paris, 1978, no. F 24, and *Louis David 1748-1825, Dessins du premier séjour romain 1775-1780*, Paris, Galerie de Bayser, 1979, 47, bis. David made this drawing after an illustration in *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines tirées du cabinet de Mr. Hamilton*, Paris, 1767, IV, pl. 24. He seems next to have drawn on a sheet, without other figures from the vase, a similarly posed couple, with the helmet of Mars modified to the Phrygian cap and the addition of a lyre; in the absence of a spear, the woman rests her hand on the man's shoulder. As the Galerie de Bayser catalogue notes in illustrating this drawing, no. 47, "Probablement, la toute première idée du tableau des 'Amours de Paris et Hélène.'" Arlette Sérullaz, Conservateur au Cabinet des Dessins, Louvre, informs me that the present location of these drawings is unknown. In a study of Paris and Helen in Stockholm, NM H 43/1969, the couple is first seen in front of their bed; in this drawing David has experimented temporarily with a standing Paris and a seated Helen who clings to him, like a Venus and Adonis. In the drawing of 1786 in Fig. 18 (*Connaissance des arts*, CCCCLXXXIII, 1983, 30, announcement of sale, Paris, Hotel Drouot, 22 March 1983), and in the final painting, the male and female figures are reversed.

<sup>25</sup> David may have derived his group of Leda and the Swan from any number of visual sources; Coche de la Ferté and Guey, 149ff., figs. 12-13, signal the sarcophagus in the Palazzo Corsetti, here Fig. 17. Brookner (as in n. 1), 87, notes the sexual symbolism of the water spouts.

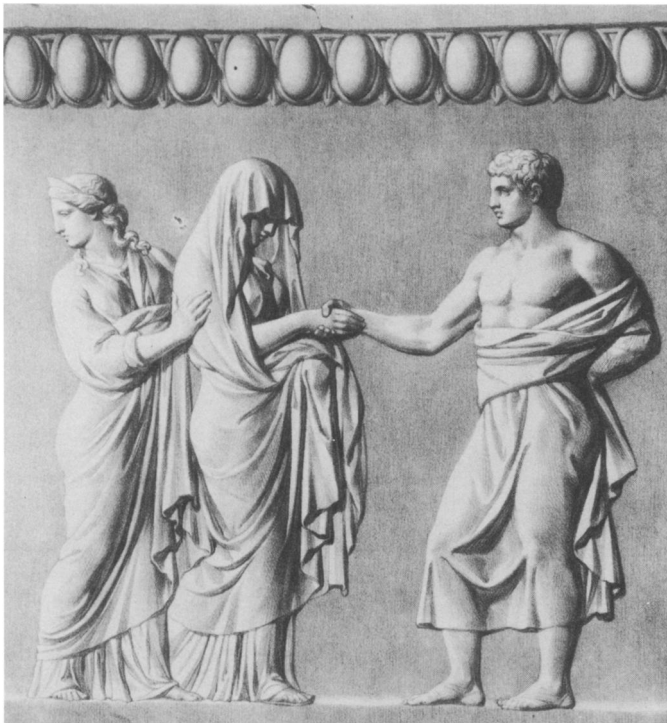




14 *Paris and Helen*, detail of base of Venus' column



16 *Paris and Helen*, detail of Leda and Swan, on bed



15 Relief of "Nozze di Peleo e Teti" after Marchese G. Pietro Campana, *Antiche opere in plastica*, II, Rome, 1851, pl. 60



17 Roman sarcophagus with Leda and the Swan, after Carl Robert, *Die Antiken Sarkophag-Reliefs*, Berlin, 1890, II, 8, no. 6

and implying choices,<sup>26</sup> nor are the references to the French royalty evident. The prominent figure of Cupid in the drawing is eliminated in the painting, which makes it look less like a family group and thus brings to the fore the self-centered nature of the love of Paris and Helen.<sup>27</sup> Further, by deleting Cupid drawing his bow, David takes away a mythic excuse for the couple's lust and focuses responsibility for their acts on themselves. By the time he worked out the painting, David had found ways to convey in a single image the history of choice and the complex interweaving of politics and persons that lie behind the moment.

In the prerevolutionary years, even love was viewed through the lens of politics and scrutinized for its connections with the monarchy. Thus one reads in the conservative *Mercure de France*, in April 1786:

<sup>26</sup> For the heavy bed with curved back in the drawing of 1786, cf. the drawing after an antique couch in one of David's Roman sketchbooks (Galerie Proute, Paris, and Galerie de Bayser, as in n. 24, nos. 58 and 46, respectively, present location unknown). In the final painting, one sees in its place the lighter, Neoclassical bed commissioned by David, according to his own specifications, from the *ébéniste* Jacob; M.E.J. Delécluze, *Louis David, son école et son temps*, Paris, 1855, 20-23. The background

of the drawing of 1786, with the flat back wall punctuated by a receding barrel vault, is clearly related to that of *Socrates*, Fig. 2.

<sup>27</sup> For children as an attribute of female virtue, and the attempt to refurbish Marie Antoinette's public image in this period by portraying her with her children, see Joseph Baillio, "Marie-Antoinette et ses enfants par Mme. Vigée Le Brun, Pt. 1," *L'Oeil*, cccviii, 1981, 34-41; Pt. 2, cccx, 1981, 52-61.



18 David, *Paris and Helen*, 1786. Location unknown (photo: Lourmel/Routhier)

La monarchie est de tous les gouvernemens [sic] le plus favorable à l'amour. Dans les Républiques, les femmes ne sont qu'économés & mères; les hommes seuls, à proprement parler, y sont citoyens & libres. . . . Dans les États despotiques, un seul est tout; le reste est esclave, les femmes comme les hommes . . . c'est donc là [dans la monarchie] qu'il faut chercher l'amour.<sup>28</sup>

A fundamental antithesis is identified between love and a republic because love conflicts with patriotism: "l'amour seroit dangereux dans une République où le patriotisme doit dominer sur tous les autres sentimens."<sup>29</sup> *Paris and Helen*, with its saturated vision of love and its references to the monarchy, visually unites this *philosophie* with the royal scandals. In his painting, David, "génie devenu temporel," as Michel Florisone defines him,<sup>30</sup> gave a classical and par-

adigmatic myth the topicality of gossip and elevated current images of scandal to the level of critical political issues and ideas.

Politics and love together are evoked in another theme in *Paris and Helen*: bondage. According to the dictionary of the Académie Française, "On dit en poésie, *Esclave*, pour dire amant."<sup>31</sup> Love and slavery are figural synonyms, and the enthralled Paris illustrates the maxim, "L'amour est un esclavage."<sup>32</sup>

The theme of bondage is realized in two other important images, each with a symbolism that conveys the complementary idea of political liberation. One of these is the group of caryatids, which provides both an architectural and a thematic framework for the painting. According to Vitruvius, at the time of the Greek wars of resistance against Persia, the Carians (of the Greek Peloponnese) allied them-

<sup>28</sup> "Monarchy is, among all governments, the one most favorable for love. In republics, women are nothing but housekeepers and mothers; only men, properly speaking, are citizens and free . . . in despotic states, one man is everything; the rest are slaves, both women and men . . . it is, hence, there, in monarchy, that one must look for love"; discussion of *Essai sur l'Amour*, published in Amsterdam, and reviewed in *Mercure de France*, 8 April 1786, 97f.

<sup>29</sup> "Love would be dangerous in a republic where patriotism should prevail over all other sentiments" (*ibid.*, 99). These ideas were current and David need not have derived them from this publication. It is likely, however,

that he was attentive to the *Mercure de France* in these days since it had published a poem celebrating his *Horatii* one week before (1 April 1786, 1ff.). This enthusiastic encomium concludes, "Non moins grand dans son Art [que Corneille], David me les [Horaces] fait voir."

<sup>30</sup> "A la recherche David" (commentary on Orangerie exhibition), *Bulletin, Musées de France*, cxxi, 1948, "Là est sans doute le principal intérêt de David: il est une nouvelle forme de génie humain. Il est la génie devenu temporel."

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 5th ed., 1786, s.v. *Esclave*, 464.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. *Esclavage*, 463.

selves with the enemy. When the Greeks emerged victorious, they punished the Carians by murdering the males and razing the town; as for the women:

. . . les vainqueurs emmenèrent femmes & filles en servitude, & ne leur voulurent permettre de despoiller leurs habitz de dames, afin qu'elles ne feussent menées en un seul triumphe, ains[i] pour éternel exemple de captivité, estant chargées d'iniures & opprobres, feussent vues porter la peine de leurs parens, alliez, & mariz. A l'occasion de quoy, ceux qui pour le temps d'adonc estoient Architectes, meirent en leurs édifices publiques les images de ces dames comme destinées à supporter le faix, afin que la punition du forfait des Caryens, feust congneu, et serveist d'exemple à toute la postérité.<sup>33</sup>

The caryatids therefore connote bondage, but they also evoke the idea of liberty because they are associated with the triumph of Greek liberty in the Persian Wars. David, with his early classical training as an architect, was familiar with Vitruvius, probably through a French edition, translated by Jean Martin and illustrated by the sculptor Jean Goujon, who created the Louvre caryatids.

The second important element that carries complementary meanings of liberty and bondage is the red Phrygian

cap worn by Paris. With its tapering shape and soft tip, it is an attribute that since antiquity had been associated with Paris, as well as with other mythological male figures tainted with effeminacy or amorous weakness — Orpheus, Adonis, Attis, and Ganymede.<sup>34</sup> But it was also known as the liberty cap and is defined as such in several dictionaries and artists' manuals that David would have known.<sup>35</sup> Like the caryatids, the liberty cap evoked freedom by recalling slavery, for it was rooted in the Roman custom in which the manumission of a slave was signaled by the wearing of a cap.<sup>36</sup> It was a ubiquitous symbol of the American Revolution, and French artists regularly added the liberty cap to almost everything associated with America, from maps and illustrated accounts of the Revolution to engraved portraits of heroes.<sup>37</sup> For *Libertas Americana*, a medallion commissioned by Benjamin Franklin in 1782 to commemorate the American Declaration of Independence, the French artist Augustin Dupré had engraved a depiction of the goddess of liberty with her liberty cap and staff.<sup>38</sup> The liberty cap as a revolutionary symbol was therefore well established within the French artistic repertoire and naturally became a significant emblem of freedom with the early events of 1789.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is a motif on many of the battalion flags of Lafayette's National Guard of July of 1789 (Fig. 19)<sup>40</sup> and on the important medallion designed by Dupré

<sup>33</sup> ". . . the victors led the women and girls into slavery, and did not permit them to lay aside their garb of rank and marriage, so that they might not be led in a single triumph but, as an eternal example of captivity, burdened with offence and shame, they might be seen forever to bear the punishment for their relatives, kin, and husbands. Thus, architects of the time designed for public buildings figures of these matrons, placed to carry a load, in order that the punishment for the crime of the Carians might be known, and would serve as an example for all posterity"; *Architecture ou Art de bien bastir de Marc Vitruve Pollion Auteur Romain antique*, transl. Jean Martin, Paris, 1547, 2. This explanation of caryatids, while today thought to be unhistorical, was the standard interpretation in the 18th century. David was very probably familiar with it through the French edition cited, and he would have found the same definition elsewhere. For example, it is fully stated in Honoré Lacombe de Prezel, *Dictionnaire iconologique ou Introduction à la connoissance [sic] des peintures, sculptures, estampes . . . etc., nouvelle edition*, Paris, 1779, I, 111f. For a recent study of a possible truth in Vitruvius' unlikely sounding explanation, see E.D. Francis and Michael Vickers, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, CIII, 1983, 61-65.

<sup>34</sup> Gérard Seiterle, "Die Urform der phrygischen Mütze," *Antike Welt*, XVI, 1985, 3, 2-13, with bibliography. For the Comte d'Artois as "la Ganimède femelle avec la reine," see *L'Autrichienne en goguettes* (as in n. 7), 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Iconologie, ou Explication nouvelle de plusieurs images, emblèmes, et autres figures, Tirée des Recherches & des Figures de Cesare Ripa, Moralisées par I. Baudoin*, Paris, 1643, 100f.; Honoré Lacombe de Prezel (as in n. 33), II, s. v. *Liberté*, 41ff.

<sup>36</sup> W. Helbig, "Ueber den Pileus der alten Italiker," *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Philos.-Hist.), 1880, 487-554; Ernst Samter, "Der pileus der römischen Priester und Freigelassenen," *Philologus*, LIII, 1894, 535-43; Andrew Alföldi, "The Main Aspects of Political Propaganda on the Coinage of the Roman Republic," in *Roman*

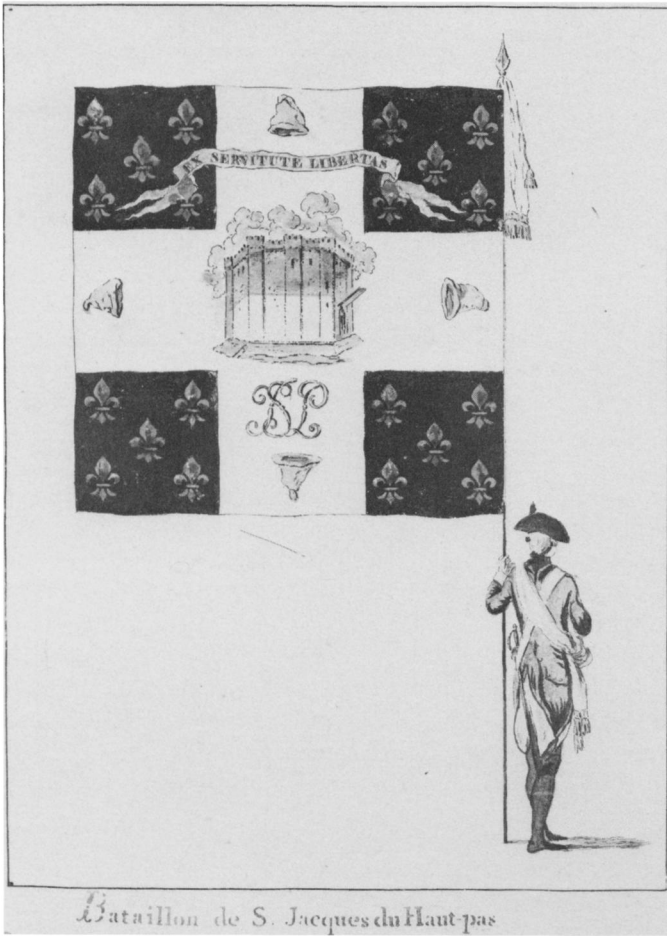
*Coinage, Essays Presented to Harold Mattingly*, Oxford, 1956, 91ff.; and Salvatore Tondo, *Aspetti simbolici e magici nella struttura giuridica della manumissio vindicata*, Milan, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, the engraved portrait by N. Pruneau, *George Washington. Commandant en Chef des Armées des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique*, Paris, 177[?], in Donald H. Cresswell, *The American Revolution in Drawings and Prints: A Checklist of 1765-1790 Graphics in the Library of Congress*, Washington, D.C., 1975, no. 211, and the French map of the "Théâtre de la Guerre Présente en Amérique," 1779, *ibid.*, no. 759, in which an Indian princess in a rococo border holds aloft the liberty cap as a symbol of the event. Also see E. McClung Fleming, "The American Image as Indian Princess," *Winterthur Portfolio*, II, 1965, 65-81.

<sup>38</sup> Dupré, who lived near Franklin at Passy, had already engraved Franklin's seal; see J.F. Loubat, *The Medallist History of the United States of America, 1776-1876*, New York, 1898, I, 86-94, pl. 14; and William T.R. Marvin, "Engravers of Revolutionary Medals," *American Journal of Numismatics*, XXVIII, July, 1893, 1-5.

<sup>39</sup> For the revolutionary liberty cap, see Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle, Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France 1789-1880*, transl. Janet Lloyd, 1981, 15-37 and *passim*; "Des bonnets rouges," *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 141, 17-24 March 1792, 534-37; and *Histoire du costume en France*, Paris, 1924, 49-51. Although much has been written about the symbolism of the liberty cap, questions that have not been elucidated concerning its introduction into the French revolutionary context are the subject of a forthcoming article by the author, "The Liberty Cap as a Revolutionary Symbol," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, II, 1987.

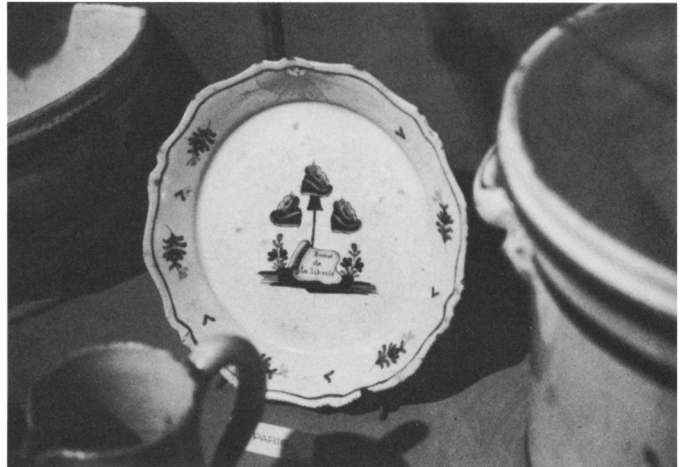
<sup>40</sup> Raymond Augustin Viel de Varenne, *Collection des drapeaux faits dans les soixante districts de Paris en Juillet 1789*, Paris, 1789-90; *idem*, *Collection entière des drapeaux de l'armée nationale parisienne*, Paris [1790?]; and M. Reinhard, "Les drapeaux de la Garde Nationale Parisienne, en 1789," *Etudes européennes, Mélanges offerts à Victor L. Tapie*, Paris, 1973, 525-32.



19 Flag of the Battallon of St. Jacques du Haut-Pas, after Raymond Augustin Vielh de Varenne, *Collection entière des drapeaux de l'armée nationale parisienne*, Paris, n.d. [1790?]



21 Revolutionary plaque, "Aux Braves sans Culottes." Paris, Musée Carnavalet



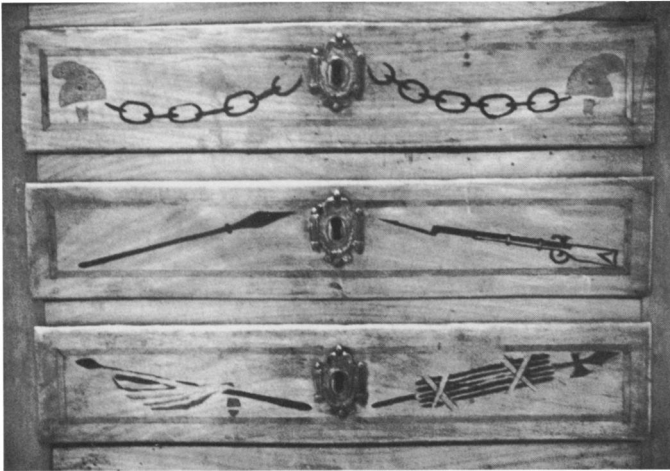
22 Plate from revolutionary "Bonnet de la liberté" tea set. Paris, Musée Carnavalet



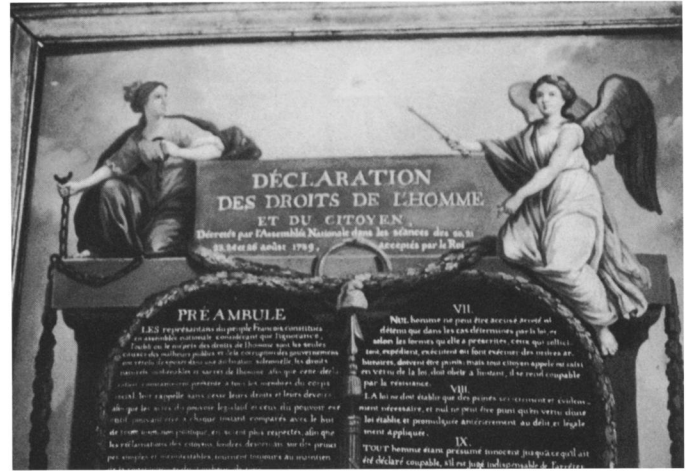
20 Augustin Dupré, Medal commemorating the establishment of the Mairie de Paris, 1789. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)

to commemorate the establishment on 15 July of the Mayoralty of Paris (Fig. 20).<sup>41</sup> The Phrygian cap also appeared as a revolutionary icon: on plaques (Fig. 21), tea sets (Fig. 22), and furniture (Fig. 23), surmounting the tree of liberty (Fig. 24), and at the top of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Fig. 25). David was surely aware of the Phrygian cap's libertarian meaning, and in having Paris wear the cap,

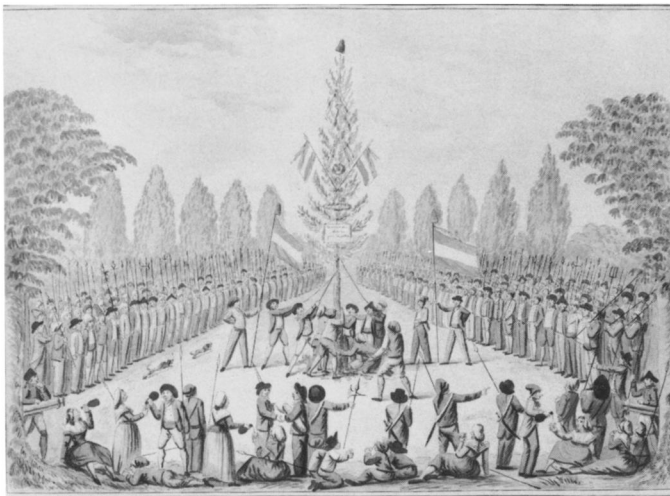
<sup>41</sup> Jean Babelon and Josephe Jacquot, *Histoire de Paris d'après les médailles de la Renaissance au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1952, no. 189 (R), 96, pl. 22 (and see p. 33 on the importance of medals in this period for the diffusion of ideas); Louis Millin Aubin, *Histoire métallique de la Révolution française*, Paris, 1806, no. 24, pl. 7; and Charles Saunier, *Augustin Dupré*, Paris, 1894, 36 and pl. 5. I. For Dupré's contacts with David, see Saunier, 5, 7, 43, 48, and *passim*.



23 Table decorated with revolutionary motifs, detail of drawers. Paris, Musée Carnavalet



25 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Paris, Musée Carnavalet



24 Etienne Béricourt, *Planting of a Liberty Tree*. Paris, Musée Carnavalet (photo: Musées de la Ville de Paris-SPADEM)



26 Louis XVI forced to wear the liberty cap, 1793. Paris, Musée Carnavalet (photo: Musées de la Ville de Paris)

he anticipated that royalty would submit to the burgeoning ideals of liberty.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in an important symbolic moment in the Revolution, Louis XVI, shortly before his execution, was forced to don the cap of liberty (Fig. 26).

**David's Brutus**

The evolving political attitude reflected in *Paris and Helen* is also demonstrated in David's change of subject matter for the project that terminated with *Brutus*. The Comte d'Angiviller, *Directeur-général des bâtiments du Roi*, had accepted David's proposal for a painting of *Coriolanus Re-*

*strained by His Family from Seeking Revenge*. Coriolanus, charged with tyrannical conduct and opposing a distribution of grain to the people, abandoned Rome and was dissuaded from mounting an attack on the city only by the pleas of his mother, wife, and children. David, apparently without informing d'Angiviller, substituted the story of Brutus, who expelled the oppressive Tarquin and then, as Consul of the Republic, condemned his own sons to death for their aristocratic intrigues. It is a story of surpassing allegiance to the republic.<sup>43</sup> Noting that David was "putting the finishing touches" to *Brutus* in August 1789, Robert

<sup>42</sup> Although the pronunciation differs, the name of the mythological Pâris looks similar in French to the city name, Paris. The king is often seen as a personification of a geographical entity: the Louis were not only kings of France, but they, in a sense that transcends metaphor, were France. Perhaps in the Paris of David's painting we may see the city in the guise of a royal personification in Helen's thrall. At the time, puns and other *jeu de mots* were in great vogue; every issue of the *Mercure de France* began with several, not written by professional writers but sent in by various classes of readers who identified themselves as members of the

nobility, merchants, military officers, and others.  
<sup>43</sup> David originally proposed two subjects for a royal commission for the Salon of 1787 — Coriolanus restrained by his family from seeking revenge and the Departure of Atilius Regulus; D'Angiviller selected Coriolanus. Fernand Engerand, *Inventaire des tableaux commandés et achetés par la Direction des Bâtiments du Roi (1709-1792)*, Paris, 1901, 138; David, 53f., 638; Herbert, 18. For David's change of subject matter from Coriolanus to Brutus, made without D'Angiviller's knowledge, see Engerand, 138, and Herbert, 18.

Herbert asks, "Was he or was he not aware of the parallels with contemporary events that ultimately would give his picture a special fame?"<sup>44</sup> The imagery indicates that David was quite cognizant of the contemporary French political dimension of the Roman and Greek subject matter in *Brutus*, and in *Paris and Helen*.

The arguments to the contrary are arguments from silence: omissions from correspondence of the summer of 1789 and from critiques of the Salon. There are in particular two letters that do not provide specific interpretations where one might expect them. Writing to his student Wicar on 14 June, David refers to *Brutus* as "un tableau de mon pur invention," but does not make clear whether "invention" refers to the change of subject matter, to his unique depiction of the moment when the bodies of Brutus' sons are returned home, to visual motifs developed for the painting, or to a combination of these elements.<sup>45</sup>

In another letter, of 10 August, C.-E. Cuvillier, writing officially on behalf of the exiled Comte d'Angiviller to Vien, President of the Academy, attempts to censor — urging "la prudence et le circonspection" — what shall be included in the Salon. Seeking to avoid "le danger de fournir un aliment de plus à la fermentation," Cuvillier refers to *Brutus* (without giving its title) and *Paris and Helen*: "C'est sous ce rapport que je suis bien aisé, autant que je peux l'être, de savoir le tableau de M. David [*Brutus*] encore loin d'être achevé; et, à propos de cet artiste, je pense avec vous, M<sup>r</sup>, que son tableau de *Pâris et Hélène* peut être exposé sans laisser aucune crainte, en taisant le propriétaire."<sup>46</sup> Cuvillier wishes to dissociate *Paris and Helen* from the Comte d'Artois, who had become the most hated man in France and had fled two days after the Bastille was taken. Explaining why Cuvillier and d'Angiviller took comfort in the *Brutus* not being ready for the Salon, Herbert concluded, "Cuvillier's fears, one can guess, were not founded on the many precise parallels of the Brutus legend with current events, but on the general association with opposition to

tyranny and still more on its evocation of bloody execution, and funereal retribution in that period of turmoil."<sup>47</sup> Even so, Herbert's surmise leaves us with a highly political perception of the painting, and if Cuvillier could have read the painting in terms of opposition to tyranny, and expected Vien to understand him, surely others, including the artist, would have perceived it this way as well.

In writing about the Salon of 1789, critics commented on the technique, classicism, psychological plausibility, and decorum of *Paris and Helen* and *Brutus*, but not on their political content. *Paris and Helen* was lauded for "la vérité d'Homère, sa simplicité sublime,"<sup>48</sup> and David was praised for his talent: "Les personnages de Pâris & d'Hélène sont si célèbres par leurs beautés, qu'il faut toujours un grand talent dans un artiste pour répondre aux idées qu'on en a concues. Il suffit donc de dire pour l'éloge de M. David, que son ouvrage remplit celles que nous en ont laissées les poètes."<sup>49</sup> The dearth of antimonarchical, republican, or revolutionary interpretation of David's art does not prove that the works did not have such pointed political content for the artist or his public. It does not even tend to suggest this, for — and this must be stressed — there is no political interpretation of *Brutus* in art reviews of the Salon of 1791, where David presented it again, in a period when its political meaning was undisputed, when it had become what Anita Brookner called a "revolutionary totem."<sup>50</sup> In 1791, when David also exhibited the newly executed drawings of the *Serment de Jeu de Paume*, the *Horatii*, and *Socrates*, the written discussion about *Brutus* took up the same issues that had been voiced in 1789.<sup>51</sup> Herbert explains that "the patriotic interpretation of *Brutus* was so much taken for granted by [1791] that the reviews wrote instead of the picture's emotional impact."<sup>52</sup> This may have been a factor, along with a persistent fear of censorship; but the repetitive analysis also reflects the conservative persistence of critical categories and vocabulary. The paintings may have been revolutionary in their content, but art criticism was still

<sup>44</sup> Herbert, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Text in David, 55ff., with facsimile following 622; the original letter is in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris. For an English translation, see Herbert, 123f.

<sup>46</sup> M. Furcy-Raynaud, ed., "Correspondence de M. d'Angiviller avec Pierre," *Nouvelles archives de l'art français*, xx-xxii, 1906, no. 763, 263ff. Herbert gives an English translation, 124f. The withdrawal from the Salon of David's *Lavoisier and His Wife* is proposed in this letter, evidently because of the chemist's recent encounter with a hostile Parisian mob.

<sup>47</sup> Herbert, 61f.; William Olander gives a balanced evaluation of these events in "Pour Transmettre à la Postérité: French Painting and Revolution 1774-1795," Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1983, 129.

<sup>48</sup> "Exposition des peintres, sculptures et gravures de MM. de l'Académie Royale, au Salon du Louvre," *Mercur de France*, 24 October 1789, 85 (Deloynes, xvi, no. 423).

<sup>49</sup> "Observations critiques sur les Tableaux du Sallon de l'année 1789," Paris, 1789 (Deloynes, xvi, no. 410). While some found the painting cold, "très-peu expressive . . . des attitudes froides & inanimées" (*Journal gé-*

*néral de France*, 9 September 1789, ms, Deloynes, xvi, no. 426), others found it the opposite: "le ravissement où leur esprit se plonge est partagé par le spectateur" ("Vérités agréables ou le Salon vu en beau," par l'auteur du Coup-de-patte [Louis de Carmontelle], Paris, 1789, 11ff., Deloynes, xvi, no. 415). Michel's view (p. 147f.) that the painting was not well received is not borne out by the reviews, which (like those of *Brutus*) were generally very favorable, with occasional reservations. Cf. "Les élèves au Salon ou l'Amphigouri," Paris, 1789, Deloynes, xvi, no. 416; *Journal de Paris, Supplément au n° 312*, Sunday, 8 November 1789, 1451 (Deloynes, xvi, no. 421); and below, n. 55.

<sup>50</sup> Brookner (as in n. 1), 90.

<sup>51</sup> See Deloynes, xvii, nos. 437, 439, and 441.

<sup>52</sup> For example, "Comme il est sombre! comme il est accablé de douleur! Ah! voilà ses funérailles: famille désolée, soeurs sensibles, versez, versez des torrens de larmes. Rome vous plaint, mais Rome fera inscrire ces mots sur le marbre: A Brutus, qui sacrifie ses enfans à la patrie reconnoissante" ("Le Plaisir prolongé, le retour du Salon chez soi et celui de l'abeille dans sa roche par Pithou," Paris, 1791, Deloynes, xvii, no. 437). Cf. Herbert, 68.

preoccupied with artistic issues established in the past.<sup>53</sup>

*Paris and Helen* was not exhibited in the Salon of 1791 or after,<sup>54</sup> and several factors probably contributed to its disappearance from view. One may have been that the Comte d'Artois continued to be a target of hatred as well as a focus of heightened fear of émigré counterrevolution. Also important were the rococo aspects of the painting, its focus on love and sensuality, its fundamental connection with the *ancien régime*. As T.E. Crow noted, the austere, dry, and even rough-hewn and anti-academic qualities of several of David's paintings were one part of his revolutionary message. *Paris and Helen* had been criticized in 1789 for its emotional softness and private focus, for being different from David's other pictures.<sup>55</sup> In a period increasingly given over to seeing things in terms of clear-cut confrontation, the subtle ironies and ambiguities of *Paris and Helen* would either have been lost or suspect, as David, with that blend of progressivism and opportunism which by this time had made him the "semi-official painter of the Jacobins,"<sup>56</sup> would have well understood. *Paris and Helen* is radical in its use of traditional iconography to express progressive political attitudes and ideas, but in the realm of style as content, it would have been perceived as *retardataire*, the last thing David wanted.

*Paris and Helen* is a painting with many cloaks, and many elements in it are partly covered. Heavy drapery crosses the interior wall and falls over the faces of the divinities on the plinth; three of the four sculptural caryatids are covered up to the neck. Most important, the beautiful outer forms of Paris and Helen (the opposite of the homely but virtuous Socrates) mask their unattractive inner selves. Things that are clearly depicted, such as the *fleur de lys*, are at the same time hard to see; perhaps that is why the sphinx, symbol of enigma, appears on the tripod base (Fig. 14).<sup>57</sup> While David is thought of as a great history painter,

this work reminds us that, in French academic theory, as stated by Félibien, history painting was not the acme of artistic achievement; above it, "montant encore plus haut, il faut par des compositions allégoriques, sçavoir couvrir sous le voile de la fable les vertus des grands hommes, & les mystères les plus relevez. L'on appelle un grand Peintre celui qui s'acquitte bien de semblables entreprises. C'est en quoi consiste la force, la noblesse & la grandeur de cet Art."<sup>58</sup> *Paris and Helen* is a veiled allegory: in this as in other works, David did not miss reaching the top rung of the hierarchy of genres.

The conflicts and choices of patriotism and self-interest, duty and negligence, public and private worlds lie at the heart of David's major prerevolutionary paintings, and they are the central issues of *Paris and Helen*. While in the *Horatii*, *Socrates*, and *Brutus* David depicted heroes and extolled virtue, in *Paris and Helen* he presented the negative side of the same stern morality. Indeed, there are ways in which *Paris and Helen* goes beyond the other works in its exploration of contemporary concerns. It is the only one of David's paintings begun in the prerevolutionary period that takes up in its imagery the duality of freedom and bondage. It is also the only painting in which the primary virtue of setting public benefit ahead of personal satisfaction is related specifically to the duty of kings.<sup>59</sup> By placing *Paris and Helen* in symbolic relation to the royalty, David submits it to evaluation by this standard, and finds it failed. In his choices, the king of France eschewed wisdom and power; Paris, perhaps here a name for the king himself, used bad judgment. The poignant sense of other possibilities that saturates the painting helps to account for its aura of nostalgia; it is the last great painting of the *ancien régime*, while filled with latent revolutionary content.<sup>60</sup>

As events unfolded, *Paris and Helen*, a painting about choice motivated by amoral attitudes and private indul-

<sup>53</sup> When one turns from art critics to a political commentator such as Père Duchêne (Lemaire), who rarely wrote on art and had very little knowledge of it, but who was committed to revolutionary utilitarianism, one finds the revolutionary view of David's *Brutus* in 1791. In "Des Decorations" Duchêne holds that David's paintings are superior to books in their revolutionary value of conveying ideas of liberty to the many who are illiterate: "Ces tableaux divins de *Brutus* et des *Horaces*, n'ont-ils pas enflammé plus d'âmes pour la liberté que les meilleurs livres?" (*Le Véritable Duchêne, Lettres bougrement patriotiques*, Paris [179?], Letter 212, October 1791, 3f.).

<sup>54</sup> Michel Florisone, *David, Exposition en l'honneur du deuxième centenaire de sa naissance*, exh. cat., Orangerie, Paris, 1948, 55, and *David e Roma*, 152, with corrections; *Archives Nationales*, Paris, AB XIX, 3324, F XVII, 1266f. The painting, sequestered as goods of an émigré, was held in the Hôtel de Nesle, rue de Beaune, and then passed to the Minister of the Interior probably in 1803; it was placed in the Musée du Luxembourg in 1820, and from there was moved to the Louvre.

<sup>55</sup> "Je ne crois pas que le Peintre vigoureux des *Horaces*, des *Socrates*, des *Brutus*, descende au genre de l'*Albane*, plus heureusement que Corneille n'approcha de *Quinault*" ("Supplément aux remarques sur les ouvrages exposés au Salon par le C. de M. M. de plusieurs Académies, etc. [Le Comte de M. de Maupas]," Paris, 1789, Deloynes, xvi, no. 414). Cf. "Entretien entre un amateur et un admirateur sur les tableaux exposés au

Sallon du Louvre de l'année 1789," Deloynes, xvi, no. 412.

<sup>56</sup> Herbert, 68.

<sup>57</sup> Lacombe de Prezel (as in n. 33), II, 234f., defining the sphinx as a symbol of mystery, notes that Emperor Augustus had one on his seal because "il vouloit faire entendre par cet hiéroglyphe, que les secrets des Princes doivent être inviolables."

<sup>58</sup> ". . . Climbing even higher, one must know how to cover under the veil of fable the faculties of great men and the most elevated mysteries, by means of allegorical compositions. He who acquits himself well in such undertakings is called a great painter. It is of this that the power, the nobility, and the grandeur of this art is composed"; (André Félibien, *Conférences de L'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (1669), preface, 16f., printed with *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres*, Amsterdam, 1706.

<sup>59</sup> "Un véritable Roi . . . immole ses jouissances personnelles à la tranquillité générale. Oh! qu'ils sont rares, les Rois qui s'immolent ainsi au bonheur de leurs sujets" (*Mercur de France*, 14 January 1786, 89, review of premiere of *Céramis* in December 1785, at the Comédie Française).

<sup>60</sup> Norman Bryson in *Word and Image*, Cambridge, 1981, chap. 8, analyzes poignantly the tragic conflicts in some of David's prerevolutionary paintings, but he underestimates the implication of political release that the works hold.

gence, developed as a pendant to *Brutus*, a painting about choice motivated by moral and public concerns. That each of these works is fundamentally tragic reveals the complexity and depth of David's understanding of issues on the eve of the Revolution, a complexity that was to vanish from the artist's expression once the Revolution began.

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