

Facets of French Heritage: Selling the Crown Jewels in the Early Third Republic*

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The construction of a national heritage in France has often been described in heroic tones. It was built around a series of critical legislative milestones, from the campaign against vandalism launched by Abbé Grégoire in the 1790s, through the work of the Commission des Monuments Historiques from the 1830s, and culminating in the protection of urban ensembles provided under the loi Malraux (named after the minister who did so much to popularize the noun *patrimoine* in the 1960s).¹ According to this story of progressive enlightenment, France became the laboratory for heritage initiatives in response to the shock of 1789. In its desire to smash outworn institutions and relocate authority not in historic precedent but in the immutable laws of nature and human reason, the French Revolution succeeded in making the preservation of the past an urgent political conundrum. Just as the creation of the Louvre has been hailed as the birth of modern museology, so too the bureaucratic instruments devised for sifting and inventorying objects reappropriated from the crown, the church, and the émigrés have been acclaimed for placing the postrevolutionary heritage on a scientific footing.² During “le moment Guizot” in the 1830s, the task of conservation was increasingly professionalized, awarded to bourgeois *capacités*, such as scholars and architects,

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¹ André Chastel and Jean-Pierre Babelon, “La notion de patrimoine,” *Revue de l'Art* 49 (1980): 5–32; Françoise Choay, “Le patrimoine en questions,” *Esprit* 359 (2009): 194–222.

² Dominique Poulot, *Musée, nation, patrimoine: 1789–1815* (Paris, 1997); Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origin of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, 1994).

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who worked to document and restore monuments deemed to be exemplary.³ The result was a philosophy of conservation at once didactic and elitist, technical and state regulated, nourished on an idea of French exceptionalism.

Yet this account of the consolidation of French heritage has come under fire for both its celebratory mood and its empirical omissions. Architectural historian Jean-Michel Leniaud has dismissed the argument that the French notion of heritage dates from the revolutionary rupture, instead highlighting the slow growth of the concept of collective property over the *longue durée*. Collective understandings of patrimony already circulated under the old regime, grounded in family law or the inalienable goods of the church; to that extent Leniaud has tried to recuperate the original meaning of *patrimoine* from the Roman term *patrimonium*, linked to the juridical transmission of property across generations.⁴ His argument tallies with the enduring power of familial metaphors in the discourse of national heritage, analogized to heirlooms, relics, or bequests. In his critique of the suffocating Jacobin state, however, Leniaud underestimates the vitality of those nineteenth-century subcultures that dissented from centralized initiatives, including royalist notables, regionalist societies, and religious groups.⁵ Fine studies of nineteenth-century historicism have stressed the complex dialogue between *amateurs* and professionals, Paris and the provinces, the market and the museum, secular and confessional priorities.⁶ After 1870, the republicans were obliged to work with a number of curators, critics, collectors, and dealers whose sympathy for the new regime was uncertain. Far from being monopolized by the state and its agents, the protection of French heritage involved a coalition of fractious interest groups within civil society, which successive governments struggled to coordinate around any consensual vision. It took years of wooing aristocrats and collectors by republican administrators, for instance, to institutionalize the rococo and enshrine it “as a legitimate part of the national cultural trust.”⁷

Despite its antimodern animus and nostalgic sentiments, the protection of cultural property has rightly been viewed as a corollary of modernization. Accord-

³ Dominique Poulot, “The Birth of Heritage: Le moment Guizot,” *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (1988): 40–56; see also Françoise Bercé, *Les premiers travaux de la Commission des Monuments historiques 1837–48: Procès-verbaux et relevés d’architectes* (Paris, 1979).

⁴ Jean-Michel Leniaud, *Les archipels du passé: Le patrimoine et son histoire* (Paris, 2002).

⁵ Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York, 2003); Odile Parsis-Barubé, *La province anti-quaire: L’invention de l’histoire locale en France (1800–1870)* (Paris, 2011).

⁶ Kevin Murphy, *Memory and Modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vézelay* (Philadelphia, 2000).

⁷ Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, Style* (Berkeley, 1992), 142.

ing to Paul Betts and Corey Ross, “the obsession with heritage reflected the need to engineer a form of historical consciousness geared toward a modern world of rationality and technology and to circumscribe an appropriate place for it.”⁸ The *patrimoine* offered a mechanism by which key stakeholders, the Church and the aristocracy, could be bound into the Third Republic, even if they fiercely defended their own forms of historical consciousness. Astrid Swenson has argued that this adaptation and integration of elites was happening in parallel across Europe by the later nineteenth century because heritage had come to function “as a yardstick for a people’s cultural attainment.”⁹ Displaying due care for cultural patrimony was not just a strategy in nation building but also a matter of international standing—especially when this patrimony was potentially imperiled by the forces of democracy, industrialism, and the globalized art market. The perceived need to defend the nation’s treasures against outside predators politicized auctions in the later nineteenth century. Tournaments of values, the dramatic scenes that played out in the salesrooms of Paris, were crucial not just for exposing the numeric and symbolic currency of different national brands but also for extending the Great Powers’ competition to annex the spoils of civilization.¹⁰

How these dynamic contexts interacted can be grasped through a focus on one exceptional event: in May 1887, after two decades of wrangling, a large portion of France’s crown jewels were sold at auction. While the origin of the royal regalia dates back to the eighth century, the *joyaux de la couronne* had been permanently established in the sixteenth century and endowed by successive generations of monarchs who had drawn on them as ceremonial attire, diplomatic gifts, or fiscal assets in times of crisis. Housed under Louis XIV in the Garde-Meuble, the collection was inventoried as national property in 1791. Stolen under mysterious circumstances the following year, the collection was reassembled and expanded under Napoleon and achieved a new public prominence in the Second Empire. The decision to part with the jewels in 1887 continues to arouse indignation, and the foremost historian of the collection, Bernard Morel, has narrated the litany of blunders that dogged each stage of the sale proceedings.¹¹ Daniel Alcouffe, former curator of decorative arts at the Louvre, denounced a policy that “dramatically amputated the national heritage. . . . Financially disap-

⁸ Paul Betts and Corey Ross, “Modern Historical Preservation—Towards a Global Perspective,” *Past and Present* 226, suppl. 10 (2015): 14.

⁹ Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in Germany, France and England* (Cambridge, 2013), 273, 276.

¹⁰ For essays on the emulative competition between nineteenth-century institutions, see Bénédicte Savoy and Andrea Meyer, eds., *The Museum Is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums, 1750–1940* (Berlin, 2014).

¹¹ Bernard Morel, *Les joyaux de la couronne de France: Les objets du sacre des rois et des reines suivis de l’histoire des joyaux de la couronne de François Ier à nos jours* (Paris, 1988), 369–77.

pointing, the sale was disastrous with regard to history, with regard to mineralogy, considering the quality of stones which no longer exist, and with regard to the arts, with so many masterpieces of French jewelry disappearing at the same time.”¹² Since the Second World War, Louvre curators such as Pierre Verlet tried whenever possible to reacquire these dispersed treasures, so that by 1989 the Galerie d’Apollon could display with pride the fabled Sancy diamond (missing since the Revolution), the *parure* of Marie-Amélie (bought from the comte de Paris), and the tiara of Empress Eugénie.¹³

Without seeking to reprise the debate about the wisdom of the sale, the aim here is to study what it reveals about the value assigned to royal heritage during the consolidation of the Third Republic. Precious stones with glamorous provenances commanded immense prestige in the nineteenth century. Parisian goldsmiths such as Alfred André specialized in mounting Renaissance jewels in order to satisfy the demand for pieces that combined luxury craftsmanship and romantic associations.¹⁴ Yet, beyond their aesthetic appeal, the crown jewels were also the symbolic apparel of power. British historians have demonstrated how the acquisition and adaptation of trophies such as the Koh-i-Noor diamond can illuminate national and imperial identities.¹⁵ Intimate, tactile, seemingly indestructible, the crown jewels were cherished as emanations or crystallizations of the sovereigns whose bodies they adorned. In contrast to the familiar link between *patrimoine*, architecture, and urbanism, the crown jewels invite us to consider monuments on a miniature scale, items of “portable property” whose possession was haunted by a pervasive fear of loss.¹⁶ The dismay caused by their alienation was exacerbated due to the sensitive timing of the sale, which coincided with the antiparliamentary agitation of General Boulanger and the Schnaebeler affair that brought mutterings of another Franco-German war.¹⁷ Steeped in sym-

¹² Daniel Alcouffe, “Une catastrophe nationale: La vente des diamants de la couronne en 1887,” *La Tribune de l’Art* (2008), <http://www.latribunedelart.com/une-catastrophe-nationale-la-vente-des-diamants-de-la-couronne-en-1887>. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹³ Bernard Morel, “La vente des joyaux de la couronne en 1887,” in *De Versailles à Paris: Le destin des collections royales*, ed. Jacques Charles (Paris, 1989), 182; Daniel Alcouffe, “Les collections d’objets d’art dans la galerie d’Apollon 1861–2004,” in *La Galerie d’Apollon au Palais du Louvre*, ed. G  n  v  e Bresc-Bautier (Paris, 2004), 213–16.

¹⁴ Philippa Plock, “Rothschilds, Rubies and Rogues: The ‘Renaissance’ Jewels of Waddesdon Manor,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 29, no. 1 (2017): 143–60.

¹⁵ Danielle Kinsey, “Koh-i-Noor: Empire, Diamonds, and the Performance of British Material Culture,” *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 391–419. See also Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status* (Cambridge, 1986), 82–106; Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery* (New Haven, CT, 2010), 1–10.

¹⁶ John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

¹⁷ Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Reb  rioux, *The Third Republic from Its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914*, trans. J. F. Foster (Cambridge, 1987), 128.

bolism and ceremonial, the sale was represented alternately as a farewell to monarchical detritus, a salutary rupture with tradition, a lucrative commercial opportunity, an irreparable blow to national character, and a humiliating prostration before foreign enemies and interlopers.

The archival documentation for the fractured, complex event of the sale is exceptionally rich, allowing us to reconstruct the perspectives of the organizers and their critics.¹⁸ This corpus of sources reveals how the sale was debated and contested by elected deputies, by officials and experts charged with its execution, by self-styled *amateurs* who advanced their superior competence to arbitrate on artistic matters, and by sensationalist journalists benefiting from the liberalization and dramatic expansion of newspapers.¹⁹ The conduct of the sale exposes the compromised nature of French heritage policies, shaped by the interplay between different domains (the legislature, the administration, scholarship, and the press) and between rival ideological conceptions. Adopting a jewel metaphor, this article cleaves apart the 1887 sale and describes the diverse groups who pushed for it to happen and who discursively shaped its meaning. The following discussion cuts the sale into four facets: first, the debate among republican deputies Benjamin Raspail, Jules Ferry, and Adrien Hébrard; second, the implementation by the administrative team and specialist collaborators Émile Vanderheyem and Arthur Bloche; third, the dissent of *amateurs* and *érudits* led by Germain Bapst; and fourth, the antirevolutionary polemics spearheaded by Édouard Drumont.

Taken together, these four facets demonstrate the fraught stakes, lengthy preparations, and unexpected repercussions of a single “micro-event.” Analyzing each facet in turn reveals how the sale was inspected, distorted, and magnified from different vantage points, unleashing quarrels over the interpretation of the collection and the competence of its custodians.²⁰ Not only did the protagonists in the debate struggle to agree on a price for the jewels; their discord stemmed from the clash of incommensurable categories of value. The first facet illuminates the political value of these royal treasures within the nascent republican order, with many deputies eager to break with the hollow and unprofitable pomp

¹⁸ Manuscript material is scattered between the Archives Nationales (AN), the Archives des Musées Nationaux (AMN), the Archives de la Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs (ABAD), the Bibliothèque de l’Institut (BI), and especially the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) (including NAF 18118–33 for the papers of Bapst & Falize, NAF 24525–40 for Bapst’s personal correspondence, and NAF 9552–9572 for papers donated by Bapst related to the “joyaux de la couronne”).

¹⁹ Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, 1999), 13–44.

²⁰ For a multiperspectival, almost cubist, framework see Carlo Ginzburg, “Micro-history: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35.

of the past. The second facet reveals the commercial value of the stones, as the administration carefully advertised and choreographed the sale to ensure maximum financial return. The third facet frames the aesthetic and historic value attached to the jewels, viewed by scholars as “priceless” emblems of French craftsmanship and resilience across the centuries. The fourth facet presents the national, often racial, values attributed to the crown jewels, whose demotion from communal heirlooms to alienated commodities heralded the seeming precariousness of other venerable monuments in a postmonarchical, anticlerical, and rapidly globalizing era. The 1887 sale generated so much curiosity and rancor because it marked the intersection of several warring estimations or regimes of value.²¹

FIRST FACET: LEGISLATIVE DEBATE

The possibility of selling the crown jewels had first been mooted in 1848 by the firebrand doctor François-Vincent Raspail.²² The Second Republic unraveled so quickly that the proposition received scant consideration, and with the emergence of the Second Empire, the royal collections were not simply conserved but dramatically expanded. Empress Eugénie commissioned Alfred Bapst to produce ostentatious new settings for some fabled stones for her own wardrobe, and the rest of the precious gems were displayed for the first time in the *Galérie d’Apollon*.²³ During the Franco-Prussian War, the jewels were smuggled out of the capital and concealed in a boat off Brest, duping the Communards into thinking that they were buried in a vault under the *Banque de France*.²⁴ Following the terrible events of 1871, deputies for the first time in a generation reconsidered the fate of the collection, tarnished now by associations with the Second Empire. In August 1871 Hervé de Saisy proposed sacrificing the jewels for the sake of national solidarity: “they represent everything which is at once the most vain and most useless, the most fragile and the most superfluous.” In Saisy’s argument, neither moderate royalists nor morally upstanding republicans would ever pine for “these trinkets” (*ces hochets*), a phrase laced with infantilizing contempt.²⁵

²¹ For anthropologists’ reflections on this term in relation to commodities, gift exchange, and art, see Fred R. Myers, *The Empire of Things: Material Culture and Regimes of Value* (Albuquerque, NM, 2001).

²² The political zigzags surrounding the sale have been admirably reconstructed in Agnès Callu, *La réunion des musées nationaux 1870–1940: Genèse et fonctionnement* (Paris, 1994), 103–31.

²³ Daniel Alcouffe, “Introduction,” in *Les gemmes de la couronne* (Paris, 2001), 22–24.

²⁴ Maxime du Camp, *Les convulsions de Paris*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1879), 2:275–76.

²⁵ Other contemptuous terms include *les oripeaux* (baubles), *les jouets* (toys), *les brimborions* (trinkets), and *les cailloux de prix* (expensive pebbles).

The boldness of the measure echoed the desperate public mood following defeat and the hefty reparations imposed by the Treaty of Frankfurt. Other proposals in 1871 called for an auction of royal palaces, which would purge the furniture they contained.²⁶ Happily, the new government succeeded in settling its debts more rapidly than expected, and drastic schemes of liquidation could be shelved. Yet the jewels remained in the spotlight throughout the 1870s. First there was the question of restitutions to Empress Eugénie, who demanded the return of pieces deemed her personal property, even if their silver mounts had been purchased from the *Liste civile*.²⁷ A commission of experts was assembled—including Alfred Bapst—in order to determine how to divide up the disputed pieces.²⁸ Second, the jewels garnered widespread newspaper coverage when they were displayed as part of the 1878 Exposition Universelle (fig. 1).²⁹ In that year, with the republicans scenting victory following the Seize Mai crisis, a new attack was launched by Benjamin Raspail, who was determined to complete his father's proposition. Raspail wanted to obliterate the jewels as revenge against the regime that had sentenced his family to exile after 1851. Backed by a cohort of radical republicans—including Louis Blanc, Martin Nadaud, and Georges Clemenceau—he argued that the jewels were “useless, either in a monarchy, or in a republic” and that it was unacceptable to let the capital they represented remain “unproductive.”³⁰ Raspail invoked cross-party consensus, but his vendetta fed on revulsion at the extravagance of the Second Empire. Anecdotes circulated about the ostentatious monstrosities that Eugénie had commissioned from jewelers, inspired by her aping of theatrical costumes.³¹ The imperial crown fashioned in 1852 was described by Raspail as an object “in the most hateful taste. In all respects, its place is at the Mint, for fire can purify everything.”³²

Behind these aesthetic judgments was a clear political agenda. The commission set up to consider Raspail's motion acknowledged the suspicions that the jewels were being retained as if “waiting for a monarchical restoration.”³³ This was not an idle fear in 1879, although the next few years were decisive both for

²⁶ Séance, November 17, 1871, Conseil général of the Préfecture du département de la Côte-d'Or, AN O5/2308.

²⁷ Catherine Granger, *L'Empereur et les arts: La liste civile de Napoléon III* (Paris, 2005), 369–444.

²⁸ Letter from the Minister of Finances to Alfred Bapst, January 19, 1875, BnF NAF 18130, no. 37.

²⁹ *Le Monde Illustré*, August 10, 1878.

³⁰ Chambre des députés, no. 818, June 7, 1878, 2–3. Many parliamentary debates have been collated in AMN M-4: “Dossier–Diamants de la Couronne.”

³¹ *Le Temps*, December 8, 1881.

³² Chambre des députés, no. 782, May 6, 1882, 8.

³³ Chambre des députés, no. 1859, July 31, 1879, 3.

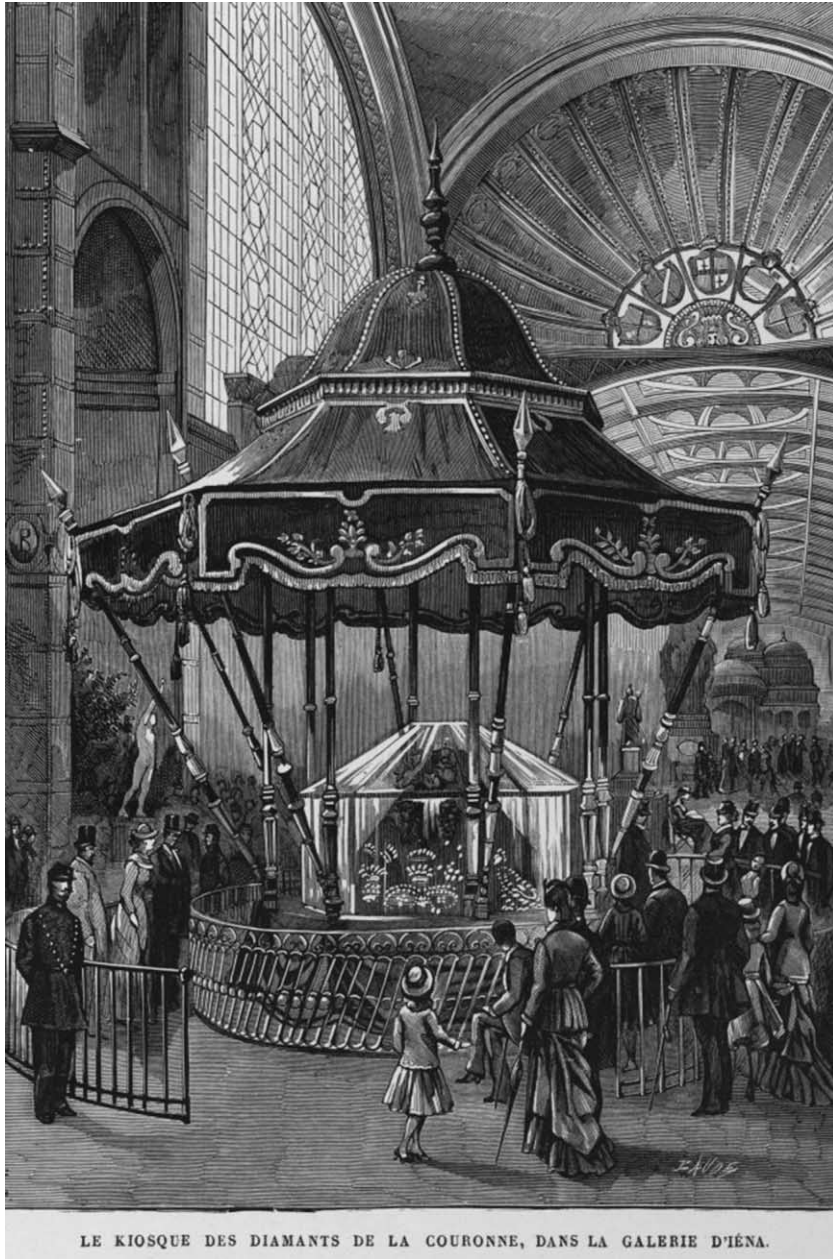


FIG. 1.—Charles Baude, “Kiosque des diamants de la couronne dans la Galerie d’Iéna,” in Simon de Vandière, *L’Exposition universelle de 1878 illustré* (Paris, 1879). Hay Library, Brown University.

the embedding of the Republic and the proscription of any monarchical alternative. The unfolding debate about the jewels ran in direct parallel with the collapse of Bonapartist and Legitimist ambitions following the deaths of the Prince Imperial in 1879 and the comte de Chambord in 1883—as well as the demolition of the charred remains of the Tuileries in 1883 and the banishment of the Orléanist princes in June 1886.³⁴ Sensing the winds of change, Raspail rejoiced that monarchism seemed to be in retreat across Europe: Had not the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs sold off many of their own “baubles” in 1878? Considering Portugal, which was still a monarchy, had parted with these pointless ornaments, surely it would be perverse if the French Republic “hesitated a single instant to shake off the last vestiges of the monarchy?”³⁵ By 1881 Raspail was confidently predicting that 35 or even 40 million francs might be raised (a sum almost double the official estimate of the collection’s value).³⁶ Thrilled at the prospect of this windfall, Raspail called for the entire collection to be liquidated, since even the historic stones had been deformed through their tasteless appropriation by the Bonapartes. The proceeds should then be reinvested as funds for those injured at work. “The crown jewels have been paid for with the money of the nation; it is only right to give back to the people what belongs to the people.”³⁷

An intervention in the spring of 1882 slammed the brakes on such redistributive fantasies. Moderate deputies were unwilling to countenance a total alienation and insisted that objects of primary artistic or historical value should be conserved. Moreover, Jules Ferry wanted the proceeds not to be frittered away on a *Caisse des invalides* but to be poured into the coffers of France’s museums. He cited humiliating figures: if the Germans allocated 406,000 francs for annual acquisitions to the Berlin museums, and the British earmarked 589,000 francs for London collections, the French could muster only 162,000 francs, shared between the Louvre and Luxembourg, Saint-Germain, and Versailles. When it came to voting extra credits, too, the record was embarrassing. French digs at Delphi had been starved of funds, in sharp contrast to triumphant German archaeological projects at Pergamon and Olympia. Moreover, major auctions—such as those at San Donato in 1870 and at Hamilton Palace in 1882—saw the price of *objets d’art* hit stratospheric levels.³⁸ New sources of funding were urgently needed if the French hoped to withstand “formidable capitalists of the old and new worlds.” Otherwise, the cash-strapped museums would be forced to petition the Chamber

³⁴ Louis Iandoli, “The Palace of the Tuileries and Its Demolition: 1871–1883,” *The French Review* 79, no. 5 (2006): 986–1008.

³⁵ *Débats parlementaires*, July 29, 1881, 1824. Cuttings from *Débats parlementaires* appear in AN O5/2308.

³⁶ Note from Marchand, September 3, 1881, AN O5/2308.

³⁷ Chambre des députés, no. 156, November 14, 1881, 4.

³⁸ Gerard Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste II: The Rise and Fall of Objets d’Art Prices since 1750* (London, 1963), 133–41.

for emergency supplements—such as the 118,000 francs required to buy four Courbet canvases, or the 207,000 francs requested to cover purchases at the sale of the collection owned by Louis-Charles Timbal.³⁹ Such sporadic generosity could not prevent France from slipping behind, for “in the domain of art,” Ferry warned, “as in that of industry, not to go forward is to succumb to an imminent decadence.”⁴⁰ Channeling the funds toward museums would also serve the republican agenda for education, capitalizing on the 1882 schooling reforms. Hippolyte Maze insisted that public museums were not simply “places for promenading” but also “schools” from whose soil future French genius might germinate. Out of the capital locked up in jewels that had decorated the foreheads of princes, Maze aspired to make “a new crown for France herself,” thus affirming the alliance of “the art of taste with our republican democracy.”⁴¹

Both camps eventually agreed that only part of the collection would be subject to auction, with exceptions made for jewels that fell into one of three categories. First, the most prestigious pieces, such as the Régent Diamond (valued on its own at 12 million francs in 1791), were held back for the Louvre.⁴² Even Raspail conceded that the latter should be saved, although he maintained that to the naked eye it looked like the plug on a decanter (*bouchon de carafe*).⁴³ A second class of stones of mineralogical merit were to be dispatched to the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle and the École des Mines. Pieces in a third category, largely consisting of diplomatic gifts and defunct decorations, were condemned to be broken up, with the stones removed for sale and the settings melted down at the mint. This category also included a number of items of regalia—such as the *glaive du dauphin* and the crown of Charles X—since they were deemed to be lacking in artistic merit, and it was feared “that these emblems of royalty might be acquired by some kind of Barnum and become the opportunity for a scandalous and lucrative exhibition.”⁴⁴ The sorting of the jewels into categories was overseen by a commission created in 1882, although not all its recommendations were heeded.⁴⁵ For instance, the panel advised that all eight of the “Ma-

³⁹ Chambre des députés, no. 782, May 6, 1882, 1311.

⁴⁰ *Débats parlementaires*, June 21, 1882, 976.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 974.

⁴² In addition to the Régent, the Louvre retained the *épée militaire*, the *broche reliquaire* (designed by Frédéric Bapst), the watch of the Dey of Algiers, the large *chimère* ruby, the pearl and enamel dragon, a small insignia from Denmark’s Order of the Elephant, and one of eight Mazarin diamonds.

⁴³ *Le Matin*, January 25, 1886.

⁴⁴ Parisis (Émile Blavet), *La Vie Parisienne: 1887* (Paris, 1888), 108.

⁴⁵ The commission consisted of Émile Vanderheym, president of the Chambre syndicale des diamants; Paul Jannettaz from the Sorbonne, assistant *naturaliste* at the Muséum; Charles Martial-Bernard, president of the Chambre syndicale de la joaillerie; Honoré, an *ouvrier-ciseleur* who had been awarded prizes in the 1878 Universal Exhibition; and Paul Bapst, descendant of the dynasty of court jewelers.

zarin” diamonds be retained for the Louvre due to the spectrum of polychrome effects, but the Chamber deemed that one representative sample sufficed.⁴⁶

With these subtractions noted, the sale of the remaining jewels was voted for in June 1882 by a margin of 342 to 85. Yet this striking result disguises the true extent of the ideological divisions. Raspail maintained a rhetoric of redistribution and put forward his *Caisse des invalides* in order to “definitively implant the Republic” among the workers.⁴⁷ He urged fellow republicans to hurry in order to realize the dreams of a “social” republic first articulated in 1848. By contrast, the newspaper proprietor Adrien Hébrard intervened in the Senate to discredit Raspail’s inchoate plans, which reeked of “state socialism,” and instead endorsed extra spending on buying artworks for museums. “The works that spring from the hands of [France’s] artists and workers—are they not her jewels and their fame her crown?”⁴⁸ Despite the deadlock between the Chamber and the Senate, republicans in both houses shared a vision of a patrimony made “productive” in inspiring scientific research at the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, preserving outstanding items in the Louvre, educating artisans through masterpieces of craftsmanship, and equipping France with the budget necessary to flourish in what Hébrard called “the great competition of the current moment, the law of all civilized countries.” Only a major injection of funds would allow France to keep its stature in these “peaceful struggles” (*luttres pacifiques*).⁴⁹ Dissent from monarchist deputies was limited to warnings about clumsy planning and poor returns, as well as sniggering at the absurd notion of a president of the Republic trying to wear the Régent in his hat.⁵⁰

The emboldened republicans decided that before the jewels were placed under the hammer, they would be exhibited once more. In 1884, a special octagonal vitrine was installed in the Salle des États of the Louvre. Having served as a throne room under the Second Empire, this venue now provided a spectacular backdrop for the ambitions of the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs (UCAD). The objectives of the UCAD evolved from an earlier focus on the education of skilled workers into a forum for rich collectors to display their prime acquisitions.⁵¹ Entitled “Exposition nationale des arts industrielles,” the resulting show was a hybrid affair, with the “retrospective” section of donations awkwardly juxtaposed with specimens of contemporary artisanal production, intended to

⁴⁶ “Rapport au nom de la commission chargé de faire l’expertise des joyaux de l’état dits diamants de la couronne,” February 23, 1882, AN O5/2320.

⁴⁷ Chambre des députés, no. 782, May 6, 1882, 7, 12.

⁴⁸ Sénat, no. 40, February 12, 1884, 6–7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ The opposition retorted that the insinuation that the Republic lacked majesty rang hollow after the sight of Louis-Philippe in his white trousers, twiddling an umbrella. See the speech of the comte de Lanjuinais in *Débats parlementaires*, February 4, 1886, 124.

⁵¹ Rossella Pezone, “Controverses sur l’aménagement d’un Musée des Arts Décoratifs à Paris au XIXe siècle,” *Histoire de l’Art* 16 (1991): 55–65.

prove that “the *industriels*, the workers themselves are already artists or are becoming so more and more.”⁵² The mayor of the eighteenth arrondissement, Émile Bin, designed a vast decorative allegory in which the City of Paris appeared holding the rod of government.⁵³ She was flanked by other personifications in a tableau of republican verities, such as Commerce, Science, and Empire:

The Genius of France, who shakes his flag with one hand and carries an olive branch with the other, presents her [the Ville de Paris] with the diverse national industries. Immediately to the left of the Ville de Paris, an allegorical figure of Commerce and Industry seems to await from her a creative impulse. At her feet, Labour brings his instruments. On either side are emblematic subjects which complete the ensemble, namely: on the left of the spectator, Truth leaning on Science, trampling down blind Routine and unproductive Laziness; on the other hand, the colonies bring their industrial products to the Ville de Paris while the sun lights up the horizon.⁵⁴

The mural expressed the idealism, as well as the partisanship, that had underpinned the parliamentary debates. It was a visual manifesto for the principle, according to General Boulanger, that “a democracy sure of itself and confident in its future has a duty to free itself of these objects of luxury, without utility and without value.”⁵⁵ It also proclaimed the alliance of Marianne with the market, hailing enlightened global commerce as a way for the Republic to fulfill its regenerative mission.⁵⁶ After an opening attended by President Grévy and luminaries from politics, business, and the arts, the short-lived show attracted thirty thousand visitors over its three-week duration.⁵⁷

In the short term, the moderate republicans triumphed; the decision to sell passed into law definitively on December 7, 1886 (on condition that the final destination of the proceeds be postponed for future debate).⁵⁸ But if the principle was secured, the execution was still uncertain, for the outcome of the sale would depend on both on the vagaries of market forces and the collaboration of specialist groups like the Parisian jewelers. Already in 1884 some commentators attributed the exhibition’s success to the “elite of *amateurs*” who had lent

⁵² *Exposition nationale des arts industrielles: Diamants de la Couronne; Salle des états, Palais du Louvre* (Paris, 1884), 9.

⁵³ Bin also painted an iconographic series for the centenary of 1789. See Pascal Ory, *Une nation pour la mémoire: 1889, 1939, 1989 trois jubilées révolutionnaires* (Paris, 1992), 73, 96.

⁵⁴ *Exposition nationale*, 25.

⁵⁵ *Chambre des députés*, no. 1352, December 7, 1886, 2.

⁵⁶ Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Marketplace: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley, 2001).

⁵⁷ Émile Vanderheyem, *Notice historique sur les joyaux de la couronne et objets des sacres exposés au Musée national du Louvre, galerie d’Apollon* (Paris, 1889), 32.

⁵⁸ *Journal officiel*, January 11, 1887, 1.

stones from their own vitrines to “serve as an escort to these incomparable crown diamonds, just as the great aristocrats and noble ladies used to form a cortege around the all-powerful masters of these gems and these jewels.”⁵⁹ If the 1884 exhibition resembled a funeral rite for the defunct monarchy, then the profits and the dignity of the 1887 sale would also depend on the ability of the administration to reconcile antagonistic interest groups.

SECOND FACET: ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The task of coordinating the unprecedented event was entrusted to two officials: the *directeur générale de l'enregistrement, des domaines et du timbre*, Tiphaigne, and his chief advisor, Chaumard, *directeur des domaines de la Seine*. Aware that he was out of his depth, Chaumard recognized the need to draw on “the insight and celebrity [*notoriété*] of figures who have a technical competence that no one in my department could claim.”⁶⁰ This embrace of collaborators also chimes with two prongs of republican cultural policy. On one side, there was a coherent vision for democratizing the arts, which accorded to the state the functions of oversight and symbolic recognition.⁶¹ On the other, the practical delivery of policy was devolved to groups in civil society, such as the bourgeoisie who supported local museums or the societies of artists who from 1882 were charged with organizing the Salon.⁶² The state was not simply capitulating to a laissez-faire outlook, although arts budgets across the Third Republic were certainly shrinking.⁶³ Rather, as Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix argues, the regime introduced a double logic in which some matters of “national” artistic importance were assigned to regulation (such as the protection of historic monuments), whereas other matters, such as the success of the modern “French” school of painting, could best be promoted via the market.⁶⁴ In contrast to monolithic myths of the French state, honorific public oversight was combined with remarkable latitude for private enterprise. According to Nicholas Green, a key consequence of this recalibration was “the pervasive presence and input of ‘neutral’ expertise (and its informal cultural repertoire) . . . a

⁵⁹ Louis Énault, *Les diamants de la couronne, publié avec le concours, pour la partie technique, de M. Émile Vanderheyem* (Paris, 1884), 112–13.

⁶⁰ Letter from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, December 31, 1886, AN O5/2320.

⁶¹ Miriam R. Levin, *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1986).

⁶² Daniel Sherman, “Art Museums, Inspections and the Limits to Cultural Policy in the Early Third Republic,” *Historical Reflections* 15, no. 2 (1988): 337–59.

⁶³ Paul Gerbod, “L’action culturelle de l’état au XIXe siècle (à travers les divers chapitres du budget général),” *Revue Historique* 270, no. 2 (1983): 389–401.

⁶⁴ Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, “National Art and French Art: History, Art, and Politics during the Early Third Republic,” *Studies in the History of Art* 68 (2005): 39, 46.

crucial factor in shaping the administrative dimension of republican hegemony from the 1870s.”⁶⁵

This need for “informal” expertise was especially pressing when it came to the delicate business of predicting and coaxing a specialist market. Tiphaigne diagnosed the pitfalls ahead: first, there was the danger that the sale would not attract the requisite number and quality of buyers; second, there was the risk that the value of the jewels might plummet, especially in a depressed economic climate; third, there was the alarming possibility that bids would be dominated by cartels of buyers who would manipulate the sale through a process known as “revision.” Such maneuvers had devastated the 1874 auction of the duke of Brunswick’s jewels in Geneva.⁶⁶ To prevent such chicanery, seating arrangements in the salesroom were carefully planned, inserting randomly allocated places to prevent communication between improvised “coalitions.” To reduce auctioneers’ fees and increase capacity, the location was fixed not at the Hôtel Drouot auction house but in the Pavillon de Flore of the Louvre, decorated with the curtains, paneling, and security devices recycled from the UCAD exhibition in 1884.⁶⁷ Every detail was carefully choreographed, from the distribution of tickets and incognito security agents to the surveillance of the standing public of four hundred persons.⁶⁸

Tiphaigne assembled a team of three experienced men to prepare the catalogue and manage the bidding. The Minister of Finance immediately recommended Eugène Escribe, an advisor during the sale of porcelain from the Liste civile in 1873, and Émile Vanderheyem, who had assisted in auctioning the Rothschild jewels in London and was president of the *Chambre Syndicale des Diamants*.⁶⁹ When choosing a third collaborator, Chaumard wanted an intermediary between the authorities and the leading Paris jewelers. It is a sign of the anticipated benefits of the role that politicians waded in to push their favored candidates.⁷⁰ The post eventually fell to the young jewel dealer Arthur Bloche, noteworthy for his “very large activity & rare competence.”⁷¹ He further endeared himself by offer-

⁶⁵ Nicholas Green, “All the Flowers in the Field: The State, Liberalism and Art in France under the Third Republic,” *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no. 1 (1987): 74–75.

⁶⁶ “Rapport de M. Bloche sur les Diamants de la Couronne,” AN O5/2308.

⁶⁷ Letter from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, March 29, 1887, AN O5/2308. On the reverse of his summary report Tiphaigne confessed that he had originally wanted to enlist the courtiers de commerce, who had experience at the Bourse, but the Minister had confided the task to “two persons who I see as unworthy.” “Rapport générale” from Tiphaigne to Ministère des Finances, August 31, 1887, AN O5/2308.

⁶⁸ Letter from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, March 29, 1887, AN O5/2308.

⁶⁹ Letter from Tiphaigne to Ministère des Finances, January 14, 1887, AN O5/2320.

⁷⁰ Escribe was “strongly supported” by senators Campayré and Devès, while Bloche was backed by the deputy Dubort. Letter from Tiphaigne to Ministère des Finances, January 14, 1887, AN O5/2320.

⁷¹ Letter from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, March 15, 1887, AN O5/2320.

ing his services absolutely free.⁷² At moments Tiphaigne would doubt the wisdom of his appointment: on learning of Bloche's involvement in a fraud case in March 1887, Tiphaigne scrawled in red pen, "No luck with the choice of our experts!" and "German Jew charged with the sale of the crown jewels."⁷³ Yet Bloche's great asset was his insight into the mindset of the Parisian jewelers, poisoned by "political grudges or commercial jealousies. . . . Fighting against them would have been, perhaps, to ensure if not certain defeat, then at least a series of harmful incidents."⁷⁴ The sale coincided with an 1884 dispute between the *Chambre Syndicale de la Bijouterie* and the government over quality controls on exports of gold and silver.⁷⁵ It was feared that the nonparticipation of Paris's star jewelers would either heap discredit on the merchandise or abandon the field to outsiders. Bloche's tactic was to give the impression that the sale was not being inflicted on on high but was organized with the jewelers' aid. He flatteringly pointed out "the important role that they should occupy in the battles that were forming." These enticing words were accompanied with financial advantages: Bloche and Vanderheyem refused to take personal commissions from rich *amateurs*, who were instead directed to employ Parisian jewelers as their agents (on condition that these *amateurs* also attend the sale in person). Moreover, Bloche pushed for accredited French buyers to be allowed to pay for their purchases in instalments and to form tactical associations in order to keep as many of the jewels in France as possible.⁷⁶

Bloche also recognized that the sale had to create buzz among connoisseurs; it was "a veritable event" that should be "dressed in a commercial, but not mercantile, guise." Reputable *agents de propagande* were hired to spread news of the sale abroad, often hand delivering the catalogue to well-known foreign collectors.⁷⁷ From an early stage global communications were embraced—hardly surprising in light of the growing American presence in European salesrooms.⁷⁸ Tiphaigne employed the advertising agencies Dollinger and Haval to issue a statement in "all the Paris newspapers, in the principal newssheets of the provinces and in the great newspapers of Europe and America."⁷⁹ The sale also

⁷² Letter from Bloche to Chaumard, February 11, 1887, AN O5/2320.

⁷³ Undated note, alongside cutting from *La Loi*, April 6, 1887, AN O5/2308.

⁷⁴ "Rapport de M. Bloche sur les Diamants de la Couronne," AN O5/2308.

⁷⁵ Jacqueline Viruega, *La bijouterie parisienne: Du Second Empire à la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris, 2004), 198–200.

⁷⁶ "Rapport de M. Bloche sur les Diamants de la Couronne," AN O5/2308.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Letter from Tiphaigne to Chaumard, February 7, 1887, AN O5/2308. See Véronique Long, *Mécènes des deux mondes: Les collectionneurs donateurs du Louvre et de l'Art Institute de Chicago 1879–1940* (Rennes, 2007).

⁷⁹ Tiphaigne to Dauphin, August 31, 1887, "Rapport générale," 17–19, AN O5/2308.

courted the cosmopolitan elite, melding official and *mondain* Paris. A contingent of forty-six ambassadors was invited to the opening of the sale, representing not just the European powers but also Turkey, China, Japan, the United States, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Liberia. Invitations to join the political, administrative, and diplomatic top brass were issued to the *cercles* of high society, including the Jockey Club, les Mirlitons, L'Escrime, Les Deux Mondes, le Cercle Franco-Américain, le Cercle de la Chasse, le Cercle de la Librairie, and the Yacht Club.⁸⁰ The attraction the sale exerted for *le tout Paris* can be deduced from the many dignitaries who asked for entry passes for their female friends.⁸¹ The May date was chosen precisely because it fitted in with the social calendar: the elites would not yet have left for summer in the country, and the city would be thronged with foreigners.⁸² Open for late-night visits with electric lighting, the exhibition of the jewels allowed fashionable society women to imagine how luminous the jewels might appear if worn at balls and parties.⁸³

Two things were not in the hands of the administrators and threatened to undo the fastidious preparations. The first was timing: although Tiphaigne and Chaumard had begun planning from 1878, they had no idea when the event would take place owing to the impasse between the Chamber and the Senate. By the end of 1886, Vanderheyem feared that the current buoyant prices might be “promptly followed [by] a regressive movement.”⁸⁴ Estimates of the expected profits oscillated wildly: the valuation shrank from the 8,650,000 francs predicted by the commission in 1882 to a mere 4,179,662 francs in the sober calculations of Bloche and Vanderheyem five years later.⁸⁵ The second danger was the attitude of the press; managing media relations was imperative because adverse comments might dent the desirability of the collection. The minister of finances Albert Dauphin authorized periodic payments amounting to 19,000 francs for editors of publications such as *Le Gaulois*, *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, *Événement*, *Voltaire*, *Gil Blas*, *Le Matin*, *Le Courier du Soir*, *Galvani's Messenger*, and *La Lanterne* who would publicize the sale and follow the government line.⁸⁶ While he could count on the fidelity of republican papers, Tiphaigne hoped that through sweeteners he might secure “the sympathy, or at least the silence” of the “organs

⁸⁰ See invitation lists in AN O5/2320.

⁸¹ See letters from Sylvain du Boif (May 7, 1887), Bowden (May 12, 1887), Poubelle (May 26, 1887), AN O5/2320.

⁸² Letter from Tiphaigne to Ministère des Finances (Dauphin), January 14, 1887, AN O5/2320.

⁸³ *Le Matin*, March 22, 1887.

⁸⁴ Letters from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, October 15 and November 22, 1886, AN O5/2320.

⁸⁵ See “Diamants, perles et pierreries,” AN O5/2308.

⁸⁶ Tiphaigne asked Chaumard to transmit all relevant articles that appeared in these sponsored papers. Letter from Tiphaigne to Chaumard, May 20, 1887, AN O5/2320.

of the opposition.”⁸⁷ Yet instead of acquiescence, Tiphaigne found that enemy papers gleefully filled up their columns with “the echo of more or less far-fetched slanders and revelations about the conduct of my administration.”⁸⁸ From malice or ignorance, articles spread false information about the timing, the procedures, and the extent of the sale, implying that not even the Régent diamond would be spared.⁸⁹ Paranoid accusations and “curious revelations” insisted that the administration would line the pockets of corrupt individuals.⁹⁰ If the sale raised 20 million francs, then it was alleged that 1,600,000 francs would be creamed off by the hired experts. It was intolerable to think of the auctioneer, “a monopolist” rather than a patriot, getting rich from “a few minutes of peaceful activity, needing no knowledge, requiring no responsibility! Things should not be like this in France, in a democratic country!”⁹¹

Tiphaigne countered that his critics were so poorly informed that few gave their accusations much credence.⁹² Yet the polemics were indicative of how clannish the art world appeared to outsiders. An occasion of national importance had been entrusted to private individuals whose authority stemmed from their informal contacts and commercial client books. The public auction, supposedly a watchword for transparency, instead generated paranoia about hidden cabals. Despite attempts to square republican morality with consumer behavior, fears about impure or unequal markets endured.⁹³ A representative of workers in the jewelry trade petitioned deputies to be vigilant against any “coalition between international capitalists.”⁹⁴ Newspapers thundered that the government must do everything in its power to “disarm the intrigues of *la bande noire*” and stamp out “coalitions of buyers, to prevent resale or revision.”⁹⁵ At least one scheme, run by Lepée Esmelin, planned to unite a number of investors behind a communal purchase, determined to stop the jewels succumbing to “a few *privilegiés* of high finance” and big diamond houses motivated by pure “speculation.”⁹⁶

⁸⁷ Tiphaigne, “Rapport générale,” 18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁹ *La Lanterne*, February 26, 1883; *Gil Blas*, December 23, 1884; *Le Figaro*, February 3, 1882; *L’Intransigeant*, January 28, 1887.

⁹⁰ “Curieuses révélations,” AN O5/2320. This document is possibly by Bapst, as it also appears in BnF NAF 9567, no. 123.

⁹¹ Irénée Blanc, “Les diamants de la couronne.”

⁹² Tiphaigne, “Rapport générale,” 20.

⁹³ Victoria Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830–1870* (Baltimore, 2000).

⁹⁴ Dadier, “Petition 835,” AN O5/2308.

⁹⁵ *Le Pays*, January 28, 1887; *La Justice*, January 26, 1887.

⁹⁶ Advert, “Vente des diamants de la couronne participation collective à un achat partiel,” AN O5/2320.

Stung by the press backlash, Tiphaigne diluted the blaring publicity recommended by Bloche. The collection ought to be visible, but not too visible, for the function of the sale was to “wipe out in certain ways the traces of vanished regimes.”⁹⁷ He dispensed with commissioning a literary preface to the catalogue and excluded from the bidding any ceremonial decorations produced under the Second Empire in case their sight in the salesroom might unleash “regrettable displays.”⁹⁸ Yet this attempt to subtract the politics from the occasion was in vain when every purchase was open to political interpretation: who would get the lions’ share, French or foreign buyers? Who was secretly creaming off the profits? And what dark fate awaited the jewels after they departed the safe? Henri Rochefort jested that the whole collection could have been easily disposed of through a lottery of 30 million tickets each costing a franc or two. Fetishistic royalists would purchase all the tickets in order to prevent the jewels falling into “demagogic hands.” He explained:

When a piece of furniture worth 150 francs sells for 500,000 on the grounds that it belonged to Dubarry, who can doubt the delirium that would seize *amateurs* of memories and regrets at the hope of being able to install in their vitrines a necklace that served Marie-Antoinette, a bracelet that clasped the arm of Marie-Louise, or a simple rhinestone comb that held back the shells with which Marie-Amélie liked to frame her face? Some would take tickets out of tenderness, others out of speculation; but we see no disadvantage in that the Republic would benefit from the passions unleashed.⁹⁹

La Lanterne imagined sordid futures for discarded regalia: “Those family sabres would have made quite an impression on a fairground stage or in a performance of *La Belle Hélène*! There was even talk for a while about le Chat Noir.” The circus, the operetta, the cabaret—this was all the relics of monarchy were good for in the modern era, to be hawked abroad and “scattered around the four corners of the world.”¹⁰⁰ While Rochefort rejoiced at this *profanation républicaine*, opponents of the sale insisted that the jewels were not gaudy playthings but integral to French art and French history.

THIRD FACET: INTRANSIGENT ERUDITION

In 1884, the novelist Louis Énault observed that the decision to sell had provoked “in the world of historians, artists, thinkers, poets, and women a real emotion, lively and profound.”¹⁰¹ Énault pitched this coalition of fine-feeling souls

⁹⁷ Tiphaigne, “Rapport générale,” 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁹ Henri Rochefort, “Couronnes en loterie,” *L’Intransigeant*, February 8, 1887.

¹⁰⁰ “Joyaux à vendre,” *La Lanterne*, January 16, 1887.

¹⁰¹ Énault, *Les diamants*, ii.

against the brutal “*logiciens* who rate algebra above sentiment.” In contrast to centuries of patient accumulation, these precious stones now faced an undignified, promiscuous circulation. “It does not please us at all to think of the studs of Anne of Austria, the diamonds of Louis XIV, the rubies of Louis XVI and the pearls of Marie-Antoinette passing, from sale to sale, into the hands of the dealers.”¹⁰² Other journalists personified France as one of those “loose and destitute old women” forced to sell their heirlooms when “creditors were at the door.”¹⁰³ The stones were anthropomorphized to spark outrage at the way they were being mistreated, shut away in the basement of the Ministry of Finances: “prisoners in the depths,” “buried in the shadows,” “mutilated, stripped bare.” “We are going to judge them, condemn them, and banish them,” protested *Le Figaro* in an article entitled “Carnet d’un mondain”: “as if the crown jewels did not form part of the indivisible fortune of France, of the same order as the paintings of the Louvre or the collections of the museums.” The stones evoked painful memories of Eugénie and the diamond necklace affair entrapping Marie-Antoinette (“The sovereign would only receive from her people the red collar of the martyr”).¹⁰⁴ The intimate connection between doomed royal bodies and the doomed stones invested the jewels with an “aura of sanctity” and a quasi-organic vitality.¹⁰⁵ For if it seemed that “glory had left its rays” imprinted on the stones, then “sorrow seems to have crystallized in them some tears” and even “drops of blood.”¹⁰⁶

Such imagery predominated in the royalist imaginary, with its constellation of relics and martyrs, but it had limited resonance with a wider public. Across the 1880s opponents of the sale appealed not just to monarchist sentimentality but also to economic reasoning and feelings of national honor. Énault noted that the permanent exhibition of England’s crown jewels at the Tower of London generated 150,000 francs a year.¹⁰⁷ Enriched by Napoleonic victories in Germany—indeed, the Régent had once decorated the hilt of Bonaparte’s sword—Énault apostrophized the collection as “one of the ornaments of France herself.”¹⁰⁸ Gaston Calmette went one better, suggesting that the evolution of the collection enacted the national epic in miniature: “The history of the crown jewels is, in effect, the history of France herself. Humble at the beginning, they grow and multiply when France herself grows and multiplies: their shine becomes stronger and

¹⁰² Ibid., 137.

¹⁰³ Tout-Paris, “Notes parisiens- les joyaux de la couronne,” *Le Gaulois*, January 14, 1887.

¹⁰⁴ Étincelle, “Carnet d’un mondain,” *Le Figaro*, February 3, 1882. The author is probably Bapst writing under an alias.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Herzog von Württemberg, “The Crown Jewels: Their Fate from 1853 to 1887,” in *The Belle Époque of French Jewellery, 1850–1910: Jewellery-Making in Paris*, ed. Michael Koch, Frances Wilson, and Caroline Crisford (London, 1991), 181.

¹⁰⁶ Étincelle, “Carnet d’un mondain.”

¹⁰⁷ Énault, *Les diamants*, 139.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 105, 119, 137.

their value greater. . . . Everything is hence compressed in this common and indissoluble existence of men and things.”¹⁰⁹ Calmette insisted that the time had now come for the collection to go abroad to enlighten other peoples; “it will give at once a profoundly moving and profoundly rare education to all other nations.”¹¹⁰ For Calmette, writing in defense of the government’s decision, the sale was pictured as an extension of France’s civilizing mission.

The symbolic translation of the jewels from the dynastic to the national body was effected most subversively by Germain Bapst.¹¹¹ Art historian, bibliophile, and *érudit*, Bapst was also heir to a dynasty that had been founded by George-Michel Bapst in the mid-eighteenth century and had proudly served the crown for nine generations. Alfred Bapst, Germain’s father, had worked for Eugénie and had obtained glowing praise for his displays at the 1878 exhibition. After his death in 1879, the business split between “Bapst & Falize” (formed by the partnership of Germain with Lucien Falize, another jeweller-critic) and “J. & P. Bapst et fils” (run by Germain’s younger brothers Jules and Paul).¹¹² Bapst family members had contributed at several moments to deciding the collection’s fate: Alfred had advised on extracting Eugénie’s jewels from the Liste civile in 1875, whereas Paul had sat alongside Vanderheyem on the 1882 commission (although he kept a wary independence).¹¹³ If Alfred and Paul Bapst were suspected of being uncooperative, Germain seemed to be wantonly disruptive. “Attached by family tradition to the conservation of this collection, of which my father was the final jeweller,” Bapst told the director of museums in 1887, “I have refused to be involved in the destruction of it and in the present circumstances I hold more than ever to the line of conduct that I have pursued up to now.”¹¹⁴ Benjamin Raspail knew the Bapsts as troublesome opponents and denounced them in the Chamber as Orléanist creatures, “agents of reaction who are playing a double game.”¹¹⁵ Raspail was undecided whether this sabotage was

¹⁰⁹ Gaston Calmette, “Préface,” in Vanderheyem, *Notice historique*, ii.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ii.

¹¹¹ See the (partial) notice by Michel Bascou, “Germain Bapst,” in *Dictionnaire critique des historiens de l’art, actifs en France de la Révolution à la Première Guerre Mondiale*, ed. Philippe Sénéschal and Claire Barbillon (Paris, 2009), <https://www.inha.fr/fr/ressources/publications/publications-numeriques/dictionnaire-critique-des-historiens-de-l-art/bapst-germain.html>.

¹¹² *The Belle Époque*, 186. In the merger contract, Falize hailed Bapst as an “old family, a name loved by a long-standing and loyal clientele, a name respected by all of French commerce.” BnF NAF 18129, no. 50–51.

¹¹³ Tellingly, Paul Bapst inspected the collection on different days from the rest of the commission. See “Rapport au nom de la commission,” AN O5/2320.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Bapst to Kaempfen, April 28, 1887, BnF NAF 9567.

¹¹⁵ *Débats parlementaires*, February 4, 1886, 126–27. Paul Bapst was brother-in-law of Léon Say, the moderate minister who in 1882 worked with Ferry to dilute Raspail’s proposed *Caisse des Invalides*.

motivated by “political affections” or “personal interests,” although he found it difficult to separate the two.¹¹⁶

Germain Bapst styled himself as the tribune for the *Chambre Syndicale de la Bijouterie, Joaillerie et Orfèverie*, which he described with deliberate archaism as a “corporation” whose patriotism precluded it from assisting the sale.¹¹⁷ He also belonged to a generation of *amateur* historians in the 1870s who embraced archival research to document collections, sponsor design reform, and protect historical monuments.¹¹⁸ Under the influence of his friends Jérôme Pichon and Louis Courajod, Bapst had mined eighteenth-century inventories and catalogues as a means of accessing “the most intimate facts of private life.”¹¹⁹ Echoing the approach of the Goncourt brothers, Bapst reconstructed the inventory of Marie-Joseph de Saxe, mother of the final Bourbon kings, to describe her (lost) library, her wardrobe, and the jewels of her toilette.¹²⁰ Hailing Bapst for “your science and your taste,” one admirer claimed that the study of personal effects had allowed the reader “to penetrate into the intimacy of a princely life.”¹²¹ But while material culture acted as a portal for entering the old regime, Bapst was also a champion of modern industrial reform through his activities with the UCAD.¹²² He frequently underlined the connections between the development of craftsmanship and the flowering of the national genius before French taste was denatured by Renaissance excess.¹²³ This conviction that past styles should inform future refinement explains why he viewed the alienation of the crown jewels as “prejudicial” to the edification of French artisans and consumers.¹²⁴

Énault’s emotive protest against the sale had glossed over the jewels’ specific history; indeed, his account began with a paeon to precious jewels found in Hebrew, Egyptian, Chinese, and Indian mythologies.¹²⁵ By contrast, Bapst’s 1889 *Histoire des joyaux de la couronne* drew on family business records supple-

¹¹⁶ *Le Matin*, January 25, 1886.

¹¹⁷ Germain Bapst, “UCAD Conférence 12 avril 1887,” AMAD, Mss Z-23, 184–85.

¹¹⁸ Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 109–33.

¹¹⁹ Germain Bapst, “Les diamants de la couronne,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January 1887, 55.

¹²⁰ Germain Bapst, *Inventaire de Marie-Josphe de Saxe, dauphine de France* (Paris, 1883), 62, 104–12.

¹²¹ Letter from Jourdain to Bapst, May 10, 1883, BnF NAF 24533, no. 116.

¹²² Germain Bapst, *Le Musée rétrospectif du métal à l'exposition de l'Union Centrale des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1880).

¹²³ Germain Bapst, *Les métaux dans l'antiquité et au moyen-âge- l'étain* (Paris, 1884), v–vii. Bapst’s views resemble those of Louis Courajod; see Michela Passini, *La Fabrique de l'art national: Le nationalisme et les origines de l'histoire de l'art en France et en Allemagne, 1870–1933* (Paris, 2012), 9–58.

¹²⁴ Bapst, “Les diamants,” 55.

¹²⁵ Énault, *Les diamants*, iv–v.

mented by archival research in the British Museum and Public Records Office by his brother Edmond, employee of the French embassy in London.¹²⁶ This positivist rigor underwrote his claim for the jewels as embodiments of the national drama, both fashioned by and fashioners of French history. As he told attendees at a meeting of the UCAD in April 1887, a month before the sale, defending the jewels was like defending the nation's frontiers:

Gentlemen, certain historic objects are identified with the milieu they have passed through or the events whose birth they have seen. They recall to the imagination of those who look at them the memories of the past with a charm and a poetry that will often be missing from printed or manuscript documents. When these objects, thanks to circumstances, have been mixed into all the great events of history, then they have become an integral part of the country, and, in this regard, their conservation is as dear to all patriots as that of a province or a fortress (Applause).¹²⁷

Through his research Bapst overturned the assumption of the commission that the collection began in 1661 with Cardinal Mazarin. Rather he demonstrated that the origins of the collection went back to 1530 and to François I who, in the wake of the humiliation of Pavia, specified a set of "jewels which will remain inalienable from the Crown, that is to say from the state, this is to say from the nation. These jewels will become, according to the modern expression, national property."¹²⁸ Bapst emphasized that the concept of national *patrimoine*, often ascribed to the Revolution, had actually been anticipated by the Valois two hundred and fifty years before.

Moreover, the collection had a critical role in brokering alliances and raising capital when France was in the grip of crisis. In 1575, Jean Casimir, the Palatine count, took advantage of confessional strife to maraud across France, and was only persuaded to leave when Charles IX offered him a vast tribute and casket of jewels. Bapst sketched the repellent swindler count returning to Germany:

It was thus he inflicted on France one of the greatest injuries she has ever received: returning into his country, he formed a procession, driving before him herds of cows and sheep that he had gathered in Champagne; behind him came chariots fitted with platforms on which were set the crown jewels, which had been given to him as a ransom, which were displayed in a way that all the people could see them; behind them came the hostages that he had taken from the king of France. . . . Ah, gentlemen, don't you find it sad today that we have agreed to sell this collection, and that after these jewels or other similar ones were paraded through Germany after defeat, delivering a serious insult to

¹²⁶ See the letters from Edmond to Germain Bapst, BnF NAF 24525, nos. 366–418.

¹²⁷ Bapst, "UCAD Conférence," 1–2. The defense of a fortress carried particular resonance following the defense of Metz and Belfort in the Franco-Prussian War.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7–8.

the French flag, it is possible today for a powerful enemy to exhibit them, perhaps, in one of his museums with this label: "Crown Jewels of France!"¹²⁹

To Bapst's dismay, the spoliation in the sixteenth century now seemed to be repeated at the close of the nineteenth, as the jewels became the latest trophies in the ongoing tit-for-tat plunder between France and Germany.¹³⁰ Bapst revealed how, time and again, from the Wars of Religion to the Directory, French rulers had raided their jewel reserves in order to raise troops and defend the nation's borders. This only added to the aura of the jewels, whose names triggered memories of the glorious feats of arms that they had secured on battlefields like Marengo.¹³¹ Bapst shuddered to think how easily this collection, once part of the military arsenal, could disappear across the Rhine: "Do you think the Iron Chancellor would hesitate for a minute if, for this small sum, he could inflict on our country the injury, which would especially please German pride, of exhibiting in Berlin before the eyes of everyone, complete with their former label, the diamonds of the French crown?"¹³²

Bapst challenged the rationale of the sale on three fronts. First, he questioned the financial argument. By releasing so many precious jewels at once, the government would almost certainly depress the market and be obliged to undersell. Echoing Énault, he queried the financial logic of shedding a reliable source of revenue, since whenever they had been put on show "the crowd has come, packed in, ever renewed, ever curious, full of a naïve respect for the past, to contemplate them."¹³³ Second, he pointed out the sheer incompetence that had dogged the preliminary organization. Those who had lobbied for the sale had been grossly ignorant; Hébrad's report to the Senate made only three factual assertions about the jewels, and all three were false.¹³⁴ The 1882 commission charged with choosing which stones to spare from the destruction were no better informed. A Second Empire brooch whose setting had been made by Albert Bapst, Germain's father, was identified in the 1884 report as "visibly a work from the era of Louis XV."¹³⁵ More shockingly, a ruby known as the "Cote de Bretagne," originally bequeathed by Anne de Bretagne to her daughter and designated to be worn as part of the Collier de la Toison d'Or by Louis XV, had been dispatched to the Muséum as

¹²⁹ Ibid., 61–63.

¹³⁰ For German recriminations in 1870–71 about the French revolutionary-era confiscations, see Bénédicte Savoy, *Le patrimoine annexé: Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800*, 2 vols. (Paris, 2006), 1:285–93.

¹³¹ *L'Événement*, February 28, 1886; *Le Rappel*, February 15, 1886.

¹³² Germain Bapst, *Histoire des joyaux de la couronne de France, d'après des documents inédits* (Paris, 1889), 878.

¹³³ Ibid., iii.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 666.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 660.

a “pierre sans valeur.” It was eventually retrieved thanks to the intercession of a Louvre curator, but when questioned, the president of the commission, Vanderheym, confessed he had never heard of the piece.¹³⁶ Third, Bapst accused the organizers of partisan spitefulness. Once the decision was announced, he and his relatives had written to ministers offering to buy Charles X’s coronation crown, crafted by Frédéric Bapst, planning to create a replica for the Louvre. The letters went unanswered for months and this “historic monument” was needlessly destroyed.¹³⁷ Further investigations revealed that employees in the Ministry of Finances had called it a *panier de salade* and kicked it around like a ball. They even fabricated little hammers to aid in the wrecking game, aiming to sell these afterward as memorabilia. “We believe it necessary to signal this [behavior] at a moment when the government is creating commissions, and when private societies are being set up on all sides, to prevent the destruction of the artistic monuments of our country.”¹³⁸ By highlighting this infantile behavior, Bapst attested that the Republic was guilty not just of negligence but of a species of *vandalisme*—a term that was coined in 1793 but that carried extra bite following Hausmannization and the Commune. After 1871, the protection of the *patrimoine* had acquired the urgency of a moral crusade, and protecting historic treasures was frequently described in terms of filial honor.¹³⁹ It was disturbing to see the Republic voting to destroy a collection that had survived previous “decrees, thefts, pillages” and would otherwise continue to survive “for future generations as a testimony to the triumph of good sense over vulgarity, ignorance and stupidity.”¹⁴⁰

Bapst also chipped away at the stones’ attributions. The initial catalogue of the collection was regarded by many jewel experts as woefully deficient.¹⁴¹ Of the eight shimmering diamonds it identified as “Mazarins,” Bapst alleged that only one (no. 4) was authentic and could be traced back to the seventeenth century. The others were purchased during the First Empire. He first dropped this

¹³⁶ Germain Bapst, “Les joyaux de la couronne,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, February, 1886, 865–66; see Claude Frégnaç, “L’histoire glorieuse et la fin tragique des joyaux de la couronne,” *Connaissance des Arts* 122 (1962): 104.

¹³⁷ Letters from Germain Bapst to Tiphaigne January 6, April 8, and May 7, 1887, AN O5/2308; letter from Charles Bapst to Tiphaigne May 11, 1887, AN O5/2308; Morel, *Les joyaux*, 372.

¹³⁸ Bapst, *Histoire*, 623–24. The organizations he has in mind include the *Société de l’histoire de l’art français* (1872) and the *Société des amis des monuments parisiens* (1884).

¹³⁹ Tom Stammers, “Collectors, Catholics and the Commune: Heritage and Counter-revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014): 53–87; Ruth Fiori, *L’Invention du vieux Paris: Naissance d’une conscience patrimoniale dans la capitale* (Paris, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ Bapst, “Les joyaux,” 861.

¹⁴¹ The head of the Chambre Syndicale, Marest, complained that the catalogue photographs gave no information about the scale of the pieces and were useless for training artisans. Letter from Marest to the Ministère des Finances, April 8, 1887, AN O5/2308.

bombshell during a public lecture at the Cercle Saint-Simon on March 21, 1887. One of Chaumard's agents had been present at the talk, and he reported back that Bapst's revelations, once reprinted in major newspapers, would not just dent the reputation of the Mazarins but also inspire "doubts on the value and authenticity of other pieces or settings."¹⁴² Bapst was indeed ruthless in prosecuting a media campaign, recruiting society journalists as allies to his cause and furnishing documents from the family archive that contradicted the official classification of the jewels.¹⁴³ Beyond specialist periodicals such as the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, he wrote under aliases for the popular newspaper *Illustration*, describing in lurid terms the gruesome scenes he had witnessed in the bowels of the Ministry of Finances in February 1887. While the wife and daughter of the finance minister looked on, visibly moved, heartless male employees broke up the pieces destined for the mint with pincers, hammers, and even their bare hands, throwing the silver settings into a vase of acid.¹⁴⁴ He even tried to persuade the Louvre curators to change which jewels were exhibited in the vitrines of the Galerie d'Apollon.¹⁴⁵ Stung by accusations of ineptitude, Bloche was jolted into publishing a new version of the catalogue in 1888, eager to correct "the embarrassing impression" that its predecessor produced "among the discerning public."¹⁴⁶ On the offensive, Vanderheyem wanted to quash any talk of "vandalism" and insisted that the sale had been guided throughout by men of irreproachable "competence" and "patriotism."¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Vanderheyem queried why, if Bapst was so devoted to the jewels, he seemed determined to do "everything possible to undermine their value." Surely his habit of throwing attributions into doubt risked harming France's interests?¹⁴⁸

Yet although Bapst's rhetorical opposition to the sale was total, it was qualified by recognition of its commercial advantages. He did not refrain from buying in 1887; in the preceding weeks he escorted rich clients to inspect the lots.¹⁴⁹ The firm of Bapst and Falize assisted with carrying out repairs to the jewels in prep-

¹⁴² Letter from Yvan to Chaumard, March 21, 1887, AN O5/2320.

¹⁴³ Letter from Bapst to Alis, December 15, 1886, BI Mss 8440 pl. 141; undated letter from editor of the *Revue Illustrée* to Bapst, BnF NAF 24531 no. 164–65; *Gil Blas*, December 23, 1884.

¹⁴⁴ X, "Les diamants de la couronne," *L'Illustration*, February 19, 1887, 130–31. The unusually precise information in this article tipped off the organizers that their confidences to Bapst had been betrayed. Letter from Chaumard to Tiphaigne, January 14, 1887, AN O5/2320.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Saglio to Bapst, December 12, 1888, BnF NAF 24539 no. 202.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Bloche, *La vente des diamants de la couronne: Son histoire, ses préparatifs—ses résultats, avec le catalogue raisonné des joyaux* (Paris, 1888), viii.

¹⁴⁷ Vanderheyem, *Notice historique*, 36.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Bapst, April 19, 1887, in reference to client M. Polontsof, AN O5/2320.

aration for the sale, so that these pieces could be shown in their optimal aspect.¹⁵⁰ The publicity Bapst won through his writings enhanced his authority and he received numerous letters asking him to authenticate family heirlooms or intervene in forthcoming sales.¹⁵¹ He took comfort that amidst those jewels remaining in the Galerie d'Apollon, several still bore the signature of his grandfather and his father, "the reminder of an old tradition, of a former splendour, and . . . a promise of future glory." While he confessed his sense of "regret" and "bitterness" at the way the sale had been handled, he still acknowledged hope that at least some good might come of it if the proceeds were directed toward a grand patriotic end. He cited as a precedent the provision in Napoleon's will that the 600,000 francs worth of jewels from his personal collection should be invested in pensions for those who fought in the Grande Armée, their widows, and their descendants.¹⁵² Bapst had a fervent passion for military history, and especially for that of the armies of the First Empire, whose exploits he compared to Homeric heroes.¹⁵³

The closing line of his *Histoire des bijoux* offered the consoling thought that despite recent setbacks France would remain "the first country on earth, that which brings the benefits of progress to other nations."¹⁵⁴ Eager to maintain that superiority, Bapst supported the industrial policies of the Republic and was sent on foreign tours and missions to Germany and Russia as part of his work for the UCAD.¹⁵⁵ Bapst thus continued to collaborate with the government, and despite his spat with the regime over the sale he was proud to assist in organizing displays—especially *l'art militaire*—as part of the 1889 Exposition Universelle.¹⁵⁶ On that occasion, he had the satisfaction of seeing the firm of Bapst and Falize praised to the skies for their historicist jewelry, including an armor-clad bust of *Gallia*. The exhibition helped to vindicate the notion that private individuals showed greater respect for French traditions than the shortsighted administration.¹⁵⁷ Bapst had a complex relationship with the Republic, but he was willing

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Rouvier to Kaempfen April 15, 1887, AMN M-4.

¹⁵¹ Letter from Dr Louge to Bapst, December 24, 1889; letter from Hunt and Roskell to Bapst, August 10, 1894, BnF NAF 24532, nos. 286–87, 371–72.

¹⁵² Bapst, "UCAD Conférence," 187. Bapst endorsed a campaign to secure Napoleon's bequest for the nation, although the organizer suspected that the Bapst family were "*inféodés* to the cause of the Orléans princes, politically." See letters from d'Epailly to Bapst, March 26, 1887, and May 29, 1887, BnF NAF 9567, nos. 106, 124–25.

¹⁵³ Germain Bapst, ed., *Exposition historique et militaire: De la Révolution et de l'Empire* (Paris, 1895), 5.

¹⁵⁴ Bapst, *Histoire*, 666, 668.

¹⁵⁵ Order of President du Conseil to Bapst, April 7, 1887, BnF NAF 24533, no. 179.

¹⁵⁶ See the letters from Bapst to Gervais, BnF NAF 23531.

¹⁵⁷ See the commemorative photograph album kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale: *Reproduction de plusieurs objets d'art exposés par MM Germain Bapst et Falize à l'Exposition Universelle de 1889*.

to cooperate, episodically and on his own terms, to defend the national collections. This was quite different from the attitude of his one-time protégé, Édouard Drumont, who reinterpreted the sale through an antirevolutionary and racist lens.

FOURTH FACET: THE REVOLUTION AND THE JEWS

In the course of his research Bapst had reopened the files on the notorious theft of the jewels in September 1792. If the inventory of 1791 had placed the total value of the collection at 30 million francs, the gang that breached the Garde-Meuble escaped leaving only 50,000 francs' worth of stones behind. A major investigation was launched by the Convention, resulting in the arrest and execution of the perceived ringleaders and the recuperation of some of most celebrated stones following confessions and tip-offs. But who exactly had directed this conspiracy was shrouded in mystery: as Harry Alis observed, "Nobody wanted to believe in an ordinary theft."¹⁵⁸ Gaps and inconsistencies in the trial record bred suspicion that a theft of this magnitude could only have happened with collusion from above. In the conspiracy theory advanced by Léon Pagès, the theft had been the brainchild of Danton and Thuriot, who had used the jewels to bribe the Prussians into staging the improbable defeat at Valmy. Writing in 1877, Pagès connected the criminality of the Jacobins and the confiscations of the Commune with the greater "dilapidations" perpetrated by the new regime born on September 4.¹⁵⁹

By contrast, Bapst in the *Histoire des joyaux* dispelled the more lurid rumors and highlighted the banal aspects of the heist. He concluded that the culprits were a gang of around thirty veteran criminals from Paris and Rouen whose leader, Paul Miette, first devised the plan when observing the deficient security measures at the Garde-Meuble.¹⁶⁰ Despite his hostility toward the revolutionaries—sneering that the Girondins did not speak "a word of criticism for the massacres of September"—Bapst argued that they had only indirectly encouraged the crime through their carelessness and weak authority.¹⁶¹ Early reviewers of Bapst's monograph were thrilled by his detective work, even if they felt fatigued by the detail.¹⁶² Bapst boasted that his work had superseded all previous discussions of the theft, including that by Édouard Drumont.¹⁶³ Yet Bapst's minimizing of Drumont concealed their earlier intimacy. In 1887, a month be-

¹⁵⁸ Alis, "Débats du dimanche 13 février 1886," BI Ms 8440, pl. 16–17.

¹⁵⁹ Léon Pagès, *Valmy, les diamants de la couronne de France et les dépouilles des victimes des 2 et 3 septembre, rançon de la République* (Paris, 1877), 39.

¹⁶⁰ Bapst, *Histoire*, 463.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁶² Édouard Rott, "Histoire des joyaux de la couronne," *Revue Historique* 45, no. 1 (1891): 162.

¹⁶³ Bapst, *Histoire*, 447.

fore the sale, Bapst had encouraged readers to investigate the “remarkable and . . . interesting work that our friend M. Edouard Drumont has published, in the *Revue de la Révolution*, on the theft of 1792.”¹⁶⁴ In turn, Drumont in 1885 frankly acknowledged his gratitude to Bapst for help with sources. He urged Bapst to write a comprehensive history of the jewels: “No publication would be more interesting.”¹⁶⁵ Quotations from Bapst appear in various places in Drumont’s rambling *La France juive* as well.¹⁶⁶ Drumont cited a letter published under the pseudonym of Josse in the *Moniteur Universel* in which Bapst taunted the Minister of Fine Arts, Antonin Proust, for choosing as the frontispiece of *Revue des Arts Décoratifs* a mirror ostensibly crafted for the Renaissance beauty Louise de Vaudecourt—but which in fact had been manufactured in 1863. A true connoisseur like Bapst knew better than the ignorant minister, although Drumont blamed the mistake on confusion spread by “parasitic and intermediary” Jewish dealers.¹⁶⁷

Yet these friendly relations cooled in the following months, and in an undated letter Drumont upbraided Bapst for suddenly omitting reference to Drumont from later publications: “My dear friend, I thank you for sending your article, but, frankly, it seems to me that it would have been simple good manners to reference the work that I published—very much thanks to you, I recognize this—in the *Revue de la Révolution*. Since I have been sufficiently kind toward you that you pay me back with this lack of *politesse* I will be obliged to do the same to you in the same situation. Without bitterness. Ed. Drumont.”¹⁶⁸ The reasons for this falling out are hard to ascertain; it is possible that Bapst, who clearly had originally aided the little-known Drumont with his polemic in 1885, was embarrassed after the seismic success of *La France juive* the following year. If Drumont is to be believed, although Bapst shared some of his detestation for the “*trafic du Juif*,” he preferred to hide his barbs under an alias.¹⁶⁹ Bapst’s discussion in the *Histoire des joyaux* focused on the calculations of the thieves themselves, not on those German and Jewish *brocanteurs* “indulging in an illicit trade, in usury, and especially in the resale of stolen objects.”¹⁷⁰ These shadowy figures are only footnotes in a bigger conspiracy for Bapst, yet they dominated the thinking of Drumont.

¹⁶⁴ Bapst, “Les diamants de la couronne,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, March 1887, 244. *La Revue de la Révolution* was founded in 1883 by Charles d’Héricault and denounced freemasonry and the centenary commemorations. See Ory, *Une nation*, 38.

¹⁶⁵ Édouard Drumont, *Le vol des diamants de la couronne au Garde Meuble* (Paris, 1885), 42.

¹⁶⁶ Édouard Drumont, *La France juive: Essai d’histoire contemporaine*, 2 vols., 43rd ed. (Paris, 1886), 2:29.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:88.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Drumont to Bapst, undated, BnF NAF 24529, no. 512.

¹⁶⁹ Drumont, *France juive*, 2:88.

¹⁷⁰ Bapst, *Histoire*, 501.

The fate of the jewels marked a radicalization in Drumont's rhetorical strategy and, by extension, fed into the emergence of a new strand of antisemitism at the close of the nineteenth century. The 1885 article was the first time that this journalist and controversialist, previously known for his socialist sympathies and antiquarian writings on *vieux Paris*, published a diatribe against the Jews. The intellectual roots of this development predated the friendship with Bapst. Drumont borrowed his belligerent, populist Catholicism from Louis Veuillot, and his fullest biographer, Grégoire Kaufmann, has uncovered the critical role played by his correspondence with Jesuit father Stanislas Du Lac.¹⁷¹ From Naturalist literary circles and the tragedy of his mother's insanity he developed his obsession with poverty, victimhood, inheritance, and degeneration. Drumont's first novel, *Le Dernier des Trémolin*, compressed the troubles of the age into the disintegration of a single family unit.¹⁷² His early interest in collecting and in the history of the Revolution present affinities with other proponents of Naturalism, such as Guy de Maupassant, Hippolyte Taine, and Edmond de Goncourt.¹⁷³ Yet the strongest literary influence on Drumont was Alphonse Daudet, whose reputation for Provençal comedies has concealed his darker, political obsessions.¹⁷⁴ There is no better symbol of the mixed ideological heritage of Naturalism than the fact that Daudet's coffin would be carried by the implacable foes Zola and Drumont.¹⁷⁵

It was through Daudet, indeed, that Drumont was first sensitized to the topic of diamonds, in a novel entitled *Les Rois en exil*. Published in 1879, when debates on the crown jewels were just beginning, the novel had been first conceived in the wake of the destruction of the Tuileries palace. Daudet fleshed out his chronicle of royal decline by dramatizing headlines from the contemporary salesrooms: the legal wrangling over the Toison d'Or, pawned against the honor of the Spanish Bourbon Don Carlos; the Tattersall auction, in which the duke of Brunswick's carriages were bought by the Hippodrome circus; and the sale of crowns belonging to Queen Isabel of Spain at Hôtel Drouot in 1878.¹⁷⁶ Although he had shaken off the Legitimist beliefs of his upbringing, Daudet was

¹⁷¹ Édouard Drumont, *De l'or, de la boue, du sang: Du Panama à l'anarchie* (Paris, 1896), viii; Grégoire Kauffmann, *Édouard Drumont* (Paris, 2008).

¹⁷² Édouard Drumont, *Le Dernier des Trémolin* (Paris, 1879).

¹⁷³ Maupassant's famous story about paste diamonds, "La Parure," was written in 1880.

¹⁷⁴ J. P. Clébert, *Les Daudet: Une famille bien française* (Paris, 1988).

¹⁷⁵ Kate Cambor, *Gilded Youth: Three Lives in France's Belle Époque* (New York, 2009), 158.

¹⁷⁶ Alphonse Daudet, "Histoire de mes livres: Les Rois en exil," in *Oeuvres II* (Paris, 1990), 1130, 1133. For the Spanish Bourbon jewelry sale see *Catalogue des diamants anciens, émeraudes, saphirs, rubis, perles, camées, appartenant à S.M. la reine Isabelle de Bourbon* (Paris, 1878).

fascinated by the poignancy of such occasions, and he started to research foreign monarchs who had fallen on hard times.¹⁷⁷ There are at least three features of the novel that inspired Drumont's approach. First, Daudet wrung maximum pathos out of the plight of exiled monarchs, but he ultimately saw their fate as irreversible; the "race" of kings was finished, living on only as a group of decrepit human antiques.¹⁷⁸ In a central episode in the novel, Queen Frédérique orders her servant to dismantle the crown of Illyria, deploying garden secateurs to pluck out the strangely animate stones: "The royalist suffered, fumed at the insult being inflicted on the crown. He felt it shuddering, resisting, struggling." To add to the indignity, the dislodged stones proved on inspection to be false, a metaphor for the imposture of royal authority.¹⁷⁹ Second, Daudet offered a detailed depiction of the swindles and chicaneries of the art market. Opening with the portrait of the unscrupulous, ingenious "fixer" Tom J. Lévis, whose shop is a bazaar of wonders, the novel delineates a "mysterious freemasonry" of dealers who rejoice in recounting how they have manipulated auctions, disfigured their stock, and duped gullible buyers.¹⁸⁰ Third, *Les Rois en exil* equated these unscrupulous commercial practices with a "ghetto" of Jewish vendors who infest urban *quartiers*. The Jewish dealer Père Leemans proclaims the pleasures of being a *brocanteur*: "We have dealt in everything, in every period we have lived in. Everything must come to us, pass through our hands and leave behind a bit of its skin."¹⁸¹ Père Leemans, acquirer of the ruined crown, and his seductress daughter Séphora thrive on the misery of destitute royals (including the revealingly named Christian II).

These insights were to be recapitulated in various ways in Drumont's writing, from the nostalgia for prerevolutionary values (shorn of any viable monarchist politics), the critique of cosmopolitanism, and the revulsion for Hôtel Drouot. They surfaced most dramatically in the aforementioned 1885 article that Drumont penned on the theft of the jewels. For Drumont, there was nothing accidental about this incident; rather, it was an inexorable consequence of republicanism:

The crown jewels did not stand a chance with the Republic. The First Republic stole one part and let the rest be stolen. The Third Republic wants to put them up for sale. Thus is revealed the difference between these two revolutionary movements: one, more brutal, more instinctive, concerned on the day after the victory to lay hold immediately of the

¹⁷⁷ Daudet modeled his portraits on Ferdinand II of Naples, Isabel of Spain, Don Carlo, the former prince of Orange and king of Hanover. Daudet, *Oeuvres II*, 1433.

¹⁷⁸ Daudet, "Les Rois en exil," 1102.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 975–77.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1038.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1041.

precious objects; the other, more ceremonial and more circumspect in its outward forms, is fundamentally an organizer of cartels [*syndicats*]. In reality, the result is the same: everything which the monarchy saved has been wasted, for the benefit of no one.¹⁸²

Bapst too had discreetly contrasted the accumulative tendencies of the monarchy with the mindless squandering of the republics.¹⁸³ But Drumont pushed further in emphasizing that this *vandalisme* was intrinsic to the men of 1789 and their heirs, who sought to “complete the work of pillage and destruction from the Revolution.”¹⁸⁴ He drew explicitly on Taine to indict Danton and Pétion for their venality and corruption. The republic had been born in a culture of confiscation: “They pillaged everywhere; they sacked the Tuileries after the 10th August.”¹⁸⁵ Readers need only recall the analogous behavior of the Communards in 1871 dressed as *commissaires de police*, “carrying out confiscations, breaking into the houses and carrying off everything they could lay their hands on.”¹⁸⁶

Drumont had limited insights into who plotted the theft, but he was keen to stress that it was the Jews who had reaped the benefits, lingering on the names of intermediary dealers and profiteers called Dacosta, Lyon Rouef, Israel, Aaron Hombergue, and Benedict Salmon. The decision to sell the jewels in 1887 should be regarded as an obvious next step for the republicans and their Jewish accessories who had already sold off “faith, honor, the respect for ancestral glory, flawless diamonds of the human soul.” Ironically, the liquidation sale was the last act in a drama that had already played out, disposing of external effects when the internal assets were already lost. In imagery that anticipated but also racialized passages in Bapst, Drumont closed with an extraordinary vision of France’s alienated and poisoned *patrimoine*:

We are revolted, however, at the thought of seeing sparkle on the thickly painted (*plâtré*) forehead of a fashionable prostitute the diamonds that sparkled at Reims coronation day on the robes of our Kings. We can scarcely stomach the idea of knowing that the stones that shone out on the hilt of Napoleon’s sword under the triumphal sun at Austerlitz will decorate the *parure* of some baronne of recent vintage, will serve as the futile toys (*hochets*) of the wife of some German banker whose offensive fortune has been swelled by a murderous crash. It seems that we can see in the clarity of the *lustres* in these diamonds, in the dazzling fires, the blood of so many wretched suicides, of so many victims driven to despair by some shock of the stock market.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Drumont, *Le vol*, 5.

¹⁸³ Bapst, “Les diamants,” March 1887, 244.

¹⁸⁴ Drumont, *Le vol*, 42.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8, 9; Hippolyte Taine, “La Conquête Jacobine,” in *Les origines de la France contemporaine*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1899), 6:18–19.

¹⁸⁶ Drumont, *Le vol*, 8.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

Drumont's wild pairings accentuated the profanations involved; the sale was synonymous with the victory of courtesans over the queen, of blasphemy over Christian religion, of superfluous luxury over honest necessity, of vulgar parvenus over true aristocrats and impoverished workers, of Germany over France.¹⁸⁸ Royal jewels metamorphosed into blood diamonds, paid for in human terms by the catastrophic collapse of the Union Générale bank in 1882.

The debate over the diamonds, then, was the moment that crystallized many of Drumont's rhetorical strategies. Drumont refused to let the memory of the sale disappear, and diamonds and gemstones return obsessively in his subsequent writing, as he noted that the death of the comte de Chambord heralded the reign of the Jewish anti-Kings.¹⁸⁹ Drumont detected usurpation everywhere, railing against distasteful Jewish outsiders who had risen up through the jewelry trade like the Rothschilds and now dared to plunder the pomp of the French crown. The French Revolution had emancipated the Jews, and no sooner had they acquired political rights than they scrambled to appropriate furniture and textiles hemorrhaging out from Versailles. Building on Catholic writers from abbé Barruel to Pierre Pierrard, Drumont painted the Revolution as a "gigantic spoliation" from which only the Jews had profited.¹⁹⁰ Disguised in the colors and the costumes of previous generations, the Jewish aristocracy were no better than *simulacres*, false jewels rather than the genuine article.¹⁹¹ Drumont noted that the chateaux fringing Paris had one by one been devoured by Jewish proprietors. The forest of Champrosay, where his mentor Daudet had lived, had become "a semitic fief" after the Cahen d'Anvers banking dynasty moved in and reprised the monstrous inequalities of feudalism. "While [Monsieur] Cahen hunts in the forests that once saw the elegant cavalcades of the 18th century, Mme Cahen drapes herself in the jewels that belonged to previous queens and princesses, with the poor taste of the *parvenu*." She even had the insensitivity to parade a pearl necklace once commissioned by Napoleon while paying a visit to Bonaparte's descendant, the Princesse Mathilde.¹⁹² What was happening at Champrosay was replicated in every grand house:

The eyes of all the French are opening bit by bit; they see what the Revolution has led to; they notice Jews vomited out from all the ghettos, installed now as masters in historic chateaux that evoke the most glorious memories of old France; they find Rothschilds

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁹ Édouard Drumont, *La fin d'un monde: Étude psychologique et sociale* (Paris, 1892), 392. For diamond references, see Drumont, *France juive*, I, 19, 20, 40, 44, 60, 98, 118, 119, 129, 143, 144, 234; II, 124, 136, 161, 277.

¹⁹⁰ Michel Winnock, *Drumont et Cie: Antisémitisme et fascisme en France* (Paris, 1992), 41.

¹⁹¹ Drumont, *Fin d'un monde*, 380.

¹⁹² Ibid., 520.

everywhere: Ferrières and at Vaux-de-Cernay, in the abbey founded by Blanche of Castille; they find Hirsch at Marly, in the place of Louis XIV; Ephrussi at Fontainebleau, in the place of François I; the Dreyfus of dung (*guano*) at Pont-Chartrain. Walking along our long avenues, they notice that the most magnificent hôtels are occupied by Jews, and that each of these dwellings speaks of a theft, a fraud, a *pouf*, a crash, a bankruptcy, a run on the stock exchange, miseries and suicides.¹⁹³

Drumont's perspective was not narrowly French but drew frequently on examples of patrimonial dissolution elsewhere in Europe. If Daudet had been drawn to the humiliation of the Spanish Bourbons, Drumont meditated on the sufferings of Empress Elizabeth of Hapsburg, thrown onto the mercy of the Viennese Rothschilds.¹⁹⁴ He took a keen interest in the Jew-baiting debates in the Austrian parliament, where the deputy for Styria warned that Austria might follow the terrible example of France and sell the crown jewels to ruthless Jewish magnates. As in Paris, so too in Vienna, Europe's liberal elites were locked in a dance around the Golden Calf.¹⁹⁵

In his classic study of antisemitism as an ideology, Stephen Wilson noted Drumont's views that Jews were the enemy of patrimony ("that is, all legitimate and durable property") and his obsession with the vanishing of "Old France." Echoing Sartre, Wilson speculates that such "anti-Semitic attachment to historical France can be interpreted as a claim of 'ownership' over it, and thereby to a status that is impregnable because it is inherited and not achieved."¹⁹⁶ It should be added that Drumont's bid for ownership over a *generic* French past (encompassing St Louis, Henri IV, and Napoleon) coexisted with an intense combat for specific historic monuments that seemed in jeopardy. Drumont's writing on the jewels integrated his earlier antiquarian research into the material traces of the ancien régime with the totalizing vision of modern cultural pollution outlined in *La France juive*. Historians have long noted the ubiquity of patrimonial metaphors of heredity, lineage, descent, and dispersal in right-wing thought.¹⁹⁷ But these tropes gained potency when enlisted for well-publicized struggles over French historic property, seemingly menaced by political, economic, and cultural outsiders. The controversy over the crown jewels represents an early instance of how the discourse of national heritage—brandished by republicans and liberals in the 1820s and 1830s to denounce the scourge of *démolisseurs* and *la bande noire*—was by the 1870s and 1880s deployed against the cynical

¹⁹³ Drumont, *De l'or, de la boue*, vi.

¹⁹⁴ Frederick Busi, *The Pope of Anti-Semitism: The Career and Legacy of Edouard-Adolphe Drumont* (London, 1986), 30.

¹⁹⁵ Drumont, *Fin d'un monde*, viii–ix.

¹⁹⁶ Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience: Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Portland, OR, 1982), 616, 626.

¹⁹⁷ Jean-Pierre Chaline, "Le patrimoine," in *Histoire des droites en France III: Sensibilités*, ed. François Sirinelli (Paris, 1992), 731–55.

republican order.¹⁹⁸ Bapst's and Drumont's intervention foreshadowed later initiatives from conservatives and the Radical Right—including André Hallays, Charles Maurras, and Maurice Barrès—to mobilize public opinion behind *le patrimoine en danger*.¹⁹⁹

HISTORY UNDER THE HAMMER

Against a backdrop of gloomy predictions in the newspapers, the sale took place in May 1887. In the fortnight beforehand the jewels were once again exhibited and attracted significant crowds; Bloche estimated as many as six thousand visitors a day came to bid farewell, while Tiphaigne thought that twenty-five thousand people surged in during the days prior to the sale.²⁰⁰ The walls of the Pavillon de Flore were decked out with tapestries from the Garde-Meuble illustrating mythical heroes and tragic heroines. The reporter for *Illustration* marveled at an unexpected effect of the *mise-en-scène*: "By a singular coincidence, they [the tapestries] are topped by bundles of tricolor flags whose *cartouches* with the letters R.F. are placed immediately above the shields of the royal house of France." In this powerful symbolism, the fleur-de-lis was subordinate to the tricolor, and republican deputies sat on the spot where Eugénie had formerly opened parliament.²⁰¹ The sale enacted an exorcism of the monarchical tradition. One observer compared the disappearance of the jewels to the scattering of rose petals or laurel leaves, hoping implicitly that they might one day flower again.²⁰² Énault saluted the jewels "whose name is imperishable, and which, even after their dispersal, will always be called the Diamonds of the Crown!"²⁰³ Bapst described the ghostly official photographs in the catalogue as "effigies of souvenirs," remnants of a lost love affair. He was right that the plates within Michel Berthaud's album successfully showed off the brilliance of the merchandise but also had a solemn, commemorative quality (fig. 2).²⁰⁴ Even among those unsentimental presiding officers at the sale, the gravity of the occasion was affecting. Vanderheyem reported that in watching the jewels being led to their final

¹⁹⁸ Patrice Beghain, *Guerre aux démolisseurs! Hugo, Proust, Barrès, un combat pour le patrimoine* (Paris, 1997).

¹⁹⁹ Laurent Ferri, "Les intellectuels s'intéressent-ils au patrimoine monumental et architectural? Un siècle de pétitions en France," *Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture* 5, no. 1 (2003): 129–40.

²⁰⁰ Bloche, *La Vente des Diamants*, 17; Tiphaigne, "Rapport générale," 26.

²⁰¹ *L'Illustration*, May 21, 1887.

²⁰² [Jobard?], *Diamants de la couronne* (Dijon, 1887), 7.

²⁰³ Énault, *Les diamants*, 113. Many of the jewels sold that day are still kept in the purple, upholstered commemorative cases presented to buyers, with these words embossed on the lid in gold.

²⁰⁴ *Le Gaulois*, January 14, 1887.



FIG. 2.—“Diadèmes de turquoise.” Photograph by Michel Berthaud. *Diamants de la couronne de France* (Paris, 1887), plate 3. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Color version available as an online enhancement.

resting place in the vitrines, “we experienced a feeling analogous to that one feels when attending the deposition of a corpse. Everything conspired to give the scene the appearance of a funeral ceremony.”²⁰⁵

However valedictory, the sale was also a grand social occasion, “a Parisian event, if ever there was [one].”²⁰⁶ The “*Gotha* of Europe” flocked as potential bidders, and the auction marked a climax to a decade of exceptional jewelry sales, including those of Nélie Jacquemart and Marie Blanc.²⁰⁷ Prestigious jewelers took commissions on behalf of the European courts: Garrard, jewelers to Queen Victoria, competed against Friedburg, supplier of Württemberg, and Bachruch, who served the Hapsburgs in Budapest. Despite their reservations about the sale, French dealers were determined not to miss out, and they too turned out *en masse*, including Boucheron, Rouvenat, Hamelin, Briquet, Meyer, Seligman, Ochs, Guillemin, Lowenstein, Michel Ephrussi, Noury, Levi frères, and of course Bapst *frs*.²⁰⁸ The collision of foreign rivals, high society, government dignitaries, and ogling crowds proved irresistible to reporters from across the continent. Paul Eudel noted that journalists hurried to describe the luster of the event, “down to the smallest detail of its physiognomy.”²⁰⁹ Every aspect of the event was historic, and hence collectible; one English eccentric apparently paid 5,000 francs for the hammers that had been used to break up ancient regalia.²¹⁰ International buyers made the most specular purchases: Garrard bought a diadem at 180,000 francs for the Prince of Wales; the mysterious baron de Horn spent nearly a million francs to “reconstruct in India a vitrine for the French crown”; and the American jeweler Louis Comfort Tiffany acquired four of the seven so-called Mazarins.²¹¹ The sale cemented the reputation for discerning luxury Tiffany had won at the 1878 exhibition and confirmed his alliance with millionaire American clients such as the Pulitzers and the Stanfords; the New York Herald headline crowed triumphantly, “Tiffany takes the cake!”²¹² By September, with all bids counted, the sale was reckoned to have raised 7,097,665 francs.²¹³

By anatomizing the sale into its constituent parts, we can grasp the jarring conceptions of value that were projected onto the jewels. The 1887 sale testifies to the composite nature of French heritage politics and its reliance on recalci-

²⁰⁵ Vanderheyem, *Notice historique*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Blavet, *La Vie Parisienne*, 106.

²⁰⁷ Michel Beurdeley, *Trois siècles de ventes publiques* (Paris, 1988), 131–33.

²⁰⁸ Vanderheyem, *Notice historique*, 35–36.

²⁰⁹ Paul Eudel, *L'hôtel Drouot et la curiosité en 1886–87* (Paris, 1888), 280.

²¹⁰ “Le marteau des démolisseurs,” *Gil Blas*, February 9, 1887.

²¹¹ Eudel, *L'hôtel Drouot*, 293.

²¹² Katherine Purcell, “Tiffany and Paris, 1850–1910,” in *Bejewelled by Tiffany, 1837–1987* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 34–35.

²¹³ *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, September, 1887, 243.

trant elements, unpredictable events, and volatile markets. Each group—politicians, bureaucrats, scholars, dealers, and journalists—had turned the sale to their own advantage. The French state was flush with a new source of funds, but hopes for a new Caisse des Musées were thwarted by years of inaction and indecision.²¹⁴ Tiphaigne and Chaumard congratulated themselves that everything went relatively smoothly, and even Jules Marest, head of the *Chambre Syndicale*, expressed gratitude for how the administration had proceeded.²¹⁵ As for Bapst, he had the satisfaction of seeing his reattributions vindicated on several occasions. For instance, the wealthy American Mrs. Suzanne Gall thought she had acquired the “Miroir de Portugal” diamond, when in reality it was a stone bought for Napoleon by Nitot in 1810.²¹⁶ In his letters to Tiphaigne pointing out such embarrassing facts, Bapst signed off with the title “*lauréat de l’Académie Fr & de l’Académie des Inscriptions*.”²¹⁷ Bapst’s corrections were not just sweet revenge; they were also demonstrations of the superior science possessed by the scholar and art lover (*amateur*) over the philistine official. Meanwhile Drumont seized on the sale as proof that the republican propensity for vandalism in the 1790s had not been cured but only redirected, and he warned that the collection would be degraded in unworthy, foreign hands. The auction marked the inception of Drumont’s antisemitic campaign, and it allowed him to implant the defense of French heritage at its core.²¹⁸

These disputes over expertise between individuals paralleled conflicting definitions of heritage itself. Conservatives drew upon a notion of patrimony strongly informed by juridical and familial understandings: historic objects were a bequest from the dead to their descendants and had to be preserved with care so that this property could be passed on undivided. Jules Laforgue mocked the reactionary collector who might buy one of these jewels but was revolted at the thought of wearing it, since to do so would be a profanation.²¹⁹ Conversely, republicans celebrated their dynamic, productive, and potentially transformative stewardship of past treasures. A report from deputy Trouillot in 1895 defended “democratic regimes” from accusations of indifference toward France’s treasures, since it was republican governments that first “saw something beyond a means of entertainment and an object of curiosity, and understood the true educational mission.”²²⁰ In opting for a selection (*triage*) of the best jewels, in subjecting the stones to sci-

²¹⁴ Louis Gonse, “La Caisse des Musées,” *Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* 85 (November, 1893): 275.

²¹⁵ Letter from Marest to Dauphin, May 21, 1887, AN O5/2308.

²¹⁶ Eudel, *L’hôtel Drouot*, 284.

²¹⁷ Letter from Bapst to Tiphaigne, undated (May 1887?), AN O5/2308.

²¹⁸ Stammers, “Collectors, Catholics,” 84–86.

²¹⁹ Jules Laforgue, “Chroniques Parisiennes,” in *Oeuvres: Édition chronologique intégrale 1884–87*, ed. J. L. Debauxe, 3 vols. (Paris, 1986), 2:636.

²²⁰ *Chambre des députés*, no. 1225, March 12, 1895, 5.

entific investigation at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, in exhibiting national treasures in order to aid industrial education—in sum, in enlisting the resources of the past for the needs and benefit of the future—the men of the Third Republic upheld protocols originally created by the Convention.

As so often in the scandal-ridden Third Republic, deliberations previously conducted within a narrow circle spilled out to become a media *affaire*.²²¹ The sale occupied newspaper column inches for nearly a decade, from the first vote on alienation in 1878 through to the momentous 1887 sale. One writer in *Le Voltaire* complained that the issue threatened to “go on forever” and was relieved that in May France would be “finally rid of” the jewels.²²² Thanks to this long exposure, and the sharply contrasting positions, the sale generated an unusually wide-ranging if not well-informed discussion. For Émile Blavet, the sale “has unleashed lively controversies. It has its passionate enemies and convinced partisans.”²²³ Blustering through the technicalities, journalists focused more on what the sale meant for French identity at a time of economic recession, political upheaval, and grumblings about decadence. The ensuing fears and resentments were ventriloquized by novelists and journalists, who translated the legislative debates into the idiom of a family melodrama or the scenario from a Naturalist novel.²²⁴ If the jewels were valued by Énault and Bapst less as royal decorations than as national assets, Drumont pictured France as a house stripped of its contents, losing in swift succession not only its valuables but also “all the relics of the past, everything that spoke to the soul, everything that recalled the life of the ancestors. The Rothschilds began by emptying the drawers, tearing down the crucifix; the Jews Vanderheyem and Bloche have been commissioned, on the initiative of Lockroy, to sell the diamonds of the Crown.”²²⁵

The timing of the sale coincided with a period of exceptional transition in politics, in the arts, and in the relationship between the two.²²⁶ The salesroom is a vital arena for historians seeking to understand these transitions, framing the high-stake *luttres pacifiques* in which different nations and political camps went head to head. The 1887 debate on jewels was followed only two years later by the furor over Millet's *Angélus* at the Secrétan sale, leading to a highly pub-

²²¹ Odile Rudelle, *La République absolue: Aux origines de l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine 1870–1889* (Paris, 1982), 290.

²²² Alberty, “Les diamants de la couronne,” *Le Voltaire*, February 6, 1887.

²²³ Blavet, *La Vie Parisienne*, 106.

²²⁴ Philippe Daryl, “La Vie Partout,” *L'Illustration*, May 28, 1887. On the framing of politics through fictional plots, see Frederick Busi, “The Balzacian Imagination in the Dreyfus Affair,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 6 (1978): 174–88.

²²⁵ Drumont, *Fin d'un monde*, vi.

²²⁶ Philip Nord, “The New Painting and the Dreyfus Affair,” *Historical Reflections* 24, no. 1 (1998): 115–36; Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1994).

licized tussle between French ministers (especially Antonin Proust) and a consortium of American collectors.²²⁷ The year 1889 also saw the subscription campaign launched by Monet to purchase Manet's *Olympia* for the Luxembourg, alarmed at the "predicted departure for another continent of so many works of art that are the joy and the glory of *la France*."²²⁸ Four years on and the Spitzer sale again exposed how auctions dredged up revolutionary memories, administrative ineptitude, and antisemitic slanders.²²⁹ Of course, due to the transnational character of the art market, related frictions emerged elsewhere in Europe. Britain in the 1880s and 1890s witnessed the heyday of "auction fever" and "picture mania"—especially after the Settled Lands Act and the introduction of death duties in 1894 led to heated debate over the dismantling of its country house collections.²³⁰ The aesthete J. C. Robinson protested in 1895 that Germany was "robbing us of the very springs and bases of connoisseurship, the noble art treasures which our fathers and grandfathers endowed us with, while we waste our money on second-rate curiosities only, or worthless trash."²³¹ Yet the Germany of Wilhelm von Bode, feared as unstoppable in France and Britain, was convulsed with its own collecting malaise. Beth Irwin has demonstrated how the expansion of a middle-class public reading about and investing in art fed into a backlash in the 1890s against difficult "cosmopolitan" experiments (linked to the Berlin Secession and Jewish influence).²³²

Such shrill, defensive, xenophobic voices were integral to emerging discourses about patrimony in many European states.²³³ Nonetheless, these discourses acquired a singular bitterness in France due to both the ideological fervor that had been injected into heritage debates since 1789 and the centrality accorded to (gendered) norms of taste as an index of French citizenship and distinction.²³⁴ Most fundamental was the dissonance between normative ideas of state heritage

²²⁷ Bradley Fratello, "France Embraces Millet: The Entwined Fates of 'The Gleaners' and 'The Angelus,'" *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (2003): 685–70.

²²⁸ Paul Hayes Tucker, *Monet in the '90s: The Series Paintings* (London, 1990), 61.

²²⁹ Agnes Bos, "Émile Molinier, the Incompatible Roles of a Louvre Curator," *Journal of the History of Collections* 27, no. 3 (2015): 309–21.

²³⁰ Dianne Sachko MacLeod, "Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F. G. Stephens's 'The Private Collections of England,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 1001 (1986): 602–3; Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 118–27.

²³¹ Cited in Jeremy Warren, "Bode and the British," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 38 (1996): 124.

²³² Beth Irwin, *Art for All? The Collision of Modern Art and Public in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), 312–15.

²³³ Swenson, *Rise of Heritage*, 273–328.

²³⁴ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley, 1996); Whitney Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1992).

jurisdiction and the openness of France to international commerce. Paris remained throughout the nineteenth century the hub of the market in fine and decorative arts, and French tastes set the tone across Europe and North America. For some, the global dissemination of masterpieces by the nation's artists and craftsmen was a salutary form of cultural imperialism, helping to civilize backward neighbors. Indeed, the republican argument for making the *patrimoine* productive was predicated on the ability to dispose of France's cultural surplus through market channels. Yet boasts of grandeur oscillated with jeremiads of decline, as others equated the business of the salesrooms with the corrosive features of modernity, in which iconoclastic democracy and mercenary global capitalism conspired to expatriate France's ancestral possessions.