

Table 1.1 Key dates and milestones in French history

10,000 BC	Cave paintings at Lascaux, south-west France
58–49 BC	Julius Caesar conquers Gaul
496	Baptism of Clovis, King of the Franks
786–814	Charlemagne's Empire
1066	The Norman Conquest
1096–1270	The Crusades
1337–1453	The Hundred Years' War with England
1431	Joan of Arc burned at the stake in Rouen
1598	Edict of Nantes (revoked 1685)
1643–1715	Reign of Louis XIV at Versailles
1789	Beginning of the French Revolution on 14 July
1804	Napoleon I crowned Emperor
1805–1815	Napoleonic battles including Trafalgar, Austerlitz and Waterloo
1830–1848	France conquers Algeria
1848	Universal male suffrage
1871	France loses Franco-Prussian War
1880	National Day (14 July) established
1882	Jules Ferry laws establishing free, secular and compulsory primary school education
1901	Law providing for the freedom of association
1904	Entente cordiale between France and Britain
1905	Law separating Church and State
1914–18	World War I
1919	The Versailles Treaty
1936	Popular Front government and the Matignon agreements providing workers' rights including paid holidays
1939	World War II begins
1940	Armistice with Germany
1944	de Gaulle calls for French resistance
1944	Allied Normandy landings in June begin the liberation of France. Women get the vote
1950	Schuman Declaration (9 May) begins <i>la construction européenne</i> : European integration
1951	Signature of Treaty of Paris creating the European Coal and Steel Community: France one of the six founder members (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg)
1954	Loss of French colonies in Indochina
1954	Algerian war begins
1958	Algerian war triggers return of Charles de Gaulle and founding of Fifth French Republic
1962	Constitutional amendment providing for direct election of President of the Republic by universal suffrage
1968	Student uprisings, general strike

Table 1.1 continued

1975	Legalisation of abortion and divorce by consent Programme of nuclear power generation
1981	Abolition of death penalty Liberalization of television and radio
1984	National Front breakthrough in European Parliament elections
1990–91	France takes part in first Gulf War
1992	Approval of the Maastricht Treaty paving the road to European Economic and Monetary Union
1994	Inauguration of the Channel Tunnel linking France and England
1998	'Rainbow' French football team wins World Cup
1989–90	Fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany
2001	End of military conscription
2002	France starts using the Euro – the European single currency
2003	France refuses to join the US-led coalition in Iraq in the second Gulf War
2004	Law banning Islamic headscarves and other 'conspicuous' religious signs in state schools
2010	Parliamentary debate on banning clothing that 'hides the face' – notably the Islamic <i>burqa</i> and <i>niqab</i> – anywhere in public
	French football team returns in disgrace after losing in the first round of the World Cup in South Africa: President Sarkozy launches an enquiry

Sources: Data from Baycroft (2008); Crook (2002); Davidson (1971); Evans and Godin (2004); Ledésert, D.M. (1976).

## The Making of the French Nation-State

### *From Roman Gaul to Renaissance France*

When discussing prehistoric, ancient and medieval France, contemporary notions of *national* identity – let alone *national consciousness* – are anachronistic, since these periods all established the diversity – regional, cultural, tribal – that, to this day, challenges aspirations to French national unity. The Romans conquered the native Celts in 1BC, assimilated them, then left them to successive waves of invading barbarian (foreign) tribes. Prehistoric man had already left traces

of social organization, the evidence of which is best known in the shape of the cave paintings at Lascaux in the Dordogne region of south-west France (on public show in replica form), and the eerie standing stones of Brittany.

Under Roman rule, France was known as Gaul and, of the tribal invaders, the fifth-century Germanic Franks lent their name to what is now France. The Romans left their physical marks on Gaul, many of which still stand today (of which the *Pont du Gard*; and the *Maison Carrée* in Nîmes). Significantly, Julius Caesar's *pax romana* brought stability and shape to Gaul, by means of what we would today call centralized language and communications policies, and a unitary legal system. These were all enforceable by legions of Roman soldiers, as immortalized in Goscinny's cartoon illustrations of the plucky and comic Astérix facing down the intruder.

The Catholic Church slowly took over from the Roman Empire as a source of minimal cohesion between disparate peoples. Clovis, King of the Salian (northern) Franks, converted to the Christian faith in the late fifth century, and many followed his example, giving them something in common, although hardly a nationality as we now understand it. The combination of Clovis and Church was significant in shaping medieval France, where Paris and its region, the Île de France, were already emerging as the epicentre of power; today, the area is France's biggest and richest region. Clovis's descendants were the Merovingians, by all accounts long-haired and loutish, and with the time and energy to extend the kingdom to Burgundy and Provence. But their lax rule allowed aristocratic rivals to emerge, and from these emerged the Carolingian line, via the well-known historical figures of Martel and Pepin. The best-known son of the Carolingians was Charlemagne. Crowned Holy Roman Emperor in AD800, his legendary influence was a civilizing force in the 'Dark Ages' (the ninth and tenth centuries), even naturalizing Viking invaders. His immediate legacy was the territory of West Francia, the physical template for contemporary France but, after his death, his Empire disintegrated, shrinking by the tenth century to an area little bigger than today's Île de France region.

Anglo-French rivalry marked this period in France, and cross-Channel competition exists today, albeit within a stable and friendly partnership: war is unthinkable between the two formerly and frequently warring neighbours. William the Conqueror's victory in England in 1066 rebounded against the stability and territorial ambitions of French royal authority insofar as his successors mounted

repeated challenges to French monarchs over a lengthy period, which included the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) and the burning of Joan of Arc by the English. But, by the end of the War, the French had made considerable territorial gains from the English contenders, including the large and rich province of Aquitaine in the south-west, thus consolidating the royal domains. The quest by the British to colonize this region nevertheless continues to this day in the far more peaceful shape of second homes and British exiles seeking the 'good life' in rural France.

In other respects, too, these were centuries of consolidation the impact of which is still felt today. King Philippe Augustus (1180–1223) paved Paris, and the foundations of the spectacular gothic cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris were laid in these years. The Sorbonne university was established in 1257 and, with it, the roots of Paris's contemporary reputation as a seat of learning and knowledge, as well as the growing role of the French language (alongside Latin) in these fields. By the fourteenth century, French royal prestige was high and, by the early fifteenth century, the territory of France had expanded to resemble its contemporary shape. Papal authority had, for a while (1309–1377), been established in France, in Avignon, and a sense of national identity was emerging around these developments. The Renaissance of the sixteenth century strengthened this feeling, and many of today's extrovert symbols of utter Frenchness – the chateaux of the Loire, the Louvre, French literature, the French language (the King's *langue d'oïl*, or language of the north) – date from these days.

#### *The 'Ancien Régime': The Emergence of the Modern French State*

The France of the *ancien régime* – the old, or 'former', pre-revolutionary order of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – was ravaged by religious strife and wars. The Wars of Religion (1562–98) brought bloodshed and a waste of human talent; the Saint Bartholemew's massacre of six thousand French Protestants on 24 August 1572 stands out as a particularly bloody historical date. Under the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715), the French Huguenot Protestants were eventually exiled, taking much creative and intellectual know-how with them. But these earlier years and these battles also gave France its first Bourbon King, Henry IV. Having converted to Catholicism and offered limited tolerance to the Huguenots in the form of the 1598 Edict of Nantes, he ushered in

the 1600s. That epoch was known as *le grand siècle* ('splendid century'), and it marked a revival in the standards of the French monarchy measured in terms of ruthlessness, authoritarianism, images of greatness and expense, all in the name of French nation and state-building.

Henry IV's immediate successors, Louis XIII and Louis XIV, established the most sumptuous period of French royal history ever, and their names and those of their ministers (Richelieu, Mazarin, Colbert) are engraved on the French psyche as symbols of when France was great, however troubled. Their 'absolutist' systems of authority (kings were deemed to answer to no one but God) ensured new levels of administrative efficiency, as did Richelieu's *intendants*, precursors of today's departmental *préfets* (see Chapter 4). This was also a time of ostentatious greatness, ranging from works of architecture (Versailles, near Paris); art and culture (the creation of the Academy by Richelieu in 1635; the royal patronage of manufacture and science); and imperialism (1648 saw the Treaty of Westphalia sealing victory over the Hapsburgs). Despite serious popular uprisings against royal authority – which, in retrospect, were a dress rehearsal for the French Revolution – France was strong, and the monarch powerful. But aggressive foreign policies were ruinously expensive, and taxation systems required the cooperation of potential challengers to royal authority in the shape of the regional *parlements* (courts), and the aristocratic lawyers that peopled them.

By the time of the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, 'France' and the 'French' had, thus, neither been created by any continuous, strategic action on the part of a single dynastic leadership, nor by a spontaneous, popular process of unification at a given point in time. Instead, the French state and nation had emerged from centuries of war (foreign, civil, religious), waged by leaders of varying abilities and desires, but sharing a quest for power, and whose authority was always and inevitably vulnerable to challenge, and luck. 'Society' was highly disparate, composed of groups – the noble aristocrats, the bourgeoisie, the clergy, the peasants, the workers – enjoying vastly different sets of privileges and opportunities, which created permanently combustible mixtures of resentments. A form of centralizing authority did appear over time, although in a punctuated, often chaotic manner, in the shape of authoritarian – royal and clerical – structures intended to save costs and consolidate power by the imposition of norms of language, religion, justice and taxation. These met with varying success.

### *1789–1799: A Decade of Revolution*

The French Revolution of 1789 was a decisive episode in French history. Its impact is still felt in contemporary French political culture, even though the process by which democratic, republican politics subsequently took root in France was long, tortuous and frequently deadly. The French Revolution was, in all respects, dramatic. It produced a set of apocryphal characters, amply represented ever since in literature, film and art, and it engaged a series of battles at home and abroad that still resonate in France today, however faintly. It lent a patriotic dimension to the formation of French identity, gave root to the modern-day concepts of nation and nationalism, and is at the heart of the notion of French 'exceptionalism' that bolsters France in its global ambitions in the present day. The French Revolution was not a sudden event, neither did it change France overnight, but its best-known effects were momentous, particularly for its losers and their interests. The *ancien régime* was definitively repudiated by the physical elimination, by guillotine, of its leading figures, including the King and Queen; and by the abolition of noble and feudal privilege through destroying the 'orders' of the old system – the clergy, nobility, lawyers, crafts and guildsmen.

The Revolution had no initial blueprint, and the line between the Revolution and the stable Republicanism of present-day France is over two hundred years long, broken and rejoined in several places (see Chapter 3). The ideals of the revolutionaries, as expressed in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, spawned the vocabulary of contemporary French politics: popular sovereignty, the rule of law, equality before the law, free speech, and political representation. Today's Constitution, moreover, begins with explicit reference to the 1789 text (see Box 1.1). But two centuries were needed for these notions to become embedded as standard political practice, and they are still being revised in line with contemporary social norms.

### *The Napoleonic Empire, 1799–1815*

By 1799 army officer Napoleon Bonaparte was sufficiently admired for his victories in the Revolutionary wars that he was able to exploit the confusion of the revolutionary decade and take power by a *coup d'état* on 18–19 Brumaire (9 November) 1799. He was appointed

**Box 1.1 A founding text of French democracy**

From the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen:

## Article 1

'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good.'

## Article 2

'The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are Liberty, Property, Safety and Resistance to Oppression.'

## Article 3

'The aim of all sovereignty lies essentially in the Nation. No corporate body, no individual may exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it.'

From the 1958 (current) French Constitution:

## Preamble

'The French people solemnly proclaim their attachment to the Rights of Man and the principles of national sovereignty as defined by the Declaration of 1789.'

Source: Data from Elysée (2010a).

First Consul for ten years but, after only five, on 18 May 1804 he had himself crowned the first Emperor of his new hereditary Empire. Napoleon's regime maintained the revolutionary ideal of popular sovereignty, but perverted it into the shape of a presumed bond between the people and the great leader himself. Within this bond, and under his charismatic – authoritarian – guidance, the people could express their will in carefully-manufactured plebiscites, but not in free elections; neither did they enjoy free speech or a free press, which were curtailed and censored in these years. Echoes of this style of personalized leadership have persisted into contemporary France and its provisions for a powerful president, as we elaborate in Chapters 3 and 4: when President Nicolas Sarkozy was elected in May 2007, comparisons with Napoleon Bonaparte, comic and serious, were common media currency.

The backbone of the French state in the Napoleonic era, also still recognizable today, was a professional, elitist bureaucracy, trained up in the new *lycées* – senior schools – established during this time, and

on which state senior schools are modelled in France today. Napoleon also controlled the Church in the form of a Concordat signed with Rome in 1802. Finally, and significantly for contemporary France, he governed the whole of the French territory by means of a uniform legal system – the Napoleonic codes – and an administrative machine answerable to the Emperor, and which rewarded its faithful servants with the newly-created *Légion d'honneur*. Napoleon's domestic reforms could not guarantee the success of his wars and he abdicated in April 1814, after his military retreat from Russia and before making his '100 days' comeback, which ended in 1815 in further military defeat at the famous battle of Waterloo at the hands of Britain's Duke of Wellington.

*Nineteenth-Century Restorations: Monarchy, Empire and Republic*

Which regime would secure both national reconciliation (internal stability) and military success (external prestige), and in what circumstances? The default setting of the nineteenth century was a restored, constitutional monarchy, trapped between the historical pulls of authoritarianism and, on occasions, revolutionary republicanism. The context was burgeoning industrialization, mass literacy, the rise and rise of the property-owning bourgeoisie; the Romanticism of nineteenth century art, literature and philosophy; and new signs of the French propensity for glamour and glory. These were the years when Baron Haussmann drove the wide *grands boulevards* into Paris, bearing their characteristically well-proportioned buildings that are so distinctive of today's French capital city; the Arc de Triomphe was completed; colonies and territory were won (Algeria, Nice and Savoy); and Emperor Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (1851–1870) and the Emperess Princess Eugénie indulged in a socially liberal lifestyle. More significant, universal male suffrage and the abolition of slavery in the colonies were also legacies of the nineteenth century.

But the popular uprisings of 1830 and the workers' revolution of 1848 drove the monarchy (Bourbon King Louis XVIII and the Orleanist 'citizen-king' Louis-Philippe, respectively) into exile in England. The Paris Commune of 1870, following France's military defeat by Prussia, brought about the painful loss of Alsace and Lorraine, and the end of the Second Empire. These were all versions of a civil war that the 1789 Revolution had not definitively resolved.