Mobilizing Historicity and Local Color in *Fernand Cortez* (1809)

Narratives of Empire at the Opéra

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ABSTRACT This article interrogates why the creators of Napoleonic opera, specifically of Gaspare Spontini's *Fernand Cortez* (1809), were so eager to publicize their source-based method for representing history. The article frames this eagerness in broader developments toward historical realism in nineteenth-century France and its epistemological claims, namely, that history provides true knowledge about the past. These epistemological claims are foundational to how historians and artists sought to mobilize historicity and local color to champion narratives of empire as founded on the supposedly transhistorical process of civilization. In *Fernand Cortez* these mobilizations revised eighteenth-century skepticism toward sixteenth-century colonialism into a narrative of imperial success that the government hoped would garner support for Napoléon's Spanish campaign. Ultimately, the emphasis on historicist detail undermined the opera's specific propagandistic message, but it did provide a model that popularized and disseminated general ideologies about empire and civilization beyond France's intellectual circles.

KEYWORDS Napoleonic opera, historiography, historicism, local color, narratives of empire

> We are happy to note that there are few dramatic works . . . where history is more faithfully followed than in this opera.
> —Libretto preface to *Fernand Cortez ou la conquête du Mexique*

With these lines, the libretto preface drew attention to the historical research that had gone into producing Gaspare Spontini's newest opera, *Fernand Cortez ou la conquête du Mexique* (*Hernán Cortés or the Conquest of Mexico*), which premiered at the Paris Opéra on November 28, 1809.[1] The opera depicts an important episode in the Spanish colonization of the Americas: the

1. In the early nineteenth century the Aztec Empire was generally referred to as Mexico and its inhabitants as Mexicans. Therefore, throughout this article, I use *Mexican* as a synonym for *Aztec* when translating nineteenth-century documents.

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siege and fall of the Aztec capital, México-Tenochtitlan, in 1521 at the hands of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés and his soldiers. The libretto, written by Etienne de Jouy and Joseph-Alphonse Esménard, is structured around two well-known historical events. Act 1 depicts the moment when Cortés burned his fleet to defy the Aztecs' demand that he leave their shores and to rob his mutinous soldiers of the means to return to Spain. Act 3 opens with the massacre at the Great Temple—a Spanish intervention during an Aztec sacred festival in which most of the participants were slaughtered (allegedly to prevent a human sacrifice).[2] But it is not just the plot that reflects the imprint of history. The set and costume designs, some of the musical instruments, and possibly even the choreography were based on historical sources.

While this article details how these sources were used, its principal aim is to examine why the artists producing *Fernand Cortez* thought fidelity to history so important to their work. In particular, I explore the ideological significance of a source-based methodology in the construction of historical knowledge and local color. This shift in methodology has most often been discussed in relation to the later ascendency of a "new school" of historiography in the 1820s, represented perhaps most iconically by the German historian Leopold von Ranke but also connected to French historians such as Augustin Thierry and François Guizot.[3] Musicologists such as Anselm Gerhard, Sarah Hibberd, and Mark Pottinger have pointed out that this "new school" shared a mode of historical narration with a French opera genre that arose in the 1820s: *grand opéra*.[4] Since the genre's attention to historical fidelity in the visual, musical, and narrative representation of a plot's historical era and place was well publicized, *grand opéra* is thought to have become a more conspicuous vehicle for this new approach to history than other operatic genres. Moreover, scholars have linked the genre's investment in a historicist representation, which allowed a work to present multiple "safe," less propagandistic readings that appealed to a wide variety of audiences, to the increasing urbanization and the emergence of more democratic forms of government in 1820s France.[5]

2. Historians largely agree that the massacre was not motivated by a desire to prevent human sacrifices. The Aztec accounts indicate that their precious ritual vestments had aroused the greed of the Spanish. See Roa-de-la-Carrera, "Francisco López de Gómara," 40–41; and Lockhart, *We People Here*.

3. See, e.g., Reizov, *L'historiographie romantique française*, 11; Bann, *Clothing of Clio*, 8–53; and den Boer, "Historical Writing in France," 184–87.

4. Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 71–76; Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*; Pottinger, *Staging of History in France*. The connections among historiography, the novel, and various theatrical genres are also discussed in Samuels, *Spectacular Past*.

5. The importance of "safe" readings that had a wide appeal in *grand opéra* is highlighted in Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 7–8, 180; and Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 298–301.

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Yet, modes of historical representation that claimed a certain historical fidelity by featuring source research antedate the cultural and political developments of the 1820s. Following in the footsteps of Hayden White, Stephen Bann has connected this mode to the mid-eighteenth-century emergence of new ideas about historical verisimilitude and fidelity, which not only affected history writing but also went hand in hand with "the increasingly expert production of pseudohistorical forgeries" such as James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry.[6] In the same period, historical fidelity became a hot topic in theatrical production and its discourse as well: theaters rivaled one another publicizing their "faithful" engagement with history and historical sources, and critics eagerly discussed whether productions realized this ambition.[7] The Opéra, which thought itself the premier theater of France (and, by extension, of Europe), could not be seen to fall behind: from the late 1760s onward it started to embrace this new theatrical trend.[8] By the Napoleonic era (1799–1815) most operas were based on historical subject matter from antiquity and beyond rather than mythological subjects (see appendix). Perhaps more important, the Opéra's artists and management proudly trumpeted the fact that these plots were based on historical sources and presented in a historicized manner—meaning they were located in a historically specific time and place.[9] *Fernand Cortez* in particular became the early nineteenth-century standard-bearer of these ambitions and has therefore been mentioned as a precursor to later *grand opéra*.[10] Yet, as I will discuss, Spontini's work underscores how this historicist mode of representation in opera emerged earlier than the urbanizing and democratizing processes of the 1820s and was embroiled in Napoléon's imperialist politics.

A particular artistic technique to convey this historicist mode of representation was the use of what late eighteenth-century artists and critics started to

6. Bann, *Clothing of Clio*, 14, 2.

7. For a broader discussion of the increasing engagement with historicist representations, see Frantz, *L'esthétique du tableau*, 97–98; and Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra Comique*, 233–37.

8. Henri Rossi identifies *Ernelinde, princesse de Norvège* (1767) as the earliest French historical opera (*Opéras historiques français*, 15). Mark Darlow has demonstrated that parts of the plot and the set designs for *Nepthé* (1789) were based on historical sources (*Staging the Revolution*, 235–40).

9. This historicized representation was even adopted in Ossianic and biblical plots, which today would more likely be categorized as legendary or mythological, such as *Ossian ou les bardes* (1804). See Andries, "Uniting the Arts to Stage the Nation," 167–75. To champion their historicist representation, many early nineteenth-century libretti included prefaces that identified the historical sources and events the plots drew on. Historical images also frequently inspired costume and set designs. Publications such as Jean-Charles Levacher de Charnois's *Recherches sur les costumes et sur les théâtres de toutes les nations, tant anciennes que modernes* (1790, repr. 1802) exploited the demand for historically researched materials. While I have found little evidence of the Opéra and its artists publicly communicating their efforts beyond libretto prefaces, they may have done so informally, since it is an item repeatedly discussed in reviews and other critical writings.

10. See Charlton, *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, 5–6; Döhring and Henze-Döhring, *Oper und Musikdrama*, 117–19; Gerhard, "*Fernand Cortez* und *Le Siège de Corinthe*"; and Mungen, "Wagner, Spontini, und die Grand Opéra."

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call "local color" (*couleur locale*).[11] This term was used to convey how the temporal (and at times geographical) distance of a plot was conveyed on a visual, textual, and musical level—a representational method required by the aforementioned new attitudes toward historical verisimilitude that had also found their way to the theater.[12] This emphasis on representing the "distance" did not prevent these works from losing their educational and political function. Indeed, in her work on historical theater in Berlin around 1800, Katherine Hambridge has pointed to the mediating function of local color.[13] After all, the historicist project was not as easily achievable in theater and opera as in writing or painting, because the former combined different arts: while costume and set designers could precisely copy historical objects and images (though this does not mean they always did or that their sources were historically accurate), such fidelity was not possible for composers or librettists. The latter artists were often short of historical source material, for speech and music are ephemeral, and often no notated music was available for a specific time period and region. In addition, it was paramount that the historical events and sounds be molded to fit contemporary theatrical conventions; after all, audiences were less likely to accept speech or music that sounded completely out of the ordinary. Therefore, Hambridge argues, local color "mediated between the twin imperatives of historical difference and familiarity."[14] Contemporary, "modern" harps, for instance, were used to represent any variety of ancient plucked string instruments, whether aeolian harps or lyres.[15]

Because of these problems with historical fidelity, musicologists have at times dismissed historicist local color as a mere decorative surface effect or a fetish of the French theatrical landscape around 1800.[16] However, an emphasis on mediation and attendant concerns about intentional or unintentional

11. See Malakis, "First Use of *Couleur Locale*."

12. According to several scholars, local color was used to represent a different approach to history: see Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra Comique*, 233–36; Frantz, *L'esthétique du tableau*, 97–98; and Samuels, *Spectacular Past*, 3–5.

13. See Hambridge, "Performance of History." This function also shines through in David Charlton's discussion of André Grétry's use of local color in his *opéras comiques* of the late 1770s and 1780s (*Grétry and the Growth of Opéra Comique*, 172).

14. Hambridge, "Performance of History," 19.

15. For instance, modern harps were used in abundance to convey a fourth-century bardic local color in Jean-François Le Sueur's *Ossian ou les bardes*. See Andries, "Uniting the Arts to Stage the Nation," 169.

16. One of the earliest instances of this criticism is found in Victor Hugo's well-known preface to *Cromwell* (1827). Several scholars have since sided with Hugo. Moreover, the aesthetic estimation of local color is implicated in music scholarship's ambivalent relationship with exoticism and Orientalism. Already in 2011 Jonathan D. Bellman pointed out that Orientalist features of a musical work are often brushed off as merely "decorative." Because of local color's assumed aesthetic superficiality, Gerhard advocated a shift of focus to "couleur" or "tinta," a broader, supposedly more unifying compositional technique used to express the drama's atmospheric and psychological weight. See Hugo, *Cromwell*; Bellman, "Musical Voyages and Their Baggage," 418; and Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 163–64.

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inaccuracies or even revisionisms ignores that the artists of *Fernand Cortez* attributed significant importance to their work's historical fidelity, as the above-cited excerpt from the libretto preface makes clear. Taking this engagement with historicity seriously, I propose that the enthusiasm for historically researched local color in *Fernand Cortez* was at least in part fueled by the epistemological claims that come with this mode of historical narration—what Kalle Pihlainen has recently called "narrative truth."[17] Source-based representations gave the historical representations an aura of scientific truth value, of providing true knowledge.

This was, however, knowledge not just about a specific historical event but also about events' underlying "transhistorical processes," that is, processes recognized to function throughout history independent of time or place. I am borrowing transhistoricity as a concept from current curatorial practices in which objects are thematically related across various times and geographical boundaries in museum exhibitions.[18] The concept facilitates a connection between the particular time and place of a historicist representation and the generality of historical narrative constructions. These transhistorical processes made it easier to use history for education purposes because they formulated narratives that were validated in the specificity of historical episodes but simultaneously applicable to different historical times and places, including the present.

In this article, I show how the historicist representation and use of local color in *Fernand Cortez* activated transhistorical narratives of empire and thus cast this opera as a tool for propagating early nineteenth-century French imperialism. These narratives were based on the popular notion that humanity was progressing toward an ever more civilized state—a topic of intense intellectual debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was also widely invoked at the time as a justification for European imperialism and colonialism, including Napoléon's own military campaigns.[19] While previous discussions of historicism and local color in opera and theater around 1800 have largely examined their connection to nation building, my approach here casts a wider net, examining their impact on sustaining contemporary French narratives of empire.[20]

17. Pihlainen, *Work of History*, 1–14.

18. The concept is elaborately discussed in Wittocx et al., *Transhistorical Museum*; see esp. Setari, "Notes on Transhistoricity."

19. According to Stuart Woolf, the term *civilization* was used in Britain and France from the 1760s on as a typical characteristic of European societies, giving them license to propagate this characteristic across the world ("Europe and Its Historians," 323–24). This connection among civilization, Europe, and imperialism is found in several eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts, of which several are excerpted in von Kulessa and Seth, *L'idée de l'Europe au siècle des Lumières*.

20. On connections of local color to ideas of nation building and nationalism in early nineteenth-century Europe, see Hambridge, "Performance of History," 19; and Samuels, *Spectacular Past*, 46–47.

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I first explore how the source-based method of historical representation and narration was used to connect various examples of imperialism. A brief survey of institutional French historiography around 1800 highlights the discipline's growing enthusiasm for source research entwining with its propagation of narratives of empire—characteristics found in both nationalist and Orientalist historiographical projects. Then I turn to narratives about the "conquest" of the Americas related to *Fernand Cortez*, showing how the opera interweaves different historical processes of "civilization" to amplify the plot's imperialist message: the conquest of the Aztec Empire (1521), the campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801), and Napoléon's Peninsular War started in 1808 with more covert reference to Charlemagne and his medieval empire. Local color and claims of historicity were specifically mobilized to interweave these events; I favor *mobilization* here over the term *mediation* for its more conspicuous political and militaristic overtones.

While these mobilization efforts may effectively propagate more abstract transhistorical notions of empire, at the end of the article I discuss their weakness when it comes to providing propaganda for a specific political enterprise, in this case Napoléon's Spanish campaign. The superimposition of various imperial endeavors in *Fernand Cortez* created uncertainty about exactly how this transhistorical process was to be mapped onto the present; the confusion was heightened by the opera featuring Spanish conquistadores as the civilizers while in 1809 the Spanish were supposed to be the ones subjected to French civilization efforts. Still, the multivalence of this transhistorical message facilitated the continued popularity of this opera following the fall of the Napoleonic Empire. More broadly, the opera provided a model for narrating the civilizing process across time and space that would continue to be used in other operatic, theatrical, and historical texts of the nineteenth century.

Historicity and Historiography of Empire

The decades straddling 1800 in France were marked by a lively and ever more popularized interest in historical sources and artifacts. An often-cited indicator of this popularization is the emergence of the modern public museum, with the opening of the Louvre and the Musée Nationale des Monuments Française in 1793 and 1795, respectively.[21] In addition to museums, France also saw a marked rise in the establishment of learned societies, some with the explicit intent of studying history and historical sources.[22] Both the museums and the intellectual

21. On the emergence of the public museum, see McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. On the rhetoric concerning historical verisimilitude in the museum, see Bann, *Clothing of Clio*, 77–92.

22. See Lentz, *Quand Napoléon inventait la France*.

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societies indicate that studying and exhibiting historical objects were activities profoundly entwined with politics, education, and above all, propagating France's intellectual and cultural prestige. This was clearly the aim of the Institut de France, one of France's most prestigious intellectual institutions. Founded in 1795, it was considered a living counterpart to the *Encyclopédie* as it brought together (and expanded on) the intellectual disciplines previously divided among the royal *académies*.[23] Its foundational decree proclaimed that "its aim is to perfect the sciences and the arts through uninterrupted research, the publication of its discoveries, and correspondence with foreign learned societies. . . . These scientific and literary endeavors serve the general utility and glory of the Republic."[24]

The writing of history was one of the Institut de France's intellectual endeavors. Initially, the discipline was part of the second class, dedicated to the moral and political sciences (the first class covered the natural sciences, and the third, literature and arts). This division already gestured toward history's entwinement with political and educational matters. The second class was populated in part with prominent political figures, such as Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès and Jean-Jacques-Régis de Cambacérès, who became Napoléon's fellow consuls in 1799. At the same time, its members included important historians such as Louis-Pierre Anquetil, the author of the newest *Histoire de France* (first published in 1805), and Pierre-Charles Levesque, who taught history at the Collège de France from 1791 until his death in 1812.[25] The intertwining became slightly less overt in 1803, when Napoléon reformed the Institut de France and gathered disciplines that strongly relied on researching and interpreting historical sources in the "class of history and ancient literature," which also encompassed Oriental languages, philosophy, legislation, and ancient geography.[26] The historiography discussed in this class was not limited to French national history but also included ancient history and histories of foreign regions and countries, such as China and Egypt.

The attitude toward history writing at the Institut de France can be gleaned from the *Rapport historique sur les progrès de l'histoire et de la littérature ancienne depuis 1789 et sur leur état actuel* (*Historical Report on the Progress of History and Ancient Literature since 1789 and on Their Present State*), commissioned by Napoléon in 1802 but published in 1810.[27] The document substantiates

23. On the foundation of the Institut de France, see Beale, "Academies to Institut."

24. The decree was reprinted in the *Almanach nationale de France*, 445.

25. *Almanach nationale de France*, 450. Despite its popularity throughout the nineteenth century, Anquetil's *Histoire* was criticized by Augustin Thierry, a representative of the "new school" of the 1820s, for being too anecdotal and devoid of source research. On Anquetil's profile as a historian, see Whitehead, "Revising the Revisionists."

26. See *Almanach impériale*, 577.

27. Dacier, *Rapport historique*.

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that historiography was a French prestige project and thus entwined with nationalist and imperialist ambitions. Since the document was addressed to Napoléon, the sycophantic tone of the opening sections is unsurprising. The first address by Levesque described the emperor as the savior of modern history from revolutionary destruction and more generally justified this reverence by claiming that history's main goal was to "one day celebrate with dignity the greatest of reigns and the greatest of nations."[28] Later on, the link is made to Charlemagne as one of the first French monarchs to employ historians to record the history of his empire.[29] The second address by the historian Bon-Joseph Dacier commended Napoléon "for surrounding himself with all the Enlightenment's intellectual activities, for embracing at a glance all human knowledge, for appreciating it in its entirety and diversity, and for judging its utility for the happiness and prosperity of the great society of mankind."[30] Thus Dacier connected Napoléon's patronage of this discipline to justifications for his imperialist ambitions, as he extended the boundaries of France through myriad military campaigns.

The body of the *Rapport historique*, which consists of a brief overview of French historiography and evaluations of historical writings, is a witness to the increasing estimation of historical fidelity. It highlights that in the eighteenth century, when "history was most cultivated in France," authors distinguished themselves by "engaging their readers through their style" and by their "greater respect for the truth than most of their predecessors."[31] The combination of these two qualities has led some historians to regard these claims of "truth" with skepticism and to dismiss them as largely a mode of rhetoric.[32] Despite differing from our modern approach to historical information, the *Rapport historique* still corroborates that source research lent credence to historical writing. After all, important criteria for praising works were evidence of extended source research; a balanced, calm, and impartial approach to these sources; and detailed information being used to uncover the transhistorical causes of important events.[33] In contrast, anecdotes intended to amuse readers, overt political bias, and impassioned narratives that vilified one political party were regularly criticized.[34] The authors regretted, for instance, that the aforementioned Anquetil had turned more toward the anecdotal than the instructional in his later works, including

28. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 2.

29. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 168.

30. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 3–4.

31. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 171.

32. See, e.g., Reizov, *L'historiographie romantique française*, 15–19.

33. See, e.g., the reports on modern history (i.e., since the fall of the Roman Empire): Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 204–21.

34. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 214–17.

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the *Histoire de France*, but they praised the rigorously researched earlier writings, such as his *L'esprit de la Ligue* (1767).[35]

Political ideology was, of course, not absent. In light of my focus on narratives of empire, it is worthwhile to spotlight the evaluation of two histories of Charlemagne. The authors found fault with Gabriel-Henri Gaillard's *Histoire de Charlemagne* (1782), inasmuch as Gaillard denounced "war and conquest . . . in the hope of bringing general peace to Europe by way of his writings."[36] Though written before Napoléon's rise to power, Gaillard's narrative was now out of favor for it went directly against France's imperialist "war and conquest." Moreover, Charlemagne was considered one of the earliest heroes of French history and one of the figures on which Napoléon liked to model himself.[37] The report's ideological tone is further supported by the praise for Dietrich Hermann Hegewisch's *Geschichte der Regierung Kaiser Karls der Grossen* (*History of the Reign of Emperor Charlemagne*, 1777); a French translation was published in 1791. Despite Hegewisch's being a "Saxon," he considered Charlemagne's subjugation of his people and their conversion to Christianity necessary because it delivered them from their "ferocious turbulence" and "bloodthirsty superstition."[38] This discussion thus upheld the notion not only that it was France's (historical) duty to spread the principles of civilization (and Christianity) it had nurtured in its own borders but also that the subjugated populations benefited and would eventually be grateful for being conquered.

Even when the Institut de France was not merely a governmental puppet and actively opposed governmental interference, history as practiced at this institution was conceived as a profoundly political discipline.[39] The members of the class of history and ancient languages still included many prominent politicians, such as Napoléon's brother Joseph and Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, who despite France's turbulent political climate held influential governmental positions almost continuously from the 1780s until the 1830s. While invested in source research, how historians constructed narratives from these sources was strongly influenced by the notion that historiography, at least in part, raised good French citizens. And as Matthew d'Auria has recently shown, many of the narratives that throughout the nineteenth century informed

35. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 211.
36. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 208.
37. See Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 150–52.
38. Dacier, *Rapport historique*, 209.
39. This opposition was especially clear in 1810 with the decennial prize competition, which was to honor the best works of the previous ten years in various disciplines. While the Institut de France's members served as jury, they had not nominated all the works that Napoléon favored, which led to much controversy; eventually no prizes were ever awarded. See Seth, "L'Institut et les prix littéraires"; and Grigsby, "Classicism, Nationalism, and History."

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historians' concept of what a good French citizen was were rooted in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writings.[40]

Yet, while many authors have focused on nation building through national history, a similar function was also performed by Orientalist historiographical projects in which source research was similarly used to lend credence to "narrative truths." Perhaps the most renowned example is the historical and scientific output of Napoléon's Egyptian and Syrian campaign (1798–1801), which Edward Said argued marked the emergence of modern French-British colonialism.[41] On this campaign, Napoléon had taken thirty-five intellectuals who formed the Institut d'Egypte. They were hired to advise the government and "propagate the Enlightenment" and to study the country's fauna, flora, geography, history, music, and so on.[42] Their efforts resulted in the monumental, multivolume publication *Description de l'Egypte*, of which the first volumes were published in 1809, the year *Fernand Cortez* premiered. Its introduction shows the intersection of the scientific activities (including source research) and ideology. It stated that Napoléon's campaign aimed "to ease the condition of the inhabitants and to obtain for them all the advantages of a perfected civilization," and it asserted that "one cannot attain this goal without the continuous employment of the sciences and arts."[43] While the Egyptian campaign ultimately failed, these research activities allowed France, according to Said, to exercise an intellectual form of control over Ottoman Egyptian culture and its history; it was "the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one."[44] Historical and scientific research sanctioned by an institution is again constructed as providing epistemological criteria for a transhistorical narrative that justifies empire. It is exactly this fusion of a source-based historical representation with Orientalist and exoticist tropes that is used to strengthen this narrative in *Fernand Cortez*.

Historicist Narratives of Empire in *Fernand Cortez*

It has long been known that the artists creating this opera were eager to display their historical research. As early as 1874, the archivist and librarian Théodore de Lajarte (1826–90) uncovered a letter indicating that the scene painters for *Fernand Cortez* sought historically accurate illustrations of sixteenth-century Mexico, its inhabitants, and the Spanish conquistadors to reproduce this setting in

40. D'Auria, *Shaping of French National Identity*.
41. Said, *Orientalism*, 42–43.
42. Lentz, *Quand Napoléon inventait la France*, 265.
43. Fourier, *Description de l'Egypte*, vi.
44. Said, *Orientalism*, 42–43.

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the sets with greater fidelity.[45] Several of the costume designs were inspired by a single scholarly source, *The History of Mexico*, a 1787 English translation of Francesco Saverio Clavigero's *La historia antigua de México* (1780).[46] The resemblances between the costume designs for the production by François-Guillaume Ménageot and the *History of Mexico*'s illustrations are remarkable. Some figures are reproduced almost exactly—down to details of posture and facial features—while others are clad in outfits and armor from the *History of Mexico* (see figs. 1–5). Clavigero's book may even have supplied material for the sets. While the one design tentatively associated with *Fernand Cortez* does not offer a clear resemblance, the book may have provided a template for the Aztec zodiac calendar detailed in descriptions for an act 1 ceiling curtain.[47]

The *History of Mexico* is also the likely source for the most peculiar detail of the opera's musical historicism: the score features an *ayacachtli* (see figs. 6–7).[48] The *ayacachtli*, spelled *ajacaxtli* in Spontini's autograph manuscript score as in Clavigero's *History of Mexico*,[49] is a gourd-shaped rattle known in Europe from publications on the Americas, some dating back to the sixteenth century, as a prototypical indigenous Mesoamerican instrument.[50] Originally, Spontini had intended the instrument to serve as a pervasive sonic marker of the Aztecs, used in several numbers, including in the Mexican March in act 1 when the Aztecs first arrive on the stage.[51] However, the instrument is crossed out in most

45. Report from Mitoire, guard of the storage facilities of the Menus-Plaisirs, the organization responsible for royal festivities and theater, to Picard, directeur de l'Académie Impériale, May 17, 1809, Archives Nationales à Paris, AJ13 92. Lajarte's discovery is mentioned in Charlton, *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, 5.

46. Clavigero, *History of Mexico*. A stamp on the first page of the book now held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France shows that it was indeed part of Napoléon's Bibliothèque Impériale and may thus have been the volume found by the Opéra's artists.

47. Report from Mitoire to Picard, June 16, 1809, Archives Nationales à Paris AJ13 92. The zodiac signs are also described in a review of *Le publiciste*, Nov. 30, 1809. The critic's contention that M. Humboldt had delivered the images for the zodiac and the plants is likely erroneous but points to the reviewer's interest in validating the accuracy of this staging element.

48. While there are similarities between the naming and depiction of the instrument, the costume of the dancer seems not directly based on Clavigero's *History of Mexico*. It is possible that inspiration was taken from the illustrations by I. Van Beecq for Antonio de Solís's *Histoire de la conquête du Mexique ou de la Nouvelle Espagne*, a source cited in the libretto preface of *Fernand Cortez*. In these illustrations the Aztec dancers are depicted with feather loin and head garments (de Solís, *Histoire de la conquête du Mexique*, 275, 290).

49. Spontini, "Fernand Cortez," 1:331–35, Paris, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra A418 i; Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, 398.

50. The earliest European source to mention an *ayacachtli* is Bernardino Sahagún's *Historia general de Las Cosas de Nueva España* (ca. 1577), also known as the Florentine Codex. Publications about extra-European exploration were the most prominent source for descriptions of non-European music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Irving, "Comparative Organography in Early Modern Empires." On the *ayacachtli* specifically, see also Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory*, 34–36.

51. Originally, every act of the opera contained a march or a dance that featured this instrument. Spontini, "Fernand Cortez," 1:331–35, 3:266–90, 5:291–99, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra A418 i–v.

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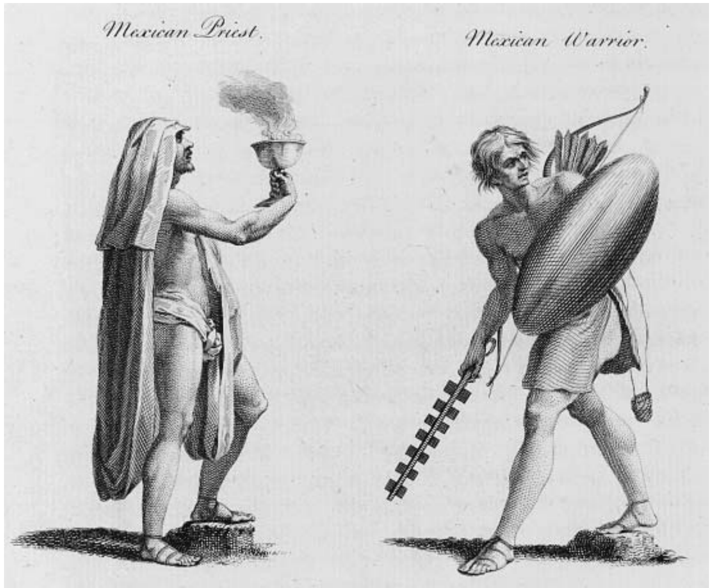

FIGURE 1 Engraving of a "Mexican Priest" and a "Mexican Warrior," from Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, 1787. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

FIGURE 2 Engraving of "A Common Sacrifice," from Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, 1787. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

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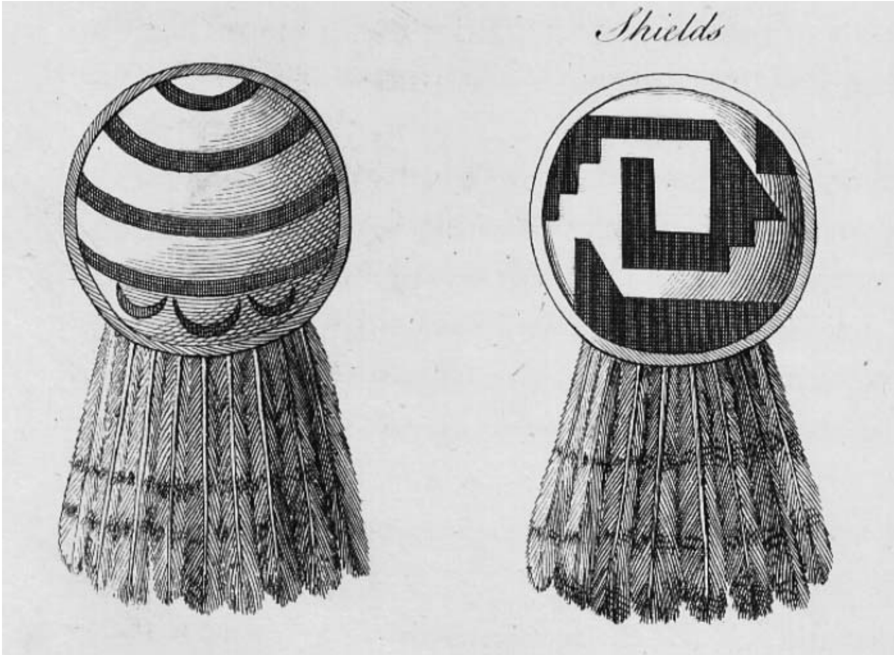

FIGURE 3 Engraving of “Shields,” from Clavigero’s *History of Mexico*, 1787. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

FIGURE 4 Ménageot’s costume designs for a “Mexican Sacrificial Priest” and a “Priest” in *Fernand Cortez*, based on the engravings of a “Mexican Priest” and “A Common Sacrifice” (figs. 1–2), ca. 1809. Courtesy Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra.

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FIGURE 5 Ménageot's costume designs for "Mexican Soldiers and Officers" in *Fernand Cortez*, based on the engravings of a "Mexican Warrior" and "Shields" (figs. 1 and 3), ca. 1809. Courtesy Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra.

places, possibly because of its rather small sound and limited carrying power. It seems that at the premiere it featured in only one Aztec dance, the only number in the printed score in which the instrument appears.[52] In this number, a dancer beats the instrument onstage so that its function as an Aztec marker is also realized visually.[53] No evidence indicates that such an instrument had previously appeared on a European stage.[54] Until then, composers had largely resorted to imitating historical or exotic sounds with standard Western instruments rather than by reconstructing indigenous instruments. Consequently, the efforts to include the *ayacachtli* are another testament to the artists' unprecedented engagement with historical sources.

The libretto also proudly advertised the production's adherence to historical sources. The preface claimed that "the most trustworthy historians have furnished us with all the principal events and all the important characters (except for

52. Spontini, *Fernand Cortez*, 226.

53. Because of its limited appearance and visual rather than aural effect, Alessandro Lattanzi describes the *ayacachtli* in *Fernand Cortez* as "another example of the Parisian fetishism for *couleur locale*" and "a surface exoticism" ("Spontini's Panoply," 52).

54. Michael V. Pisani claims that this is the very first "attempt to use any indigenous American instruments in a European musical composition" (*Imagining Native America in Music*, 43).

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FIGURE 6 A dancer with an *ayacachtli* in Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, 1787. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

FIGURE 7 Ménageot's costume design for a dancer with *ayacachtli*, ca. 1809. Courtesy Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra.

Alvare [Cortez's brother])."[55] Any adjustments made to the original historical events seemed merely to align the libretto with the expected dramatic conventions, and some were justified by reference to historical fidelity. The excision of the Aztec emperor Montezuma, for instance, happened because "history, by stigmatizing the shameful weakness of this prince, did not allow us to present him onstage in a dramatic manner."[56] In this quote, the librettists suggest they prefer cutting characters over portraying them in a manner violating historical accounts.

Indicating the similarity between libretto and historical circumstances is the reason for a lengthy quotation ascribed to Antonio de Solís's *Histoire de la conquête du Mexique ou de la Nouvelle Espagne* (*History of the Conquest of Mexico or New Spain*, 1691).[57] The quote supports the claim that the relationship

55. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 4–5.

56. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 5.

57. This is the first French translation of Antonio de Solís's original Spanish *Historia de la conquista de México* (1684).

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between Cortez and the character of Amazily was modeled on Cortés's romance with Doña Marina, his historical Aztec mistress. Since this quotation offers a key to understanding the narrative of empire underlying the opera's use of historical sources, it is worth quoting in full:

> This historian [de Solís] says that of the twenty women given to Cortés by the chief from Yucatán, this general [Cortés] immediately noticed the superior genius of one of them. He had her educated and baptized as *Marina* (we have named her *Amazily*). It seems that geniuses of a superior order stimulated each other. Cortés and Marina liked each other from the very first moment and then bound themselves to each other with the most tender love. Cortés, who quickly recognized the extent of his lover's intelligence and strength of character, made her his advisor and translator, and considerably benefitted from his relationship with this young American: twice she saved his life, risking her own; and because among heroic souls, a taste for pleasure often goes hand in hand with a passion for glory, they fell in love and from their union a son was born, named *Martín Cortés*, who Philip II [of Spain] invested with the title of knight of St. Jacques.[58]

Given all the effort spent on the historicist representation of *Fernand Cortez*, it may come as a surprise that this quotation is a fabrication. Even though it sounds historical, it neither cites nor paraphrases any text from de Solís's *Histoire de la conquête du Mexique*. De Solís's study focuses on Doña Marina's role as a translator and negotiator in Cortés's campaigns. He only briefly mentioned that the conquistador had approached her with "manners that purity would not have allowed" and as a result had a son with her—behavior that his fellow historians, so he claimed, had criticized as "unbridled passion."[59] The libretto's quotation, in contrast, cleanses the historical figures of these less savory aspects and makes them more suitable as operatic heroes. Because altering events and characters in light of contemporary theatrical and moral conventions was a common practice, and one already admitted to in the libretto preface with regard to Montezuma, this deception is especially surprising.

While one may suggest that the artists were merely seeking historical verisimilitude, I argue that the semblance of historical accuracy achieved by this fabricated quote was needed to uphold the epistemological claims about the opera's narrative of empire. The narrative's essence is even encapsulated in the quotation itself: Cortés/Cortez undertakes the project of civilizing Marina/Amazily through education, religious conversion, and compassion. This project elevates the previously "uncivilized" other to a level comparable to that of the "civilized" self, and the relationship between the two becomes mutually beneficial and

58. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 5–6.
59. De Solís, *Histoire de la conquête du Mexique*, 138–39.

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leads to a union (their son, Martín Cortés). This narrative is also neatly reproduced in the opera itself, where the confrontation between the Aztecs and the Spanish conquistadors ultimately results in a final celebration of the "union of two worlds."[60] It is no accident that a major agent in this unification is Marina/Amazily, the person who supposedly could testify to the benefits of the imperialist civilizing mission. Besides the visual and musical local color in the production, the quotation in the introduction, as long as its fabricated nature is not revealed, could thus underscore the transhistorical narratives of civilization and empire.

Narrating the Conquests of the Americas

Establishing this "narrative truth" was important for the reception of *Fernand Cortez*, because Napoléon's government hoped to use the opera to garner support for another imperial campaign: the Peninsular War.[61] This war started following the abdication of the Spanish king Charles IV in favor of Ferdinand VII in March 1808. The French government, however, did not recognize Ferdinand as the new sovereign and instead installed Napoléon's brother, Joseph.[62] This decision caused violent uprisings in Madrid and elsewhere in Spain, which French troops brutally suppressed. In the summer of 1808, Ferdinand VII decided to launch a military campaign against the new government the French installed in Bayonne, where his forces ultimately clashed with the armies of Napoléon.[63]

From Bayonne the emperor reportedly wrote a letter to Joseph Fouché, minister of police at the time, to commission an opera that would create public support for this war.[64] It is unclear who decided on the topic for the opera, but it was likely chosen in the hope of evoking a parallel between Cortés's conquest of the Aztec Empire and Napoléon's Spanish campaign.[65] After all, as a

60. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 62.

61. For more on the Peninsular War, see Esdaile, *Peninsular War*.

62. Esdaile, *Peninsular War*, 37.

63. Esdaile, *Peninsular War*, 38–39.

64. See Madelin, *Les mémoires de Fouché*, 259. The authenticity of the memoirs of Fouché has been challenged, since they were first published after Fouché's death. Yet Louis Madelin's preface suggests that even though the narrative may have been fabricated, the information is based on existing notes by Fouché. With regard to *Cortez*, correspondence between Fouché and the librettist Esménard from May 1808 suggests that the minister of police was indeed involved in the opera's creation. See Libby, "Gaspare Spontini," 109–10.

65. Conflicting narratives exist in the anecdotal notes by de Jouy, one of the opera's librettists, that accompanied the 1817 revision of *Fernand Cortez* and Adolf Bernhard Marx's records of conversations with Spontini that variously attribute the choice of plot either to de Jouy or to Napoléon. Yet de Jouy's memoirs and the above-mentioned correspondence between Fouché and Esménard suggest that the government tasked the librettists with finding a plot that would fit the political situation. Libby, "Gaspare Spontini," 108–10.

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governmentally funded institution subject to censorship, the Opéra regularly featured works that had a propagandistic tone, if not always as closely paralleling political realities as this one.[66] Moreover, one of Napoléon's censors, Esménard, was specifically asked to collaborate on this libretto. While the Opéra and its artists were silent on this parallel between the plot and the Spanish campaign, the official reading was clearly recognized by several critics. For instance, Lucien Geoffroy wrote in the *Journal de l'Empire* that "one should observe that while the Spanish conquerors justly opposed the abominable sacrifices [of the Aztecs], the Inquisition was authorizing similar ones in their country, for burning people is not less barbarous than slitting their throats. Hail to the hero of humanity [Napoléon], who is destroying this horrible desecration of a clement, peaceful, and charitable religion."[67] French public opinion was starting to oppose Napoléon's incessant warfare and likely motivated this operatic propaganda campaign.[68] Still, the government profited from a well-established image of Spain as a society on the fringes of Europe and civilization, "a barbarous and inhospitable land," as one revolutionary publication called it.[69] While the actual reasons for Napoléon's Peninsular War are complex,[70] officials frequently used the imperialist narrative that it was a country in need of civilizing, especially when it came to its religious practices.[71]

As Sarah Hibberd has demonstrated, recasting his Spanish campaign as a religious war fitted with Napoléon's politics of presenting himself as the savior of Catholicism.[72] These politics had started when he reconciled France with the Catholic Church in the 1801 Concordat, and they were enforced in 1806 when the emperor instituted official celebrations for St. Napoléon on his birthday, August 15.[73] The emperor may even have taken his inspiration from Spanish history itself; since 1493 Spanish monarchs had been allowed to carry the title "Rex Catholicissimus" (Ferdinand VII was still addressed as such) and used the title to justify their sponsorship of the Inquisition and colonial exploits in the New World and elsewhere.[74]

To imbue the conquest of the Americas with a positive imperialist message, it was necessary to change the narrative. Eighteenth-century intellectuals,

66. An elaborate discussion of Napoléon's use of the Opéra and its repertoire for political ends is given in Chaillou, *Napoléon et l'Opéra*.

67. *Journal de l'Empire*, Nov. 30, 1809.

68. Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 273.

69. Bourdon, *Recueil des actions heroïques et civiques*, 17–18. Quoted in Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 273.

70. The different causes of the war are elaborately described in Esdaile, *Peninsular War*, 1–36.

71. On the perception of religious differences between French conceptions of Catholicism and those of the Mediterranean regions during the Napoleonic Wars, see Clarke, "Encountering the Sacred."

72. Hibberd, "'L'épique en action.'"

73. Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 212–15.

74. On the entwining of Catholicism with Spain's colonial projects, see van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism*, xi–xii. A brief overview of the Inquisition is given in Tarver and Slape, *Spanish Empire*, 113–16.

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such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, often used this conquest to debate the merits and abuses of empire building, especially through colonialism and its attendant atrocities and religious extremism.[75] This debate also informed theater works such as Voltaire's *Alzire, ou les américains* (*Alzire, or the Americans*, 1736), which denounced the aggressive colonialist who seeks to dominate indigenous peoples and to force them into subjugation.[76] Since Voltaire, similar approaches had been taken in two works loosely based on his tragedy: Pierre-Joseph Candeille's *Pizarre, ou la conquête du Pérou* (*Pizarro, or the Conquest of Peru*), a *tragédie lyrique* (1785), with a libretto by Charles-Pierre Duplessis, and a melodrama of the same title by René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, which premiered in 1802.[77] The latter also features a "benevolent" colonialist mediator as a figure that allows for a narrative supporting imperialism. This is also the case with Etienne-Nicolas Méhul's opera *Cora* (1791) with a libretto by Valadier, in which the Incan title character is in love with the Spanish mediator. She seems to support a more positive image of Spanish imperialism by proclaiming that "everything is changed in these climates: everything has softened, our morals, our virtues, our courage, [we are] less ferocious in battle and more humane after a victory."[78] Still, a handful of good Spanish characters had not redeemed the unfavorable light in which the conquest of the Americas had usually been portrayed on Parisian stages.[79]

According to *Fernand Cortez*'s librettists, the main culprit of Cortés's bad reputation among the Parisian audiences was not a play or an opera but Jean-François Marmontel's popular novel *Les Incas, ou la destruction de l'empire du Pérou* (*The Incas, or the Destruction of the Empire of Peru*, 1777).[80] While this novel, like the theatrical pieces, focused on Spanish atrocities during the colonization of Peru, it also featured lengthy episodes in chapters 6–8, in which two Aztec refugees related the fall of their empire, thus casting Cortés's conquest in the same light as Pizarro's.[81] The librettists claimed, though, that equating the two Spanish conquistadors was a mistake:

75. See Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*.

76. Sanchez, "Voltaire et sa tragédie américaine Alzire," 20.

77. Duplessis, *Pizarre, ou la conquête du Pérou*; Pixérécourt, *Pizarre ou la conquête du Pérou*.

78. Valadier, *Cora*, 3.

79. Of these versions, only Candeille's *Pizarre*, performed at the Opéra a few times in 1785 and 1791, was referenced in reviews of *Cortez*. See *Journal de l'Empire*, Nov. 30, 1809; and *Journal de Paris*, Dec. 1, 1809. Jürgen Maehder has demonstrated that the libretto of *Fernand Cortez* was instead closely related to various eighteenth-century Italian *opere serie* ("Die Darstellung der Conquista Mexicos").

80. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 3. Marmontel's novel had also been the source for Méhul's *Cora*, performed a total of five times during 1791. This opera seems to have been entirely forgotten by the premiere of *Cortez*, for the librettists and critics only reference Marmontel's *Les Incas*. On *Cora*, see Bartlet, "Etienne-Nicolas Méhul and Opera," 194–214.

81. The librettists' criticism of Marmontel's *Les Incas* was another of their deceptions. As Dennis Libby has shown, it had been a prominent model for the libretto of *Cortez*. Marmontel had also based his

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> Cortés, a Spanish nobleman gifted with all the qualities that make a hero, had to fight in his prodigious expedition, against obstacles that only he could have surmounted. With a strong army of *seven hundred men*, *eight cannons, and seventeen horses*, he conquered an immense empire defended by a nation of warriors whose ferocious morals and cruel superstitions weaken the sympathy that one would usually feel for those with unhappy courage.[82]

These qualities, they argued, set Cortés apart from Pizarro, who supposedly had many more military resources available and faced a peaceful, unarmed nation, which he brutally exterminated.[83]

By claiming that their portrayal of Cortez was based on historical sources, the librettists thus "corrected" the Enlightenment version of the conquest of the Americas. They highlighted that Cortés had "truly" been a heroic man and the Aztecs were uncivilized barbarians unworthy of the audience's sympathy. Under the cloak of historicity, the artists not only made their Cortez into a more typical operatic character—the benevolent ruler—but also mobilized this historical episode to align Cortés's conquest with Napoléon's imperialist projects. The preface states that this historical episode "proves with the greatest brilliance what the courage, perseverance and indomitable will of a *great man* can achieve."[84] This mention of a "great man" is almost certainly an implicit reference to Napoléon; after he became emperor, he regularly styled himself Napoléon Le Grand, probably after Charlemagne, whose imperialist projects, as we have seen, were a well-worn topic of historiography discussed at the Institut de France around this time.[85]

The link between Cortés and Napoléon was made more explicitly in other writings of the time. In 1808, a certain P. Roure published the epic poem *La Cortésiade ou le Nouveau monde en douze chants* (*The Cortesiad or the New World in Twelve Cantos*).[86] The poem is preceded by an "Hommage à Napoléon le Grand," glorifying the emperor's endeavors to end oppression and bring

plot on the historical accounts of Antonio de Herrera and de Solís, the two histories cited in the libretto preface of *Fernand Cortez*. Marmontel's version closely resembles the events as played out—and further compressed—in the opera. Moreover, the names Amazili and Telasco first crop up in his novel, where they are a young Incan couple rather than Cortés's Aztec mistress and her brother. Because of these connections, Libby has suggested that Marmontel's novel was a more direct source than the actual historical works of de Solís and de Herrera ("Gaspare Spontini," 124–27).

82. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 3.

83. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 4.

84. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 3 (emphasis mine). The link was made more explicitly in the printed score, which was dedicated to the queen of the two Sicilies, meaning Julie Clary, the spouse of Joseph I, king of Spain. Moreover, the dedication specifically states that through his "conquests" the "great man" had made Paris "the capital of the world" (Spontini, dedication in *Cortez*).

85. On Napoléon modeling himself on Charlemagne, see Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 150–52.

86. Roure, *La Cortésiade*.

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freedom to the world.[87] The poem, as promised on the title page, is "enriched with historical and geographic notes, and notes concerning natural history," thus reflecting the tendency to validate narratives by showing off historical research.[88] It is uncertain whether Roure knew of the opera *Fernand Cortez* when writing his text. Yet this poem demonstrates that the creators of this opera were not the only ones eager to revise the historiography of the conquest of the Americas to exploit its political expediency in 1808, when Napoléon embarked on his Spanish campaign, as well as to appeal to French pride in the country's historical and scientific activities.[89]

Mobilizing Musical Local Color

The alignment between historical episodes of civilization and present-day imperialism was also present in how Spontini crafted the musical opposition between the Spanish conquistadores and the Aztecs. Of course, instances of historically "accurate" local color in music—even when very freely interpreted—were limited and would have been undesirable. As mentioned earlier, the *ayacachtli* was in all likelihood used in only one dance at the opera's premiere and served more as a visual than a musical marker of otherness. Similarly, the only instance of identifiably Spanish-flavored local color appears but a few pages later, when the Spanish cavalry charge is accompanied with triplets evoking the typical rhythm of a bolero, a reference picked up by at least one critic.[90] More generally, the score is permeated with musical idioms that at first sight have little to do with historically researched local color. Yet these idioms had familiar associations with other narratives of empire for the opera's first audiences, more specifically the recent Egyptian and Syrian campaign.

In the Mexican March—the music heard when the Aztecs first arrive onstage—Spontini replaced the crossed out *ayacachtli* with a triangle.[91] At the time, the triangle was commonly associated with the *alla turca* style, a highly popular, stylized manner of depicting exotic characters in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially Ottomans.[92] The Mexican march in *Fernand*

87. Roure, *La Cortésiade*, vi–vii.

88. While the appearance of footnotes in an epic poem may surprise modern readers, it may have been unremarkable to Roure's contemporaries. After all, epic poems were considered valuable sources of historical information. For example, in the 1780s the French archaeologist Jean-Baptiste Le Chevalier had used Homer's *Iliad* to locate and excavate the site of Troy (Le Chevalier, *Voyage dans la Troade*).

89. Népomucène Louis Lemercier's *Christophe Colomb*, a *comédie historique* about the 1492 voyage to the Americas, also highlights the progressive scientific ideas that allowed Columbus to succeed in his journey and how religious extremists opposed him. The play was first performed at the Odéon on March 7, 1809, only a few months before the premiere of *Fernand Cortez*.

90. *Le publiciste*, Nov. 30, 1809.

91. Spontini, "Fernand Cortez," 1:331–35, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra A418 i.

92. On *alla turca* in eighteenth-century opera, see Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 110–23; Locke, *Music and the Exotic*, 299–323; and Hunter, "'Alla Turca' Style." Thomas Betzwieser (*Exotismus und "Türkenoper"*)

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FIGURE 8 *Fernand Cortez*, act 1: the beginning of the Mexican March. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Cortez (fig. 8) contains several features typical of this style. Its harmony is simple, merely alternating between dominant and tonic chords, and the melody uses many semitone figurations. The march's short repetitive motives, dotted rhythms, and abrupt dynamic accents give the piece a percussive character that is further

and Larry Wolff (*Singing Turk*) have discussed at length how the portrayal of Ottoman characters is connected to eighteenth-century political ambitions in France and the Habsburg Empire, respectively.

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FIGURE 8 (continued)

underlined when the cymbals, bass drum, and triangle chime in. Such *alla turca* features, musicologist Ralph P. Locke contends, constitute "a complex of generally noisy sonic materials," and throughout the eighteenth century this association with noise had generally dehumanized or ridiculed Ottoman and other exotic characters.[93]

93. Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 110.

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The composer's intentional creation of a "noisy" musical idiom is even more conspicuous in the act 3 opening chorus, "Enchaînons, frappons les victimes" ("Let us enchain, beat the victims"). This chorus depicts the Aztecs as they are readying themselves to commit that most contemptible act: human sacrifice (specifically of Cortez's brother, Alvaro, and his men). The scene starts as a soft rumble in the low strings and timpani, with the tempo indicated as *allegro feroce marcato*, a ferocious, marked, and quick tempo—*feroce* is an unusual addition to a tempo indication (fig. 9). Then, after four measures, a loud *fortissimo* call in the horns, trumpets, and trombones announces the beginning of the sacrificial rite. Following the call, the tam-tam, bass drum, and side drum—the loudest instruments then available in operatic orchestras—join in, and above this noisy tapestry the violins foreshadow the chorus's first theme. This theme displays many of the distinctive features of Spontini's Aztec music and, like the Mexican march, makes some allusions to the *alla turca* idiom: a simple harmonic accompaniment and a melody with chromatic ornamentations that circles around semitones. Its dotted rhythms, staccato markings, and plethora of accents give the music an aggressive, percussive quality. Throughout the chorus, the themes prioritize rhythm over lyricism: the repetition of notes and short motives and the small range prevent the melodic material from developing and expanding.

The text setting adds to the repetitive impression of this chorus. The entire number is based on just four eight-syllable lines:

Enchaînons, frappons les victimes,	Let us enchain, beat the victims,
Répandons leur sang odieux;	Let us spill their odious blood;
Nos fureurs sont trop légitimes;	Our furor is all too legitimate;
Nous vengeons l'empire et les dieux.	We avenge our empire and our gods.[94]

The series of imperatives—"enchaînons, frappons, . . . répandons"—and the short sentence structures made it easy for the composer to break down the text into single words and small phrases that are frequently repeated. Whereas the first theme sets the whole poetic text once, subsequent thematic sections feature several repetitions of either parts or the entirety of the text. This textual repetition, combined with the percussive musical setting, turns the Aztecs' exclamations into an oppressive sonic tapestry that enacts the violence and bloodlust expressed in the lyrics.

The opening of act 3 elicited significant consternation in the press, with several critics indicating that Spontini had created the impression that the Aztec's music was barbarous, bordering on "noise." The reviewer of the *Courrier de l'Europe* declared that "these are the songs of barbarians, which says it all. Here, the composer became completely Mexican, because there is such torment

94. De Jouy and Esménard, *Fernand Cortez*, 47.

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ACTE IIIme.

(Le théatre représente le péristyle d'un temple consacré au dieu du mal.)

SCÈNE PREMIÈRE.

(ALVAR et les prisonniers espagnols sont amenés au temple par des soldats mexicains, au bruit d'une musique guerrière et sauvage. Le peuple qui les suit se livre aux transports d'une joie féroce.)

CHŒUR ET DANSES BARBARES N.º 1.

Allegro feroce marcato.

1.er Violon.
2.^d Violon.
Petites Flutes.
Hautbois.
Clarinettes.
Cors en Ré.
Cors en Mi ♭.
Trompettes en Ré.
Bassons.
Trombonnes.
Timbales en si♭.
Tamtam. Grosse-Caisse. derrière le théâtre.
Tambourins. Cimballes. par les figurans.
Tambour avec la corde lâche derrière le théâtre.
Altos.
Violoncelle et C-Basse.

Quatre Jongleurs sur le bord du souterrain font l'appel en sonnant de la trompe.

avec sourdine.

FF

P

Allegro feroce marcato.

FIGURE 9 *Fernand Cortez*, act 3: the opening of the Aztec chorus "Enchaînons, frappons les victimes." Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

and musical movement in the orchestration, which undoubtedly reflects the [dramatic] situation, but tires out even the most undaunted contemplator and his ear."[95] Many critics similarly complained about the barbarity expressed in

95. *Courrier de l'Europe*, Dec. 3, 1809.

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FIGURE 9 (continued)

these and other Aztec choruses; the impression was sometimes so strong that it affected the assessment of the entire score as mere noise.[96]

96. One critic grumbled that "from start to end it is really such frightful noise that one cannot leave without a headache" (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Feb. 21, 1810).

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FIGURE 9 (continued)

One possible explanation for the critics' visceral reaction is that Spontini had simply outdone any of his predecessors and contemporaries in imagining a kind of music that drastically deviated from contemporary norms. The excess of Spontini's music became very conspicuous when reviewers compared it to other so-called barbarous choruses, such as those of the Scythians in Christoph

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Willibald Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779), an opera still performed at the time.[97] Even though Gluck used some of the same instruments (piccolo, cymbals, and side drum) and a similar syllabic, strongly accentuated text setting, the Scythian choruses are shorter, have more conventional harmonic language and more lyrical melodies, and avoid incessantly repetitive motives.[98]

Spontini's Aztec music did not come across as wholly invented, though; even though the above-quoted critic may have meant the remark that "the composer became completely Mexican" as scorn, it does give the impression that he thought Spontini had captured some essence of what "Mexican music" may have sounded like. It is indeed possible that Spontini had taken inspiration from Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, which highlighted the prominence of percussive instruments in Aztec music, such as the *huehuetl* and *teponazli*. Clavigero described the *huehuetl* as a three-foot-tall drum and the *teponaztli* as another drum that comes in different sizes, but the sound of the largest one "is so loud that it may be heard at the distance of two or three miles." Moreover, he specified that the Aztec's "singing was harsh and offensive to European ears, but they took so much pleasure in it themselves, that on festivals, they continued singing the whole day."[99]

Such ethnographic descriptions did not have to go together with assumptions of barbarism. Musicologist Olivia Bloechl has argued that there was a continuous tension between representations of "race" and "exoticism" that on the one hand sought to gain control over the Other and on the other hand reflected Enlightenment fascination in Europe with "primitive" cultures unsoiled by the influences of modern, scientific society.[100] However, the latter representations were hardly estranged from discourses of power; as Vanessa Agnew highlights, this fascination could still result in the exploitation of so-called primitive cultures as scientific test subjects.[101] These tensions are clear in Clavigero's book itself, whose depiction of indigenous Mesoamericans is entirely in line with the Enlightenment's "noble savage": it includes criticism of the violent intervention by the Spanish but simultaneously accentuates that Aztec practices were regarded as uncivilized.[102] Yet Spontini's noisy, oppressive music leaves no room for this

97. The opera was performed at least twice a year from 1800 to 1808, with a total of forty-one performances for these years. Performance data have been collected from the *Journal de l'Opéra* (gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb426079139/date.r=Journal+de+Paris).

98. According to Libby, this resulted in the contemporary judgment that Gluck's Scythian choruses had the "force of brevity, clarity, and simplicity" ("Gaspare Spontini," 152–54).

99. Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, 398.

100. See Bloechl, "Race, Empire, and Early Music."

101. See Agnew, "Music's Empire." On the politics of power behind pre-nineteenth-century descriptions of non-European music, see also Irving, "Comparative Organography in Early Modern Empires."

102. The encounter between the Spanish and the Aztecs is detailed in the second volume of Clavigero's *History of Mexico*. This volume is not held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, so it may not have

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tension: it is the opposite of the more common musical representation of the "noble savage" in French opera, with simple but highly melodious music.[103]

Crucially, with his noisy musical idiom and invocation of *alla turca* style, Spontini instead superimposed onto the Aztec music an association with the Ottoman Empire, the nation against which Napoléon had undertaken his Egyptian and Syrian campaign in 1798. The aforementioned *Description de l'Egypte*, which began publication the same year *Fernand Cortez* premiered, also included a discussion of Ottoman Egyptian music, clearly affirming its inferiority compared to Western music.[104] Its author, Guillaume André Villoteau, a member of the Opéra's chorus, had joined the campaign's scientific team as the music specialist. He had studied theoretical treatises and recorded many detailed accounts of its music in his notebooks, but the *Description de l'Egypte* provided space only for simplified and generalized reports, leading to very prejudiced viewpoints.[105] For instance, he described Egyptian music as "splitting our ears with forced, hard, and baroque modulations, ornaments that reveal an extravagant and barbarous taste, and all this performed by rude, nasal, and badly intoned voices, accompanied by instruments whose sounds are either thin and muted or shrill and piercing."[106] His response to this music shows some similarities to that of a reviewer of Spontini's opera, who judged one of the Aztec choruses as "too barbarous, . . . one hears a little flute that pierces the ears, and that produces a repulsive effect rather than a frightening one."[107] It is significant that in both instances the music is described as *barbarous*, an adjective commonly used for nations and people considered to be in need of civilization.

The musical enactment of the Aztecs' assumedly uncivilized nature was set in great relief in the opening of act 3, where the Aztec music alternates with music by the Spanish prisoners awaiting sacrifice. The latter music appealed to France's revolutionary imagination, as well as its Catholic identity. The first piece, "Le brave est au-dessus des caprices du sort" (The brave one is above the whims of fate), is a solo for Cortez's brother, Alvaro, with choral response. Its text invokes revolutionary values such as brotherhood and a willingness to die for the fatherland, while musically it references the end of the *Marseillaise*. The

been part of Napoléon's Bibliothèque Impériale, and the artists involved in creating *Cortez* may thus not have known about it.

103. On the representation of the "noble savage" in French opera at the time, see Andries, "Uniting the Arts to Stage the Nation," 169–75.

104. See Leoni, "Western Middle-East Music Imagery."

105. Leoni, "Western Middle-East Music Imagery," 177–78.

106. Villoteau, "De l'état actuel de l'art musical en Egypte," 614–15. The original French is quoted in Leoni, "Western Middle-East Music Imagery," 180–81.

107. *Petites affiches*, Dec. 14, 1809.

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second piece is an a cappella trio for Alvaro and two of his compatriots, which specifically connects sentiments of patriotism with the idea of a religious war. It reminded reviewers of François-Joseph Gossec's unaccompanied trio "O salutaris hostia" (1784), a hymn for the Feast of Corpus Christi.[108] In 1794 this trio had been turned into the revolutionary "Hymne à la liberté," providing a clear example of how religious music was mobilized for the republican national cause,[109] and in 1803 it was used in the popular pasticcio oratorio *Saül*, sung by the Levites safeguarding the Holy ark against ungodly invaders.[110] The national and religious associations from the trio further enhanced how musical local color was mobilized to revise history; namely, it suggested that Cortés had indeed waged a religious war to abolish barbaric religious superstition and civilize its Aztec population and that Napoléon had the same goal when invading Spain.

Failed Mobilizations: The Problem of Historical Contingency

Despite all the efforts to imbue *Fernand Cortez* with a political message about civilization through imperialism, the work famously failed to fulfill its intended propagandistic purpose. French musicologist Jean Mongrédien has argued that some of the praise for Cortez's victories in the opera libretto ended up being perceived as "an affront to Napoléon," since the Peninsular War had not led to victory; subsequently, performances were suspended.[111] The reality may have been more complex. The first performance run was interrupted due to an illness of Caroline Branchu, the soprano cast as Amazily.[112] Still, *Fernand Cortez* was not the hoped-for success. In addition, with public opinion becoming increasingly hostile toward Napoléon's imperial projects in the 1810s and with the French army's atrocities in Spain and Egypt gaining publicity, the silent disappearance of *Fernand Cortez* from the Opéra's repertoire in 1812 may well have been politically motivated.[113]

108. Gossec, "O salutaris hostia," Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS-1484.

109. Gossec and Caron, "Hymne à la liberté." The use of this hymn is one of myriad examples that demonstrate how the revolutionary cults, such as the Cult of the Supreme Being, were built on religious practices, despite the strong rhetoric of dechristianization. See Tallett, "Dechristianizing France"; and Aston, "Impact of the Revolution."

110. De Chédeville and Deschamps, *Saül*, 18. The trios in *Saül* and in *Fernand Cortez* were performed by the same singers, which may have strengthened the connection between the two numbers.

111. Mongrédien, *French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, 59–60. The same information is given again without specific documentary references in Chaillou, *Napoléon et l'Opéra*, 233.

112. This was noted in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Feb. 21, 1810; and *L'ambigu*, Mar. 10, 1810.

113. The final performance on January 24, 1812, roughly coincided with a turning point in the Spanish campaign: on January 19 Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington, had breached the French defense wall between Portugal and Spain by winning the border fortress Ciudad Rodrigo. In recent histories of the Napoleonic Wars this event tends to be regarded as the first sign of the collapse of the French Empire, which

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In a short biography of Spontini from 1840, the failure of the political message was ascribed to Spontini's music, in particular the aforementioned a cappella trio:

> [Spontini] had painted the Spanish character with so many beautiful colors, notably in the admirable *trio of the Spanish prisoners*, the first example of a trio without accompaniment, in which the exaltation of patriotism and faith stands out to such a high degree that the result ended up being diametrically opposed to the intentions of the emperor. He wanted to draw the attention to Spain, and thanks to Spontini's opera, every night one could admire the pride, courage, and fanaticism of the Spanish whose sons were the only ones to hold their heads upright against him in the middle of a subjugated Europe, and led by the least intrepid individuals, they made the eagles retreat for the first time.[114]

The music indeed provided a complicated referential framework. It created a clear opposition that could be read in light of imperialist ideology: on one side, an uncivilized population that produced barbarous music verging on noise; on the other, a civilized nation that expressed itself in a more conventionally lyrical manner, with gestures toward contemporary patriotic and religious music. There was, however, room for interpretation as to how this general imperialist framework was to be applied to the contemporary situation. After all, the choruses amalgamated references to various historical and contemporary empires: the Aztec Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the sixteenth-century Spanish kingdom of Castille and Aragon (then ruled by Charles I, who also was the Holy Roman Emperor), and France's republican/imperial ambitions since the 1789 revolution. Audiences could easily have read the prisoners' expressions of patriotism as Spanish and as an incentive to support their resistance against Napoléon and the brutality of his armies; after all, *Fernand Cortez* gloriously portrayed Spain's history as a bringer of civilization.[115] Moreover, the historically researched details of this operatic production and the claims in the libretto preface gave credence to this portrayal of sixteenth-century Spanish civilization efforts as faithful to historical accounts.

This uncertainty about how the narrative of empire was to be applied to contemporary situations was perhaps even a result of Napoléon's own use of

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was later accelerated by the annihilation of Napoléon's Grand Armée in the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812–13. See Esdaile, *Peninsular War*, 380; and Bell, *First Total War*, 293.

114. De Loménie, *Galerie des contemporains illustres*, 24–25.

115. It is noteworthy that by 1809 allusions to revolutionary music were increasingly problematic; as the emperor was ever more criticized for his authoritarian rule, his reputation as the "son of the Revolution" had been called into question since 1807. Moreover, "La Marseillaise" had largely been supplanted by Méhul's "Chant du départ" and the song "Veillons au salut de l'Empire" in the official music scene. Dwyer, *Citizen Emperor*, 255–56; Tulard, *Napoléon et Rouget de Lisle*, 46–49.

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history throughout his career. Christopher Prendergast has argued that Napoléon was the man of the moment, who believed in the pragmatics of action and often cherry-picked from history what seemed most useful at a specific moment. The present thus became contingent on "the often unpredictable and uncontrollable temporality of intention, deed and outcome."[116] Choosing Hernán Cortés as an example may have seemed opportune in the summer of 1808, when the Spanish campaign had just started and Napoléon intended to stamp out the protest quickly. However, an opera was not—and could not be—the work of a moment; it usually took at least a year to produce. Moreover, successful operas would be performed during multiple seasons in a continuously changing political climate. Thus, even though the censorship bureau had approved *Fernand Cortez*, claiming that "it is unnecessary to present to his majesty an analysis of this work, for he knows its beautiful conception, its noble and pure style, and the happy allusion to a hero, which excites admiration," there was no guarantee that these allusions would remain as opportune months or years later.[117] The politically fraught context of the period between November 1809 and January 1812 when *Cortez* was performed may have made audiences eager to find ways of silent resistance, misreading what the censors had deemed the opera's "happy allusions."

The failed mobilization of *Fernand Cortez* is also reminiscent of a larger problem of seeking uniformity among diversity across space and time within Napoléon's politics of empire. In an excerpt from Emmanuel de Las Cases's *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, the author detailed how Napoléon reflected on his imperialist vision in 1816, claiming that he had sought "the interests, happiness and well-being of the European association" by binding satellite states to one legal code and a uniform currency and measuring system.[118] Yet, as Biancamaria Fontana has shown, Napoléon's version of imposed uniformity was also identified as a problem in contemporary anti-imperialist critique, for it was linked to ideas of monarchical absolutism and the centralization of an empire that stamped out "local differences and regional specificities."[119] These ideas pervaded Benjamin Constant's *De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne* (*On the Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Its Connections to European Civilisation*, 1814), in which modern imperialism is characterized by an artificially imposed uniform rule, fueled by greed and

116. Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting*, 76.

117. Censorship report on *Fernand Cortez*, Nov. 28, 1809, Archives Nationales à Paris F[21] 969.

118. Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, 285.

119. Fontana, "Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations," 124.

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covered by a mantle of grand ideological statements.[120] Napoléon's government was diagnosed as despotic because it suppressed individuality, whereas maintaining the individuality of persons and regions was what had guarded ancient empires against despotism and made them thrive.[121] An imposed uniform reading would have been necessary for *Fernand Cortez* to serve its propagandistic purpose, yet opera in general does not lend itself to such practices, and the unprecedented attention to historical detail in the staging of this opera had emphasized the particularity of the Aztec Empire. By superimposing different historical episodes, *Fernand Cortez* provided a multiplicity of readings that allowed for both pro- and anti-imperial interpretations, as well as understandings not related to ideologies of empire.

While *Fernand Cortez* failed as an instrument of Napoleonic propaganda, it did not fail as an operatic work or in validating and disseminating the "narrative truth" of its transhistorical message about civilization and empire. It was one of a handful of operas revived after the fall of Napoléon in 1815 and was preserved in the repertoire at the Opéra until the mid-nineteenth century, and later in other places. It could serve as a model for staging the transhistorical process of humanity's progress toward an ever more civilized state and Europe/the West as the bringer of said civilization (whether through imperial force or not). As such, it continued an ideology that would remain omnipresent in historiography and theatrical works throughout the nineteenth century. More important, it showed the ideological work that can be achieved by local color and historicist representations in validating and disseminating the "narrative truth" of this transhistorical process.

. . .

This article has examined the intertwining of historiography, Orientalism/exoticism, and theater in promulgating narratives of empire and how a source-based representational method was mobilized for this purpose. It has highlighted how the librettists' seemingly innocuous claim to have "faithfully" followed history needs to be taken seriously to understand how the emphasis on historically researched local color was thought to serve the ideological work that the censors and government expected historical opera to do during the Napoleonic era—even if, in the end, that ideological work was not entirely successful. This era is a transitional one in the changing approaches to historical narration; while marked by an increased interest in a source-based reconstruction, history

120. Constant, *De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation*, 192–96. See also Fontana, "Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations," 124–25.

121. Constant, *De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation*, 56–59, 95 (on the benefits of maintaining individuality within empires), 171 (on Napoléon's despotism).

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simultaneously maintained its subservience to contemporary political leaders and their ideological projects.

The parallels in the developments of historical narration described in this article did not stop after the Napoleonic era. As many scholars have noted, the fall of the supposedly all-powerful Napoléon and his empire in 1815 had a considerable effect on how history was conceptualized by the "new school" of historians in the 1820s.[122] The 1817 revision of *Cortez* neatly shows this reconceptualization, which included a change of focus from individual heroism to man's subjectedness to historical circumstances and the tensions between various social groups (whether defined by class or ethnicity).[123] In 1809 the opera had opened with prominent displays of Cortez's leadership skills, as he burned his fleet to defy the Aztecs and his own mutinous soldiers. In the 1817 revision this display of political leadership was shortened and relegated to act 2.[124] Instead, the conflict between the two nations—the Spanish conquistadors and the Aztecs—became the focal point of the dramaturgy. The aforementioned, original act 3 scenes in which the Aztecs prepare to sacrifice the Spanish prisoners were now moved to the opening of the work. Another confrontation between the Spanish and the Aztecs largely took up the new final act.[125] The result of this revision is that the plot, rather than showcasing the heroism of Cortez, focused on the conflict between two nations and their people.[126] Introduced at the beginning of the opera, the particular historical circumstances, rather than the hero's personal ambitions, are cast as a motivator for Cortez's actions—a dramaturgy often found in later *grand opéra*.[127] Moreover, Maria Birbili has argued that the revised plot structure is more ethnographically informed and presents a more historically accurate version of colonial politics than the earlier version with its focus on the heroic conquistador.[128] Because these 1817 changes to *Cortez* antedate Thierry's famous *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* of 1820, which advocates a turn from monarchs to the masses as the focal point of historiography

122. See Reizov, *L'historiographie romantique française*, 11.

123. See Reizov, *L'historiographie romantique française*, 5–8.

124. See de Jouy, *Fernand Cortez*.

125. Act 3 of the 1817 revision also featured at its opening a highly abbreviated version of the scene between Amazily and Cortez, which in 1809 had taken up the entire second act.

126. Such changes also gave more independence to the chorus representing the crowd enacting some of the historical forces that propel the action. On the chorus's growing independence, see Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 82–90.

127. Scholars have also noticed that in other early nineteenth-century theatrical genres authors tended to turn away from attributing the actions of an individual to heroic, personal motivations and instead considered them at least partly guided by larger historical forces. See Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 15–16; and Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 101.

128. While Birbili's observations are valid ("Caught in Transition"), I would argue that the different political situation in France after 1815 was a more stringent motivation for de Jouy's revisions. It is true, however, that de Jouy was critical of colonialism, and Ayumi Kubo has argued that this is perceptible in both the 1809 and the 1817 libretti for *Cortez* ("Librettos of Etienne de Jouy," 59–66).

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and which is often taken as a kind of manifesto for the new historiographical school, it is unclear whether it was the page that influenced the stage or the other way around.

This further points to the symbiotic relationship between more intellectual and more entertaining representations of history; after all, Kalle Pihlainen has recently emphasized that the "work of history," or how historical meaning is constructed through narrating with historical sources, is not solely the domain of scholarly historiographical works but encompasses a multiplicity of literary, theatrical, and other genres engaging with sources.[129] Opera seems a particularly fruitful object for examining this construction. Because this genre combines different arts, it allows for narratives to be presented in visual, musical, and textual ways and to interact with a multiplicity of historical sources in its production. Moreover, as opera was a prestigious export product, works like *Fernand Cortez* traveled to various theaters around Europe and sometimes even globally,[130] and their narratives were also disseminated among wide layers of society through theatrical parodies, sheet music, reviews in the press, and so on—a topic that certainly merits its own separate discussion. The transhistorical narratives embedded in opera thus had the potential to circulate widely far beyond the reach of many intellectual histories. For now, this article has shown that the "reading together" of theatrical pieces and historiography can enhance our understanding of the political work that historicism and local color did in the Napoleonic era, whether that work consisted of spreading and popularizing particular notions about history or of showing how history is conceived to be applicable to the present.

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129. Pihlainen, *Work of History*, 95–97.

130. A concise overview of the European premieres of *Fernand Cortez* is given in Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera*, k. [col.] 612–13. In the 1830s Spontini's works, including the overture of *Fernand Cortez*, were also performed in New Orleans. See Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 91.

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APPENDIX: Repertoire of Newly Composed Operas That Premiered at the Paris Opéra, 1799–1815

May 5, 1800 [15 floréal an VIII]	*Hécube*	Score: George Granges de Fontenelle Libretto: Jean-Baptiste-Gabriel-Marie de Milcent
October 10, 1800 [18 vendémiaire an IX]	*Les Horaces*	Score: Bernardo Porta Libretto: Nicolas-François Guillard
April 12, 1801 [22 germinal an IX]	*Astyanax*	Score: Rodolphe Kreutzer Libretto: Jean-Elie Bénédo Dejaure
May 4, 1802 [14 floréal an X]	*Sémiramis*	Score: Charles-Simon Catel Libretto: Philippe Desriaux
September 14, 1802 [27 fructidor an X]	*Tamerlan*	Score: Peter von Winter Libretto: Etienne Morel de Chédeville
March 29, 1803 [8 germinal an XI]	*Proserpine*	Score: Giovanni Paisiello Libretto: Nicolas-François Guillard (after Philippe Quinault)
August 9, 1803 [21 thermidor an XI]	*Mahomet II*	Score: Louis Jadin Libretto: Georges Saulnier
February 10, 1804 [20 pluviôse an XII]	*Le connétable de Clisson*	Score: Bernardo Porta Libretto: Etienne Aignan
July 10, 1804 [21 messidor an XII]	*Ossian ou les bardes*	Score: Jean-François Le Sueur Libretto: Paul Dercy and Jacques-Marie Deschamps
April 15, 1806	*Nephtali ou les Ammonites*	Score: Félix Blangini Libretto: Etienne Aignan
August 19, 1806	*Castor et Pollux*	Score: Peter von Winter Libretto: Pierre-Joseph Bernard
October 23, 1807	*Le triomphe de Trajan*	Score: Louis-Luc de Persuis Libretto: Joseph Esménard
December 16, 1807	*La vestale*	Score: Gaspare Spontini Libretto: Etienne de Jouy
March 21, 1809	*La mort d'Adam*	Score: Jean-François Le Sueur Libretto: Nicolas-François Guillard
November 28, 1809	*Fernand Cortez*	Score: Gaspare Spontini Libretto: Etienne de Jouy and Joseph Esménard
March 23, 1810	*La mort d'Abel*	Score: Rodolphe Kreutzer Libretto: François-Benoît Hoffman

(*Continued*)

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APPENDIX (*Continued*)

August 9, 1810	*Les bayadères*	Score: Charles-Simon Catel Libretto: Etienne de Jouy
April 16, 1811	*Sophocle*	Score: Vincenzo Fiocchi Libretto: Etienne Morel de Chédeville
December 17, 1811	*Les Amazones*	Score: Etienne-Nicolas Méhul Libretto: Etienne de Jouy
September 15, 1812	*Jérusalem délivrée*	Score: Louis Luc de Persuis Libretto: Pierre-Marie-François Baour-Lormain
April 6, 1813	*Les Abencérages*	Score: Luigi Cherubini Libretto: Etienne de Jouy
August 10, 1813	*Médée et Jason*	Score: Georges Granges de Fontenelle Libretto: Jean-Baptiste-Gabriel-Marie de Milcent
May 30, 1815	*La princesse de Babylone*	Score: Rodolphe Kreutzer Libretto: Louis-Jean-Baptiste-Etienne Vigée

Note. This repertoire list includes all evening-length operas, generally in the genre of the *tragédie lyrique*, performed at the Opéra, even if libretti and scores often gave different genre names. The Opéra's repertoire also included shorter one- or two-act operas, opera-ballets, ballets, oratorios, and patriotic and propagandistic pieces, as well as many revivals of older compositions.

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