

Between the Crown and the Chambers: Blacas, Decazes, Madame du Cayla and Polignac, Favourites of Louis XVIII and Charles X

Philip Mansel

The power of the monarchy in France after 1814 explains the continued existence of royal favourites. Even in a parliamentary system that required the government to retain a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, monarchs did not leave the political arena. Still convinced of their right to rule as well as reign, they may have felt a particular need for a favourite more trustworthy than politicians and ministers who might have other loyalties – to the Bonapartes or the two Chambers. Similarly in the seventeenth century, as John Elliott and Laurence Brockliss have shown, monarchs had needed a Buckingham or a Richelieu to help them with the increasing scale, complexity, and centralisation of state business – and to take the blame for unpopular policies.¹

Louis XVIII and Charles X had four principal favourites: Pierre-Louis Jean Casimir, Count of Blacas (1771–1839, minister 1814–15); Elie Louis Decazes (1780–1860, 1st minister 1819–20), Madame du Cayla (1785–1852, 1821–1824); and Jules de Polignac (1780–1847, 1st minister 1829–30). Royal favour proved a vital political force, distinct from household office and political office. In 1830 it helped the monarchy destroy itself.

Blacas and Decazes confirm what is clear from the examples of ministers of Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI such as Mazarin, Colbert, Louvois, Cardinals Dubois and de Fleury, and Necker, and of royal mistresses such as Mesdames de Maintenon, de Pompadour, and du Barry. The kings of France combined restriction of their households and their guests, before 1790, to members of the noblesse présentée – the old nobility which could supply proofs of nobility from before 1400 – with a preference for outsider ministers and mistresses, from what were considered obscure backgrounds.

¹ J. H. Elliott, 'Introduction', in: J. H. Elliott and Laurence Brockliss, eds., *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven – London 1999) 4; Laurence Brockliss, 'the Anatomy of the Minister Favourite', in: idem, 279–309.

1 Blacas

A noble from Provence, whose family had never been presented at court, Blacas had fought in the émigré army from 1791 until its disbandment in 1801. Serving the émigré government in 1803–8 as a diplomat in St. Petersburg, he won the approval of Louis XVIII and the Comte d'Avaray. In 1803 Louis XVIII wrote to him: 'Adversity is not very difficult to support when one has faithful subjects like you, and one does not lose hope of employing their zeal in the service of the state.'²

D'Avaray was the king's former Maître de la Garde-robe, to whom, as his 'liberator', the grateful king (then Comte de Provence) had dedicated his account of their flight from Paris in 1791, which d'Avaray had organised.³ As the exiled king's ministers like the Maréchal de Castries and the Comte de Saint-Priest retired, d'Avaray became his principal minister, as well as his favourite and, as Capitaine des Gardes (a post he had received in 1791 as a reward for the successful escape), a senior court official. Like the powerful 'Spanish favourite' Godoy, whom Charles IV called 'Manuel', d'Avaray filled an emotional and political vacuum. The king called him 'mon ami', saw him every day, trusted him with royal security and in 1809 made him a duke. D'Avaray's health, however, had deteriorated, and in 1810 he retired to Madeira, where he died on 4 June 1811. The king's letters to him confirm their continued intimacy.⁴

Blacas had escorted Queen Marie Joséphine from Mittau to rejoin Louis XVIII in England in 1808, and rapidly joined d'Avaray in the king's confidence. Like d'Avaray, Decazes and Polignac (Madame du Cayla saw the king only once a week), he soon enjoyed the principal criterion of royal favour – constant access to the monarch. In March 1809, while d'Avaray was still in England, Louis XVIII had made Blacas 'commissaire-général' of the king's household and Grand Maître de la Garde-robe.⁵ A provincial noble succeeded the Duc de Liancourt, from the famous family of La Rochefoucauld which had

2 Archives Privées (name withheld by request, henceforth AP), *Louis XVIII to Blacas*, 29 March 1803.

3 Louis XVIII, *Relation d'un voyage à Bruxelles et à Coblentz* (1791) passim and 3 (Paris 1822).

4 Louis XVIII, *Correspondance privée*, Paris 1836, passim.

5 AP, Louis XVIII to Blacas, 13 March 1809, 'En chargeant le Comte de Blacas de commander en Chef ma Maison, mon intention est que lui seul y donne des ordres, reçoive les rapports de tous et me rende compte'; 'Je donne au Comte de Blacas la charge de mon Grand-Maître de la Garde-robe, vacante par la démission du Duc de Liancourt, Hartwell ce 8 août 1809. Louis'. The letters patent granting the office were counter-signed by d'Avaray.

held this great court office uninterruptedly since 1673, just after its creation.⁶ A minor revolution at court, and a sign of the rise in status, after 1789, of the provincial nobility.

In effect prime minister in exile, Blacas also ran what remained of the émigré government of diplomats, officers, and secret agents. On 19 December 1812 he had received, in secret in London, Castlereagh's suggestions about accepting the 'present state of things' and the personnel of the Empire.⁷ The mild Declaration of Hartwell of 1 March 1813 promised to maintain existing officials and the Code Napoleon, except in matters of religion. In return the British government secretly supported the Bourbon restoration, helping the émigré government to spread the declaration on the continent through British diplomats and officers, as well as French royalist agents.⁸

Blacas presented the Bourbons as a European necessity as well as a legitimate dynasty. They were willing to abandon all French conquests. On 17 March 1813 for example, Blacas wrote to the king's agent in Vienna the Marquis de Bonnay (who had taken d'Avaray's place as the king's principal adviser in 1803–4, when d'Avaray had left Warsaw for Naples for his health).

I can besides only repeat to you, Monsieur le Marquis, what I have already told you with regard to The King's opinion of the true interests of France. They are invariably inspired by the sentiments of moderation and justice which only a legitimate government can make the French people share ... the king will ennoble the sacrifices which are necessary.⁹

He expected that allied successes 'will restart the machine of Europe.'¹⁰ Blacas helped, with the king, to coordinate the arrival of British troops and the king's nephew the Duc d'Angoulême with the royalist rising in Bordeaux on 12 March 1814, to cries of 'à bas les aigles!', 'vivent les Bourbons!' This first public declaration for Louis XVIII in 1814 helped persuade Parisians of the possibility of his restoration.¹¹

6 Philip Mansel, *King of the World: the life of Louis XIV* (London – New York 2019) 233. Liancourt had resigned his office, like other leading court officials, in 1791.

7 AP, Blacas to Artois, 8 January 1813 (draft), Louis XVIII to Blacas, 9 February 1813.

8 Philip Mansel, 'The Return of the Emigrés: Bordeaux, 12 March 1814', in Laure Philip and Juliette Reboul, eds., *French Emigrants in Revolutionised Europe: Connected Histories and Memories* (London 2019) 277–296.

9 Archives Nationales (henceforth AN) 37 AP1, Bonnay papers Blacas to Bonnay, 17 March 1813.

10 AN 37 AP 1, Blacas to Bonnay, 20 September 1813.

11 Mansel, 'The Return of the Emigrés'.

Blacas was helped by another forgotten nineteenth-century minister favourite, his friend Count von Münster, Hanoverian State Minister in London from 1805 to 1831 in charge of the German Chancery – the king's office for Hanover – in Saint James's Palace. Blacas described him as 'the person who has his [the Regent's] most intimate confidence'.¹² Münster, who often visited Hartwell and knew Blacas well, allowed Hanoverian couriers to carry Blacas's despatches – a considerable saving for an exiled government.¹³ Rarely mentioned by Anglo-centric historians, Münster organised the recovery of Hanover in November 1813 and its elevation to the rank of kingdom a year later. The regent included his portrait among those of the leading monarchs, generals, and statesmen who had helped overthrow Napoleon, which he commissioned after 1815 from his Principal Painter Sir Thomas Lawrence for the new Waterloo Gallery in Windsor Castle.¹⁴

For many in the old court nobility Blacas remained an outsider – although on 22 April 1814 he married Mlle. de Montsoreau, daughter of the Grand Prévôt de France, and related to many other court officials.¹⁵ His marriage, in the middle of the whirlwind of festivities in London preceding Louis XVIII's embarkation for France on 24 April 1814, was proof of the importance kings attached to elevating their favourite's social status – Charles IV of Spain, for example, had arranged Godoy's marriage to the king's cousin Maria Teresa de Borbon in 1797. Only the financial constrictions of the Emigration had allowed d'Avaray to remain a bachelor.

A friend of Madame de Staël, whom he had met in Florence and London during the emigration, Blacas was at this stage relatively liberal. He called Louis XVIII's Declaration of Saint Ouen of 2 May 1814, with its promise of constitutional government 'one of the finest days in the history of the monarchy'. He also believed that the 'true force of the government will be in opinion' – not in troops or divine right.¹⁶

12 'La personne à laquelle il accorde sa plus intime confiance', AP, Blacas to Louis XVIII, 30 June 1815. The regent made Münster a Knight of the Garter and of the newly created Guelphic Order; and Erblandmarschall of Hanover: Alheidis von Rohr, *Der Weg zur Krone: Macht- und Herrschaftszeichen der Welfen* (Göttingen 2014) 42–44, 50–51.

13 AN 37 AP1, Blacas to Bonnavy, 24 October 1813.

14 Benjamin Buhring, 'The German Chancery in London' and Christine van der Heuvel, 'George IV and William IV: the End of the Personal Union', in: *Als die Royals aus Hannover kamen*, exh.cat. (Hannover 2014) 106–115, 180–201.

15 Philip Mansel, *The Court of France 1789–1830* (Cambridge 1988) 95.

16 AP, Blacas to Artois, 15 April 1814, to La Chatre, 2 May 1814, 'la véritable force du gouvernement sera dans l'opinion ... ce jour est un des plus beaux de la monarchie'.

Nevertheless, his unpopularity grew with the deluge of applications for jobs and titles from all over France, with which he had to deal as *Ministre de la Maison du roi*, the post to which Louis XVIII appointed him in May 1814. He continued to see the king alone every day and to enjoy his confidence more than other ministers: the king regarded Talleyrand, for example, as a disagreeable necessity. Blacas often worked until three in the morning. He was a channel for patronage demands, he did not create his own patronage empire: government services were too bureaucratic, schools too powerful and political loyalties too important for personal patronage to be as extensive in France as it had been before 1789. However, every department of the *Maison civile du Roi*, which he helped to reorganise in 1814, was smaller than before 1792, except his own, the 'garde-robe'.¹⁷ Another sign of his influence was that the Duc d'Avaray, father of the king's previous favourite, was the only court official from Louis XVIII's former household as *Comte de Provence* to transfer after 1814 to the same position, as *Maître de la Garde-robe*, in the *Maison du roi*.¹⁸

The court architect Pierre Fontaine complained in his diary: 'his welcome is cold', although he admitted that he had good manners, and appeared extremely well educated.¹⁹ Blacas accompanied the king in his carriage during the king's flight from Paris on 19 March 1815 at the start of the Hundred Days. French courtiers had a sense of history.²⁰ Blacas's letters to Madame de Staël from Ghent during the Hundred Days mocked himself as 'the most arrogant and most incapable favourite who has appeared since Concini' (Marie de Medici's favourite, murdered on Louis XIII's orders on 24 April 1617).²¹ He warned her: 'never believe in the constitutions of the Empire'. Like many royalists, Blacas considered Napoleon rather than the Allies, 'the true enemy of the French'.²²

17 Mansel, *The Court of France*, 95–96, quoting the *Mémoires du Vicomte de La Boulaye*, 265–270.

18 Philip Mansel, 'The Court of France 1814–1830' (PhD dissertation, University College London, 1978) 75–6.

19 P. F. L. Fontaine, *Journal* (1987), vol. 1, 420, 5 June 1814, 'son accueil est froid ... ses manières sont polies il paraît fort instruit'.

20 An *Histoire des Ministres favoris anciens et modernes* (Paris January 1820) mentioned Blacas and Decazes as final examples in a long list of favourites starting in antiquity and including Piers Gaveston ('Gaverston') as well as Concino Concini ('le Maréchal d'Ancre'), Potemkin and Godoy. It claimed, falsely, that in France under Decazes 'le nom de s Bourbons ne se prononce plus qu'en secret' (426) and accused him of acquiring a fortune and flattering and betraying every party.

21 Philip Mansel, *Pillars of Monarchy: An Outline of the Political and Social History of Royal Guards 1400–1984* (London 1984) 108–109.

22 AP, Blacas to Staël, 2 May, 17 June 1815, 'ne croyez jamais aux constitutions de l'empire ... le favori le plus arrogant et le plus incapable qui soit paru depuis les jours de Concini ... Véritable ennemi des Français'.

While Madame de Staël remained a loyal friend, all others in France and in Ghent, except the king, blamed 'the divine Blacas' for the mistakes of the First Restoration. The interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, Arnail François Marquis de Jaucourt, denounced to Talleyrand the confusion of orders, the shame of the flight from Paris (prompting Napoleon's remark, referring to the Duchesse d'Angoulême's attempted resistance in Bordeaux, 'she is the only man in that family'), and Blacas's stupidity in not taking more money for the journey from government reserves, for fear of public condemnation: 'they are crying [beware of] Blacas as if they were crying [beware of the] wolf', Jaucourt told Talleyrand. He was hated by the French as much as the Spanish had hated Godoy. Since favourites were considered a race apart, a French favourite was compared to a Spanish one, rather than to his French ministerial colleagues.²³

Yielding to pressure from his court, European diplomats and French opinion, Louis XVIII dismissed Blacas on his way back to Paris, at Mons on 24 June. Showing the mechanics of disgrace under a constitutional monarchy, he could not be exiled from the court or Paris, as Louis XV's ministers Maurepas or Choiseul had been in 1749 and 1770,²⁴ since this was illegal under the Charte. Instead, he was sent on a mission to London, and then, as Louis XVIII's ambassador, to Naples.²⁵ There in 1816 he helped to negotiate the marriage of King Ferdinand I's grand-daughter Marie Caroline to Louis XVIII's nephew the Duc de Berri. He was later appointed ambassador to Rome and in 1817 negotiated a concordat with the Pope, which was, however, soon abandoned in favour of a return to Napoleon's concordat of 1802.²⁶

His friend Madame de Staël had written in July 1815, and printed in Geneva (although not published) an anonymous pamphlet called 'Un mot sur M. de Blacas par un français ami de la liberté'. She called Louis XVIII 'a gift from heaven for France in present circumstances' and Blacas, in a later letter, 'the only man who by his situation and his faculties can save France'. For her Blacas was a guarantee of constitutional government and she wanted him to return

23 Comte de Jaucourt, *Correspondance ... avec le Prince de Talleyrand* (1905), 265 and 291–295, Jaucourt to Talleyrand, 24, 25 April, 2 May 1815. Blacas was always with the king and wrote or drafted most of his letters, therefore correspondents were wary of denouncing him.

24 cf. Julian Swann, *Exile, Imprisonment or Death: The Politics of Disgrace in Bourbon France, 1610–1789* (Oxford 2017).

25 Ernest Daudet, *Joseph de Maistre et Blacas* (Paris 1908), 296n. In his letter of 24 June Louis XVIII expressed the hope that their separation would not last, promised rewards and ended: 'je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire de compter à jamais sur mon estime et sur mon amitié – Louis'.

26 G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich et la France après le Congrès de Vienne*, vol. 1 (Paris 1968–1970) 122.

to court, as did many ultra-royalists appalled, by 1816, by the king's turn to liberalism.²⁷

Like many contemporaries, including the Bourbons themselves, Blacas was multinational, or multi-monarchical, operating in different courts at different times or simultaneously: London, Paris, Rome, Naples. In Rome he retained an interest in French politics. Blacas's brief return from his embassy in Rome to Paris in 1817, without authorisation from Louis XVIII (with whom he had continued to correspond) or the Foreign Minister the Duc de Richelieu, shows the king's compartmentalisation of household office, royal favour, and political power. Since September 1815 the President of the Council and Foreign Minister had been the Duc de Richelieu. Unlike his predecessors, he had never served the Republic or the Empire. The post of Premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi, which Richelieu had inherited from his grandfather in 1788 but probably never exercised, did not influence his nomination. Recommended by his friend and patron Alexander I, he had been appointed by Louis XVIII not only because the Tsar was the most powerful monarch in Europe, and Richelieu had won a European reputation as Governor of Odessa in 1803–14, but also because he could win the support of the French royalist deputies elected, against the wishes of the Talleyrand government, to the Chamber of Deputies in 1815. The king liked and respected him.²⁸ Foreign statesmen, including Wellington, believed: 'the Duc de Richelieu's word is worth a treaty'.²⁹

Suddenly on the morning of 23 April 1817 Richelieu announced to Louis XVIII – since Blacas had been travelling privately and was not in uniform: 'Sire, I am bringing you a traveller in frac'.³⁰ Blacas was allowed to resume his duties as Grand Maître de la Garde-robe and to reoccupy his apartment in the Tuileries. Paris politicians, overjoyed at a sign of government weakness, talked of little else. Blacas's unpopularity evaporated: one admirer said there were now two suns in the sky.³¹ Reverting to the Versailles of her youth, which she had known when her father was Louis XVI's minister and her husband was Gustavus III's

27 Madame de Staël, *Correspondance générale* (henceforward CG), vol. 9 (Paris 1962–1990) 263, Staël to Louis XVIII, July 1815; AP, Staël to Blacas, 21 July 1815, 11 July 1816 'pourquoi n'occupez-vous pas votre place à la cour?'; 'Vous êtes le seul homme qui par sa situation et ses facultés puisse la sauver'.

28 Cf. François de Coustin, *Elie Decazes, Le dernier favori* (Paris 2020) 222; Louis XVIII to Richelieu, 'vous savez si je vous aime votre amitié pour moi'. He gave Richelieu a Sèvres vase with a portrait of the Cardinal de Richelieu in 1817: Mansel, *Louis XVIII* (Paris 2004) 318.

29 François Duluc, *Le Marquis de Bonnay* (Paris 2021) 332, Bonnay to Cussy, 3 June 1822, 'La parole du Duc de Richelieu vaut un traité'.

30 Philip Mansel, *Louis XVIII* (Paris 2004) 366.

31 Ernest Daudet, *Louis XVIII et le Duc Decazes* (1899) 181–197, based on despatches of Count von der Goltz, Prussian ambassador, 25 April, 7 May 1817.

ambassador, Madame de Staël wondered who would stay last at night with the king: 'everything had taken the aspect of the old Court of France.'³² Two men competed for the favour of Louis XVIII, Blacas and Decazes.³³ Each thought the other dangerously ambitious.

In reality, Blacas recovered neither his ministry nor the king's favour. Louis XVIII had become a constitutional monarch. Unless they also enjoyed either royal favour and political office like Blacas in 1814–15, or political office, like Richelieu in 1815–18 and 1820–21, Restoration court officials had little or no political influence. After his fall from power in September 1815, Talleyrand had been compensated with the lucrative court office of Grand Chambellan, but he too, like Blacas, failed to recover political office or influence. The king wrote: 'these offices are not political [ne tiennent point à la politique], they should depend only on my will, and I would not want that my ministers should want to make them a means of government'.³⁴ In another letter he reiterated his desire to keep the household out of politics, 'so that the king can have at least a shadow of liberty'.³⁵ After only ten days, Blacas returned to Rome on the king's orders (encouraged by Richelieu) on 3 May, without having been allowed to show himself to the public in the king's carriage, during the king's annual drive through Paris every 3 May, on the anniversary of his entry in 1814.³⁶ In 1821, however, as a reward for past services, like d'Avary in 1809 and Decazes in 1820 (and the husband of Madame de Polignac in 1780), Blacas was made a duke.

When Blacas next returned to Paris from Rome in late 1822, in time for his year of duty as Premier gentilhomme in 1823, the king again demonstrated, in his fashion, that his former favourite was now simply a court official. At first the king pretended not to recognise him:

'Ah, vous voilà de retour de votre campagne, monsieur de Durfort!'
 'Mais, Sire, c'est M. de Blacas', said the Duc de Duras, premier gentilhomme in waiting.
 'Allez!' replied the king and the royal wheelchair moved on.³⁷

32 Staël, *CG*, vol. 9, 604, Staël to Wellington, 7 May 1817; Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 350.

33 See below, p. 214.

34 Daudet, *Louis XVIII*, 457, Louis XVIII to Decazes, 16 August 1817, 'ces places ne tiennent point à la politique; elles ne doivent dépendre que de ma volonté, et je ne voudrais point que mes ministres en voulussent faire un moyen de gouvernement'.

35 Daudet, *Louis XVIII*, 470, Louis XVIII to Decazes, 18 January 1818, 'pour que ledit seigneur roi ait du moins pour que le roi ait au moins quelque ombre de liberté, non seulement pour l'administration mais encore pour le choix du ministre'.

36 Staël, *CG*, vol. 9, 604, Staël to Wellington, 7 May 1817.

37 Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich*, vol. 2, 588, quoting despatches of the British ambassador Stuart and the Swedish ambassador Lowenhielm, 4 November 1822.

In 1820–22 and 1824–28 Blacas became a favourite in another court. In this age of turmoil, when monarchies swung between absolutism, constitutionalism and revolution, Naples and Sicily experienced a brief period of constitutional monarchy in July 1820–March 1821, due to the desertion of royal troops faced by a constitutionalist and military revolt. King Ferdinand I, swore solemn oaths to the new Constitution, but corresponded secretly with Metternich and his own ambassadors, using Blacas's couriers. He sent terrified letters requesting foreign help and repudiating his oaths. Richelieu commented to the French ambassador in Vienna, that if the king's letters were published, they would do more harm to the cause of royalty than 'all the efforts of our revolutionaries and radicals'.³⁸

Blacas and Ferdinand I both attended the Congress of Laibach in what is now Slovenia in January–May 1821. Publicly repudiating his oaths to the Neapolitan constitution, Ferdinand approved the Austrian invasion and occupation in March 1821 – although he did not dare return to his capital until 15 May 1821. Blacas's advice helped him recover absolute power and choose two capable ministers, Medici, and Tommasi. The king called him 'a guardian angel sent by the lord in his infinite mercy' and considered him both a minister and a friend.³⁹

Blacas maintained French influence in Naples after 1825 when a new King Francis I succeeded to the throne and helped him torpedo any idea of an Austrian-led Italian confederation. His pride, of which other ambassadors also complained, was so great that the Queen of the Two Sicilies, wife of Francis I, remarked: 'When M. de Blacas speaks, I never know which of us is the Bourbon'.⁴⁰

Throughout his period as ambassador to Rome or Naples, Blacas also organised surveillance of the exiled Bonapartes. Suspicious of the 'numerous reunion of the members of the Bonaparte family' in Rome, their links with the radical conspirators called carbonari, their use among themselves of imperial titles and emblems, and King Jerome's 'très grand état de maison', he feared that they were 'still the same'. The Bonapartes retained their ambitions for the French throne.⁴¹

38 Ibidem, vol. 2, 432, Richelieu to Caraman, 23 November 1820.

39 Harold Acton, *The Bourbons of Naples* (London 1974) 684–5, Ferdinand I to Duchess of Florida, 24 December 1820, 693; Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich*, vol. 2, 424, Blacas to Pasquier 25 December 1820, 532, Blacas to Pasquier, 18 September 1821, 579–581.

40 Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich*, vol. 2, 473, 497, 529, 580, 1002–1009.

41 François Charles-Roux, *Rome, asile des Bonapartes* (Paris 1952) 41–3, 92–3, Blacas to Montmorency, 20 March, 9 April 1822, and 98, 120.

Like many past royal favourites, such as Buckingham, Mazarin, Lord Bute and Godoy, Blacas also assembled an art collection of regal proportions. Distinguished by its size, range, antiquity, and erudition, it included Egyptian sculptures, Greek vases, several thousand Roman cameos, coins, and medals, the 'Esquiline treasure' of Roman silver, the 'Blacas cameo' of Augustus, the 'Blacas tomb' from outside Naples and, for the first time in France, Persian and Arabic coins, and Islamic metalwork such as the 'Blacas ewer' from Mosul. His first purchases had been in Florence in 1803, but most objects were purchased in Paris, or excavated outside Rome and Naples between 1815 and 1830. As a special favour to Blacas, Ferdinand I and Francis I had given him permission to conduct excavations at Nola, and to take his finds out of the country. He also patronised, both privately and as French ambassador, modern French artists like Fabre, Ingres and Horace Vernet, and the great Egyptologist Champollion, for whom, despite his Bonapartist past, he secured an audience and financial support from Louis XVIII in 1824. More popular in Rome and Naples than in France, in 1829 Blacas was made Director of the International Institute of Archaeological Correspondence in Rome.⁴² At a ball he gave in Paris in 1830, his collection of Greek vases and Roman medals, considered the best in Europe after that of the King of the Two Sicilies, was described as 'the real interest of the evening', more than his guests or the political situation.⁴³

2 Decazes

Within a few weeks of Blacas's departure in June 1815, he had been replaced as the king's favourite by another outsider, called Elie Decazes. This former secretary of Louis Bonaparte and possibly lover of Queen Hortense was born

42 Andrea Milanese, 'Pierre-Louis-Jean-Casimir, Duc de Blacas (1771–1839), collectionneur et mécène, entre Florence, Rome, Naples et Paris', in: Monica Preti-Hamard and Philippe Senchal, eds., *Collections et marché de l'art en France 1789–1848* (Rennes 2005) 327–347; Camille Py, 'Le Duc de Blacas (1771–1839) en Italie: les grandes étapes dans la constitution d'une collection privée au début du XIX^e siècle', *Les Cahiers de l'École du Louvre*, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cel.23172>; J.-T. Reinaud, Lettre à M. le baron Silvestre de Sacy sur la collection de monuments orientaux de S. Exc. M. le Comte de Blacas, 1820; C. T. Newton, *A Guide to the Blacas Collection of Antiquities* (London 1867); Lesley and Roy Adkins, *The Keys to Egypt: the Race to read the Hieroglyphs* (London 2001) 207.

43 Duchesse de Maillé, *Souvenirs des deux Restaurations* (Paris 1984) 293. The Blacas collection, having been refused by the Louvre, was sold in 1866 by his son to the British Museum, where it has been dispersed among different departments.

in 1780 far from Paris and the court: his father was a non-noble legal official in Libourne near Bordeaux.

His loyalty during the Hundred Days (when he served in the popular royalist force known as *Volontaires Royaux*), and his success, as an officer in the *Garde Nationale*, in shutting the Napoleonic Chamber of Representatives on 8 July 1815, brought him to the king's attention. *Préfet de police de Paris* in the traumatic summer of 1815 when allied troops occupied Paris and half France, he established a direct correspondence with Louis XVIII and, due to the king's favour, became Minister of Justice in Richelieu's government in September 1815. If Blacas had been above all a manager for the king, Decazes was a politician with a cause: as he said to the Chamber in December 1817, to royalise the nation and nationalise royalism, and to stop Louis XVIII from being 'the king of two peoples'. Enjoying a favourite's constant access, every evening after dinner he worked alone with the king for between one and two hours, often leaving the Tuileries palace after midnight on foot: visible proof of the continued power of the king and the importance of royal favour in the French constitutional monarchy.⁴⁴

The letters of Louis XVIII to Decazes, published by Ernest Daudet in 1899 but since inaccessible in his descendants' Chateau de la Grave, reveal the beating heart of royal favour. These words are used deliberately. Favour was personal as well as political, founded on two individuals' feelings for each other, as well as their political needs. Louis XVIII's need for favourites was partly emotional, since they helped fill the emotional vacuum created by his childlessness, and his isolation in his family, whose members were less intelligent than himself. The intensity of the king's letters to Decazes anticipates those of the British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith to his daughter's friend Venetia Stanley in 1914–1915, during the First World War. They too were driven by love, political worries, and the need of a highly literary older statesman to write emotional daily letters, almost as great as his need to see their recipient.

Louis XVIII had written that he felt as sure of d'Avaray, 'mon ami', as he did of himself. His letters to Blacas are affectionate and friendly. Decazes, however, became like a son to the childless king, as the king became like a father to Decazes. In 1816 the king ended one letter m. e. j. t. p. s. m. c. e. j. t. b. m. e. m. f. : abbreviations for 'mon Elie, je te presse sur mon cœur et je te bénis mon Elie, mon fils'.⁴⁵ In their evening talks, he wrote, 'everything was common between us, serious discussions, jokes, joy, sadness'. Showing his solitude in his own

44 AP, Hue to Blacas, 7 July 1816; Coustin, *Decazes*, 67, 127, speech of 15 December 1817, 150, 202.

45 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 347, letter of 11 July 1816.

court and family, he described the years 1816–20 as ‘three years of pure happiness, without one single cloud, crowned by the greatest of all for me, that of having assured yours’. The king had in 1818 helped to arrange his marriage – as he had helped arrange the marriage of Blacas in 1814 to Mlle de Montsoreau – to an heiress related to the princes of Nassau-Saarbrücken and Brunswick, Mlle de Sainte-Aulaire.⁴⁶

Another emotional link with Decazes was Louis XVIII’s platonic passion for his sister Madame Princeteau. For a time, they sent each other bouquets of flowers every day, as Baron Hue, one of the king’s Premiers Valets de Chambre, reported with distaste to Blacas in Rome. She wore his flowers when she attended Sunday mass in the Tuileries chapel.⁴⁷ In November 1819 Decazes, with the king’s support, finally became President of the Council.

On 13 February 1820 the king’s nephew the Duc de Berri was murdered by a Bonapartist outside the Paris opera. French politics had become so embittered that at her husband’s deathbed the Duchesse de Berri accused Decazes, by his liberal policies, of contributing to Berri’s death. In a calculated threat, the king’s other niece the Duchesse d’Angoulême asked for Decazes’s dismissal ‘to avoid a new crime’. She implied that the Gardes du corps of the king (the same noble bodyguard which two hundred years earlier had eliminated Marie de Medicis’s favourite Concini outside the Louvre) might attack Decazes, either when presenting his condolences to the royal family in the Tuileries, or in his residence in the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁸ Most guards, like most court officials, detested Decazes’s liberal policies. Louis XVIII had sometimes prolonged his afternoon drives, to stop his accompanying court officials from voting against his ministers in the Chamber of Peers.⁴⁹

Decazes’s principal weakness, even before 1820, was his lack of a firm majority in the Chamber due to the reluctance of the left and centre left to support him – partly because his youth, his origins, and his position as the king’s favourite inspired feelings of condescension, distrust, and envy.⁵⁰ He lost office in February 1820, as Talleyrand had in September 1815, and as the Duc de Richelieu would in December 1821, when he no longer commanded a majority

46 Coustin, *Decazes*, 165, 189, 249, 286–7 ‘À trois années de bonheur pur, contenu, sans un seul nuage, couronné par le plus grand de tous pour moi, celui d’avoir assuré le tien ... là tout était commun entre nous, discours sérieux, plaisanteries, joie, tristesse’, Louis XVIII to Comtesse Decazes, 11, 23 August 1818.

47 AP, Baron Hue to Blacas, 30 September 1816.

48 Coustin, *Decazes*, 238, 242–3, 245, 247.

49 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 295.

50 Coustin, *Decazes*, 219, 227–9, 247, ‘Sire nous le demandons pour éviter un nouveau crime’.

in the Chamber of Deputies. The Chamber had more political power than the court.

As a condition of returning to office, the new President of the Council the Duc de Richelieu insisted that Decazes leave France: otherwise, ambassadors would prefer to consult Decazes, the king's favourite, rather than himself.⁵¹ Like Blacas in 1815, he was sent abroad as ambassador, in his case to London. Louis XVIII sent a letter to 'mon cher Georges', his friend George IV who in 1811–14 had supported his restoration, comparing Decazes to George III's favourite Lord Bute, and telling him: 'if matters in France were as before the Revolution, he would have remained my minister until my death'.⁵² In reality even before the revolution, kings had bowed to public opinion. Louis XIV himself had been obliged to dismiss his war minister Chamillart in 1708,⁵³ as Louis XVI had been obliged to dismiss his leading ministers Calonne in 1787 and Loménie de Brienne in 1788, and to recall Necker that August.

The king wrote Decazes dotting letters: 'my heart is broken my son, my dear son. I love you, I will love you until my last breath'. 'Good evening, my dear son, I have no more strength except to love you with all my heart'.⁵⁴ He made Decazes a duke and sent him all the medals of the reign in platinum, gold and silver.

After 1820, however, Louis XVIII proved more loyal to his new ministers than to his former favourite or, as he wrote to 'Georges', he sacrificed the man to the monarch. When Decazes returned to Paris in 1820 owing to his wife's illness, like Blacas returning from Rome in 1817, he found the king polite but changed. He did not recover his past royal favour and was asked by the king not to stay in Paris for more than a week. The king reminded his 'fils trop cher': 'you are an ambassador, you must be one'. France had moved to the right. Their correspondence, like Louis XVIII's with Blacas after 1815, dwindled. At the baptism of the Duc de Bordeaux in May 1821 Decazes was merely a distant spectator, eyes fixed on the king.⁵⁵

51 Coustin, *Decazes*, 262, 268.

52 Ernest Daudet, *L'ambassade du duc Decazes 1820–1821* (1910), 74, Louis XVIII to George IV, 5 July 1820, 'Si les choses étaient en France comme avant la révolution, il serait resté mon ministre jusqu'à ma mort'.

53 Philip Mansel, *King of the World: the life of Louis XIV* (London 2019) 52, 387, 390. In 1706 Louis XIV's favourite general Villeroy was also dismissed, owing to public hostility.

54 Coustin, *Decazes*, 246, 249, 259, Louis XVIII to Decazes, 15, 16 February 1820, 'Mon cœur est brisé mon fils, mon cher fils. Je t'aime, je t'aimerai jusque à mon dernier soupir ... Bonsoir cher fils, je n'ai plus que la force de t'aimer de tout mon cœur'.

55 Coustin, *Decazes*, 256–262, 280–283, Louis XVIII to Decazes, September 1820, 'vous êtes ambassadeur, il faut l'être'.

His descendants' chateau of La Grave near Bordeaux, never opened to the public, probably contains more royal presents, as well as a magnificent archive with letters from monarchs and politicians throughout Europe.⁵⁶ The inaccessibility of the archives of Blacas and Decazes, since they were opened to Ernest Daudet in the decades before 1914, the apparent destruction of the Polignac family's papers, and the disappearance of Louis XVIII's correspondence with Madame du Cayla, as well as historians' neglect before 1990 of the French court in general and the French Restoration in particular, help explain why these favourites have been partly omitted from history books.

3 Madame du Cayla

After the fall of Decazes the king acquired a new favourite (it is doubtful, given the king's age, size, and ill-health, whether she was his mistress). He saw her once a week and maintained another emotional correspondence with her. Madame du Cayla was beautiful, witty, 'fort intrigante' and by marriage a member of the old 'noblesse présentée' (her father Omer Talon was from the old 'noblesse de robe'). She may have been primarily an intermediary, skilled at passing on conciliatory messages between the king, his family, and politicians. She had been initially helped by Decazes, so she was not totally right wing.⁵⁷

In November 1820 Louis XVIII allowed the barrier which he had tried to maintain between the court and the ministry to be broken down. By right of his office of President of the Council, showing the dominance of the ministry over the court, Richelieu modernised the Maison du Roi in the only reorganisation in its history. His intention was, in his words, to 'open this career to all social successes without any exception'. The department of the garde-robe, for example, was abolished and absorbed into the Chamber. Blacas was made one of the four Premiers Gentilshommes de la chambre, in compensation for the loss of his post of Grand Maître de la Garde-robe. The Chamber itself was expanded by the appointment of 32 new Gentilshommes de la chambre, including many non-noble former Napoleonic officers and court officials. More government officials were given the entrées to the state apartments. A new Ministre de la Maison was appointed, who sat in the Council, a former general of the empire, the Marquis de Lauriston.⁵⁸

56 Coustin, *Decazes*, 255–260.

57 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 401–409.

58 Mansel, *The Court of France*, 120–128.

Richelieu resigned in January 1822, after his loss of a majority in the Chamber was shown by its vote of an insulting address blaming him for grain imports from Odessa, which he had once governed for Alexander I. Louis XVIII insisted, citing 'many English examples', that all ministers resign with Richelieu, so they all did. Except, at the king's personal insistence, continuing the king's attempts to keep the household out of politics, the Marquis de Lauriston, *Ministre de la Maison*. A new, ultra-royalist ministry led by Comte de Villèle proved remarkably effective. Louis XVIII said at one council meeting: 'What is not going well now?' Despite his bad health, he continued to attend council meetings, to decide the fate of some ministers, and policy issues like French intervention in Spain.⁵⁹ Madame du Cayla probably helped the rise to power of the Villèle ministry, by praising him to the king, although the general political situation, and the increasing number of right-wing deputies after elections that autumn, were equally important factors.

In 1821–23 Louis XVIII built a chateau at Saint-Ouen just outside Paris, similar in scale and elegance to the Petit Trianon which Louis XV had built for Madame de Pompadour in 1762–8. It was not only a present and personal residence for Madame du Cayla, and a sign of her favour, but also – appropriately for a favourite in a parliamentary monarchy – a political memorial, to the *Déclaration de Saint-Ouen* granting France representative institutions, which he had signed in an earlier building on the same site on 2 May 1814.

The chateau was inaugurated by a reception for 450 politicians, diplomats, and courtiers, including the Papal Nuncio, on 2 May 1823, anniversary of the *Déclaration*. As the chorus of the Paris opera sang cantatas in honour of the king, guests could admire in the principal salon magnificent suites of gilded furniture, and a portrait by the *Premier peintre du roi*, Baron Gérard, given by Louis XVIII to Madame du Cayla. It was 'composed', like the chateau itself, by the king. It shows him on 3 May 1814, on his first day in the Tuileries. He is sitting in what had been Napoleon's study, at the simple wooden desk ('la table de Varsovie') at which, in exile in Warsaw in 1803, the king had written his rejection of Napoleon's offer of financial 'compensations', if he renounced the throne of France. The desk had subsequently accompanied him around Europe. He is shown 'meditating on the institutions he will give his people'. A proud inscription in large letters of gilded bronze can still be seen on an octagonal marble plaque in the wall opposite the wall where the portrait hung: 'Ici le 2 mai 1814 a commencé une ère nouvelle'.⁶⁰

59 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 403. Bibliothèque Victor Cousin, Fonds Richelieu, MS. 96, f. 194, *Mémoire du Duc de Richelieu à sa sortie du ministère*, 3 January 1822.

60 E. Perret, *La comtesse du Cayla* (Paris 1937) 80–86.

A register of Madame du Cayla's correspondence in 1823–4 is a sign of royal favour almost as revealing as the Chateau de Saint-Ouen. Some of the highest in the land, the Princesse de Poix and the Duc de Mouchy of the great court family of Noailles for example, are listed asking for her help to secure jobs, honours, and other favours (no doubt many other begging letters were not listed in this register). The Duc d'Avaray, father of Louis XVIII's favourite, received the well-paid position of commander of a military division, despite his advanced age, after one request made through Madame du Cayla. Other requests however were less successful. 'I am not Decazes' she sighed.⁶¹ Like Blacas in 1814–15, she was a channel for requests, she did not build her own patronage empire. Her suggestions that her friend Sosthènes de La Rochefoucauld should become a minister, or that her adversaries Chateaubriand and Corbière should leave the ministry, were unsuccessful.⁶²

In another sign of royal favour, like Blacas and Decazes before her – and many of the king's ambassadors – she was given a porcelain service from the royal factory at Sèvres.⁶³ In September 1824, when none of Louis XVIII's family and court dared to do so, only Madame du Cayla, at the Comte d'Artois's request, had the courage to tell him that he was about to die and should prepare to receive the last sacraments.⁶⁴

4 Polignac

One of the intermediaries used by the Comte d'Artois in February 1820 to assure the Duc de Richelieu that he would support Richelieu's new ministry was his favourite aide de camp (ADC), Jules de Polignac.⁶⁵ Polignac came from a celebrated family of court officials of the noblesse présentée. His mother had been the favourite of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Gouvernante des enfants de France, she had entertained on their behalf in her large apartment at Versailles. The queen and Artois often came. One of her many English guests, the diplomat William Eden, wrote in 1787: 'the evening assemblies at madame de

61 Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BNF), Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises, 4760, registre de correspondance de Madame du Cayla, 13 juillet 1823–1, février 1824; Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 410.

62 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 409.

63 Ibidem, 318.

64 National Library of Scotland, Stuart de Rothesay papers, ms. 6228, f.2, Stuart to Canning, 11 September 1824.

65 Coustin, *Decazes*, 252.

Polignac's were subjects of greater animadversion than all the extravagance of the court'.⁶⁶

In 1789 she became politically as well as personally unpopular, for her support of counter-revolution. After 14 July, with her friend the Comte d'Artois, she was one of the first emigres to leave France. Her son 'Jules', as he was often called, was brought up in England in the 1790s by his parents' friends the duke and duchess of Devonshire. He was imprisoned for his role in the 1804 Cadoual Conspiracy against Napoleon, and in 1814 became an ADC of Artois.

Both Artois and Jules de Polignac denied that Artois was influenced by court officials. 'I always saw that it [courtiers' influence] was weak on others, and I always felt it was powerless ('nulle') on myself', wrote Artois in 1799. Jules de Polignac wrote to his fellow courtier Mathieu de Montmorency of 'an influence which neither I nor anyone else has had or ever will have'.⁶⁷ However, Polignac's influence on, or submission to, Artois's reactionary political views is suggested by the eagerness of French governments to separate the two. Polignac was appointed ambassador to George IV in 1823 and stayed there six years, longer than any of his predecessors. Princess Lieven, a shrewd judge of character, knew Polignac in London, where her husband was Russian ambassador, and called him 'a man without sense or ability, of a crooked and obstinate character and with the narrowest views'.⁶⁸

By 1824 or earlier, Charles X had become a supporter of the Charte, to which he had sworn oaths of loyalty in 1815 and at his coronation in 1825. 'It is succeeding with us here', he said and noted how peaceful France had become.⁶⁹ In 1829, however, as he turned against his liberal Martignac ministry, he began to see 'Jules' in private audiences, in order to form a new ministry. Due to his mother's reputation for counter-revolution and extravagance, Polignac's name alone alienated most of France. His favour with the king depended on shared political opinions, not on court office – he was for many years an ambassador away from the court. The deluded duo combined desire to increase royal power in France – despite the immense powers already reserved to the monarchy in the Charte – with desire to redraw the map of Europe. In 1828, according to the Russian ambassador Pozzo di Borgo, Charles X told Jules de Polignac: 'perhaps a war against the court of Vienna would be useful to me because it would cause

66 Lord Auckland, *Journal and Correspondence* (London 1861–1862), vol. 1, 217, 220, Eden to Mrs Eden, 10 October 1787.

67 Mansel, *The Court of France*, 150, 169, Artois to Barentin, 1799, Jules de Polignac to Montmorency nd., 'Je l'ai toujours vue faible sur les autres et je l'ai toujours sentie nulle sur moi'.

68 Princess Lieven, *Letters ... during her Residence in London* (London 1902) 216, letter of 19 March 1830.

69 Mansel, *The Court of France*, 169, quoting the notes of the Duc de Levis.

an end to internal dissensions and will occupy the nation *en grand* and as it desires'.⁷⁰

By 1829 most liberals accepted the Bourbon monarchy as the best guarantee against anarchy and a republic.⁷¹ It was not the liberals but the king who created political turmoil. Moreover, his son the dauphin had abandoned his previous moderation.

The new ministry appointed in August 1829 included fatally unpopular names, in addition to Jules de Polignac: Decazes, approached as a prominent liberal by Polignac, refused to join.⁷² General de Bourmont, who had deserted the French army before Waterloo and been a witness in the trial of Marshal Ney, was Minister of War. La Bourdonnaye, known as 'le jacobin blanc', was Minister of the Interior. To the British ambassador Lord Stuart de Rothesay the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Polignac resembled Milton's Paradise of Madmen; but he could not believe that, at the age of seventy-three, the king would risk disaster by ruling through ordonnances, as Article 14 of the Charte gave him the power to do (like his contemporary King William I of the Netherlands, known as the decree king). On 20 February 1830 Pozzo di Borgo wrote to Tsar Nicholas I: 'the position in which the king has placed himself is not the result of one error but of the error of his entire life.'⁷³

Polignac was more unpopular and isolated at court than Decazes and Blacas had been. It is difficult to generalise about such a large group as three to five hundred court officials, who naturally often changed political opinions. But diplomats and courtiers believed at the time that most senior court officials, including Polignac's own brother the Duc de Polignac, Premier écuyer du roi, content with the monarchy and the Charte, and their large official salaries, derided the government as incapable and unconstitutional. Court office and political office remained separate spheres, as they had been under Louis XVIII.⁷⁴

The government relied on army loyalty and public passivity. The ministry believed that, as the new Prefect of Police wrote in a report of 20 August 1829, 'the working class remains foreign to all political discussions'. In 1830 Polignac

70 Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich*, vol. 3, 1218.

71 Cf. J.P.G. Viennet, *Journal* (Paris 1955) 90, 23 February 1829, writing of the Bourbons: 'ils ne peuvent être remplacés que par l'anarchie'.

72 Daudet, *Ambassade*, 269, Decazes to Duc de Guiche, 1829.

73 Vicomte de Guichen, *La Révolution de 1830 et l'Europe* (Paris 1921) 8, 9, 31, despatch of Pozzo, 1/13 February 1830; cf. NA FO 27/411 f. 172 Stuart to Aberdeen, 23 July 1830.

74 Mansel, *Court of France*, 170, quoting letters of the Duc de Luxembourg and Madame de Podenas, September, November 1829; Archivio di Stato Turin, Lettere Ministri Francia, de Vignet to La Tour, 30 August 1829.

repeated the right-wing catchphrase to the Piedmontese ambassador: 'the real people was entirely foreign and indifferent to all this disordered activity ... [he said] that this people had handed in its resignation and would not take part in future disorders'. He was completely unrealistic – there had been political disorders in 1820, 1826 and 1827.⁷⁵

The dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies after March 1830, the loss of national elections in June, the government's lack of military preparations, and the absence of most of the army fighting Arabs in Algeria or fires in Normandy, make the ordonnances of 25 July 1830 a clear example of how not to make a coup d'état. In July 1830 most French people preferred the Charte to the dynasty. On 27–29 July 1830 Parisians defeated the royal guard and the army. As the monarchy collapsed, and Charles X retreated to the Normandy coast, Polignac delivered a final blow. Politicians did not believe that Charles X had withdrawn the Ordonnances, and changed policy, since, despite his appointment on 29 July of a liberal President du Conseil the Duc de Mortemart, Jules de Polignac remained at court, – where his position as ADC of the king gave him the right to be. The king continued to consult him. He had not immediately left after dismissal like Blacas in 1815, or Decazes in 1820. He finally left on 31 July but was arrested in Normandy on 15 August trying to flee the country, tried, imprisoned for six years, then banished from France. His disgrace with the French nation was as complete as his favour with the king had been in 1829–30.⁷⁶

5 Conclusion

Blacas, Decazes, Madame du Cayla and Polignac were not the last favourites in nineteenth century parliamentary monarchies. The Comte de Montalivet, Intendant Général de la Liste Civile under Louis Philippe, helped run his household and palaces and frequently saw the king. As Blacas had helped organise Louis XVIII's flight from the Tuileries in March 1815, Montalivet did the same for Louis Philippe, from the same palace, in February 1848.⁷⁷

75 Jean Tulard, *Paris et son Administration 1800–1830* (Paris 1976) 501, bulletin of 20 August 1829; Archivio di Stato Turin, Lettere Ministri Francia 1828 in 1835 36 f 137, Marchese Alfieri di Sostegno to La Tour, 12 January 1830.

76 Philip Mansel, *Paris Between Empires 1814–1852* (London 2001) 259, 237–258, for an account of the July Revolution: Pierre Robin-Harmel, *Le prince Jules de Polignac, sa vie de 1829 à 1847* (Avignon 1950) 112.

77 Comte de Montalivet, *Fragments et Souvenirs*, 2 vols. (Paris 1899–1900) passim.

Britain, too, contained a court society in a parliamentary monarchy. Baron Stockmar, Secretary, Doctor, Comptroller of the Household and Keeper of the Privy Purse in 1817–31 for Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, son-in-law of the Regent, played a vital role in preparing him for the throne of Belgium, and his niece Victoria for the throne of Britain. He also advised the Coburg dynasty on its members' education and marriages, as well as on political matters. Like other favourites, he broke rules. Rooms were kept ready for him at Balmoral, Osborne, and Buckingham Palace. Prince Albert would burst in at any time of day. Since he felt the cold, he alone was allowed to wear trousers instead of knee breeches, at dinner with the queen, and to withdraw immediately afterwards to his own apartment. He was much admired and consulted by the queen's ministers, including Melbourne and Palmerston.⁷⁸

Sixty years later Lord Esher was another influential royal favourite. Starting in the Department of Works, then serving as one of the king's ADC's and Deputy-Governor of Windsor Castle, Lord Esher not only helped organise Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and a new ceremonial approach to Buckingham Palace, but also used his daily meetings and correspondence with Edward VII after 1901 to reform the army, galvanise the Committee of Imperial Defence (often called the Esher Committee), and advance secret military 'conversations' with France. Many complained that he had more power over military affairs than the Secretary of State responsible for the army.⁷⁹

The continued power of favourites, like the multiplication of monarchies from the Netherlands to the Balkans, and the expansion of royal households, palaces, and guards, shows that the nineteenth century was an age of courts and kings, as well as revolutions and nationalism.⁸⁰ France was a court society in terms of the power of the king, the numbers going to court, the appeal of honours and titles, and the importance of favourites like Blacas, Decazes, Madame du Cayla and Polignac. Yet it was also, like Britain, a parliamentary monarchy. There was no incompatibility between the two.

Indeed the new French constitution after 1814, by creating powerful parliamentary Chambers, may have increased monarchs' desire for favourites, to strengthen or defend their position. Blacas was used as a scapegoat for the king's unpopular initiatives in 1814–5, for which Blacas was not responsible, such as the recreation of the pre-1775 *Maison Militaire* or the lack of a united, responsible ministry. Decazes's favour with Louis XVIII and the liberal policies

78 Baron Stockmar, *Memoirs* (London 1870), vol. 1, LII, LXXVIII–LXXX.

79 Keith Hamilton, *Bertie of Thame, Edwardian Ambassador* (London 1990) 344–349; James Lees-Milne, *The Enigmatic Edwardian* (London 1986) passim.

80 See: Mansel, *The Power of Courts: Europe, from Napoleon to Wilhelm II* (forthcoming).

they both supported helped convince part of French public opinion of the sincerity of the king's commitment to the Charte.⁸¹ However, the Bourbon monarchy also functioned effectively in September 1824 – August 1829 when there was no minister favourite.

On the other hand, France was only partly a court society. Louis XVIII was forced to dismiss Blacas in 1815 and Decazes in 1820. France rose against the Polignac ministry in 1830. All four favourites, nevertheless, also show the continued importance of nobles in post-revolutionary France. Decazes and Blacas founded political dynasties: their sons were politicians who served the Third Republic and its adversary the exiled Bourbon pretender, Charles X's grandson 'Henri V' respectively. Outside Gorizia in the Bourbon crypt of the convent at Castagnavizza, the 'Saint Denis of exile' – in a sign of exceptional royal favour – Blacas is buried beside Charles X and his family, whom he had followed into exile.

After the death in 1851 of Madame du Cayla (who had intended to leave it to 'Henri V' or the city of Paris), her descendants of the Beauvau family sold the chateau de Saint-Ouen and dismantled it as a shrine to Louis XVIII and the Déclaration de Saint-Ouen. They displayed Louis XVIII's portrait by Baron Gérard, and the suites of furniture given her by the king, at the family chateau of Haroué in Lorraine. Some remain there. Since 2017, however, the king's portrait and some of the furniture have been moved to the Chateau de Maisons Lafitte west of Paris.⁸²

The Polignacs survived by making advantageous marriages.⁸³ Pierre de Polignac, chosen by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1920 as husband for the heiress of the principality of Monaco, was a descendant of the Duchesse de Polignac and a great-grandnephew of Jules de Polignac. The present prince of Monaco is his grandson. Royal favour in France casts a long shadow.

81 Mansel, *Louis XVIII*, 381.

82 See eg. Christiane de Nicolay-Mazery and Jean-Bernard Naudin, *Haroué, demeure des Princes de Beauvau-Craon* (2002) 59–74, 'le mobilier de Louis XVIII'.

83 For example, a son of Jules de Polignac married an American heiress: Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: a life of Winaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (New York 2003).