

Louis Antoine de Bourbon, Duc d'Angoulême :**The loyal Dauphin***Heidi Mehrkens*

On 2 August 1830 the heir to the throne of France, Prince Louis Antoine de Bourbon, Duc d'Angoulême, was facing a tremendously difficult decision. Paris was once more in turmoil and the people on the barricades. The royal family had fled from the dramatic events of the July revolution to the Château de Rambouillet. Here, on the outskirts of the capital, King Charles X signed his declaration of abdication in favour of his grandson, the nine-year-old Henri de Bourbon, Duc de Bordeaux.



Louis Antoine de Bourbon, Duc d'Angoulême,
engraving, c. 1827

The king's eldest son and legitimate successor Louis Antoine is said to have hesitated for twenty solid minutes, during which his wife begged him not to countersign the declaration. In the end, Louis Antoine officially abandoned all his rights to the throne. The dauphin's sacrifice of handing over his rights of succession to a child was supposed to provide the dynasty with a fresh, innocent and hence generally acceptable alternative to the generations which had fallen from grace. In spite of all of this, the elder branch of the Bourbon dynasty never successfully reclaimed power in France.

With hindsight it is difficult to assess the Duc d'Angoulême's motivation for abdicating after roughly twenty minutes as King Louis XIX; the prince has left no personal account of the events. The question is nevertheless worth asking, since Prince Louis Antoine would have been the obvious choice as King Charles's successor. In the summer of 1830,

the dauphin was a respectable man of 55 years. His marriage had produced no children, but he was devoted to his wife and his nephew, and it is likely he never had a mistress. The prince lived a quiet life far from scandal; his reputation had not been compromised in any way during the fifteen years of Bourbon reign since Napoleon's final defeat in 1815.

As a military leader, Louis Antoine had fought actual battles and shown some bravery. He was neither sick nor an imbecile, even though some of his contemporaries (as well as historians) did not think very highly of the 'mediocre' and hardly impressive prince. But mind you, the biological gamble of hereditary monarchy had produced many heirs to the throne one would consider less equal to the task. Louis Antoine might not have been a Prince Charming, which certainly contributed to his dilemma, but the real reason why the last dauphin of France voluntarily opted out of the responsibilities of a future ruler lay in his challenging relationship with his family.

'La Famille Royale'. The French Royal Family around 1822 (by Gautier). The Duc d'Angoulême is standing on the right, together with his brother the Duc de Berry, who died in 1820



According to Chateaubriand who, many years later, paid the Bourbon dynasty his respects during their exile in Gorizia in the Habsburg Empire, the Duc d'Angoulême complained bitterly that he had signed the abdication of Rambouillet against his better judgment and merely in order to obey his father. It seems that the royal heir to one of the most powerful thrones in Europe had been trapped for years between conflicting claims of obligations towards his family and his own political sentiment. According to the historian Guillaume Bertier de Sauvigny, the Duc d'Angoulême suffered from a full-grown inferiority complex. It seems hardly realistic that a loyal, obedient prince should overcome his deep-seated frustration against the backdrop of a life-threatening revolution and rise boldly to brush aside the dominant father's wishes. Maybe

understandably, if unheroically, the dauphin once more did as he was told and denied his dynastic right of succession.

The eldest son of the Comte d'Artois, who was the youngest brother of King Louis XVI of France, was welcomed into the elegant world of the court of Versailles as a grandchild of France and possible successor to the throne on 6 August 1775, when the royal couple was still without offspring. Little Prince Louis Antoine's education, from the tender age of five, was placed in the hands of his governor, the Marquis de Sérent, who supervised a phalanx of three spiritual preceptors, two sub-governors and four institutors. Sérent educated the prince and his younger brother, Charles Ferdinand de Bourbon, Duc de Berry (1778-1820), at the Château de Beauregard. By doing so the governor created a visible and deliberate distance to the royal court at Versailles, where the boys' merry father enjoyed the company of the fashionable set of Paris and indulged in the pleasures of gambling and adultery.



**The Duc d'Angoulême in military uniform in 1796.
Portrait by Henri-Pierre Danloux**

The Revolution of 1789 abruptly ended the sheltered childhood at Beauregard and threw the fourteen-year-old Louis Antoine into the vicissitudes of long years of exile. It also opened up the unusual path of a military career for the two royal princes. Angoulême and Berry underwent training at the royal artillery school in Turin, where they had been invited to stay with the King of Sardinia. They served in the ranks and earned their Captain's epaulettes, eager to follow in the

footsteps of their father and lead an émigré army into battle. In the end, both sons of the Comte d'Artois would be 'far more at home on the battlefield than their father'.^[1] In April 1800, Louis Antoine took command of a Bavarian cavalry regiment and fought in the Battle of Hohenlinden. His position as a French refugee prince, caught between power struggles on the continent, prevented him from further military engagements,

though: He spent more than ten years in England, waiting impatiently for an opportunity to join the fight against Napoleon.

Among fellow soldiers Prince Louis Antoine certainly felt accepted and, as a junior member of a once mighty ruling dynasty, capable of shaping his own destiny at least to some extent. The military career opened up some opportunities to prove himself, to earn recognition on the battlefield rather than at the Bourbon exile courts, where others constantly outshone him. The young Louis Antoine apparently was a decent, very shy lad, always thoughtful, lacking the easy manners of his charismatic and handsome father Charles d'Artois and the carefree attitude of his younger brother, the Duc de Berry. A contemporary considered the adult Louis Antoine to be 'incomplete, but not incapable' – or, as Charles de Rémusat put it in his memoirs: 'He does not know anything, but he listens with attention, he wishes to learn the truth...' With considerably less benevolence, the sharp-tongued Duchess d'Abrantes preferred to call the Duc d'Angoulême 'less than a man, nothing, a human envelope, *voilà tout*.' [\[2\]](#)

To be fair, this human envelope quite successfully assisted with the reinstallation of the Bourbon reign in France after the downfall of the Napoleonic Empire. In 1814 Louis Antoine finally joined the British invasion of France, and his entry into the city of Bordeaux on 12 March, on the heels of a small corps of British and Portuguese soldiers under the command of General Beresford, marked the beginning of the Bourbon restoration. The population acclaimed and welcomed the prince, and his presence helped win local support for the Bourbon King Louis XVIII.

A year later, in March 1815, the Duc d'Angoulême was again in Bordeaux when he learned – apparently in the middle of a ball – that Napoleon had returned from his exile on the island of Elba. Following orders from his uncle the king, Louis Antoine commanded the royalist army in the southern Rhône river valley, but was unable to prevent Napoleon's return to Paris.



'L'Enjambée Impériale', print, 1815. The Duc and Duchesse d'Angoulême stand by and watch how it takes Napoleon Bonaparte but a single step from Elba to France (Source: Gallica, BNF)

Perhaps the prince's finest hour as a soldier and military leader came in 1823, when he successfully commanded a French corps sent into Spain to help reinstall the hapless King Ferdinand VII on the throne. Angoulême's 'Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis' fought victoriously in the Battle of Trocadéro; Louis Antoine was awarded the title Prince of Trocadéro for his achievements in restoring his cousin's absolute powers. The prince was less successful in preventing Ferdinand's return from becoming a cruel and bloody reaction. Disillusioned, the Duc d'Angoulême left Spain and 'refused the honors and titles which Ferdinand VII wished to shower upon him'.

The military service created a niche and some occupation for the prince who otherwise had no say in dynastic or political decisions and was held at arm's length from power once Bourbon reign had been renewed in France. It seems fair to argue that his minor position within the dynasty – where he was dominated by his father, his uncle and to some extent by his wife – as well as his own passivity prevented Louis Antoine from developing anything resembling self-esteem.

Between 1814 and 1824, during the reign of King Louis XVIII, France became a constitutional monarchy that was based on the Charter of 1814. Louis Antoine, second in line to the throne after his father, the Comte d'Artois, wholeheartedly supported the constitutional project. On 16 March 1815, all princes of the Royal House swore an oath of allegiance to the king and the charter. With his reign interrupted by Bonaparte's return to power for a hundred days in summer 1815, Louis XVIII decided to renew the oath during the first royal session of parliament on 7 October 1815. Following his

opening speech, Louis Antoine and the other princes stepped forward individually and swore 'to be faithful to the king and to respect the constitutional charter as well as the laws within the realm.' [3]

Other than his father, the fiercely conservative heir to the throne, Louis Antoine actually meant what he said. However, in the stormy first years of France's post-1815 monarchical constitutionalism, the Duc d'Angoulême was kept in a meaningless position. The prince was a blank sheet for supporters of the constitution as well as its enemies, so he ended up being considered too liberal for the political right and too conservative for support from the moderate left. Louis Antoine did not show the initiative to carve out his own political identity. Whoever tried to use him as a pawn between his father and his uncle – who disagreed on many things, perhaps most of all the role of the monarch within a constitutional system – found the prince too passive to actually become an asset for political opposition.

This caricature ridicules the relationship between father and son: the Duc d'Angoulême is wearing a uniform; still he remains a child on his father's knee (Source: Gallica, BNF)



The prince's carefully kept reserve, his silence in all matters dynastic and constitutional became even more obvious when Louis XVIII passed away in 1824 and his brother succeeded to the throne as King Charles X. The 'worldly thought and materialistic policy' of the late king had always appeared to his successor to be a fatalistic acceptance of the philosophical and revolutionary doctrines of the eighteenth century which had brought the monarchy to ruin. When Charles X embarked on a mission to bring the Bourbon dynasty back to its true (that is pre-constitutional) glory, his eldest son did nothing to

convince him otherwise. Without raising any objections, the dauphin supported the king's sumptuous coronation ceremony in the cathedral of Reims on 25 May 1825. The traditional site of consecration for French kings invoked strong – and, to many contemporaries, completely outdated – memories of the ancient regime.



**Francois Gérard:
Coronation of Charles X
(1827). Detail: The King
embraces his son and
successor, the Duc
d'Angoulême**

By contributing to the efforts of reviving an old Bourbon glory, the dauphin not only obeyed his father's wishes, but also

showed loyalty to his cousin and wife, Marie Thérèse de Bourbon, Duchess of Angoulême. *Madame Royale*, as she was known, was born in Versailles in 1778, the only daughter of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. As a teenager she endured more than three years of imprisonment at the Temple fortress (1792-95). The only member of the immediate royal family to survive the terror of the French Revolution, she married her cousin Louis Antoine in exile in 1799.

Marie Thérèse was revered in legitimist circles as the embodiment of the old regime, but she was not a winning personality. Captivity and the terror she had experienced in her early years had left her hard-edged and fearless; she was respected, but not loved. She remained forever bitter about the events of the French Revolution, and her husband silently accepted that she never warmed to the constitutional idea. Add to this that the Duc and Duchesse d'Angoulême were both level-headed and devout human beings. Both completely lacked the elegance and ease that might have helped to endear them to large sections of the French people. The cherishing of an absolutist past, which was embraced

by both Marie Thérèse and the king, failed to create public support for the cause of a modernised, nineteenth-century Bourbon monarchy – and for the heir to the throne.

Antoine-Jean Gros: Marie Thérèse Charlotte de France, Duchesse d'Angoulême, 1816



Between 1824 and 1830, the Duc d'Angoulême tried to make the most of his uncomfortable situation, which means that he did his best to stay out of harm's way. The dauphin was installed as a member of the state council and the senate. Granting the prince access to these ministerial bodies was hardly an act of support or encouragement, but the king's attempt to control his son. In order to avoid conflict, Louis Antoine kept a low profile. When he was given a task or a mission by the king, he fulfilled it meticulously and without asking questions. 'But', he admitted frankly, 'when I am not consulted or employed, then I remain quiet and I go hunting.' [\[4\]](#)

The prince considered open opposition to the king not a suitable occupation for the heir to a constitutional monarchy. Looking at the severe damage to the dynasty caused by his father's constant meddling with government affairs, the son's rejection to engage in political opposition seems quite understandable. On the other hand, the dauphin clearly lacked more than just a talent for plotting and scheming. The Baron d'Haussez described the prince's participation in the council in 1829 as follows: 'On Wednesdays and Sundays the meetings were at the palace, where the king presided and the Dauphin attended. [...] The Dauphin would leave through the military almanac on which he would note in pencil the transfer of [military] assignments, the list of which the minister of war, after going over these notations, would make up and resubmit to him. Otherwise the Dauphin took very little part in the discussions, hardly ever broke into them except to make some brief remarks, and too often introducing them with some such apologetic

phrase as: “Perhaps what I’m going to say is crazy, but you won’t pay any attention to it anyway.” [5]

Notwithstanding his widely deplored lack of enthusiasm in the field of politics, the dauphin remained a dedicated military leader right until the final day of his dynasty’s regime. On 29 July 1830, when Paris was on the barricades, Louis Antoine was appointed supreme commander of the royal troops. It seems Charles X relied on his son’s example of loyalty and bravery to refresh the soldiers’ commitment to defending the king and his dynasty. Angoulême was all in favour of mobilizing the army and crushing the uprising in Paris, exclaiming in the session of the council: ‘Let’s accept our destiny proudly and perish with arms in our hands.’ He wanted to ‘mount a horse’ (*monter à cheval*) and make a difference on the territory he was familiar with – military engagement.

However, all hope of conquering Paris was lost two days later, when large parts of the remaining royal troops refused to fight and abandoned the prince. The Duc d’Angoulême seized to be *generalissimus* almost at the same moment when he lost his position as dauphin. On his way to England, facing a new exile, Angoulême is reported to have said: ‘I have only one regret; it is that I did not die in Paris at the head of the guard.’ [6]



Henri d’Artois, Duc de Bordeaux, inspects the royal guard at Rambouillet on 2 August 1830 (Musée de la Legion d’Honneur / Wikipedia)

On 24 August 1830, the dethroned King Charles X signed the Declaration of Lulworth, England. The statement revoked the appointment of Louis-Philippe d’Orléans as temporary lieutenant general of the kingdom and declared the Duc de Bordeaux to be

pronounced as King Henry V, as soon as the boy would reach majority at the age of 14 on 20 September 1833. This time the ever loyal dauphin Louis Antoine, Duc d'Angoulême, refused to sign the document against his better judgment. His action caused great insecurity among the supporters of the legitimist cause as to who was now to be considered the rightful pretender. The declaration split the defenders of the exiled Bourbon dynasty in quarrelling fractions around the former king (Carlists), the dauphin (Dauphinists) and his nephew Bordeaux (Henriquists).

The last dauphin of France had missed out on the opportunity to gather troops around Bordeaux and conquer Paris while it was still in turmoil. Louis Antoine aka Louis XIX would never lead troops again. A loyal servant to his dynasty, he dedicated the rest of his life in exile, where he died in 1844, to the intellectual and moral education of his nephew, the Duc de Bordeaux.

Suggested further reading:

- Vincent W. Beach (1971), *Charles X of France. His Life and Times*, Paris.
- Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny (1966, original 1956), *The Bourbon Restoration*, translated from the French by Lynn M. Case, Philadelphia.
- Michel Bernard Cartron (2010), *Louis XIX celui qui fut roi 20 minutes. Mémoires de Louis Antoine d'Artois duc d'Angoulême*, Versailles. (These are no authentic memoirs, but a biography written from the prince's perspective.)
- Michel Bernard Cartron (2014), *Madame Royale. L'énigme résolue*, Versailles.
- André Castelot (1988), *Charles X, La fin d'un monde*, Paris.
- Vicomte de Guichen (1909), *Le Duc d'Angoulême (1775-1844)*, deuxième édition, Paris.

[1] Beach (1971), 92.

[2] Cabanis (1972), 442.

[3] Archives diplomatiques pour l'histoire du tems et des états. 5^{ème} vol : France, de 1814 à 1825, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1825, 68, footnote**.

[4] Cabanis (1972), 443.

[5] Bertier de Sauvigny (1966), 272f.

[6] Bertier de Sauvigny (1966), 406; quoting d'Urville's diary, 19 August 1830, 470.

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