

Jacques-Louis David,
The Emperor
Napoléon in His Study
at the Tuileries, 1812,
 oil on canvas,
 204 x 125 cm (80 x 49")

To the left of the desk a candle is nearly spent, it has been burning 'all night'. It is now early morning signified by the light seeping into the study at the left.

There is a 'classical' decoration on the wall with an eagle and sinuous floral curves and a winged head.

There is a map partly unrolled on the floor

One of the desk legs has a lion finial representing Napoléon as conqueror prepared for battle. Under the desk is a copy of Plutarch's *Loves of the Noble Greeks and Romans*.

The floor is covered by a green carpet with golden tasselled trim and shows areas of rumple where furniture has been casually or impetuously moved.

The painting might be considered to promote the emperor and his office, his attention to military matters and administration of the State and his hard work.

The painting was first publicly displayed in David's studio and used by many subsequent artists in their depictions of Napoléon. David subsequently painted a version of the picture with Napoléon in a chasseurs uniform.

initial analysis

Napoléon Bonaparte stands with 'statesman-like quietude' in the centre of the painting. The clock behind shows that it is 4.13 am. He is in his study in the Tuileries Palace in Paris. He took up residence there after appointing himself emperor in 1804, 'the year this picture is set'. His hair is rumpled, his cuffs unbuttoned and his stockings are bagging slightly around his ankles. The front of his white trousers and waistcoat are grubby from his desk work. His right hand inside his waistcoat signifies both confidence and civility rather than military, it is a posture fashionable at the time. In spite of the hour, Napoléon appears to be clean-shaven and alert, his face gives the impression that he is in a pleasant mood.



The painting was commissioned in 1811 by letter to David from the Scottish Marquess of Douglas and Clydeside, the 10th Duke of Hamilton, an art collector and Francophile. It is said that the marquess harboured an interest in fostering friendship between France and Scotland. At the time of the commission David was Napoléon's official painter.

The painting was purchased from the Hamiltons by the 5th Earl of Rosebury and then brought by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in 1954 and deposited in the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. where it now hangs.

References to some of these details in this analysis are in the course bibliography.

There is a preparatory drawing for the painting dated 1812 in the Musée des Beaux-Arts et Archéologie in Besançon. The drawing is said to have taken 15 minutes which is all the time David had with Emperor for the study. David would have employed a student in a grenadiers' uniform to pose and stand in for Napoléon in the emperor's absence.

The blue uniform with red cuffs is that of the foot grenadiers of the Imperial Guard and signifies Napoléon's solidarity with his troops.

In his left-hand is a snuff box, snuff is said to have helped him stay awake. On the desk a quill pen, a sheaf of papers bearing the letters 'COD'. He has been up all night writing the *Code Napoléon* enacted in 1804.

(The *Code* replaced the previous church and royal system of ordinances with the continuation of a patriarchal system of personal rights). On the top of the desk drawer is a blue folio. The cover is decorated with a golden motif but not the fleurs-de-lys. A sword is propped up on the seat of the chair, its harness hangs down. There are golden bees sewn into the red velvet of the chair, they are a fifth-century emblem associated with the first French rulers. The vertical elements behind Napoléon, the column of books, the 'classical' decoration, the grand clock and pendulum do not appear in the preparatory drawing. These features give emphasis to the subject of the picture and are a visual foil to the angled horizontal desk and floor.

On the desk here is a blue velvet cloth with golden trim in keeping with the gold painted furniture parts and in contrast to the red velvet of the other furnishings. The overall effect of the furnishings is plush and expensive.

