

PREFACE



For more than two centuries, the *Palais Bourbon* and the *Hôtel de Lassay* have been at the heart of French political life. From the very moment the Council of Five Hundred moved there in 1798, the edifices lost their original residential function and became the seat of national sovereignty and the cradle of our Republican values.

These ancient walls resonate with the grand voices which, together, have made France and which have shown us and continue to guide us along the path of liberty and solidarity: Lamartine, Schœlcher, Hugo, Jaurès, Clemenceau, but also, more recently, Robert Badinter or Simone Veil.

These splendid buildings are also an extraordinary testament to the architectural and artistic development of our country, from the Regency to the modern day. The architect Jules de Joly, the painters Delacroix, Vernet, Pujol, Alechinsky, and JonOne, as well as the sculptor De Maria, have all left their indelible mark here. Their artistic interpretations speak to us of France, of the demands of democratic debate and of our collective capacity to overcome our divisions.

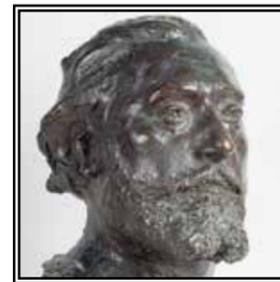
These national palaces, brimming with history, are also, through the parliamentary sittings, the daily arena for the work of MPs, their assistants and of the civil servants of the National Assembly.

The work of Parliament must be better known by all. More than ever, our Assembly, which is the expression of direct universal suffrage, must be the shared house of all French citizens. New technologies have enabled us to make huge steps in the field of transparency and the National Assembly will continue its efforts in this direction, in the same way as it wishes to allow its heritage to be accessible to all.

This current work, through its exceptional visual and textual quality allows the reader to discover our National Assembly in all its historical, contemporary, architectural and institutional dimensions. It opens up an extra door leading to the seat of the national representation where all citizens are, quite simply, at home.



Richard FERRAND
President of the National Assembly



THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

CONTENTS

Ancien Régime

6 A Grand Trianon in Paris
by Emmanuelle Chartier

1789-1814

12 New facades and new styles
by Emmanuelle Chartier

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

16 The Revolution, from the Tennis Court Oath to the Empire
by Emmanuel de Waresquiel

1814-1870

22 Palaces remodelled to enact laws
by Yoann Brault

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

42 The people, the deputies and the king: the Revolution starts over
by Emmanuel de Waresquiel

1870-1958

48 The deputies in cramped quarters
by Yoann Brault

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

52 The Third Republic, from triumph to powerlessness
by Emmanuel de Waresquiel

55 The "Fourth": a twelve-year Republic
by Yoann Brault

In the rooms and corridors

56 Eight major political figures

Today

59 Life at the National Assembly

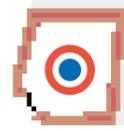
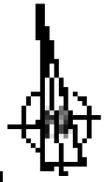
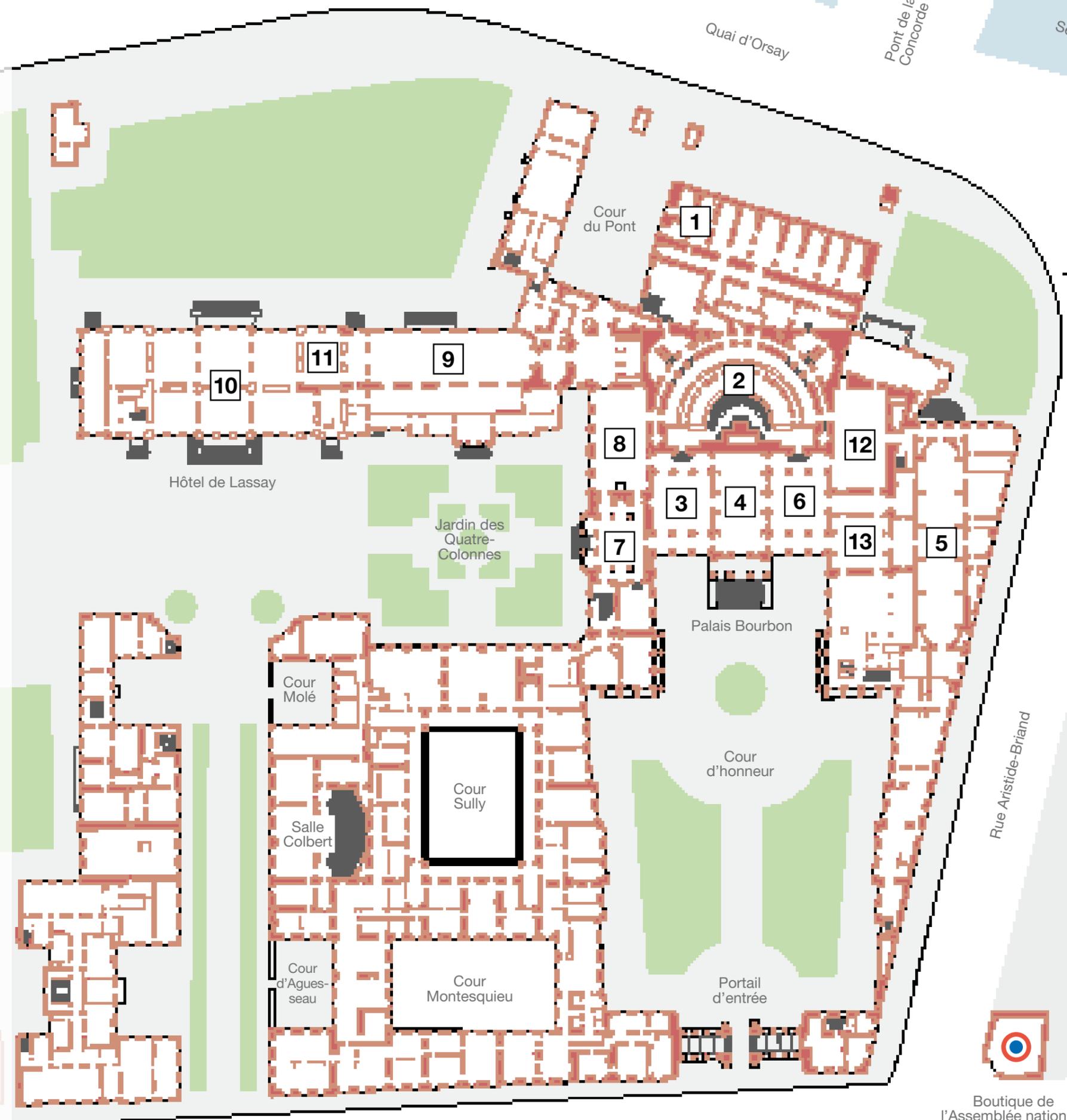
64 The Assembly at work

70 The National Assembly opens its doors to the public

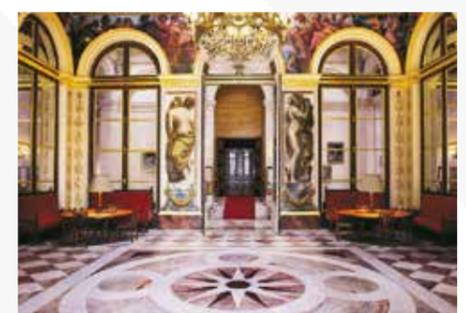
ICONIC SITES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

This overall plan of the architectural complex consisting of the Palais Bourbon and the residence of the President of the National Assembly, the Hôtel de Lassay serves as a guide to the reader. All these rooms are numbered and presented in the following pages.

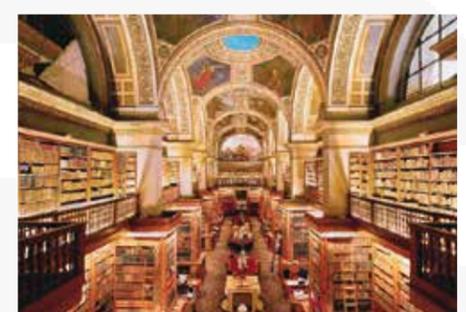
- 1** Salle Fragonard and Salle Empire
- 2** Amphitheatre
- 3** Salon Delacroix
- 4** Salle Casimir-Perier
- 5** Library
- 6** Salon Abel-de-Pujol
- 7** Salle des Quatre-Colonnes
- 8** Salle des Pas-Perdus
- 9** Salle des Fêtes and Galerie des Tapisseries
- 10** Hôtel de Lassay
- 11** Cabinet du Départ
- 12** Salle des Conférences
- 13** Salon des Mariannes



The Salle des Séances



The Salon Delacroix



The Library



The Galerie des Fêtes

Boutique de l'Assemblée nationale

A GRAND TRIANON IN PARIS

A palace for a daughter of royal blood and a mansion for her lover next door: constructed in the early decades of the eighteenth century, this first building would later become the official seat of the national legislature.

BY EMMANUELLE CHARTIER

A major construction site began in Paris in 1722 on the left bank of the Seine, just steps away from the “Pré-aux-clercs,” a countrified outlying district of motley reputation; a place where duellists met to fight. The large plot of land stretched from the Seine to the Rue de l’Université. The Duchesse de Bourbon’s palace that rose on the site was one of the largest private commissions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, worthy of the fortunes of its owner, the legitimised daughter of Louis XIV and the Marquise de Montespan. It was a freestanding building in the middle of the gardens. Under the Regency, the members of the country’s high society returned to Paris, and the nobility moved into new districts, creating speculative markets. The fashion tended toward private mansions surrounded by gardens, an arrangement that required large tracts of land. It was the Comte de Lassay, the duchess’s lover, who suggested this more rural site. He had his own private mansion built there. Soon, these neighbouring buildings formed the most fashionable complex in Paris.

The architect selected, Lorenzo Giardini, was Italian. He had barely sketched out the initial plans when he died in 1722. Yet his project demonstrated a clear penchant for a light and elegant style. Pierre Cailleteau, known as Lassurance, took over the plans. While working for Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Louis XIV’s leading architect, he had participated in the royal construction projects at Versailles and the Hôtel des Invalides. Cailleteau died in 1724, and Jean Aubert, another of Hardouin-Mansart’s protégés, took over in his place. This famous architect, who had been working for the Bourbon-Condé family since 1707, was overseeing another, more spectacular project at the time: the construc-



tion of the stables at Chantilly, which began in 1719 and was completed in 1735: “The largest private commissions in the first half of the century, at least from the Regency on, came from the younger branches of the royal family, Orléans and Bourbon Condé, and the legitimised children of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, who were, according to Louis XIV’s wishes, married to the most noble representatives of



GLOSSARY

PILASTER: flat column projecting from a wall.

CHANNELS: lines carved in an exterior wall to imitate joints between stone courses.

AGRAFE: ornamental relief on the keystone of an arch.

LINTEL: architectural member supporting the weight above an opening; the shape may vary to include a segmented arch.

Louise-Françoise de Bourbon

Engraving, early eighteenth century. Mademoiselle de Nantes was one of the legitimised daughters of Louis XIV and his favorite, Madame de Montespan. Pretty and insouciant, according to court chronicler Saint-Simon, she “spent her childhood in frivolity and pleasure.” Widowed at the age of 37 and the mother of nine children, she met the Comte de Lassay in 1711.

Armand Madaillan de Lesparre, comte de Lassay

Opposite, studio of Jean-Baptiste Van Loo, ca. 1720, oil on canvas. By the age of 28, he had already become her confidante and helped manage her affairs. After earning considerable wealth from the Mississippi shares issued by John Law, the marquis could build himself a worthy home. The Duchesse de Bourbon and the Comte de Lassay decided to construct their respective mansions on the same property bordering the Seine.

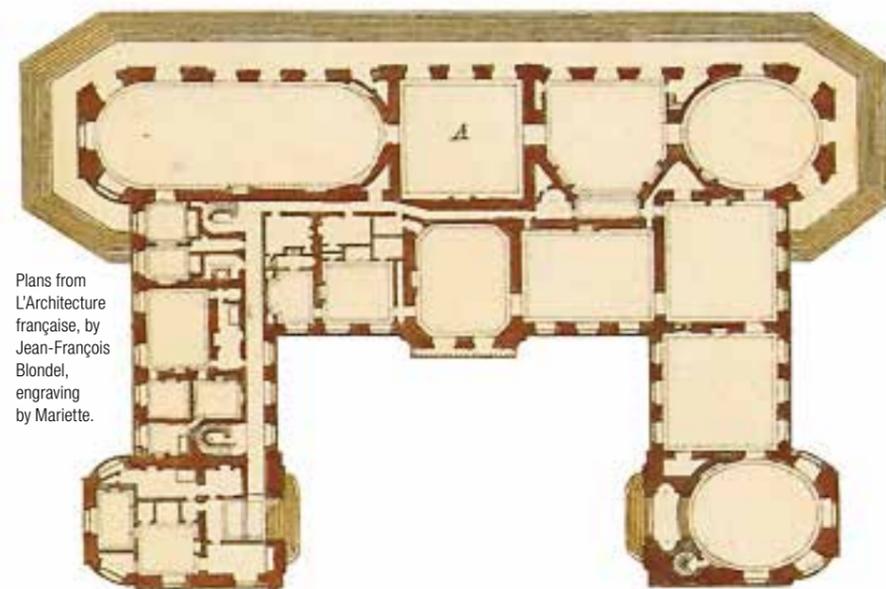
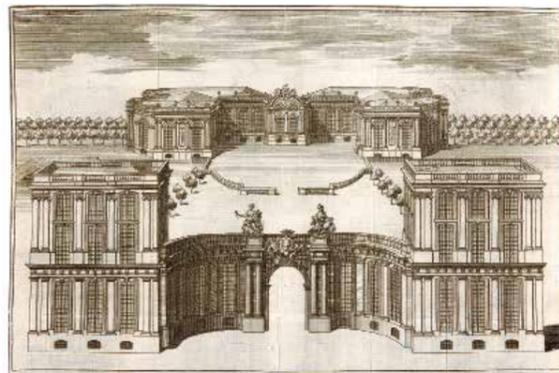
the younger branches,” wrote historian Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos. “Bastards and younger siblings formed one large—and certainly divided—family, but one that could set the tone for a half-century.”

The construction projects for the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Lassay were completed around 1728 under the direction of a fourth architect, Jacques Gabriel. The buildings shared the same style: a single-floor Italianate design with a roof that was concealed from the ground by a balustrade. The duchess’s palace consisted of a rectangular building flanked by two wings forming the Cour d’Honneur. Beyond this, the main courtyard extended as far as a monumental, half-moon-shaped portal framed by two tall pavilions marking the entrance to the palace on Rue de l’Université. The rectangular-shaped Hôtel de Lassay was of more

modest dimensions. Viewed from the Seine, the two mansions presented a clean, horizontal line, typical of eighteenth-century architecture. French-style gardens planted with shrubs stretched between the Seine and the front of the buildings. With its U-shaped plan, horizontal lines and Italianate style, the architecture of the Palais Bourbon echoed that of the Grand Trianon in Versailles (the Marble Trianon), designed and built by Hardouin-Mansart and inaugurated in 1688. “The Marble Trianon imposed the so-called Italian fashion, with a single floor and no attic, which had not garnered much success since Philibert de l’Orme first introduced it into France [for the Château de Saint-Maur in the mid-sixteenth century],” indicated Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos. Another original element contributed to the building’s elegance: the use of rounded corners for the main build-

The palais Bourbon

The Palais Bourbon was one of the most important private commissions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and was a suitable reflection of the owner's fortune. It was a palace, whose main building set in the middle of gardens. The U-shaped, Italianate floor plan was reminiscent of that of the Grand Trianon in Versailles (the Marble Trianon), designed and constructed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart and inaugurated in 1688. Another innovative element contributed to the elegance of the building: the use of rounded stones for the corners of the main building and the ends of the wings. Engraving by Janinet.



Plans from *L'Architecture française*, by Jean-François Blondel, engraving by Mariette.



ding and the ends of the wings. Indeed, Aubert had adopted this idea for another commission: the Hôtel de Peyrenc de Moras. But the most impressive aspect was the elegant facade. Designed with large windows, it featured an alternating series of double columns on the projecting section and pilasters on the main section of the building. The balustrade had a number of sculpted groups recalling Louis XIV's penchant for symbolism; these included the elements, the seasons and Apollo. The Hôtel de Lassay, built concurrently with the ducal palace, complied skilfully with the rules of hierarchy and protocol: first, it was small, just 25 meters long as opposed to approximately 80 meters for the Palais Bourbon; second, the decorative elements on the former were simple, while the latter boasted a wealth of bas-reliefs and

pediments; and third, it did not have a forecourt or a portal, but a simple tree-lined avenue with a few outbuildings (stables, storerooms) on the left-hand side. The facade had no columns or pilasters but featured a simple geometry of three slightly projecting sections. To set them off, the architect emphasised the corner stones and the ornamentation on the windows: rocaïlle-style agrafes (ornamental reliefs) for the projecting sections of the building, and more discreet agrafes and arched windows on the main section. This design still exists on the ground floor of the current building, to which an additional floor was added during the nineteenth century.

The Palais Bourbon Palace was to undergo more wide-ranging transformations and nothing remains of the duchess's apartments. Their distribution were highly modern

PARIS ONCE AGAIN BECOMES THE CAPITAL

With the end of Louis XIV's reign, the court returned to Paris, but the city had changed. The Marais, traditionally an aristocratic area, was out of fashion. The district was too dense to accommodate

the designs of sumptuous private projects. Architects turned to the large tracts of open land in the outlying areas on the left bank and the Champs-Élysées to the west. Prestigious private homes were

constructed there. These included the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel Matignon on the left bank, and the palace for the Comte d'Evreux (the current Palais de l'Élysée) on the right bank.

for the time. Reception rooms (centre, right wing, enfilade on the Seine side) and residential apartments (left wing) were separated; the rooms were of very varied shapes, which made it possible to create small service areas and recesses; the private apartments included many small rooms dedicated to specific functions. Another novel feature was the introduction of corridors. Finally, the architect sought by all means to increase the comfort and practicality of the palace, qualities which were to contribute to its renown.

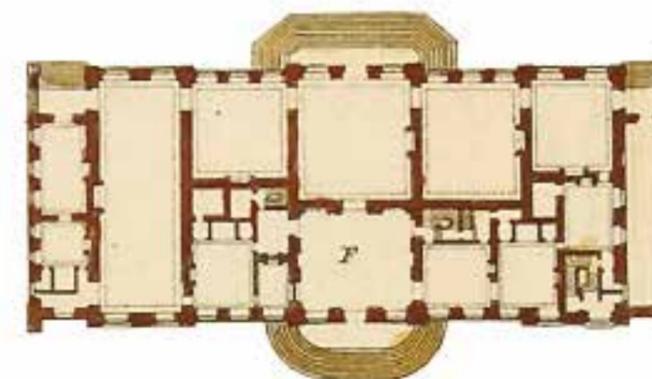
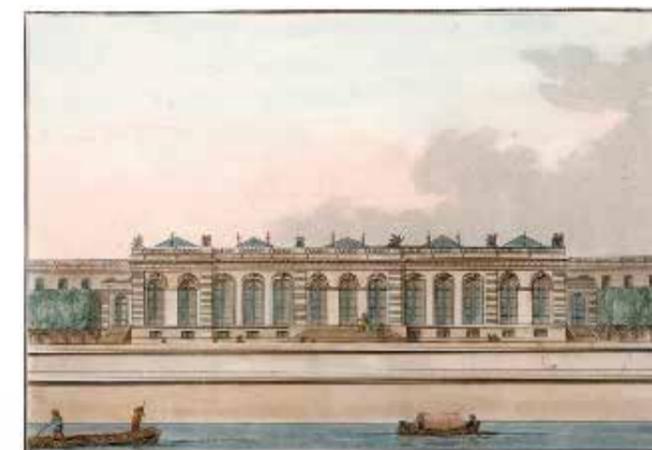
The Duchesse de Bourbon died in 1743; her lover in 1750. The palace was then sold to Louis XV, who probably wanted to include it in the reconstruction of the new Place Royale (the future Place de la Concorde). In 1764, the king finally sold it to the duchess's grandson, Louis-Joseph de Bourbon Condé, who had returned from the Seven Years' War as a hero. The fashion in the second half of the eighteenth century tended toward more monumental buildings with antique themes, a style Louis-Joseph selected for his project. Even before purchasing his grandmother's home, he had commissioned a monumental palace from Marie-Joseph Peyre, an architect with a passion for archeology. The Prince de Condé was not, however, satisfied with the ducal palace alone; he therefore purchased the Hôtel de Lassay in 1768 and decided to expand both buildings. Several architects participated in the project, most notably Bellisard and Le Carpentier. In addition, some of Peyre's ideas were used, as for example, the design of the main entrance on the Rue de l'Université. The original entrance from the duchess's era was replaced by a large central portal with a semi-circular arch, framed by a gallery of columns, considered highly fashionable at the time. Other transformations included the extension of the two wings of the Palais Bourbon, and the construction of the pavilion known as the "small apartments" for one of the prince's daughters alongside the stables and storerooms. The decoration was also refurbished to reflect the glory of the new owner: the palace vestibule was decorated with trophies recalling his exploits. Weapons, shields, armour and other stucco motifs are still visible today, as are all the preceding transformations. By the late 1780s, when the work had just barely been completed, the rumblings of the revolution had begun. The Prince de Condé went into exile, and the two buildings were confiscated in 1792. The royal palace was about to become one of the symbols of the Republic: the National Assembly. ❖

➔ FURTHER INFORMATION

Histoire de l'architecture française: de la Renaissance à la Révolution by Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, Menges/Éditions du patrimoine, 1995

Hôtel de Lassay

Engraving by Janinet.

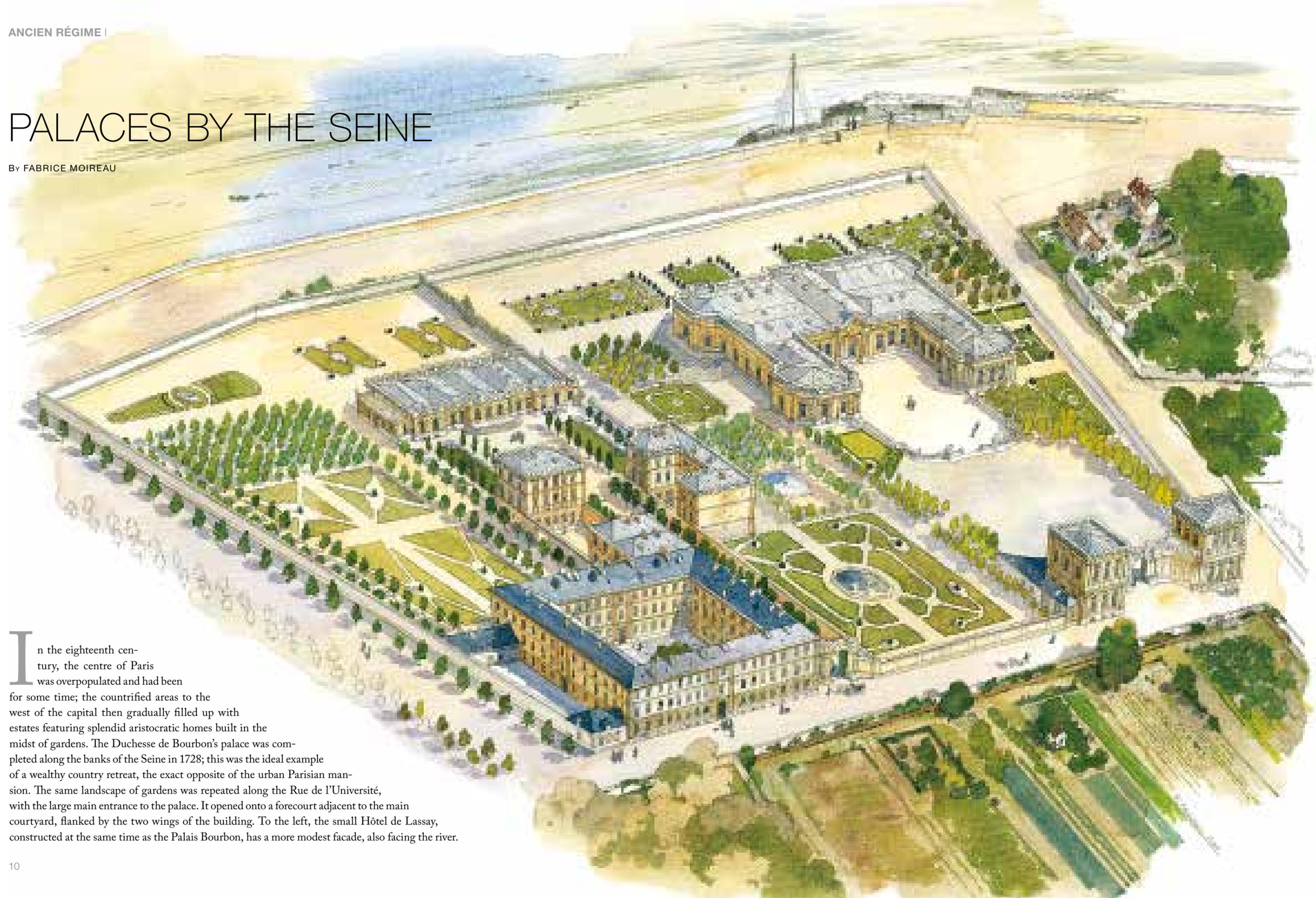


The Prince de Condé, the Bourbon duchess's grandson.

PALACES BY THE SEINE

BY FABRICE MOIREAU

In the eighteenth century, the centre of Paris was overpopulated and had been for some time; the countrified areas to the west of the capital then gradually filled up with estates featuring splendid aristocratic homes built in the midst of gardens. The Duchesse de Bourbon's palace was completed along the banks of the Seine in 1728; this was the ideal example of a wealthy country retreat, the exact opposite of the urban Parisian mansion. The same landscape of gardens was repeated along the Rue de l'Université, with the large main entrance to the palace. It opened onto a forecourt adjacent to the main courtyard, flanked by the two wings of the building. To the left, the small Hôtel de Lassay, constructed at the same time as the Palais Bourbon, has a more modest facade, also facing the river.



1789 | 1814

NEW FACADES AND NEW STYLES

From 1789 to 1798, the Duchesse de Bourbon's former palace was used for various purposes before housing the legislature, a function that required major transformations to the building.

By EMMANUELLE CHARTIER

During the Revolution, many aristocratic homes, including the Palais du Luxembourg and the future Palais de l'Élysée, became government property. When the Palais Bourbon was nationalised in 1792, the buildings were transformed and remodelled for reuse. The army convoy administration moved into the stables and outbuildings. As for the Palais itself, after housing the Ecole des Travaux Public in 1794—the future École Polytechnique—it was attributed to the Council of Five Hundred in 1795.

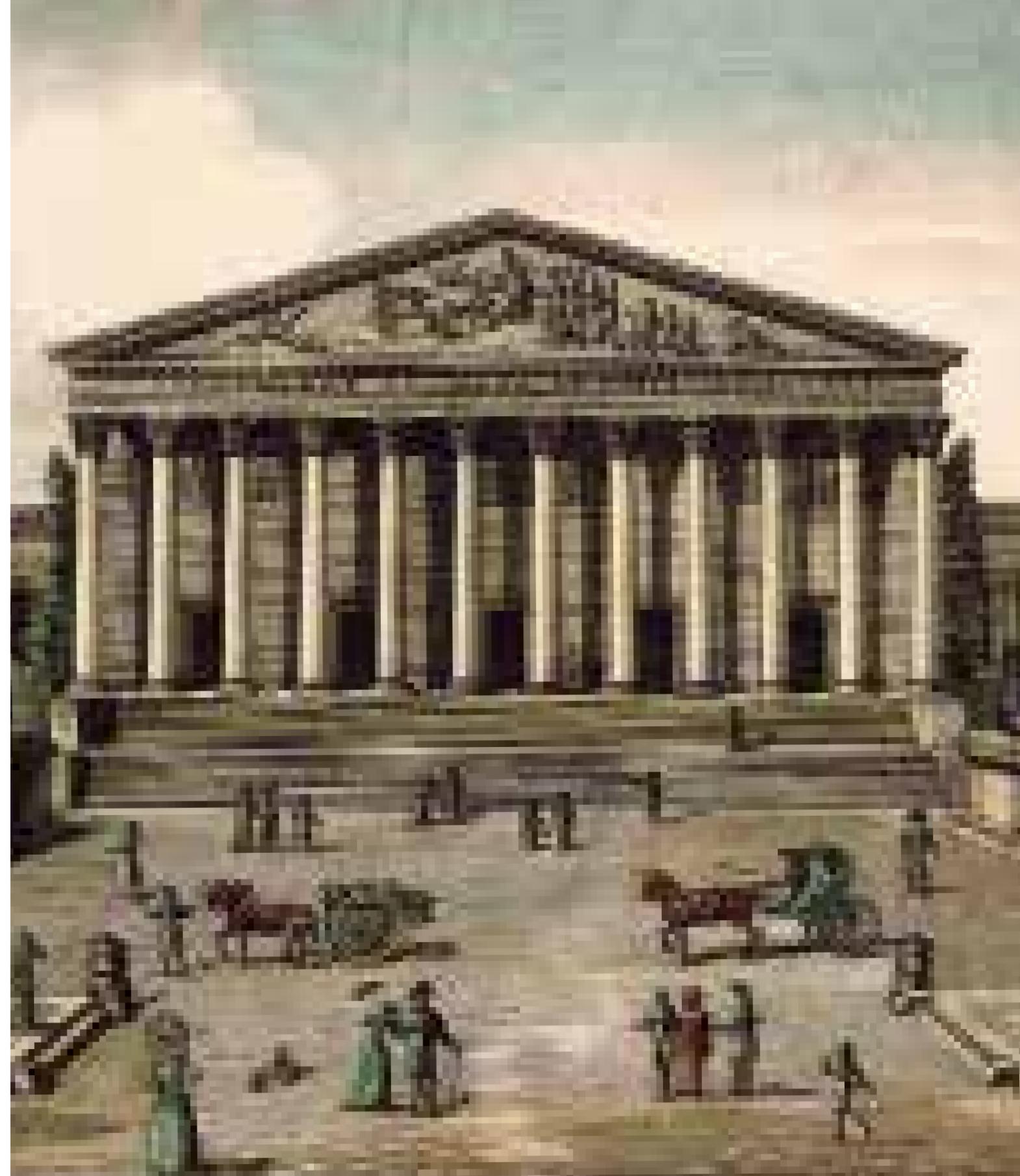
Yet the building lacked a room for the Chamber to meet, and architects Jacques-Pierre Gisors and Emmanuel-Chérubin Lecomte were commissioned for the task. The amphitheatre, shaped like a Roman theatre, had a dome with a central oculus, and borrowed other design elements from the amphitheatre of the École de Chirurgie, built from 1769 to 1774. This Chamber replaced the official apartments along the Seine. On 21 January 1798, the Council of Five Hundred met for the first time and discovered that the interior was well designed, but the acoustics were poor.

Few elements still remain from this first Chamber: the desk and chair of the President of the Assembly and the

bas-relief of the orator's rostrum. The desk and chair, made of mahogany and gilt bronze, are attributed to Georges Jacob's workshop after a design by Jacques-Louis David. As for the bas-relief, it was designed by François-Frédéric Lemot, one of the official sculptors under the Directory. It consists of two female figures, allegories of History and Fame: Fame blowing her trumpet, decreeing the law, while History records them on a tablet. The bust of Marianne stands atop a pedestal in the centre of the composition, decorated with a medallion representing the Roman god Janus. The two faces symbolise “the experience of the past and the foresight of the future.” The reliefs, finely carved in white marble, stand out against the dark, polychrome marble background of the composition.

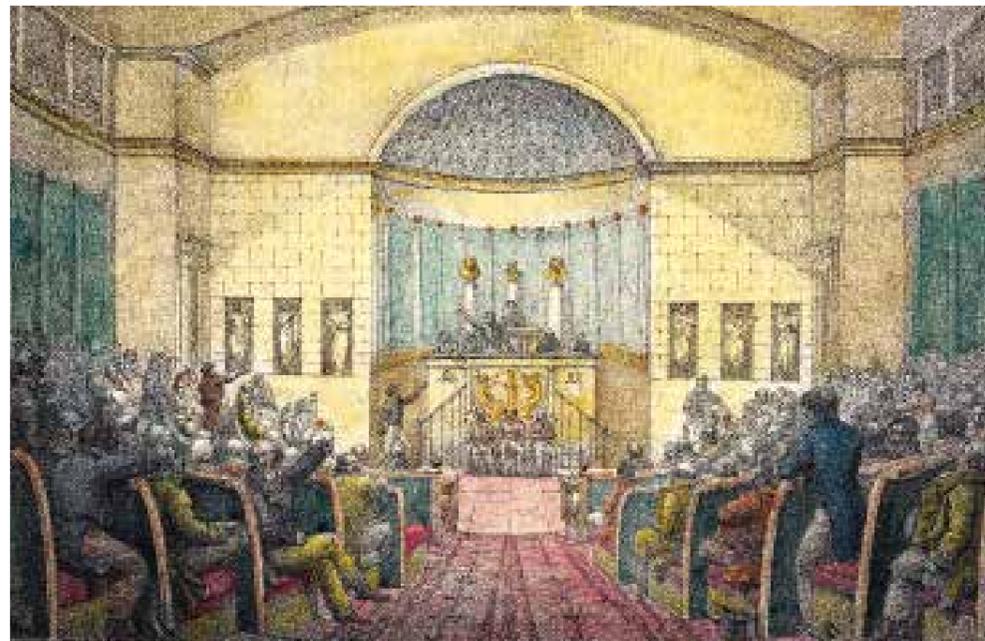
In the same period, a Rotunda was added to the front of the palace on the courtyard side, an addition designed thirty years earlier by the architect Peyre for the Prince de Condé. Finally, a wooden gallery was constructed to link the Palais Bourbon to the Hôtel de Lassay.

With the start of the Empire in 1804, it became clear that the original palace had lost the beauty, elegance and symmetry for which it had been so highly admired during the Ancien Régime. To construct the amphitheatre, Gisors



Engraving by Chapuis from a drawing by Garbizza. View of the facade of the Palais du Corps Législatif, taken from the Concorde bridge, illustrating Bernard Poyet's first project in 1806. The sculptures on the pediment were altered several times, over the course of regime changes.

**The Chamber
in the early
nineteenth century**
Ca. 1815. From *Tableaux de Paris*,
lithograph by Mariet.
Note the cul-de-four alcove
with the President's desk
and the bas-relief by Lemot.



and Lecomte added a floor to the main building, and [7] the roof of the new Chamber created an unsightly overhang above a building designed to have a flat roof. Finally, the building did not fit within the axis formed by the Madeleine Church, the Place de la Concorde and the new Concorde bridge. Viewed from Place de la Concorde, the Palais Bourbon was even partly concealed by the bridge.

To solve this problem, the legislative Bureau submitted a proposal for the Seine facade to the emperor in 1806. This facade, whose design has been attributed to architect Bernard Poyet, would be symmetrical to that of the Madeleine. This required two major steps: first, the building would be raised so as to be visible from the right bank, and second, it would be offset vis-à-vis the axis of symmetry of the building itself, so that its centre line ran along the axis of the bridge. This is how an elegant eighteenth-century building came to be buried under a monumental neoclassical structure with twelve Corinthian columns supporting an entablature and a carved pediment.

The decor of this pediment changed with each new regime. The original was carved by Antoine-Denis Chaudet and represented Napoleon on horseback, offering the legislature the flags he captured at Austerlitz. With the exception of these various decorative elements, the facade has remained the same to this day. In 1810, four statues of illustrious legislators—L'Hospital, Sully, Colbert and d'Aguesseau—were placed on either side of the flight of stairs, joined later by those of Themis, carrying scales in her left hand, and Athena, the symbol of wisdom.

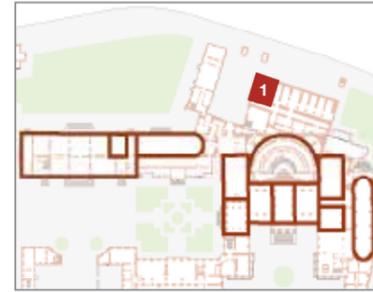
The offset between the new facade and the old building created a triangular space in which Poyet designed

two rooms: the Salles des Gardes and the Salon de l'Empereur, designed for the emperor when the Assembly session was opened.

This rectangular room had windows to the west, facing the Hôtel de Lassay. Poyet himself designed the decor: the walls were covered with stucco imitating the yellow marble of Siena. The doors, windows and the large mirrored panel framing the fireplace were flanked by Corinthian columns, which supported an entablature topped by a bas-relief. The bas-reliefs, created by Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, are still visible today; they represent winged victories surrounding a laurel medallion. In 1815, returned from exile, the Bourbon rulers would add a fleuron topped with a fleur-de-lis to the centre of the medallion, dedicated to the glory of the emperor. The ceiling originally had a barrel vault (now separated from the Salon Empire by a floor). Painted by Fragonard (hence its name, the "Salle Fragonard"), the decor consists of a trompe l'oeil chequerboard of antique bronzes, interspersed with military symbols (winged warriors and antique crests). The painter also created a series of grisaille paintings imitating bas-relief sculptures in the Salle des Gardes: *The Emperor receiving the Homage of the People* and *The Emperor Crowning the Arts and Sciences* (during the Restoration, the same emperor acquired the features of Henri IV, founder of the Bourbon dynasty).

The Prince de Condé recovered the Palais Bourbon in 1815 after the fall of the Empire, but the building had been transformed almost beyond recognition. The Hôtel de Lassay still retained its original charm, but the Duchesse de Bourbon's refined palace no longer existed. ❖

→ GUIDED TOUR



1 Salle Fragonard and Salle Empire

Alexandre-Evariste was the son of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, a famous painter during the Ancien Régime. A student of Boucher, Jean-Honoré was often considered a frivolous painter, characterised by the light brushwork of his genre scene, *The Bolt* (1778). His son, Alexandre-Evariste, was a painter and sculptor. He worked for Poyet, Napoleon's architect, then for the Chamber of Deputies during the Restoration. He created numerous decors for the Palais Bourbon, notably the bas-reliefs, the trompe l'oeil designs in the Salon Empire and the Salle des Gardes, and an intermediate design for the pediment of the Chamber of Deputies.

TODAY

The Salon Empire is used as a workplace by parliamentary journalists and press agencies following the proceedings of the National Assembly. The Association of Parliamentary Journalists holds its meetings here and regularly organises conferences with deputies.



The Salle Fragonard

This arch, covering the current Salle Fragonard, formed the ceiling of the Salon de l'Empereur (*below*). It was separated during the construction in 1888 by a floor dividing this space in half, which also cut off the natural overhead light. Entirely covered with a trompe-l'oeil of antique bronze by Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, the arch's tympanums illustrate the emperor's victories in a series of triple images.

The Salle Empire

Constructed by Poyet to receive the emperor during the opening sessions, this room was decorated in 1811. It illustrates the fashion at the time for neoclassicism: windows framed with Corinthian pilasters and walls covered with Siena yellow stucco. The ceiling, built in the late nineteenth century, repeats the motif of false coffers applied to the original arch (*above*).

THE REVOLUTION, FROM THE TENNIS COURT OATH TO THE EMPIRE

BY EMMANUEL DE WAREQUIEL



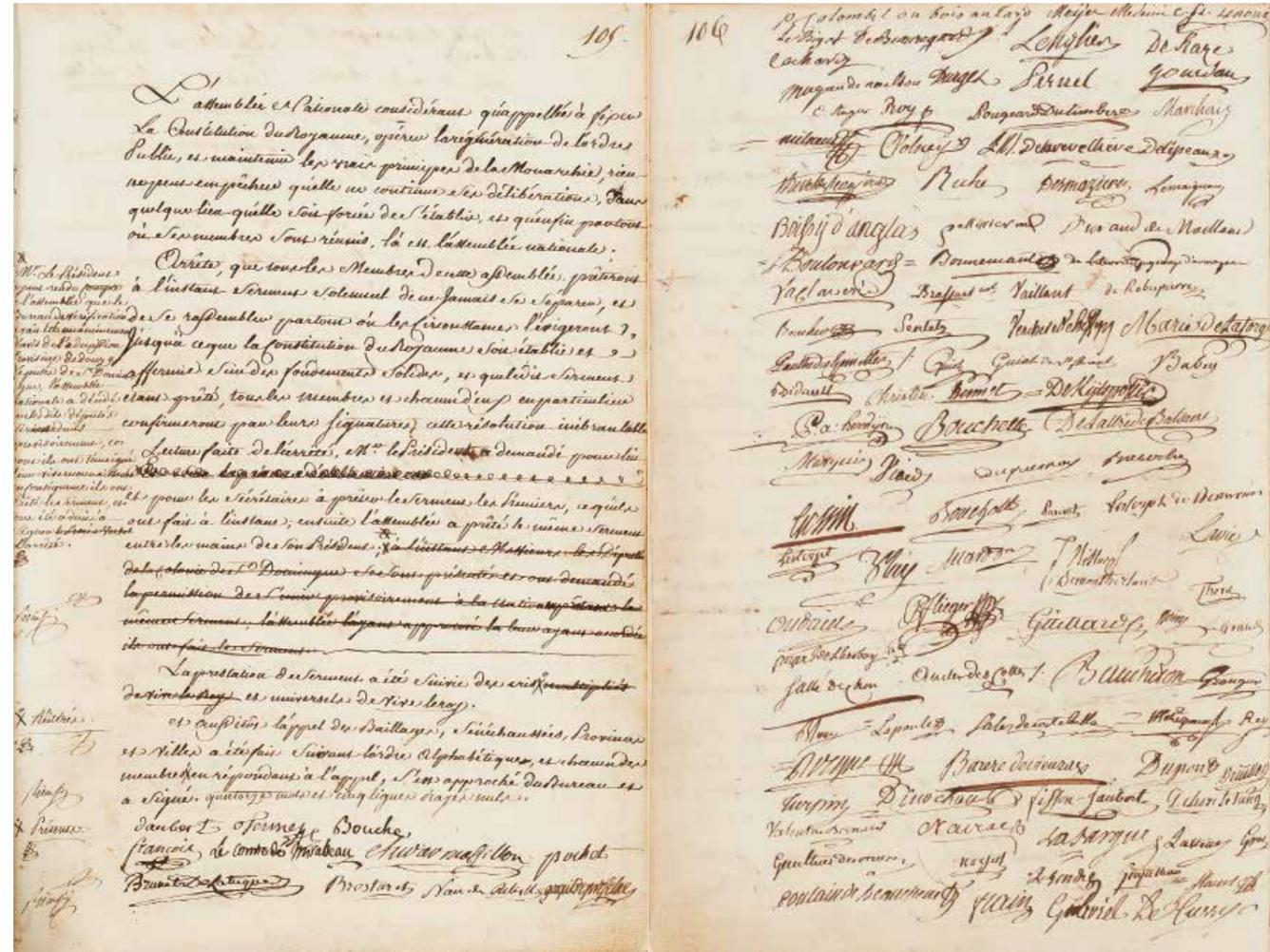
Garnerey, after Jacques-Louis David
Jean Sylvain Bailly

A deputy from Paris representing the Third Estate at the Estates General, Bailly presided over the Jeu de Paume (Tennis Court) meeting. Mayor of Paris from 1789 to 1791, he was sentenced to death and executed on 21 Brumaire, Year II (12 November 1793).

The Revolution should have begun on the spot where the deputies now meet, in the Palais Bourbon. But it actually began a few kilometres away, in Versailles, in a place that was never meant to house the future representatives of the nation: the “Jeu de Paume” (the Tennis Court), a large, empty rectangular room, measuring 30 meters long and 10 meters wide. For more than a century, it had been used to play *paume*, the precursor of both tennis and squash. The date was 20 June 1789. The deputies from the three orders of the realm, called to Versailles as part of the Estates General to solve the country’s financial crisis, had already been meeting for over one month. But the situation was blocked. King Louis XVI had closed down the Assembly’s meeting room in the Hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs, and was preparing a countermove. The 600 or so deputies of the Third Estate (the commoners) refused to assemble separately, in keeping with the defined order, and did not wait for this royal session; instead, they created

a National Assembly on 17 June, electing the famous astronomer Bailly, a deputy from Paris, as their President. It was raining and stormy on the morning of 20 June. The Third Estate deputies, joined by some twenty dissident members of the clergy (First Estate) and a few deputies from the nobility (Second Estate) from Santo Domingo, decided to meet in the Jeu de Paume.

There were no tables or chairs; everyone was standing. Bailly presided from a plank laid across two barrels. The public, packed into the galleries and watching through the windows in the attic, observed the proceedings. What happened that day, just steps from the royal chateau, the absolute symbol of absolute power, was a takeover disguised as a theatrical stunt. The National Assembly existed wherever its members chose to gather. In the heat of the moment, the already famous deputy from Grenoble, Jean-Joseph Mounier, proposed the “solemn oath not to disperse and to remain together wherever circumstances demand, until the Constitution of the kingdom be established and constructed on solid foundations.” This was the first of the great civil oaths from this period, which helped to both foster the Revolution and maintain it in a Manichean logic. On that day, the nation dispatched the old orders for good, where they remained in a past that would come to be called the “Ancien Régime” (Old Regime). The nation



The Tennis Court Oath

Signature of the deputies who signed the Tennis Court Oath on 20 June 1789.



Anonyme
Mirabeau and Dreux-Brézé, 23 June 1789

Oil on canvas, 1831. This painting commemorates the meeting during which Mirabeau, in the name of the deputies from the Third Estate, responded to the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé, who was presiding, and told the Assembly to disperse: “I declare that if you have been told to make us leave, you need to ask for permission to use force, because we will leave only at the point of the bayonet.”

“The tocsin you hear today is not an alarm, but an alert; it sounds the charge against our enemies. To vanquish them, sirs, we must dare, and dare again, and continue to dare, and France will be saved.” Danton, 2 September 1792.

had become a principle that was limited neither by geography nor pre-existing powers. It was indivisible and indissoluble. Bailly then read the words of the oath in a “voice so loud and intelligible,” he would write in his *Mémoires*, “that my words were heard by all the people in the street.” The deputies were then called, in the order of their province of election, to sign the assembly’s register of resolutions.

Five hundred and seventy signatures were lined up in tight rows, covering more than five pages. Some, anonymous at the time, would become famous: Mirabeau, Robespierre, Boissy d’Anglas, Barère de Vieuzac, Mounier, Barnave. A single deputy, an obscure representative from the bailiwick of Castelnaudary, dared to publicly challenge a resolution taken against the king’s orders. He signed “Martin-Dauch, opposed.” He was allowed to leave. In the heat of the moment, the deputies then raised a unanimous cry of “Long live the king!” How many of them knew that at that very moment, the king was no longer the king? They finally separated, around four in the afternoon. The nation had been formed. The Revolution could begin. In

two months, the Third Estate, which before had been nothing, in the words of Sieyès, seized the legislative power and assumed the right to dictate a constitution, while adopting the power to define and curtail the powers of the king. The nation expressed its sovereignty through the laws, as executed by the king. Hence the famous motto from the early days of the Revolution: “The nation, the law, the king.” But by this time,



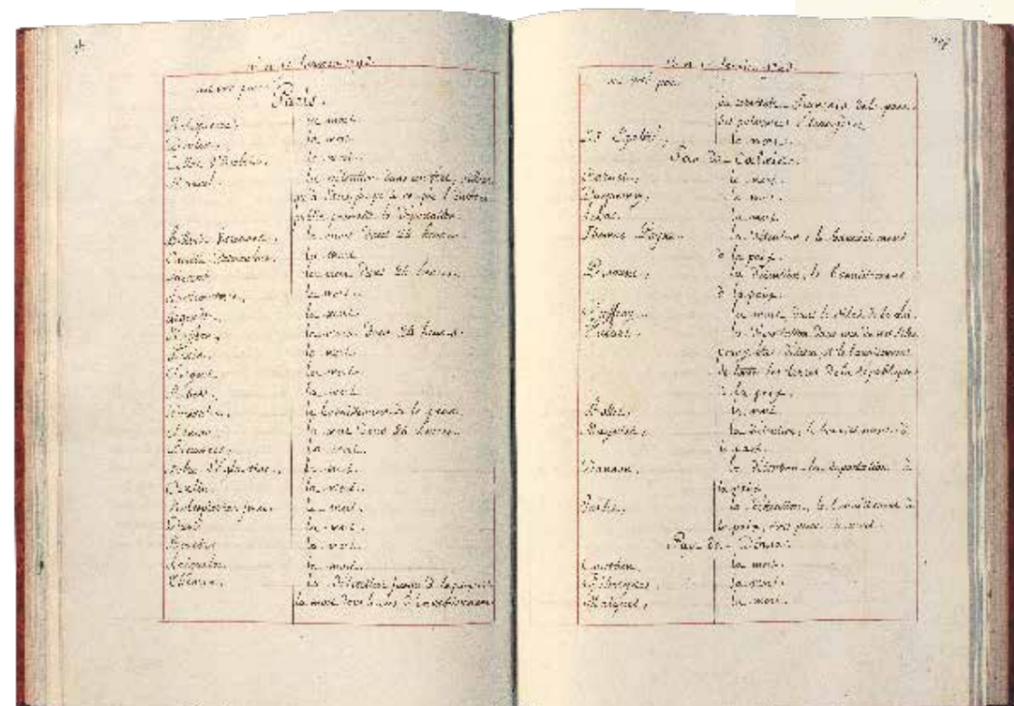
M.M.I. ROBESPIERRE
Député de la Nation
à l'Assemblée Nationale en 1793.

**Fiesinger
Maximilien
de Robespierre
(1758-1794)**

After working as a lawyer in Arras, he became a deputy at the Estates General and a powerful orator. He was again a deputy during the Convention and became the leader of the Montagnards. He inaugurated the Great Terror in June 1794, but a coalition of members of the Committee of Public Safety and moderate members of the Convention decided to put an end to his excesses, and he was guillotined on 10 Thermidor, Year II (28 July 1794). Engraving by Fiesinger after a drawing by J. Guerin.

The king’s fate

Report from the permanent session on 16 and 17 January. Folios 196 and 197. Photograph: Philippe Fuzeau. Each deputy, when his name was called, had to stand before the President of the Assembly and answer the question: “What sentence has Louis, former king of France, incurred?” The roll call of the 721 deputies started on January 16 at 6:30 pm and continued, uninterrupted, until the next evening at 7 pm. Illustrated here: the votes of Danton, Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins, Marat, David and Philippe Egalité (Philippe d’Orléans), the king’s cousin, who also voted in favor of the death penalty. Result: 366 in favor of immediate execution, a majority of 6 votes.



Charles-Louis Lucien Muller

Lanjuinais at the tribune of the Convention, attacked by the Montagnards and defended by the Girondins, 2 June 1793

Oil on canvas, 1868. Jean Denis, Comte de Lanjuinais (1753-1827), deputy from Ille-et-Vilaine, stood up against the insurrectional Commune and the Montagnards during the Convention. The painting illustrates the attack by the Montagnards Chabot, Legendre, Drouet, Robespierre and Tureau. He was defended by the Girondins Barbaroux, Peniere and Lidon.

the king was merely a shadow of his former self. On 6 October 1789, he was physically forced to abandon Versailles for Paris, under the surveillance of the people. The deputies followed him and set up the Assembly close by, in the “Salle du Manège”—yet another room initially used for sports and games, hurriedly rearranged to house them—alongside the gardens of the Chateau des Tuileries, where the royal family was then living. In September of 1791, once the Constitution had been voted and sworn in by the man who was, at this point, nothing more than the first representative of the nation, the deputies dissolved the session. The Legislative Assembly succeeded the National Constituent Assembly. On 10 August 1792, when Parisians overran the Tuileries and the Swiss guards—the last defenders of the monarchy—were massacred, the king was left exposed and took refuge with his family in the chateau. From the grated apartment of the logographer, he watched, powerless, as he was suspended from office, before the assembled crowd handed him over to the insurrectional Commune of Paris, which sent him to the Temple prison. The Legislative Assembly disbanded and the Convention, which replaced it, decreed the creation of the Republic on 21 September 1792.

The entire history of the Convention that moved into the so-called “Salle des Machines” in the Chateau des Tuileries in May of 1793, renamed the Palais National, can be summed up by the magic of speech. Whoever controlled the floor controlled power. And the battle for words began with the Convention, after the judgment and execution of the former king on 21 January 1793, in the Homeric struggle that opposed the Girondins and the Montagnards. The former wanted to consolidate the Revolution; the latter, to pursue it. The Girondins represented provincial France; the Montagnards, the Parisian dictatorship. The history of the Republic was encapsulated within this ruthless battle. It would only finally end one century later, in the 1890s, with the triumph of the radical republic—dominated by the provinces, with its civil service, its lodges and its committees. History remembers the invective of Gaston Grémieux, a future Communist—who would be executed by firing squad—speaking to the provincial and conservative majority of the Bordeaux Assembly in February of 1871: “You are nothing but a bunch of country bumpkins.” This power struggle temporarily ended on 2 June 1793 with the arrest of twenty-two of the Girondin leaders under the pressure of the Parisian sections

“The evening sessions were more scandalous than the morning ones: people speak better and more boldly by candlelight. The Salle du Manège was then a veritable theatre, where one of the world’s greatest dramas was played out.” Chateaubriand, *Memoirs From Beyond the Grave*, book 5, chapter 13.

controlled by Montagnards; it was a blood-bath—they were executed in October. The Convention or death!

Long before Lamartine became the poet of the Girondins, Charles Nodier wrote a clear-sighted account of these leaders and their “last supper” in the Conciergerie prison the night before their execution: “The polemic of the first national assemblies was tumultuous, but not fatal. During the Convention, each speaker brought his head to plead his opinion. A session of the Convention was a battle or a tragedy.” Worse lay ahead with the ensuing Terror. The indivisibility of the assembled nation could not accept opponents; it demanded traitors. While Vergniaud, the deputy from Bordeaux, was responding to Robespierre’s accusations in the midst of the storm, he pronounced what may have been the first great political speech in support of moderation: “I know, Robespierre, that freedom is always as potent as a flame; that it is irreconcilable with the perfect calm that is only suitable to slaves... But the ministry of the legislator is to prevent disasters through wise counsel, not to encourage them through imprudent manoeuvres. If to be a patriot, Robespierre, one has to proclaim one’s support for murder and robbery, you can note my declaration: I am not a patriot, I am a moderate.” It would take some time for this moderation to take hold.

In the meantime, a young general from Italy, who had just returned from Egypt, offered a personal version of rule, by silencing the “long-winded lawyers.” The coup d’état of 18 Brumaire, year VIII (10 November 1799)—after the elimination of Robespierre, and after the inability of the assemblies during the Directory to create a republican stability—ushered in a new period. The Revolution had explored every possible path that could formalise the ideal of a self-governing sovereign community. Bonaparte arrived and “again provided a head for the nation,” according to the expression of a publicist from the era, with the more or less enthusiastic consent of the nation itself—as if the anonymous and collective exercise of power had

KEY DATES

1789

17 June The Third Estate proclaims the National Assembly; the Tennis Court Oath on 20 June.

4 August The Constituent Assembly votes to abolish noble privileges. Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen on 26 August.

1790

14 July Fête de la Fédération on the Champ-de-Mars. At noon, the citizens of France take an oath to remain loyal to the nation, the law and the king. Louis XIV takes an oath to the constitution.

1791

21 June The royal family is arrested in Varennes.

1792

10 August The Palais des Tuileries is overrun by insurgents. Louis XVI is removed from power and imprisoned. Proclamation of the First Republic on 21 September.

1793

21 January Louis XVI is guillotined. The revolutionary tribunal is created on 10 March. The Terror begins on 17 September.

1794

28 July Robespierre, Saint-Just and their friends are executed without trial.

1795

23 September The constitution is proclaimed. The two assemblies, the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of the Ancients, are formed; the Directory begins on October 28.

1799

9 November (18 Brumaire) Coup d’état by General Napoleon Bonaparte.

1804

2 December Coronation of Emperor Napoleon.

1814

4 April Napoleon abdicates at Fontainebleau.

sinned by failing to find the figure of a leader. Bonaparte settled the exceptionally French paradox of the Revolution. The nation, because it had declared itself sovereign in a unilateral and overly brutal way, ended up ten years later once again looking for a new king, but without the monarchy; in other words, without the orders and the privileges. It all came to a close on 10 November 1799, in Saint Cloud, during the Council of Five Hundred, when Bonaparte, bullied by the deputies, was saved by Murat and his grenadiers: “Throw all these people out of here!” From this point on, the heart of power shifted from the assemblies to the government. “Citizens, the Revolution is attached to the principles that started it,” Bonaparte would say several days later. “It is over.”

The coup d’état of 18 Brumaire took place at the Château de Saint-Cloud, where the councils had been transferred. In reality, the elected Council of Five Hundred had already been meeting at the Palais Bourbon for nearly two years—while the Council of Ancients held sessions in the Palais du Luxembourg. Both the place and the date are symbolic. The new semi-circular Chamber had been created from the main apartments of a palace that had belonged to the Prince de Condé—the king’s cousin and leader of the émigrés—which had been “nationalised” in 1792. The date, 21 January 1798, when the members of the Five Hundred entered their new building in a procession, wearing caps and gowns, was equally symbolic as it was the anniversary of “the legitimate punishment of the last of the tyrants.” But this new and definitive national palace was poorly ventilated under its temporary overhead glass roof, insufficiently heated and had echoing acoustics that were ill suited to flights of oratory. This was scarcely a problem in the early years, because the legislative body that replaced the Five Hundred after the Brumaire coup d’état was condemned to silence. The deputies merely listened to the First Consul (Napoleon) when they met and then voted, without discussion, the laws drawn up by the Council of State and debated in another Cham-



Jacques Louis David
Napoleon Bonaparte
Oil on canvas, 1812.
Samuel H. Kress coll., National
Gallery of Art, Washington.

ber, the Tribune. Johann Friedrich Reinhardt, a German observer who attended the opening session of the legislative body on 25 February 1803, expressed his disappointment: “Although the session lasted under one hour, the deputies were constantly coming and going. A secretary read out the minutes from the first session, according to custom; we could not understand a single word. It’s true that the secretary read in a very low voice and that the legislators were constantly making noises, coughing, spitting, sneezing and blowing their noses; it sounded like an infirmary filled with flu patients!”

As the Consulate was shifting toward an Empire, genuine legislative power was increa-

singly slipping away from the deputies; at times, the Assembly was not even convened or re-elected. It was in December of 1813 when five committee members responsible for drawing up the Chamber’s speech to the Emperor dared to report on the situation. Deputy Lainé from Bordeaux led the group and spoke for the first time in over ten years the “language of truth,” discussing the continual wars, injustices in the draft system, humiliations of the administration, and excessive taxes. This was all Napoleon needed to adjourn the Chamber and exile the offenders. “I suspended the publication of your speech, it was incendiary.” Yet after one final and unfortunate campaign by France in 1814, Napoleon would himself experience the exile that he had imposed on others, first on Elbe Island, then on Saint Helena. Two men were behind the two imperial abdications in April 1814, and in June 1815 after Waterloo: Talleyrand and Fouché, but the two Chambers, the conservative Senate of 1814 and the legislative body that became the Chamber of Deputies of the Departments in 1815, also participated. It is relevant to note here that the parliamentary history of France is not restricted to what was generally known at the time as the lower Chamber—the subject at hand—but also included the upper Chamber. The conservative Senate, the hereditary Chamber of Peers, a hold-over from the constitutional monarchy, the Senate under the Second Empire, and especially during the Third Republic, all played a crucial role in this history. After limiting themselves in the early days of the Revolution to the principle of a unicameral representation (one people, one sovereignty, one Chamber), and after the fall of the Empire, the French people gradually grew accustomed to the bicameral system still in place today. The shared aspect of the legislative power, the “balance of powers” as it was called, has remained a keystone of the French constitutional system. We will not be leaving the Palais National, which became the Palais Bourbon in 1814, but we must nevertheless not forget the Palais du Luxembourg, to which it has always been linked. ❖

1814 | 1870

PALACES REMODELED TO ENACT LEGISLATION

While the Palais Bourbon—the term still used—evokes the eighteenth century, the setting of the Assemblée Nationale as we know it today was essentially created in the nineteenth century.

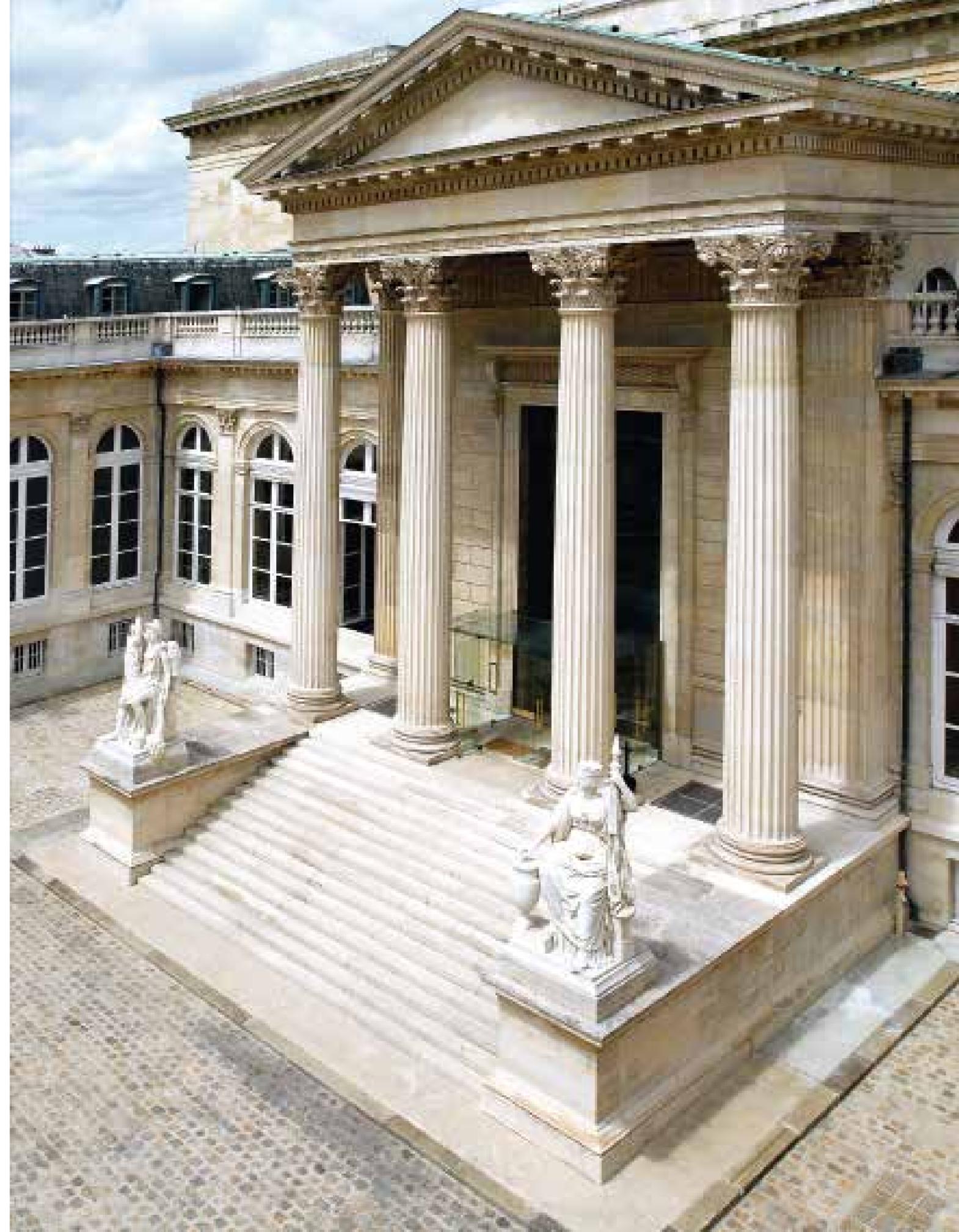
By YOANN BRAULT

The Restoration adopted the bicameral organization of the legislative power inaugurated by the Directory; yet the royal decree of 24 May 1814, returning the Prince de Condé's property, compromised the seat of the "Chambre des Députés des Départements" for a time. After seventeen years of successive remodelling projects, the public function of the former aristocratic dwelling was finally settled; the Parliament would remain in situ as a tenant of the prince for the period of three years. The first act of the new regime (in July of 1815) was to eliminate all the imperial emblems and the five bas-reliefs on the main facade, as well as the eagles and the "N"s adorning the frieze of the entablature. As for Chaudet's pediment (completed five years earlier), Bernard Poyet suggested it be concealed using a canvas-covered frame on which an appropriate image would be painted. This idea was rejected: it was unthinkable to let any image of the emperor remain, even a concealed one. A plaster composition designed by Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard was once again placed on the pediment: *Louis XVIII Granting the Charter of 1814*.

As a mere tenant, the Chamber had to wait until July 1827 to recover ownership of the walls. Yet the prevailing

indecision concerning the building's fate and the possibility of a transfer (new locations in Paris were proposed, including the then-unfinished Quai d'Orsay building) meant that the buildings were not regularly maintained: at the time, the Room of the Five-Hundred had fallen into such a state of disrepair that reconstruction had become essential. As soon as the real estate issues were resolved, the *questeurs* (parliamentary administrators) asked architect Jules de Joly (1788-1865) to submit his project for the construction of a new room. This Montpellier native, who had been working for the Chamber since January 1821, was well versed in the procedures of public programmes. Earlier in his career, on his return from Italy, he had embarked on an official career with the Ministries of Public Instruction and the Interior.

The first step for Joly and his clients was to agree on a shape for the future Chamber itself. The commission set up by the Minister of the Interior opted for the form of a semi-circular room from among the four projects submitted by the architect for their opinion (the others were elliptical, rectangular, octagonal). The Conseil des Bâtiments Civils, whose mission was to assess and, if necessary, to modify the project, examined the architect's sketches; in January 1828, Joly presented his final project, which was approved the fol-





Horace Vernet
Steam Expelling the Gods From the Seas

This work decorates the triptych on the ceiling of the Salle des Pas-Perdus. Oil on canvas, 1839.

lowing April. At the time, the project only concerned the construction of an amphitheatre and three rooms in the courtyard, while the creation of a library was postponed (construction would begin in April 1831). Thus began one of the largest public construction sites in the years 1815 to 1848, employing up to 300 workers. The project progressed well: the Minister of the Interior, La Bourdonnaye, laid the first stone on 4 November 1829. In September 1832, the new amphitheatre was tested, and it was inaugurated during the royal session of 19 November. The results of the campaign were remarkable, yet Joly did not receive unanimous praise: the estimated budget had more than doubled, and the architect was suspended from his functions from May 1833 to October 1834.

At first sight, Joly's approach was a continuation of the style of the existing buildings: the alignments, the position of the amphitheatre and Poyet's peristyle were maintained. Yet the orientation of the building was altered. Unused since Louis XVIII, the propylaeum along the Seine by which the emperor entered on the opening day of the parliamentary session was diminished and shifted to the courtyard side, where a delegation of parliamentarians would then greet the king. Joly imbued this once false entrance with the majesty required for a royal entrance as well as for the official access to the temple of laws: a portico with four Corinthian columns echoing the antique temple of Jupiter Stator, before which stretched a double ramp. The aesthetics of this "second" main facade coincided perfectly with the reigning fashion: the younger generation that had abandoned the "sublime" neoclassicism of Poyet for less monumental style of architecture.

This purpose of this new arrangement, which also concealed the volume taken up by the attic of the amphitheatre, was more than merely aesthetic: the increase in the constructed surface area allowed for the creation of a

series of large interior spaces surrounding the Chamber itself (the Delacroix, Casimir-Périer, Abel-de-Pujol rooms),

where the former layout had required people to cross the amphitheatre or the courtyard to go from one wing to another. Finally, the architect tried to introduce a certain formal diversity in the rooms and gallery, determined sometimes by proportions, sometimes through the introduction of supports, columns or pillars—after which various elements such as ceiling, colours and décor, were then added.

Work was begun in 1837 to complete the exterior decor, starting with the Seine side. Eliminated in 1815, the three bas-reliefs located behind the colonnade were not replaced, a decision that resulted in the more rigid overall appearance of the facade. Only those on the two retreating parts of the building were restored, based on new themes: *Prometheus and the Arts* (Rude) and *Public Instruction* (Pradier). On the pediment, Cortot depicted *France Flanked by Force and Justice*, summoning the elites to the preparation of laws. But this apolitical and timeless decor was only one element in the overall programme. A second theme joined the first, usefully linking two themes: the great men of the Nation and—an extremely timely choice—the restored monarchy. This series of images was based on four sculptures in the round installed in front of the peristyle: Sully (sculpted by Beauvallet), Colbert (Dumont), d'Aguesseau (Foucou) and L'Hospital (Descène). Until 1836, the sculptures were an extension of the series of statues placed on the Concorde bridge around 1828: the figures of four great ministers (Suger, Sully, Richelieu, Colbert), four military leaders (Bayard, Du Guesclin, Condé, Turenne) and four seamen (Duguay-Tourin, Tourville, Duquenne and Suffren). Thus, arriving from the Concorde—the former Place Louis XVI—the visitor followed a symbolic route commemorating the return of the Bourbons to the throne.

The carved decor in the Cour d'Honneur, begun in 1838, is less eloquent. Joly asked Gayard for two statues to frame the main portico: France and Liberty, which were not installed until 1860—and renamed *Force* and *France Placing her Vote in the Urn*.

Despite the construction work undertaken during the July Monarchy, the Chamber and its services remained in cramped conditions in the buildings acquired in 1827. It was therefore urgent to create new offices to house the committees set up to examine the proposals and bills submitted by the deputies. Furthermore, due to a lack of space, the President of the Chamber did not live on the premises (initially he lived on Rue de Lille, then Place Vendôme). In 1830, negotiations started up again to acquire the remaining Condé property. This resulted in the transfer of the western wing of the palace (occupied by the Duc de Bourbon) in November 1830 and the signature of a lease for the Hôtel de Lassay in June 1832. But very soon after, the questeurs realised that this arrangement would be insufficient. The Lassay building was in poor condition, the decor shabby, and the remodelling project to create an apartment for the President and his family implied a large-scale construction campaign, which they did not feel was justified for a building under lease.

The commission decided to purchase the Hôtel de Lassay, and the sale was concluded in April 1843. Jules de Joly was then asked to submit his proposal for the project, as defined by the *questure* (parliament's administrative department). The architect recommended adding a floor to the building, which was perfectly feasible given the excellent construction of the Hôtel de Lassay. The Pres-

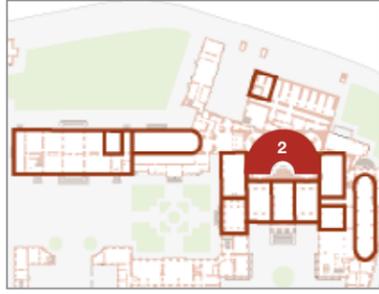
ident would then have a spacious apartment and reception areas. Joly sent his projects to the Minister of Public Works in October 1843, who approved the plan. Describing the work done during the Empire as "vandalism," the architect explained his project in these words: "I believed that it was appropriate, in restoring this hôtel, to return to the original design both inside and out, and to even apply this approach to the new buildings, which would be used as outbuildings." Work began in the summer of 1845, and the project was nearly finished when the 1848 Revolution broke out. Although the Galerie de Morny (now known as the Galerie des Tapisseries) was constructed twelve years later, it is entirely in keeping with the initial programme.

Introducing an approach that would be followed by his successors, Joly strove to ensure that his work would adapt to the building's style. The extra floor repeated the layout of the ground floor and echoed the Italianate style, notably in the simplicity of the newly created floor, and the vases and sculpted groups adorning the balustrade. At the same time, despite major remodelling undertaken inside the building, Joly endeavoured to retain the spirit of the original decor.

This decision cannot be explained entirely by the reigning eclecticism of the 1840s: it was also a way to set off the polarity that existed between the two buildings: one was eminently public and required a severe demeanour; the other was more intimate and private, and was more in keeping with the rocaille style. This polarity constitutes one of the unique aspects of the National Assembly, as compared to similar structures in other countries, which are formally more compact and aesthetically more unified. ♦



Jules de Joly, *Project for the Hôtel de Lassay*. Cross-section and elevation view of the courtyard facade and Galerie des Fêtes. Coloured engraving, 1844.



2 Amphitheatre

Created from 1828 to 1832, the Amphitheatre is shaped like the earlier Salle des Cinq-Cents: the extremely precise design is semi-circular in shape, which sets off the area of debate, and creates a public space arranged in two rows of galleries. The overall room has a lowered arch with a glass ceiling. Most of the imagery is concentrated on the supporting wall, the focal point of this design; still unchanged, it was created after the Revolution of 1848. The tapestry on the wall, designed from Raphael's *School of Athens*, echoes the statues of antique orators that once stood on either side of the rostrum in the first assembly Chamber, now in the Salle des Quatre-Colonnes.



TODAY

The Amphitheatre is fitted with cameras, so that the debates can be broadcast live on the National Assembly website; they also provide images for use by television stations. Electronic boxes have replaced the keys with which the deputies used to vote, and Internet connections have been installed in the rows.

François-Frédéric Lemot (above)

History and Fame

This relief on the orator's rostrum was initially placed in the Salle des Cinq-Cents. Joly kept this work for the Chamber under construction, as a symbol of the new regime's desire for historical continuity and to create a sense of solidarity among the French. Marble, 1797-1798.

After Raphaël (below)

The School of Athens

The change in regime (1848) meant that the iconography had to be altered. Instead of the paintings that were planned for the supporting wall of the Amphitheatre, Joly stretched gold-embroidered crimson velvet, according to one of his own designs. The central motif, *Louis Philippe I Swearing on the Constitutional Charter*, was replaced by a Gobelins tapestry (wool, silk and gold), 1683-1688 (right).



Sculptures in the Amphitheatre

The sculptures in the Amphitheatre are part of a highly structured design. The role of *Eloquence, Justice, Force* and *Prudence*, crowning the composition, is to inspire the behaviour and motivations of the parliamentarians' work. Below, *Public Order* and *Liberty* extol them to resist pressure from the executive branch and to oppose popular insurrection.

The Guignols

Nickname for two loges situated above the side entrances to the Amphitheatre: upholstered in red, they look like puppet theatres, revealing just the heads of the people sitting in them. They are reserved for photographers, television crews and government commissioners.



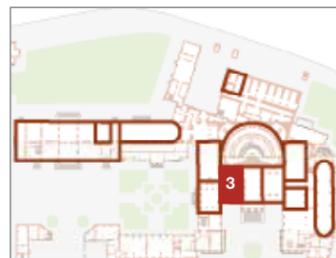
The Perchoir (left)

Nickname given to the seat of the President of the National Assembly, because it overlooks the Amphitheatre. Symbolically, however, the presidential chair is the same height as the highest seats in the Amphitheatre, a reminder that the President remains a deputy like the others. Designed by David, the presidential chair belonged to Lucien Bonaparte during the Council of Five Hundred. The word is sometimes used as a metonym for the function of the presidency of the Assembly.

James Pradier, Liberty [detail] (right)

With a panther-skin on her head, *Liberty* is trampling chains and a broken yoke underfoot. She holds the tricolour flag in her right hand, and a victory in the left, which replaced the swallow originally planned. This small figure commemorates the *Three Glorious Days*, as does an inscription on the base at the bottom of the statue. Marble, 1830-1832.





Eugène Delacroix
Oceanus (left) and
Mediterranean Mare (right)
 Oil paint and wax on the wall, 1833-1837.
 The painter completed the decoration of this room with a series of eight figures symbolising the rivers of France, along with the Mediterranean Sea and the Ocean, which, according to the artist, “form the natural frames of our country.” As part of restoration work undertaken in the room, the Oceanus was cleaned; during this process, an alteration to the composition in the upper section of the face was discovered. An underlying image appeared: a nose and two eyes looking in the opposite direction from Oceanus, suggesting an overpainting by the artist.

3 Salon Delacroix

Louis-Philippe, King of the French and not King of France, attended the opening session at the Palais Bourbon every year. A suitable space therefore had to be created, where he could receive homage from the parliamentarians. The new function of this room required a lavish decor: all the architectural elements were gilded and painted figures covered every surface. Completed in December 1836, the room was inaugurated to wide acclaim. Delacroix produced a work in keeping with the selected theme: “Four allegorical figures dominating the composition, who symbolise in [my] mind the guiding principles of the States: Justice, Agriculture, Industry and War.”

TODAY

According to tradition, left-wing deputies use the Salon Delacroix to reach their seats in the Amphitheatre. It is the room closest to the left side of the Chamber. This is also where last-minute negotiations are held concerning the amendments they are proposing during the sessions.

DELACROIX: OPTING FOR THE AVANT-GARDE

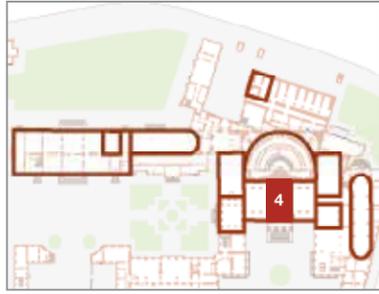
In August of 1833, the Minister of the Interior, Adolphe Thiers, commissioned Eugène Delacroix to decorate the Salon du Roi. The politician's choice was logical: eleven years earlier—when he was 25 years old—Thiers had written about the major artistic event in France, the Salon, the official exhibition for living artists. An avid supporter of change, the author defended the young artists, taking the side of those who were freeing themselves from the “yoke of the academy.” It was therefore not surprising that he developed a particular fondness for the foremost romantic painter of the time, and that, once in power, wanted to offer him such a prestigious opportunity to express his talent. Yet the attribution for this commission was greeted with surprise

and displeasure. On 11 April 1834, *Le Constitutionnel* published a critical article: “This is a painter so unconcerned with his glory, so unsure of his work, which was selected from such rough sketches, from mere indications on paper, to decorate an entire room in the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies; it is to such a painter that we have given one of the largest commissions for a monumental painting that has ever occurred in our time!” Delacroix had barely finished the work before the critics changed their minds. The press outdid itself in praise for the artist. Théophile Gautier, for example: “On seeing these cheerful and luminous paintings, one could imagine oneself in a Renaissance room decorated by artists from Florence...”



Eugène Delacroix, *Justice* [detail], Oil on mounted canvas, 1833-1838.





4 Salle Casimir-Perier

Situated in the alignment of the Cour d'Honneur and inspired from the design of Roman basilicas, this room features a series of eight Corinthian columns and a semi-circular arch; it is used as a vestibule for the amphitheatre and the adjoining rooms. The walls are decorated with statues placed in alcoves; they illustrate resistance to absolutism (Mirabeau and General Foy) and opposition to popular sedition (Bailly and Casimir Perier), and celebrate the Civil Code (Portalis and Tronchet). The coffered arch, with two bas-reliefs at either end, is illuminated by ten lunettes carved with different attributes (Meditation, Justice, Peace, Work, Industry, Commerce, Strength, War, Sea and Agriculture).



Henri de Triqueti
The Law as Protector [detail]

The bas-relief symbolises confidence in commerce and industry, the safeguards of government and the security of family. It faces a second group, featuring a much more dynamic composition, depicting *The Law as Avenger*. Stone, 1833-1834.

Francisque Joseph-Duret
Casimir-Perier
Marble, 1833.

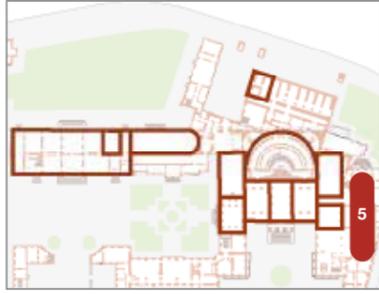
A BRONZE BAS-RELIEF WEIGHING FOUR TONS

The back of the room, which corresponds to the back wall of the amphitheatre, was unadorned at the start of the Third Republic. Thus, to commemorate the centennial of the Revolution in 1879, the Chamber of Deputies launched a competition to celebrate in situ the first meeting room, located in Versailles. The monument was supposed to consist of a column crowned with an image of the Republic, placed on a granite pedestal with two bronze bas-reliefs representing the sessions of 24 June and 4 August 1789. Jules Dalou, recently amnestied for his activities during the Paris Commune, participated in one of the winning projects. In 1881, Gambetta, then President of the Chamber, opted for Dalou's project, requesting that it be executed full-size and placed in the Salle Casimir-Perier. The work was first made in plaster and exhibited at the 1883 Salon. A decision was immediately made to reproduce the work in bronze, but this was not actually done until 1891. The bronze founder Eugène Gonon executed the work in a single piece; the lost-wax casting was a masterpiece of craftsmanship given the complexity of the model and the size: 6.5 by 2.3 meters!

TODAY

Members of the government enter the Palais Bourbon through this room to reach the Amphitheatre. This spot is particularly busy on Tuesday and Wednesday during questions to the government.





5 Library

The library is based on a rectangular floor plan. Three pairs of pillars on either side of the nave support a series of five domes on pendants illuminated by Diocletian windows. Delacroix painted the decorative elements from 1838 to 1847. The project was immense: he was responsible for four compositions for each dome and one for each of the two half domes. The artist had to fit twenty-two subjects into a difficult space, as the entrance to the room is located in the middle. He therefore decided to illustrate a sufficiently fragmented theme, the five fundamentals of human thought: poetry, theology, legislation, philosophy and the sciences.



Armillary sphere

The armillary sphere in the Library of the National Assembly may have been manufactured in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century by Erasmus Habermel; Rudolf II issued an imperial decree on 8 August 1594 naming him "creator of astronomical and geometric instruments."

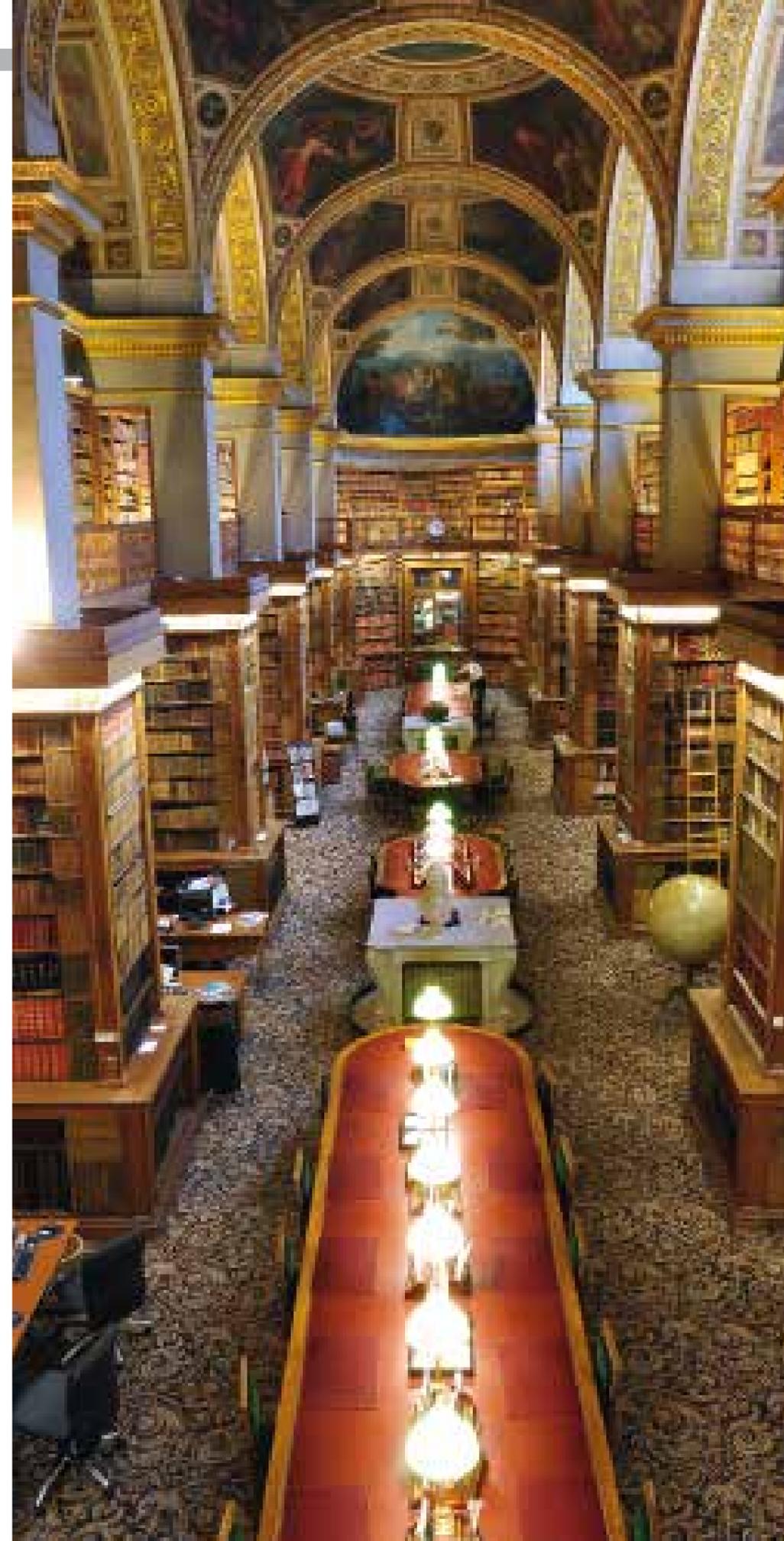
TODAY

The National Assembly library has adopted the digital revolution. The archives have been digitised, and the library's online catalogue includes no less than 600,000 books and periodicals, available to the deputies and their colleagues. The library also provides access to numerous online databases via the Assembly's intranet.



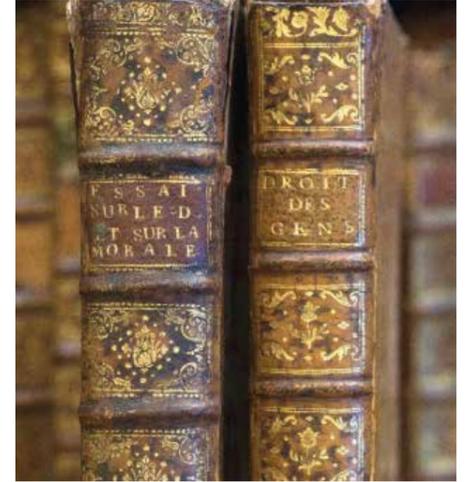
Eugène Delacroix
Cul-de-four of Peace

Orpheus Civilising the Uncultivated Greeks and Teaching Them the Arts and Peace. Encaustic painting, 1838-1847.



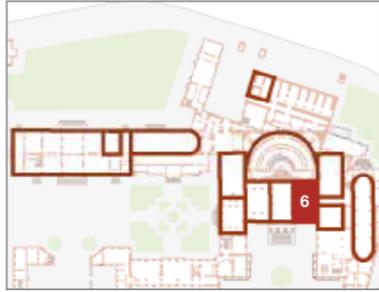
Library stacks

The books in the library, whose antique bindings contribute to the sober, hushed character of the working area, cover all the vertical surfaces. They are placed on shelves of light Dutch oak; halfway up, consoles support a passageway that runs around the circumference of the room.



A COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL TREASURES

The prestige of the Palais Bourbon's library goes beyond the quality of the paintings decorating the upper sections of the reading room. Its collection of books and periodicals, initially formed during the Revolution, has grown over the years with the addition of remarkable works, ranging from incunabula (with a Latin bible from Mainz, 1462) to a diverse group of manuscripts including the judgment of Joan of Arc (fifteenth century), the Codex borbonicus (an Aztec manuscript, ca. 1507) and the manuscript of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Finally, and above all, the library is a genuine conservatory for the parliamentary memory, as it contains Mirabeau's death mask and major historical first drafts by Victor Hugo, Jean Jaurès, Léon Blum and others.



6 Salon Abel-de-Pujol

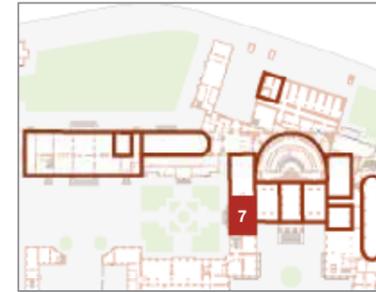
The theme selected for the decoration of the Salle Abel-de-Pujol, named for the artist who created the grisaille paintings on the ceiling (1838 to 1840), is similar in tone to that of the Salle des Conférences: the celebration of the royal figure. Here, the artist glorified the judicial events that marked the regimes, reminding the deputies of the monarch's right to initiate laws. Four figures embody the fundamental elements in the formation of French law: Salic law, the capitularies of Charlemagne (*opposite*), the edicts of Saint Louis and—a symbol of monarchical continuity and the perfection of the political system—the Charter of 1302.

TODAY

According to tradition, right-wing deputies access their seats in the Amphitheatre via the Salon Pujol. It is the room closest to the right side of the Chamber. This is also where last-minute negotiations are held on the amendments they are proposing during the sessions.



Abel de Pujol, *Charlemagne's capitularies*, Painting, 1838-1840.



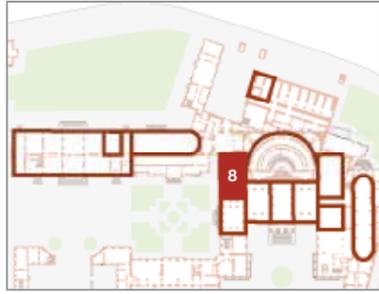
7 Salle des Quatre-Colonnes

A door leads from this vestibule, decorated with four columns, to the Amphitheatre. It is flanked by two sculpted busts: to the right, one representing Christian Democrat deputy Albert de Mun and to the left, Socialist Jean Jaurès. Their sculptures here illustrate the importance placed on political pluralism. In each of the corners of the room are statues of ancient Greek and Roman legislators— Brutus, Solon, Lycurgus and Cato—that were in the Council of Five Hundred in 1798 before the Amphitheatre was reconstructed in 1832. A marble monument on one of the walls bears the names of deputies who died for France during the First World War. Opposite is a statue of the Republic carved in homage to the deputies and parliamentary civil servants who died during the Second World War.



TODAY

The Salle des Quatre-Colonnes is the recognised meeting place where journalists interview deputies as they leave the Amphitheatre. The "sound bites" summing up the week's political news often come from the Salle des Quatre-Colonnes.



8 Salle des Pas-Perdus

Created on a former bedroom and “apartment of baths,” the Salle des Pas-Perdus appears solemn, due to the walls covered with yellow stucco from Siena; the ceiling was painted by Horace Vernet, with ornamental elements by Charles Séchan. The central motif consists of three allegories painted within trompe l’oeil frames. In the centre, *Peace Distributing Her Benefits* is framed by two themes depicting dynamic images: *The Spirit of Steam on Earth and Steam Expelling the Gods from the Seas*.

TODAY

The President of the session walks through the Salle des Pas Perdus, through a double line of Republican Guards, on his way to solemnly open the afternoon session. This ritual is highly symbolic: it signifies the subordinate position of military power to political power.

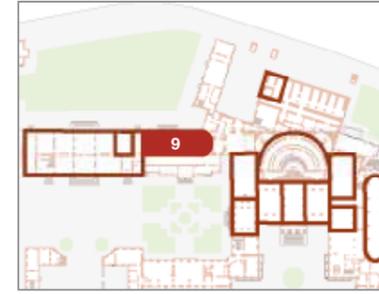


The President of the Assembly, flanked by two rows of republican guards, crosses this room from the Hôtel de Lassay to reach the Amphitheatre. Initiated under Louis-Philippe, this ceremony is conducted to the sound of drumbeats.



Horace Vernet *Peace Distributing Her Benefits*

In this triptych, the artist was able to use an allegorical approach for a modern subject, glorifying both material prosperity and technical progress (The Spirit of Steam on Earth and Steam Expelling the Gods From the Seas), as factors of peace (subject of the central motif). Oil on Canvas, 1839.



9 Salle des Fêtes and Galerie des Tapisseries

The Salles des Fêtes and the Galerie des Tapisseries form a link between the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Lassay. The former was remodelled from 1846 to 1848 with the addition of a sumptuous decor; 150 laborers worked day and night to meet the deadline set for the inauguration. The style created by the large windows and Ionic pilasters are similar to Versailles, yet the theme of the decor, created by Heim, is altogether different. A number of activities are celebrated on the walls: the arts, letters and sciences, industry, commerce and more.



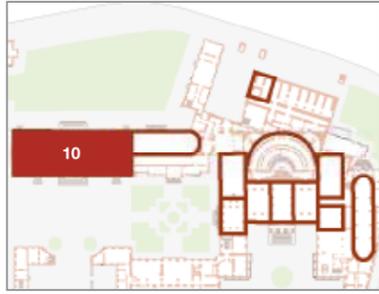
The Salle des Fêtes stands on the site of a wooden gallery created in 1809. It connects the Cabinet du Départ, at the end of the Hôtel de Lassay, to the Alechinsky Rotunda, which is the link between the two buildings.

TODAY

The Salle des Fêtes is used for public exhibitions and conferences, as well as for official ceremonies held in honour of foreign figures. This is also where the President of the National Assembly holds the ceremonies presenting the government’s New Year’s wishes.



Created under the presidency of the Duc de Morny, who wanted to display his collection of paintings there, the Galerie des Tapisseries doubled the Salle des Fêtes in 1860. The collection was broken up in 1865 and then replaced by a set of nine Beauvais tapestries that were placed in moulded panels, created in 1900.



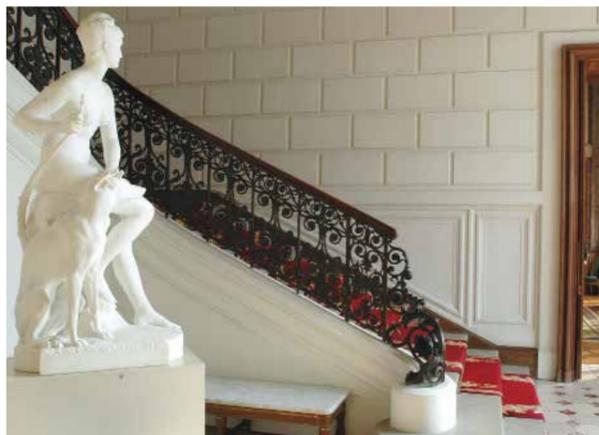
10 Hôtel de Lassay

Although the Hôtel de Lassay's restoration project considerably modified the building's overall appearance, the general layout remained the same: the front side of the ground floor retained three main rooms with a series of five salons on the garden side. All of these rooms, which were widely redecorated by Jules de Joly, were used as formal reception areas by the President. The five salons were designed as an ensemble in Joly's earliest plans. Thus, two large doors were installed between each room to facilitate movement during official receptions. The architect added an additional and particularly daring panoptic device to this section, underscored by a delicate and rich stucco decor—he cut through the partition walls and replaced the fireplace overmantels with large bay windows. This play on transparency, intended to emphasise the brilliance of the chandeliers and both expand and unify the space, did not change the individual character of each room, which are distinct through the use of diverse decorative elements. Heim was tasked with designing the overdoor features, themed in relation to the name of each room: Games, Seasons, Elements.



Hôtel de Lassay, courtyard side

The Hôtel de Lassay was altered considerably, but the architect was able to retain the spirit of the original building.



Staircase and *Diana the Huntress*

The additional floor, designed for the President's private apartments, required the construction of a staircase. The spatial layout of this element created a superb eighteenth-century pastiche. An elegant Diana the Huntress stands atop a pedestal in the centre of the vestibule.

Salon des Jeux

The Salon des Jeux is named for the overdoor decoration by Heim, which represents *Le Jeu de Boules*, *La Main Chaude*, *L'Escarpolette*, *Le Saut de Mouton*, *Colin-Maillard*, *Le Volant*. The Conference of Presidents, responsible for drawing up the Assembly's agenda for the current week and following two weeks, is held in this room.





Hôtel de Lassay garden (below)

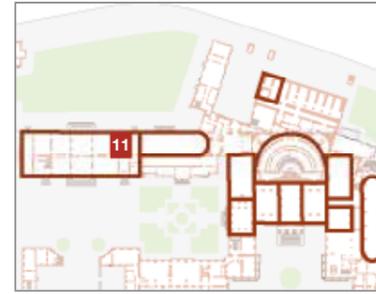
The garden is the only element that does not correspond to the esthetic principles in fashion during the first half of the eighteenth century. Instead, a large grassy area was created; it is neither divided by pathways nor embellished with ornaments. The only concession to a systematic layout is the pond and fountain, which are aligned with the Grand Salon.



François-Joseph Heim (left)

The Shuttlecock

Oil on mounted canvas, 1847-1848. François-Joseph Heim was asked to design the overdoor element in the Salon des Jeux and the Salon de Musique (top). Each of them, by faithfully reflecting the spirit of the eighteenth century (selection of subject, the plausibility of the attitudes and the costumes), constitutes a handsome illustration of the ambient eclecticism.



11 Cabinet du Départ

This room has been a study since the construction of the Hôtel de Lassay. The office, decorated with furniture from the Château de Versailles, was requisitioned in 1794 for the Committee of Public Safety. The Louis XIV-era carpet comes from a series of 93 carpets woven by the Savonnerie manufactory pour the Grande Galerie of the Louvre. Above the doors are allegories by François-Joseph Heim. A Gobelins tapestry reproduces Raphael's famous painting, *The School of Athens*. Two candelabra with 11 branches are installed on either side of the door leading to the Salle des Fêtes.



TODAY

A bell on the desk in this room rings throughout the Palais Bourbon to announce the imminent opening of the session. The Cabinet du Départ is named for the fact that the President of the session walks from this room to reach the Amphitheatre.



The Clock
Clock in the Cabinet du Départ.
Gilt bronze, ca. 1860.

THE PEOPLE, THE DEPUTIES AND THE KING THE REVOLUTION STARTS OVER

BY EMMANUEL DE WARESQUIEL



Honoré Daumier

*Bust of
François Guizot*

*Les Célébrités du Juste
Milieu* (also known as
The Parliamentarians),
1832-1835, painted
or natural terracotta.

At the start of his *Mémoires*, François Guizot summed up the extraordinary events that took place between the end of the Empire and the start of what would be called, inaptly in fact, the Restoration: “During the Revolution, we fought; under the Empire, we remained silent; the Restoration traded freedom for peace. With the ambient susceptibility and lack of experience, the

movement and the clatter of freedom, it was a civil war, about to start over again.” The regime established under Louis XVIII, the younger brother of Louis XVI, was certainly a monarchy, but it was a parliamentary regime as well. The constitutional charter of June 1814 established a system by which the legislative power was shared by the king and the two Chambers, and even granted the latter the possibility of indirectly initiating laws. Admittedly, the electoral system for the Chamber of Deputies was extremely elitist, and would remain so to a certain extent until 1848. The deputies were elected by slightly less than 100,000 electors (under the Restoration) from a population of 30 million people. These were the famous “eligible voters” who paid more than 300 francs in

annual property taxes and were assumed to be the only ones qualified to participate in the nation’s political life. Royer-Collard, one of the great orators, later to become President of the Chamber during the Restoration, described this as a “metaphor” of representation. Nevertheless, the Chamber would become, along with the press, a forum for essential freedoms and speech in the country throughout its political process. It is hard to overestimate the importance held by the great orators of the Chamber at the time: Camille Jordan, Royer-Collard, Benjamin Constant and Foy on the left; La Bourdonnaie, Corbière and Villèle on the right under the Restoration, but also Guizot, Thiers, Cormenin, Odilon Barrot and many others under the July Monarchy, after 1830. These orators not only excelled at addressing the Chamber, they were also skilled political players; furthermore, they the doctrinaires of their political actions, as both authors and speakers. Until 1848, what Thibaudet would later call political literature (during the Third Republic) was inextricably linked to action. Later, these two occasionally contradictory exercises of politics would diverge.

Guizot, who created a chair in the history of civilisation at the Sorbonne is one example. With his eloquence, he was the embodiment and voice of the parliamentary system during the July Monarchy. On 26 January 1844, one of the most violent scenes in the entire history of the constitutional monarchy took place. At this



Charles Motte (after official documents)

Coloured map of Paris with the locations of barricades and troops during the July 1830 Revolution, undated. This map was probably made by the authorities to maintain tighter control over Parisian insurrections.

François-Joseph Heim

Louis-Philippe Swearing on the Constitutional Charter on 9 August 1830

Oil on canvas, 1834-1835, Hôtel de Lassay.



“Liberty fosters a sharing of power and a mutual respect among those who hold this power. Liberty is at the heart of constitutional power, as a result of its consistent influence and respect for the laws.”

François Guizot, Chamber of Deputies, 29 December 1830.

Théodore Chassériau

Alexis de Tocqueville

1850, oil on canvas,
Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon coll., Versailles.



time, Guizot was President of the Council, leader of the resistance against the liberal Party of Movement that was pushing to democratise the electoral system. The discussion revolved around the principle of loss of citizenship rights, which brought up the issue of emigration. Yet in the eyes of his adversaries, Guizot was himself an emigrant because he had joined the king in Ghent, Belgium, during the Hundred Days, when he was still a young secretary general at the Ministry of Interior—with the purpose, he would say, of pleading the cause of constitutional principles. The attack lasted nearly two hours, and for two hours, Guizot would stand up to the Assembly, improvising—written speeches were not allowed—yet perfectly mastering the discussion, defending his past in long sequences punctuated with the same leitmotiv, proudly tossed out to the pack of his hecklers: “Yes, I was in Ghent.” Louis Blanc described Guizot during this period: “His peremptory gesture, his dogmatic tone gave him something indomitable.” What has come down to us from this long speech full of passion and suppressed violence is this: “The insults, the slander, the superficial anger can be repeated and piled as high as you want, but they shall never rise above my disdain.”

Tony-François de Bergue
Episode from the 1848 Revolution

Nineteenth century, oil on wood.
Musée Carnavalet coll., Paris.
Insurrections after the abolition of the National Workshops; officers ordering soldiers to fire.

Anonymous
The National Assembly Overrun During the Insurrection of 15 May 1848

Nineteenth century, engraving.



The art of oratory also implied the brilliant turn of phrase, a moment when a majority could shift on a single word, in a period when parties—not to mention parliamentary groups—took a very long time to form and even longer to consolidate. The entire history of the Chamber during the Second and Third Republics is littered with these oratorical disputes that occasionally came very close to personal duels: between Thiers, Molé and Guizot in the late 1830s and early 1840s; between Victor Hugo and Falloux in 1850 on the question of Catholic education; between Clemenceau and Jules Ferry in the 1880s; and between Clemenceau and Jean Jaurès from 1906 to 1909. Take the example of another famous session, that of 12 June 1906. Clemenceau, Minister of the Interior in Sarrien’s Cabinet at the time, refuted the “sumptuous mirage” of Jaurès’s socialism, who had just violently criticised the doctrine of “absolute individualism”: “You, singly, do not embody socialism, you are not the good Lord Himself.” Jaurès’s courteous response: “And you, Monsieur Minister, are not the devil.” And Clemenceau’s immediate comeback: “That’s what you think.” Right-wing historians would claim that the Chamber of Deputies formed majorities according to common interests; left-wing scholars would say they were based on ideas, a mystique. In any case, they often fluctuated, which explains, for example, the bloodbath of ministers during



Henri-Félix Philippoteaux
Lamartine Rejecting the Red Flag in Front of the Hôtel de Ville, 24 February 1848 [détail]
Ca. 1848, Musée du Petit-Palais coll., Paris.

“You will triumph, fear not, over the final difficulties still remaining on the path to an honest Republic, the national Republic, the Republic of universal law, without exception, without category or preference, excluding none of its citizens—the Republic of the entire nation.”

Alphonse de Lamartine, National Constituent Assembly, 12 June 1848.



V. Adam et J. Arnout, *Proclamation of the Republic, 4 May 1848*
From *Annales de la République française*, 1848, lithograph with watercolour.

“The orator is the sower of seeds. He takes from his heart, his instincts, his passions, his beliefs, his sufferings, his dreams, his ideas, and throws them, by handfuls, into the midst of men. Every brain is to him an open furrow. One word dropped from the tribune always takes root somewhere, and becomes a thing. You say, ‘Oh! it is nothing—it is a man talking,’ and you shrug your shoulders. Shortsighted creatures! It is a future which is germinating, it is a new world bursting into bloom.”

Victor Hugo, *Napoléon le Petit*, 1852.



Victor Hugo on the terrace of Hauteville House, in exile on Guernsey Island in 1868. After the coup d'état of 2 December 1851, more than 110 legislators were deported to Guiana and even more were exiled by “Napoleon the Small.”

the Third Republic. They also came together in an attitude of absolute defence, whenever their situation appeared to be untenable: in March of 1830, 221 liberals refused a vote of confidence for the reactionary Charles X, resulting in the famous laws in July that destroyed freedom and, several days later, triggered the eponymous revolution. On 20 May 1876, 363 republicans voted against the suspension of their Chamber as decreed by President MacMahon. Political history is sometimes a matter of arithmetic.

The deputies fought peacefully, yet they could also easily cross the line to revolution. It was Lamartine, on 24 February 1848, who

stood at the rostrum of the Chamber (overrun by the public) and, after praising the courage of the Duchesse d'Orléans, who had come to claim the regency for her son, requested the formation of a temporary government. It was Jules Favre, in the night of 3–4 September 1870, who proposed the deposition of Napoleon III in the name of 27 republican deputies. But most often, revolution was born in the streets, while the deputies, overrun or not, tried to uphold their legitimacy. In July 1830, the liberal deputies of Charles X's last Chamber joined the ongoing revolution, took control and ended up quashing it, according to the republicans, in the name of the Duc d'Or-



Jules Didier and Jacques Guiaud, *The Palace of the Legislative Body after its Last Session. Proclamation of the Fall of the Empire, 4 September 1870*, nineteenth century, oil on canvas, Musée Carnavalet coll., Paris.

léans, proclaimed King of France on 9 August. After the revolution of February 1848, the deputies elected by universal suffrage to the Constituent Assembly of April resisted the Parisian uprising in May and June—although not without difficulty and some fear. Tocqueville, like Victor Hugo, both elected in April, recounted the deputies' overwhelming and uncontrollable fear when the working classes of Paris erupted into their temporary Chamber in the garden of the Palais Bourbon on 15 May 1848. Two republics clashed that day, as they would once again clash in March 1871 with the Paris Commune: the social republic and the republic of order. In Hugo's words: “The invasion of 15 May was a strange spectacle. Waves of men in tatters coming down or rather flowing the length of the pillars by the lower gallery and even the upper gallery as far as the Chamber, thousands of flags waving everywhere. The office of the President, the platform of the secretary, the rostrum had disappeared and had become a heap of men. Men were seated on the President's chair, astride the copper griffons of his armchair, standing on the secretaries' table, standing on

the stenographers' desks, standing on the velvet of the rostrum... It took a half-hour to hear half a sentence. So that what a person wanted to say, he wrote, and constantly hoisted boards on a pike over everyone's head. A representative, Mr Duchaffaut, was caught by the neck and threatened with a dagger. Several others were manhandled.” After successfully resisting the anonymous turmoil of the Parisians, (nearly) all these same deputies would fall to the turmoil embodied by the man behind the coup d'état of 2 December 1851. More than 110 parliamentarians would be deported to French Guiana, and above all, exiled by “Napoleon the Small.”

It was only after all this unrest that the Assembly would become sovereign, once it had, in a way, ended the Revolution. The definitive rejection of the monarchy on January 1875 (with the Wallon amendment), then again in June of 1876, along with the major constitutional laws in the 1880s, created a parliamentary republic that would transform from a conservative body into an opportunist one, and from opportunist to radical after the Panama scandal in 1892. ❖

KEY DATES

1814

30 May Louis XVIII enters Paris: First Restoration.

1815

20 March Napoleon's return: the 100 Days. Return of Louis XVIII on 8 July: Second Restoration.

1820

26 March Suspension of individual freedoms.

1827

5 November Dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies.

1830

27 July Paris insurrections: the Three Glorious Days. Charles X abdicates on 2 August. On 9 August, Louis-Philippe I becomes king: the July Monarchy.

1848

23 February Paris insurrections. The regime collapses the following day, and Louis-Philippe abdicates in favour of his grandson. Second Republic is proclaimed on 4 May. Working-class insurrections in June.

1851

2 December Coup d'état by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, President of the Republic, who extends his ten-year mandate. The Second Empire is proclaimed exactly one year later.

1860

24 November Liberal political reforms, assemblies have the right to respond to the annual address from the government. Individual, electoral and press freedoms are re-established on 11 January 11, 1864. Right to strike is legalised on 25 May.

1870

19 July France declares war on Prussia. Napoleon III surrenders at Sedan on 2 September. Fall of the Second Empire and proclamation of the Third Republic.

1870 | 1958

THE DEPUTIES IN CRAMPED QUARTERS

The Third and Fourth Republics definitively established the regime of national representation. The fast-growing legislature soon ran out of space, leading to the series of renovation projects undertaken during this period.

By YOANN BRAULT

The defeat of 1870 and the episode of the Commune sent the representatives of the legislative branch into exile. After traveling to Bordeaux then to Versailles, on 27 November 1879 the deputies returned to the Palais Bourbon after an absence of nine years. At the time, the Chamber of the Third Republic had far more members than the Chambers of Louis-Philippe and of the Second Empire (this legislative body had only 260 members). Fitting the 531 parliamentarians returning to Paris into the Amphitheatre was not an easy task. At this point the President of the Chamber, Léon Gambetta, examined measures: he asked Jules de Joly's son, Edmond—who had been working for the government since 1865—to study ways to expand the seating capacity.

The narrow rows were not, however, the only faults enumerated by the deputies. As early as 1880, they were criticising various problems in the amphitheatre: the lack of ventilation, a dysfunction that the author of a report for the public hygiene commission (March 1901) cited frankly as the reason for the death of a dozen elected officials. By the end of the Second Empire, the mediocre condition of

the ventilation system had prompted the *questeurs* (parliamentary administrators) to undertake a number of renovations, in compliance with the ideas suggested by Arthur-Jules Morin, Director of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers and author, in 1865, of a work on this issue. Yet the replacement of the mechanical ventilation with a natural system did not produce the anticipated results.

And finally, added to these practical problems was a more intangible requirement: during a period when the leading European monarchies were building elegant parliamentary palaces from London to Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Rome and Stockholm, as well as the distant Melbourne, the young French Republic—for which the Parliament was the indisputable centre of political life, had to offer its elected officials a monument that would also stand as a symbol.

Therefore, in November 1879, Gambetta promoted a study to modernise the Palais Bourbon and commissioned Joly to “examine whether it would be possible to use part of the palace's large courtyard to construct a new amphitheatre.” He also encouraged the architect to travel to other capitals and study major European parliament



The large number of deputies during the Third Republic created crowded conditions within the Amphitheatre, especially during votes, such as here, on 10 January 1911.

buildings. Shortly after, in March 1882, an internal commission, realising that it would be impossible to improve the existing room to satisfaction, concluded that a new Chamber room had to be built; what had been one proposal among many others two years earlier had become a clear necessity. Joly (1882, 1886 and 1890), and his successors, Edouard Buquet (1893, 1898 and 1905) and Georges Demoget (1913) proposed various solutions—some of which called for the demolition of the facade of the Seine side—although none was authorised: the political officials who had promoted the undertaking left office; budgetary problems soon became pressing; it all resulted in the continual postponement of this ambitious project. The problem

of insufficient space remained, inspiring this diatribe from the Secretary General to the President's office, Eugène Pierre: “It's like a shoe that's too narrow; no matter what you do, it always hurts; the Chamber from 1832 is not a constitutional size.” The deputies were soon forced to adopt a number of expedient actions to carve out the necessary space: under the presidency of Charles Floquet (1885-1893), an idea was proposed to divide the Salles des Gardes and the Salon de l'Empereur with a false ceiling to create a press room.

Although the *questeurs* did not manage to create a sufficiently functional and comfortable working space for the deputies, they did try to attend to their comfort, when they

were not in session. In February 1900, Edouard Buquet submitted a proposal to transform the refreshment area; he suggested cladding it in “large carved panels of Sèvres sandstone.” Sculptors Alfred Boucher (1850-1934) and Constant Roux (1865-1929) were commissioned by the Minister of Public Instruction and the Beaux-Arts to create four decorative panels symbolising the seasons. The decor was completed in early 1902. A *Suzanne*, carved by Théophile Barrau (1848-1913), was installed in the niche and a Sèvres vase was placed in the centre of the room. Two additional panels, *Water* and *Fire*, both by Roux, completed the decoration on the front of the bar in 1905. Meanwhile, the technical modernisation of the Chamber moved forward in stages: in 1880, the Chamber itself was equipped with incandescent lighting, a method of illumination that was only extended to the rest of the buildings in 1899 and to the apartments in 1912. At the time, electricity was produced by gas motors set up in the Cour Sully. The great flood of 1910 therefore meant that the Chamber was plunged into unheated darkness.

While the First World War forced the Chamber to perform only absolutely necessary maintenance repairs and to protect the buildings from bombing, the law of 28 December 1931, “aimed at the immediate execution of certain work concerning the improvement of the national instrument” (construction or restoration of civil buildings, national palaces and public monuments), granted exceptio-

nal funds to the *questeurs* to undertake work they deemed necessary. This money allowed the Office of the Chamber to embark on a major programme: a decision was made to construct a semi-circular Chamber, the Colbert Room in place of the eponymous courtyard, and to create services instead of apartments for officials. Their occupants, *questeurs* and high-ranking civil servants, were re-housed in a building constructed between 1932 and 1935, to the left of the Allée de la Présidence.

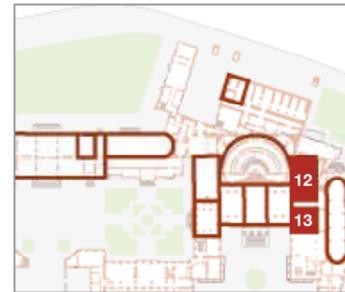
Parliamentary life came to a stop as the Palais Bourbon was requisitioned during the Occupation as quarters for the Luftwaffe military court, while a department responsible for organising the Service de Travail Obligatoire (Compulsory Work Force) employed a few students from the École Normale Supérieure there. The battles during the Liberation caused some damage: a fire in the library destroyed some 20,000 volumes.

After 1945 microphones appeared in the Chamber’s amphitheatre. The palace architect, Marcel Macary, undertook major work after seeing to the repairs required after the Liberation: he linked the east and west wings, added elevators and used the mezzanine and attic spaces to install the administrative offices. Finally, in 1954, in the first in a series of acquisitions, the Assembly purchased buildings outside the Assembly complex itself, on Rue de l’Université, thus expanding the number of services available to deputies. ❖



Georges Demoget
Remodeling Project for the Chamber of Deputies

Elevation view from the quay. This project, which required the destruction of Poyet’s peristyle, adopted an aesthetic style matching that of the Grand Palais. Ink on paper, 1912.



12 Salle des Conférences



Jules de Joly remodelled this room, the former dining room of the Condé princes, decorated with royal symbol, in 1830. Over time, the institution has aimed to make this a more republican area. A bust of Marianne now sits under the French crown on the mantelpiece. Opposite, a statue of Henri IV includes an inscription mentioning how close the “good King Henri” was to the people of France. On the ceiling, a series of paintings by Heim illustrates the history of the parliaments alongside the royalty, legitimising the constitutional monarchy of the time. Finally, two large paintings hang on the wall to the right of the chimney: *Philippe le Bel Holding the Estates General in the Notre Dame de Paris Church on 10 April 1302*, by August Vinchon, and *The Patriotic Devotion of the Burgheers of Calais*, by Ary Scheffer.

TODAY

The Salle des Conférences, next to the Amphitheatre, is where deputies finalise their work for the session, read their newspapers or check their messages before entering the Amphitheatre. This room also leads to the parliamentary “buvette” (bar).



The Piano

A piece of furniture in the Salles des Conférences, near the Amphitheatre, under the supervision of huissiers. It contains individual boxes in which each deputy can receive messages.



13 SALON DES MARIANNES

Since 2004, two collections of busts of Marianne, the allegorical figure of the French Republic, have been exhibited in the Salon des Mariannes, located in the vestibule of the Palais Bourbon. All very different in style, they illustrate both artistic and political developments.

THE THIRD REPUBLIC, FROM TRIUMPH TO POWERLESSNESS

BY EMMANUEL DE WARESQUIEL

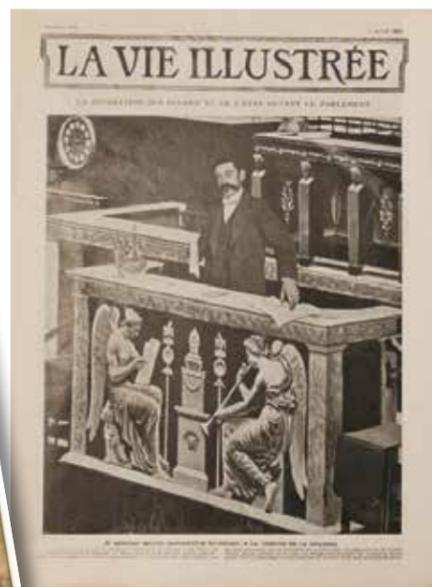


Le Petit Journal,
6 February 1898

Scandalous session in the Chamber of Deputies: During the Dreyfus affair, Jaurès is struck by the Comte de Bernis, a monarchist deputy, while on the podium.

La Vie Illustrée,
7 April 1905

Engraving of Aristide Briand, rapporteur for the law concerning the separation of Church and State, on the podium of the Chamber of Deputies.



In the 1930s, Albert Thibaudet, author of *La République des professeurs*, wrote a keen analysis of the history of the Third Republic in terms of thirty-year generations. There was the generation of the founders, the elected assembly of Bordeaux and then Versailles until 1879, of Thiers, Gambetta, Jules Grévy and Waldeck-Rousseau; then the generation of the Dreyfus Affair, with Clemenceau and Jaurès; and finally, the generation of the “Cartels des Gauches” a radical-socialist group in the 1920s, including Briand and the triumphant graduates of the École Normale Supérieure: Herriot, Painlevé and Blum. But behind this brilliant gallery, the faces of the deputies had changed dramatically in a half-century.

The provincial notables, aristocrats and property-owning bourgeois from the elections in February 1871 had gradually been replaced throughout the 1880s, from one election to the

next, by lawyers, merchants and teachers. The tone shifted gradually from the *grande* to the *petite* bourgeoisie. From 1893 to 1914, nearly one-third of the parliamentarians came from working-class origins, the sons of craftsmen, workers and peasants. These men rose from their origins to reach the heights of the republican elite: Clemenceau through medicine, Jaurès through the university, Briand through the bar. Another change occurred soon after with the major, radical educational reforms; the Jules Ferry law of 1880 creating free, obligatory and secular primary schools with Herriot’s proposal for a unique school: that of “heirs” gradually becoming one of students with stipends. The black hussars (the nickname for primary school teachers during the Third Republic) had done their work, as well as the educational reform in 1902 by Combes, known as le petit père (little father) which closed non-authorized religious schools. The deputy of the 1920s was a man of modest origins who had built himself up through study, a secular man of the provinces in a republic of comrades, networks and lodges; in sum, a cultivated humanist. In 1925, an English liberal, Lord Bryce, made this observation: “In no other legislature of modern times can one find a group of such competent political men, so skilled and distinguished [as the French parliament].” This description applied equally well to a radical deputy. “I believe that France is radical,” said a consternated Barrès, to whom Briand replied: “You have the spirit, but we have the cadres.”

The radical, even radical-socialist mystique of the Chambers was, starting in 1898, based on two battles, that of total secularism—



which culminated in 1905 with the law calling for the separation of Churches and State—and that of tax redistribution, with the creation of an income tax by Caillaux in 1914. This radical period of the republic coincided above all with the absolute primacy of the Chamber of Deputies over the country’s political life. In the 1890s, the deputy was the most important figure in the district, not the civil servant.

In Paris, the Chamber created an organisation of committees—the powerful budget committee became a genuine seat of power within the republic—and instituted the formation of parliamentary groups. The importance of the Chamber can be assessed by the status of its presidents. This figure obviously had far more power than the President of the Republic himself. Elected at the start of each parliamentary session, he went to the Chamber in a morning coat between two rows of soldiers; he opened

and closed the proceedings, controlled the agenda, directed the debates, allowed deputies to speak, and received the bills and proposals for laws, as well as petitions and resignations. When the President donned his jacket, the session was over. There were occasional complaints in the corridors of the Chamber about the overarching power of the presidents, even their “suffocating dictatorship.” Gambetta in particular was criticised, as he wouldn’t hesitate to step down from the platform to defend his ideas to the assembled members, as on 19 May 1881, when he spoke brilliantly in favour of a vote by list, leading Jules Simon to say that “We have come to an era when the government is run by the President of the Chamber.” The old parties that were formed along with the republic, particularly the radicals and the radical-socialists, continued to subsist, with their allies and traditional methods, until the First World War. It was not the sacred poli-

René-Achille Rousseau-Decelle
The Chamber in Session (or Jaurès on the Podium)

Oil on canvas, 1907. This painting was exhibited at the 1907 Salon and then given to the Assembly.

“Glory to the countries where one speaks, shame to the countries where one remains silent.”

Georges Clemenceau, Chamber of Deputies, 4 June 1888.

tical union of 1914 (by which the left wing agreed not to oppose the government) and the Chamber's voluntary relinquishment of some of its powers to the government—especially to Clemenceau after 1917—that put an end to this system. The extraordinary instability of the Cabinet that followed the failure of the Cartel des Gauches (Left-Wing Coalition) in 1915—which persisted until the late 1930s—was, in fact, due to far more than the “restructuring of the parties” that was so widely discussed at the time. It can be explained by a more serious phenomenon that arose from the Chamber's inability to govern from the centre. Before the war, the clerical issue that stood as the dividing line between the middle (right and left), did not prevent the latter from forming alliances.

After the war, particularly in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a new dividing line began to take shape: that of order and authority. The nationalisation of philosophical and scholarly ideals, which Julien Benda had condemned in his *Trahison des clercs* in 1927, did not help matters, nor did the rising power of extremists on the far right and far left. Furthermore, the ambient antiparlamentarianism on the right was exacerbated in the early 1930s—to the point where far-right leagues marched on the Palais Bourbon on 6 February 1934, an event that discredited the old system. The “600-headed sovereign,” as described by Jules Lemaitre in 1901, was decidedly

SCANDALS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

After the First World War, the radical republic suffered from an increasingly murky collusion between the political and parliamentary worlds and that of finance. The stock market crash of 1929 and its aftermath didn't help matters. In the 1930s, a striking series of events made front-page headlines. It started with a female banker well ensconced in Parisian society. In 1930, Marthe Hanau was sentenced to two years in prison after having abused the trust of thousands of small investors via her newspaper, *la Gazette du Franc* and the complicity of several highly placed deputies. Along the way,

the Minister of Finances, Raoul Péret, would be accused of having received 300,000 francs in fees from the Oustric Bank where he had been a lawyer since 1926—without ever having done any legal work. Other members of parliament were also implicated. Albert Oustric, who went bankrupt in 1930, used his political influence to list unauthorised securities on the French stock market. Péret, who was brought before the High Court of Justice, would be acquitted in July 1931. But the biggest scandal of all involved an ambitious swindler named Alexandre Stavisky. With legislators and local notables as accomplices, he created

the Crédit Municipal de Bayonne bank by issuing savings bonds backed by stolen and fake jewels. The scam fell apart on 3 January 1934. On 9 January, in a mountain chalet, “Stavisky committed suicide by a gunshot fired at him from point-blank range,” as was wryly noted the next day in the newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné*. The police had been searching for him for years, but strangely, the dozen or so ongoing legal investigations against him had been quietly withdrawn. Stavisky's shadow would hang over the anti-parliamentary riots of 6 February 1934, which broke out barely one month after his death.



Portrait of Georges Clemenceau on the podium of the Chamber of Deputies, Armistice Day, 11 November 1918

From *L'illustration*, November 16-23, 1918, p. 453

ailing. The day after the Cartel des Gauches's triumph, on 11 May 1924, the front-page heading of a friendly newspaper read: “All the seats, right now.” In the eyes of many, the republic of comrades had become the republic of scoundrels. The Action Française, in its last days, led the movement against the “republic of powerlessness and corruption” tainted by affairs that stirred memories of the Panama and “Monsieur Gendre” scandals: Marthe Hanau, the Oustric bank in 1930, the Stavisky scandal in 1934. Faced with this rising tide of criticism and crises, the Chamber gradually surrendered some of its powers—not voluntarily as at the start of the war, but because it was powerless to institute reforms or find solutions to the economic crises triggered by the stock market crash of 1929.

Starting in 1935, laws were replaced by decree-law by legislative delegation. There were

increasing moves to invest the government with full powers, even though the Cabinets were replaced at a rapid pace. This concept of “full powers” (*pleins pouvoirs*) brings to mind a certain 10 July 1940. The scene took place in Vichy in the theatre of the casino. Philippe Pétain was President of the Council. He had requested an armistice from the Germans on 16 June. On 10 July, the deputies and senators who had just arrived from Bordeaux, fleeing the advancing German army, voted to give Pétain full powers. “The National Assembly gives full power to the government of the Republic, under the authority and signature of Marshall Pétain, granting him the power to write ... a new constitution for the French State.” The outcome of this decision is, of course, all too well known, but it is always easier to predict events in hindsight. Yet eighty parliamentarians, led by Vincent Badie, the deputy from the Hérault, were clear-sighted enough to save the honour of the Third Republic. On that day, they drew up and signed a statement: “The undersigned parliamentarians ... refuse to vote for a project that will ineluctably result in the disappearance of the republican regime.” And thus the die was cast for the following four years. ❖



American tanks at the Palais Bourbon during the liberation of Paris. Postcard, August 1944.

THE “FOURTH”: A TWELVE-YEAR REPUBLIC

BY YOANN BRAULT

The traditional right-wing and radical political movements that governed during the years preceding the war were discredited by the end of the First World War. Three parties dominated the political scene: the Communist Party, the SFIO (French Section of the Workers' International) and the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), a newcomer inspired from the Christian-Democrats. The proposed Constitution was adopted by referendum on October 13, 1946, and sent from the Parliament to the executive branch. The National Assembly held most of the power; it voted the laws and approved the President of the Council, who answered to the Assembly. However, this Assembly regime was particularly unstable: the proportional method of voting used to elect the deputies favoured the creation of multiple parties; they constantly shifted alliances, which caused the fall of one government after another. This chronic instability, along with partisan alliances, the Parliament's inability to act and the government's failed efforts to solve the Algerian conflict, led to the downfall of the Fourth Republic. French President René Coty named Charles de Gaulle as President of the Council and threatened to resign if the National Assembly did not approve him. The legislative body supported Coty's recommendation, and on 1 June, approved de Gaulle's government by 329 votes, with 224 opposing votes and 37 abstentions. The constitutional law voted on 3 June called for a revision of the Fourth Republic Constitution. The proposed constitution was written during the summer and submitted to a referendum on 28 September 1958. Adopted by a wide majority, it ushered in the Fifth Republic.

KEY DATES

1871

18 March Start of the Paris Commune; this insurrection ends on 28 May, after a week of brutal fighting. Thiers is elected President of the Republic on 31 August.

1881

16 June Jules Ferry law on free primary school education.

1894

15 October Start of the Dreyfus Affair.

1914

28 June Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, is assassinated in Sarajevo, triggering a set of complex alliances: Germany declares war on Russia on 2 August, then France on 4 August. The Battle of the Marne begins on 6 September.

1918

11 November Germany surrenders at Rethondes. The Treaty of Versailles is signed on 28 June 1919.

1936

3 May The Popular Front wins the legislative elections. Léon Blum is asked to form the government.

1939

3 September France declares war on Germany.

1940

22 June France is occupied. Maréchal Pétain obtains emergency powers on 10 July.

1944

25 August Liberation of Paris. Général de Gaulle creates a provisional government on 9 September.

1945

21 October Referendum: The constitution of 1875 is abandoned and de Gaulle's government remains in power.

1958

2 June Général de Gaulle receives emergency powers. Referendum on the constitution on 28 September: end of the Fourth Republic.

In the rooms and corridors...

EIGHT MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES



Olympe de Gouges
(1748-1793)

She championed all the great causes of her time, defending the rights of those excluded from civil and political society or slaves from the French colonies. A pioneering feminist, her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) is a landmark text for those who combat abuse and discrimination against women. She tirelessly advocated for women's rights in her political brochures or her theatre. From 1789 to 1793, she regularly sent missives to the elected assemblies. Her writings are the chronicle of a free woman at a time when women were neither voters nor eligible for public office. She was guillotined on 3 November 1793, during the Terror.

Salon des Quatre-Colonnes



Alphonse de Lamartine
(1790-1869)

Initially a poet, he then became a career diplomat and earned fame in 1830 with his *Méditations poétiques*. Elected a deputy in 1833, he was called a "revolutionary of the imagination" under Louis-Philippe, for his incoherent political stances. A member of the provisional government of 1848 and unsuccessful candidate for the presidency of the Republic, he retired from public life to pursue his writing.

Salle des Conférences



Victor Hugo
(1802-1885)

By 1824, Hugo was the favorite poet of the royal government. He supported the July Monarchy, and in 1845, Louis-Philippe appointed him a Peer of France. Elected to the Constituent Assembly after the Revolution of 1848, then to the Legislative Assembly that followed, he campaigned for freedom of the press and universal suffrage. He opposed Napoleon III ("Napoleon the Small"), fled in exile to Brussels and then to Guernsey. He returned to Paris with the Revolution of 4 September 1870, and was elected deputy; he retired and did not take sides during the Commune. As a senator from the Seine in 1876, he sat among the republicans.

Salle des Conférences



Victor Schoelcher
(1804-1893)

Elected from Martinique, then Guadeloupe, Schoelcher was Under-Secretary of State to the Navy in 1848; this former militant for the abolition of slavery presided over the committee that would enshrine abolition in law. He opposed Louis Napoleon's coup d'état in 1851 and was banished. After returning from England in 1870, he was re-elected deputy from Martinique and attempted, in vain, to prevent the rupture between the Paris Commune and the government. He became a senator for life in 1875.

Library



Léon Gambetta
(1838-1882)

Born in Cahors, Gambetta moved to Paris in 1860, where he worked as a lawyer. Elected in 1869, he became the leader of the republican minority in the legislature. He proclaimed the deposition of the emperor on hearing of the fall of Sedan (1870). Minister of the Interior in 1871, he left the besieged city of Paris by hot-air balloon. He worked with his left-wing friends for the vote of the constitutional laws that instituted the Republic in 1875. He was President of the Assembly in 1879 and became head of a short-lived government in 1881.

Library



Georges Clemenceau
(1841-1929)

A native of the Vendée région, Clémenceau was the son of a Republican soldier, a "bleu." Nicknamed the "destroyer of ministries," he was a doctor in Paris, President of the Municipal Council of Paris and a deputy in 1875. Beaten in the 1893 elections, he became a journalist at *L'Aurore*. A senator from the Var, he became Minister of Interior in 1906, then President of the Council for three years. In November 1917, he returned to power and led France to victory.

Library



Albert de Mun
(1841-1914)

An officer, he participated in the Franco-Prussian War, then in the repression of the Commune. Elected as a monarchist and ultra-Catholic deputy in 1876, he was repeatedly removed from office because of his support for the clergy and his anti-republican sentiments. His "Christian Socialism" inspired vigorous debates. Considered a member of the far right, he uncharacteristically supported freedom of the press and opposed colonialist policies.

Salon Abel-de-Pujol



Jean Jaurès
(1859-1914)

A philosophy professor, Jaurès was elected as a republican deputy from the Tarn in 1885; he shifted toward socialism and founded *L'Humanité* in 1904. A great orator and defender of the working class, he strove to coalesce the various socialist movements into a single party. A partisan of peace, he was attacked by patriots and moderates, and was assassinated the day before France entered the First World War.

Salle des Quatre-Colonnes



TODAY

LIFE AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Locksmiths, IT specialists, doctors, printers, cabinetmakers and more: dozens of different professions are at work in the National Assembly. Every day, over a thousand people are busy keeping the parliamentary institution, which covers a surface area of nearly seven hectares in the heart of Paris, in good working order. The life of the parliament requires detailed logistical planning so that the deputies can exercise their mandates in optimal conditions. This includes scheduling hundreds of meetings every week, hosting official receptions, organising parliamentary travel, recording video broadcasts of debates, handling parliamentary mail, printing legislative documents and maintaining buildings.



Entrance to the building at 101 Rue de l'Université

The building at 101, Rue de l'Université is named for Jacques Chaban-Delmas, President of the National Assembly from 1958 to 1969, 1978 to 1981 and 1986 to 1988. This building was entirely renovated in 2007; it contains offices for deputies, the Assembly restaurants and two meeting rooms used regularly for conferences that are open to the public.

Walter de Maria (Left)

Bicentennial sphere

Granite, marble, gold, 1989.

This sphere commemorating the bicentennial of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen contains a gold heart. It is placed in the Cour d'Honneur. This was the winning project from an international competition launched in 1989.



The National Assembly shop

The National Assembly shop, located opposite the Palais Bourbon, has original objects (stationery, tableware and decorative items, leather goods, jewelry and accessories), as well as books written by deputies.



Post Office
With 8 million letters received and 11 million sent every year, the National Assembly Post Office handles a volume of mail equivalent to that of a city of 30,000 people. The mail for deputies is delivered to their personal mailboxes.



Parliamentary "buvette"
Located near the Amphitheatre, the parliamentary "buvette" is decorated in a Belle Epoque dating from 1894 and renovated in 1997. It is reserved exclusively for present and former members of parliament.



Salle Lamartine
The Salle Lamartine, equipped with cutting-edge technology, hosts inter-parliamentary European and international meetings. Most of the National Assembly conference rooms have video rebroadcast systems so that the proceedings can be followed via Internet.



A deputy's office
Since 2007, many offices have been renovated with two separate areas: one for the deputy, the other for his or her colleague. These offices, measuring 25 square meters, are designed so that the deputies can stay there when the Assembly is holding a night session.

CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In keeping with the tradition of patronage of the nineteenth-century Chambers, the Palais Bourbon has embraced contemporary art. For the bicentennial of the French Revolution, Walter de Maris created a monumental sculpture for the Cour d'Honneur commemorating the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Assembly purchased works of art by Jean Le Gac, Gilles Aillaud and Hervé Di Rosa. This collection of contemporary art has expanded over the years and the works of many French artists are now installed in the public spaces and meeting rooms in the various buildings of the National Assembly.



Djamel Tatah, born in 1959
Untitled
Painting acquired by the National Assembly in 2011; it is now exhibited in the lobby of the Salle Lamartine. Oil and wax on canvas.



Hervé Di Rosa, born in 1959
History of the Assembly [Detail: 1981: Decentralisation]
The artist designed a fresco for the public entrance leading to the galleries of the Amphitheatre, *Two Centuries of Combat for Law and Justice*. Acrylic on canvas, 1991.



Pierre Alechinsky, born in 1927
The Fragile Garden
The rotunda linking the Palais Bourbon to the Hôtel de Lassay was decorated by Pierre Alechinsky in 1992. This work illustrates an inscription by poet Jean Tardieu: "Men seek light in a fragile garden shimmering with colour." This work is certainly one of the major official commissions of the 1990s. Acrylic on mounted linen canvas.

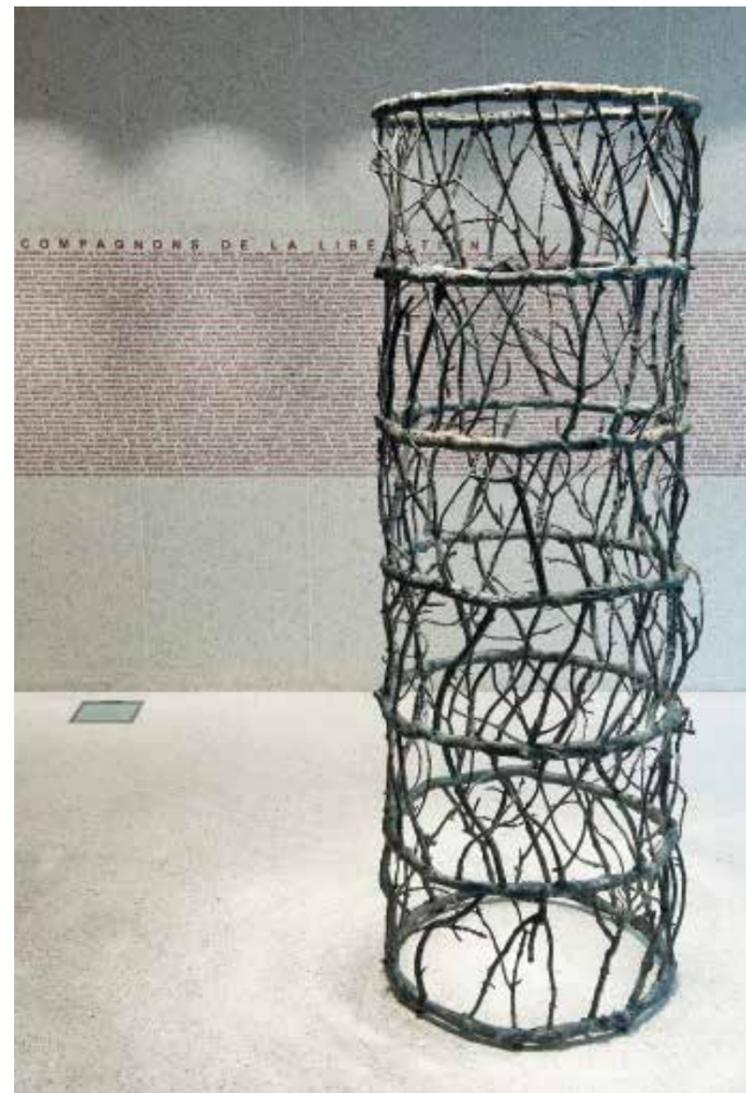


JonOne, born in 1963
Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité

Created for the Salon des Marianne and installed in January 2015, this work was made using the "reverse stencil" technique. It revisits the famous painting *La Liberté guidant le peuple* by Eugène Delacroix, whose frescoes decorate the adjoining library as well as the salon near the Salle des Séances that bears his name. The artist, of American origin and part of the graffiti and street art movement, chose this motif to "symbolize youth, the future and hope".

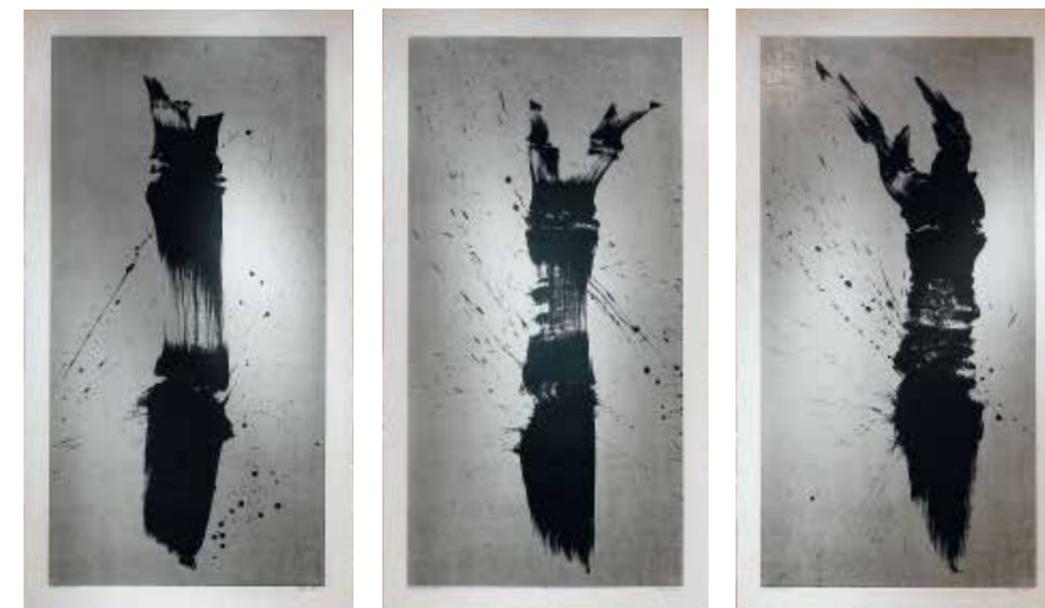


Artist's signature on the back of the canvas.



Vincent Barré, born in 1948
Column of branches - Tribute to the Companions of the Liberation

Inaugurated on 27 May 2014 on the occasion of the celebration of the first National Day of the Resistance, this work was designed for the lobby of the Jacques Chaban-Delmas building. It responds to the wall that bears the names of 1,038 Companions of the Liberation. The sculptor assembled ash branches to form a mould in which the bronze was cast. One of the seven horizontal rows bears the engraving of a line from the poet René Char: "Acquiescence illuminates the face, refusal gives it beauty." (*Feuillet d'Hypnos*, note 81, 1943-1945).



Fabienne Verdier, born in 1962

Arboretum of the imaginary
This triptych exhibited at the entrance of the Lamartine room was acquired in 2011. Silkscreen printing, stencil.



THE ASSEMBLY AT WORK

A prestigious historical building, the Palais Bourbon is also the pinnacle of French institutional life and the effective demonstration of democracy at work. People are familiar with the image of deputies in the Chamber, however the details of parliamentary activity, as defined by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, are frequently less well known.

The deputies, elected by all French citizens, form the National Assembly, which votes laws, operates as a control on government and evaluates public policies. It shares legislative power with the Senate, but if the two Chambers of parliament do not reach an agreement on a particular text, the National Assembly has the final decision. It alone has the power to censure the government, in other words, to force its resignation; it is the only governmental body that can be dissolved by the President of the Republic.

THE DEPUTIES

The National Assembly consists of 577 deputies, who are elected to five-year terms. Since June 2012 (the XIVth legislature), 11 deputies have been elected by French citizens living outside of France. They are national officials, but also represent local constituencies, and as such, act as intermediaries between citizens, who have delegated to them part of their sovereignty, and the power of the State.

While the parliamentary institution works 52 weeks per year, the public meetings are only held during session. The Constitution stipulates a nine-month ordinary session, from the first working day of October to the last working day of June. Outside of this period, the President of the Republic can convoke an extraordinary session of the Assembly, with a specific agenda. The work in public session does not represent majority of a deputy's work. Each one is a member of one of the eight standing committees responsible for examining texts. They may also be part of a committee of enquiry, a fact-finding mission, a parliamentary delegation or office or a study group on a specific topic. The deputies also meet within their own parliamentary groups. Finally, some deputies represent the Assembly in public institutions or international organisations (European Council, Union of Western Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of French-Speaking Countries and so on). The deputies and senators meet together at Versailles when they are brought together as a full Congress, to revise the Constitution or, in compliance with article 18 of the Constitution as revised on 21 July 2008, when the President of the Republic addresses the parliament.

ORGANISATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

Elected by secret ballot at the beginning of the legislative session, the President of the Assembly represents the Assembly and directs discussion and debates. This major role includes other considerable prerogatives: the French President consults with him in the event the National Assembly is dissolved or if the emergency powers stipulated by article 16 of the Constitution are implemented; he designates three of the nine members of the Constitutional Council, an institution that has the power to assess the compliance of a law or a treaty with the Constitution; and he appoints people to certain independent administrative authorities. In terms of protocol, he holds the fourth highest post in the government. The Bureau, a collegial institution responsible for the major decisions concerning the operation of the National Assembly, includes the President; six vice-presidents who can sub-



titute for the President during public sessions, if necessary; three *questeurs* (parliamentary administrators), responsible for the Assembly's financial and internal management; twelve secretaries, whose primary task is to assist the President when votes are counted in the Chamber.

At the start of the legislative session, most of the deputies choose to work with parliamentary groups organised according to political affinity. The group designates the candidates who participate in the Bureau and on the committees. Each group president has specific powers, such as the right to request a public vote or to verify the quorum. The conference of Presidents consists of the President of the National Assembly, the six vice-presidents, the committee presidents, the chairman of the Finance Committee, the President of the European Affairs Committee and the presidents of the political groups. The government is generally represented by a minister responsible for parliamentary liaison. A conference of Presidents is held each week during the open session to draw up the Assembly's working schedule, or agenda. In compliance with the constitutional revision of 21 July 2008, "two of every four weeks of the session are set aside, by priority and in the order determined by the government, to examine the laws and for the debates it has requested be included in the agenda." One out of every four weeks, however, is reserved by priority to monitoring the government's actions and assessing public policies.

VOTING A LAW

In a democracy, the law alone determines the most important rules and regulations of communal life (liberties, nationality, right of ownership, penal code, elections and so on).

The law authorises the government to impose taxes and determine expenses: this is the purpose of the annual finance law, or budget. And finally, the law authorises the President of the Republic to ratify treaties. Aside from limited cases in which a law may be submitted to a referendum, most laws are voted by the Parliament. Both parliamentarians (who submit "proposals") and the government (which submits "draft bills") can initiate legislation. Similarly, amendments, which are proposals to modify texts submitted for discussion, can be introduced by the executive branch as well as by members of parliament. The government can submit bills to either of the two assemblies, with the exception of finance bills and bills for financing the Social Security system, which must first be submitted to the National Assembly. As soon as they are submitted, the bills and proposals are put online on the National Assembly website. Unless a special committee is created, the bill or proposal is sent to one of the standing committees for evaluation; other interested committees may also examine the text. The committee appoints a person (called the *rapporteur*) who gathers all the necessary information through consultation; this person then submits a report to his or her colleagues containing an analysis of the text, along with suggestions. The committee may call for hearings to obtain additional information about a text from, for example, members of government or outside experts and specialists in the field. The report recording the sequence of this work is published and distributed to all the deputies. This report is available on the website of the National Assembly.

Since 1 March 2009, the discussion of draft bills must, in session, be based on the text adopted in committee, with the exception of bills revising the constitution, bills for finance laws and bills for financing the Social Security system. A public discussion is held once the text has been placed on the agenda. This begins as a general discussion, with several participants: a member of the government, the person who followed the bill in the committee (the *rapporteur*) along with others consulted for information, as well as the deputies who, either in the name of their group or as individuals, would like to indicate their point of view. The Assembly examines the articles one by one, along with any amendments that may be attached to each. When all the articles have been examined and voted, a vote on the entire bill of law is taken. Political groups may sometimes intervene before the vote to explain a particular position. In order for a text under discussion to be definitively adopted by the Parliament, the identical text must be voted by both Cham-

bers. The text voted by one assembly is immediately sent to the other: these successive readings form the "shuttle," which can be suspended by the creation of a Commission Mixte Paritaire. This committee, which consists of seven deputies and seven senators, must negotiate to obtain a joint text that covers the elements for which the two houses could not reach an agreement. If this negotiation procedure is not successful, the government can, after both Chambers have read the text, give the "last word" to the National Assembly; in other words, request that it take a final decision. After the law has been examined by the Constitutional Council to verify its compliance with the Constitution, if necessary, it must then be promulgated by the President of the Republic and published in the *Journal Officiel*. According to article 34-1 of the Constitution, added on 21 July 2008, the two houses can also vote on resolutions.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Control of the government's action is one of the chief functions of the Parliament. Deputies can question ministers, either in writing or orally. The Assembly can create committees of enquiry and committees to collect information. According to article 35 of the Constitution, a declaration of war is authorised by the Parliament. In the event the armed forces intervene abroad, the government—in compliance with the constitutional revision of 21 July 2008, must inform the Parliament within three days, by specifying the specific goals to be achieved. When the intervention lasts more than four months, the government must submit an extension for authorisation by the Parliament and can request the Natio-

nal Assembly to decide in case of last resort. Above all, the government is responsible to the Assembly. The Prime Minister can request a vote of confidence concerning his programme or a declaration of general policy. The Prime Minister's speech is followed by a debate in which the representatives of the various political parties participate. The programme or declaration is then put to a vote by public ballot. The programme or declaration is approved if the number of votes "for" exceeds the number of votes "against." The Assembly can dissolve the government by voting a motion of censure, which means that the government no longer has the support of the majority of the deputies. The motion of censure must be signed by at least one-tenth of the deputies. At the end of the discussion, only deputies in favour of the motion of censure participate in the vote. The motion is adopted if it receives the majority of votes of members of the Assembly, currently 289 out of 577. The Prime Minister can also involve his government by requesting a vote on a particular text: this procedure is stipulated by article 49, paragraph 3 of the Constitution. A text is considered to be adopted unless a motion of censure is voted. Once an "all or nothing" system, the recourse to the "49.3" is now strictly regulated by the constitutional revision of 21 July 2008: it is reserved to finance bills or finance laws for the Social Security, as well as to one bill or proposal per session. When a motion of censure has been adopted (which has occurred only once since 1958), or if the programme or declaration of general policy has not been approved, the Prime Minister must submit the resignation of his government to the President of the Republic. ❖



Meeting of the Senate and the National Assembly in Congress in Versailles on 3 July 2017 to hear a declaration by the French President.





The National Assembly opens its doors

Visiting the Palais Bourbon

Free tours of the Palais Bourbon are organised for groups with a maximum of 50 people, invited by a deputy, as well as for individual visitors. Reservations must be made at least 3 months in advance through a deputy.

PUBLIC ENTRANCE

33, quai d'Orsay, 75007 Paris

All information concerning tours of the Palais Bourbon (times, reservations, access) are available on the National Assembly website:

www.assemblee-nationale.fr

All news concerning the National Assembly is also available on the website:

- ❖ Information concerning your deputy
- ❖ All parliamentary documents
- ❖ Access to the video site to follow the debates live, or to watch a video on request.

The National Assembly is also on facebook and twitter



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BeauxArts &Cie

A PUBLICATION BY
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
We would like to thank the communications and multimedia service at the National Assembly for its invaluable assistance.

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ISBN 978-2-84278-977-0
LEGAL DEPOSIT January 2013
PHOTOENGRAVING Litho Art New, Turin (Italy)
Printed in France

BOOKSHOP SALES
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