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ABBREVIATIONS
MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMJ Metropolitan Museum Journal

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.
A Palace for Louis XVI: Jean Augustin Renard at Rambouillet

A floor plan for a royal palace that has until now been attributed to the French architect Jacques Charles Bonnard (1765–1818) was given to The Metropolitan Museum of Art by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman in 1970 (see fig. 9). The uniqueness of its layout and the inscription côté du canal along one of the facades contradict the suggestion written in pencil in the lower right corner of the sheet that the plan represents an unrealized project for Versailles. Close study of this sheet, particularly in its relationship to two groups of drawings that have recently come to light, permits a firm attribution of the drawing to the French architect Jean Augustin Renard (1744–1807) and identification of its subject as the third and final proposal presented in 1783 to Louis XVI for a reconstruction of the Château de Rambouillet, a project that ultimately was never carried out.
LOUIS XVI AND RAMBOUILLET
On December 29, 1783, Louis XVI, having held off during the financially uncertain years of the American War of Independence, finalized the purchase of the domain of Rambouillet from his cousin the duc de Penthièvre for the enormous sum of 16 million livres. The property was situated about 33 kilometers, or less than three hours by carriage, southwest of Versailles and consisted of more than 11,000 hectares (approximately 27,000 acres) of one of the country’s most beautiful hunting grounds, for which Louis XVI went to Rambouillet about thirty days each year from 1784 to 1789.

Rambouillet was built between 1368 and 1384 for Jean Bernier, provost of Paris and royal counselor, and remained until the end of the eighteenth century a fortified castle with a decidedly Gothic flavor reinforced by one of its main attractions, the tower in which François I died in 1547. Various attempts at refurbishing had been undertaken prior to 1783. Following Louis XIV’s purchase of the château in 1705 for his legitimized son, the comte de Toulouse, the architect Jean Sarda reshaped the courtyard into a roughly symmetrical horseshoe with its main entrance facing north, refaced the facades, and doubled the width of the lateral wings. The surrounding moat was filled in, exterior fortifications were torn down, and a semicircular forecourt enclosed by an iron fence was added. Sculptors François Antoine Vassé and Jacques Verberckt were responsible for refined boiserie in a lavish new apartment in the west wing that contrasted with the still relatively forbidding exterior. Though it was never Louis XV’s property, he too contributed to alterations at Rambouillet, which he visited for the hunt while awaiting the completion of his neighboring residence, the Château de Saint-Hubert, in 1758. He had the apartments overlooking the garden in the east wing rebuilt for his personal use by his architect Ange Jacques Gabriel. A dozen years later, when Rambouillet passed to the duc de Penthièvre, son of the comte de Toulouse, its new owner had an English-style garden designed by Claude Martin Goupy on the other side of the canal, west of the château.

Despite these efforts, which had, in fact, made the château perfectly habitable, Louis Petit de Bachaumont’s Mémoires secrets reported in November 1783, just a month before Louis XVI’s purchase of Rambouillet, that “The queen [Marie Antoinette] went to see the château, which is gothic, and it greatly displeased her.” It was perhaps for this reason—and encouraged by the more stable financial prospects promised by the Treaty of Paris, which ended the American War of Independence—that the comte d’Angiviller, director of the Bâtiments du Roi and newly named governor of the domain of Rambouillet, proposed a complete reconstruction of the château to Louis XVI.

JEAN AUGUSTIN RENARD
Renard has never before been the subject of an extended study. Born in Paris on August 27, 1744, he was the son of an administrator in the royal mirror manufactory. He began his career as a painter in the workshop of Noël Hallé, then turned to architecture, studying first with Louis François Thourou de Moranzel, grandson of Robert de Cotte, and next with Antoine Mathieu Le Carpentier, one of the most prolific architects in France in the mid-eighteenth century. Renard was trained at the Académie Royale d’Architecture. He began to participate in its competitions beginning in 1764 and, after several unsuccessful attempts, finally won the premier Grand Prix in 1773 with “A pavilion . . . built beside a large water course . . . [that] will be used for special festivities held by the sovereign.”

Like most of his contemporaries, Renard learned the mechanical aspects of his profession through practical experience, notably through his remodeling of the hôtel of the marquis de Seignelay in the Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris. He began his career as a protégé of the contrôleur général des finances Anne Robert Turgot, who recommended him to his friend the comte d’Angiviller in 1774. On August 14, 1774, Renard obtained his diploma from the crown as a fellow at the Académie de France in Rome. While in Italy between 1774 and 1779, Renard produced a large number of drawings, many of which were later published under the title Études de fragments d’architecture gravés dans la manière du crayon (1783). From the moment of his arrival in Rome, Renard was preparing for his return to Paris, however, and his election to the Académie d’Architecture: in 1775 he sent back to Paris a project for a basilica, followed in 1778 by a project for a courthouse, and in 1779 one for a conclave palace. The king’s architects looked favorably on Renard’s early drawings but faulted his skill in laying out the plans and his recycling of elements, including a rotunda based on the Pantheon. At the end of October 1777, thanks to funds secured through Turgot’s intercession, Renard traveled to the Veneto to study the work of Andrea Palladio, then to Naples, where he joined Dominique Vivant Denon, Claude Louis Châtelet, and Louis Jean Desprez, who were traveling in the Campania and Sicily preparing the Voyage pittoresque published by the abbé de Saint-Non in 1781–86. Evidently Renard established a sympathetic relationship with his illustrious
second project (figs. 4–7); a general plan and a plan of
the ground floor for the third project (figs. 8, 9). The
Metropolitan Museum’s drawing, figure 9, was presum-
ably the final iteration of an extended creative process
and development as Renard attempted to rework the
complex existing fourteenth-century structure with its
diverse eighteenth-century modifications. The other
plans are two drawings still held by Renard’s descen-
dants (figs. 2, 3) and a group of seven recently purchased
by the Bibliothèque de l’Institut National d’Histoire
de l’Art, Paris (see figs. 1, 4–8).

All of Renard’s draw-
ings for Rambouillet except the ones still with Renard’s
descendants were clearly intended as presentation
drawings as can be seen from their blue mats. Only the
Metropolitan’s drawing bears inscriptions identifying
for whom the principal apartments were destined—
the king, the queen, and their two sisters-in-law, the
comtesse de Provence and the comtesse d’Artois—and
alphabetical designations of individual rooms (presum-
ably corresponding to a now-lost text).

Differences in technique and level of detail suggest
that originally two sets of drawings existed for all three
projects, one of presentation drawings for the king
and the other for Renard’s own reference (the latter
descended in his family; see figs. 2, 3). Renard’s presen-
tation drawings are representative of those produced by
Parisian architects beginning in the second half of the
eighteenth century to appeal to clients through the use

RENARD’S DRAWINGS FOR RAMBOUILLET

On March 8, 1813, Jean-Baptiste Boutard, art critic for
the Journal de l’Empire, devoted an article to the history
of Rambouillet and reported, “I have before me
three projects that were presented to the king by the
late M. Renard, one of the king’s official architects.”
Through the drawings that have recently come to light it
has been possible to identify this series of three proj-
ects: a general plan, an elevation of the main entrance,
and a cross section for the first project (figs. 1–3); a gen-
eral plan, a plan of the ground floor, and elevations of
the main entrance and the canal facade for the

countrymen and eventually contributed twenty-four
illustrations to the publication.16

On his return to Paris at the end of 1779, Renard
started to build for private patrons, such as the comte
d’Orsay, whom he had befriended in Rome, and for the
royal government, after he married Marie Françoise
Guillaumot, daughter of Charles Axel Guillaumot,
architect to the king and inspecteur des carrières in Paris.
Renard soon became architect to the duc de Penthèvre,
for whom he built several follies in the park of his
château at Armainvilliers.17 It was probably through
Renard’s familiarity with Penthèvre’s properties and
his protection by the comte d’Angiviller that he was
in a position to propose renovations for Rambouillet
when it was purchased by the king.
fig. 2 Elevation of the Main Entrance of the Château de Rambouillet, First Project, ca. 1783. Pen and black ink, brush and pink, black, and gray wash, 10 3/4 × 15 1/4 in. (27.3 × 38.7 cm). Private collection.

fig. 3 Cross Section of the Château de Rambouillet, First Project, ca. 1783. Pen and black ink, brush and pink, black, and gray wash, 10 3/4 × 15 1/4 in. (27.3 × 38.7 cm). Private collection.
of pictorial devices that were not inherent to conventional forms of architectural representation. This is particularly evident in Renard’s use of color, atmospheric rendering of shadows and clouds, and playfully modeled water and vegetation, all of which exceed and even confuse information that would be strictly architectural in its aim. One of Renard’s most successful pictorial techniques entailed turning the paper vertically before the wash had dried so that it would drip down the sheet and give the walls of his buildings a weathered, striated effect (figs. 2, 3, 6, 7). This technique was a recent development in Parisian architectural drawing, having appeared in 1768 in Pierre Adrien Pâris’s Grand Prix drawings for the Académie d’Architecture and used successfully by Renard in his premier Grand Prix drawings of 1773.

**THE QUESTION OF CONVENANCE**

In establishing the château’s layout, Renard responded to features of the existing building even though he did not intend to use its original foundations. He preserved four buildings in order to form a pentagon with one open side. In his first proposal he inserted a circular courtyard at the center of the pentagon (fig. 1), based on the Villa Farnese at Caprarola that he had drawn during his Italian journey. The round towers at the pentagon’s corners referred to the earlier château, which he proposed otherwise to demolish, and permitted him to use round spaces as hubs between wings of the buildings, following a tradition of French layout popularized by Louis Le Vau. But these round towers were no doubt judged too Gothic, for in the second project they were replaced by large square pavilions (figs. 6, 7). This second proposal is far less daring and abandons the neo-Gothic, picturesque proposal that had spoken so clearly to the château’s origins but was perhaps considered too close to garden follies, such as those Renard had recently designed for the duc de Penthièvre and which were inappropriate at this larger scale. While Renard’s first proposal included a heavily rusticated arch (borrowed from Claude Nicolas Ledoux’s Hôtel des Fermes in Bordeaux), which evoked Roman ruins and framed radically severe, baseless Doric columns, he replaced this facade in his second proposal with a semicircular courtyard delimited by a modest iron fence and colossal, paired columns that referred to Claude Perrault’s colonnade on the eastern facade of the Louvre, considered the epitome of classical French architecture. According to contemporary practice, the Paestum Doric columns for the entry to a royal château seemed to defy all the rules of convenance—the appropriateness of architectural vocabulary to the patron’s rank—that he would have learned at the Académie d’Architecture. According to contemporary practice, the Paestum Doric was reserved for crypts, such as the one designed by Jacques Germain Soufflot for the new basilica of Sainte-Geneviève, the future Panthéon, or even for prisons. In 1785 Pâris was furious to discover that the contractor...
A PALACE FOR LOUIS XVI

When compared with Boullée’s design, Renard’s is strikingly restrained in the number of columns. Vast colonnades, which had become nearly obligatory in royal projects in the 1780s, are absent. While categorically a royal palace, Rambouillet was above all else a grand hunting lodge rather than the seat of the monarch. The challenge of inventing an architecture fit for a king but not competing with Versailles was equally in evidence in Renard’s proposed solutions for the layout at Rambouillet.

In the second proposal for Rambouillet, Renard reused a number of elements from his submission to the Académie d’Architecture’s competition of 1773, including the shallow dome (a recurrent motif in his designs, as the Académie would complain in 1779; see note 14) and a taste for horizontal bas-reliefs that became fashionable in Parisian architecture in the 1760s and were epitomized the following decade in Ledoux’s pavilion for the comtesse du Barry at Louveciennes.23 The canal facade of Rambouillet (fig. 7) comes close, albeit in a less spectacular mode, to a proposal for Versailles by Etienne Louis Boullée, probably devised in 1785, about the same time as Renard’s Rambouillet projects.24 But when compared with Boullée’s design, Renard’s is strikingly restrained in the number of columns. Vast colonnades, which had become nearly obligatory in royal projects in the 1780s, are absent. While categorically a royal palace, Rambouillet was above all else a grand hunting lodge rather than the seat of the monarch. The challenge of inventing an architecture fit for a king but not competing with Versailles was equally in evidence in Renard’s proposed solutions for the layout at Rambouillet.

AMBIGUOUS PLANS

The first planning difficulty Renard faced was the distinction between the axis of the canal-facing facade and the one created by the avenue extending from the château to Versailles. The two axes, which appear in red ink in all presentation plans, meet at a 142-degree angle.
In the first proposal, Renard treated only the avenue axis, neglecting the tree-lined allée running parallel to the canal on the right side (northwest) of the drawing (fig. 1). In the two succeeding proposals he took this allée into account (figs. 4, 8), designing a semicircular forecourt and creating a route to the village in order to produce a three-pronged arrangement, a clear allusion to the Versailles Place d'Armes.25 In the first proposal, the château’s circular courtyard is mirrored by an esplanade planted in the same form around the entire château. Subsequent proposals abandon the circle and instead use the square: esplanade, château, courtyard, and plantings all conform to this basic geometric form. This device of replicating simple, geometric forms was a defining feature in plans by Boullée and Ledoux.

A floor plan for the first proposal has not been located, but the surviving cross section indicates that the architect envisioned placing a vast two-flight staircase on the entrance axis (fig. 3). In the second proposal, the surviving plan indicates that the entrance axis was to be filled by a round chapel (or, in the third proposal, a central stair) ingeniously situated at the center of one of

![Diagram](image1)

*Deuxième Projet*

--- *Entrée Principale du Château*

--- *Façade sur le grand Canal*
Oddly for a royal residence, a chapel is not found on the same floor as the royal apartments and no theater is included. The latter is a particularly glaring omission given the evident desire to attract Marie Antoinette to Rambouillet. A plan for the second floor is not known, but it is likely that each of the king’s brothers was given an apartment above that of his wife, and that the royal children were given one above their parents, an arrangement typical of a country house rather than a royal palace.

**RENARD AND RAMBouillet AFTER 1783**

Just thirty years after Renard’s creation of the drawings, Boutard wrote in the *Journal de l’Empire*: “If this proposal had been decided upon and time had permitted its execution, the French court would never have known a residence that was at once so pleasing and so regular.”26 The entry in Bachaumont’s *Mémoires secrets* for November 1783 reported, however, that Louis XVI found Renard’s projects too expensive, and the project was not realized.27 Only days after the signing of the sale of Rambouillet to Louis XVI, the comte d’Angiviller named Jean Jacques Thévenin the official architect of the domain.28 Thévenin had already proven himself in the royal building sites, even bearing the late payments typical of the king’s projects through his extensive work for private clients. As for Renard, he received in compensation the position of controller of the king’s works in Paris and oversight of the future Musée du Louvre.29 He was also commissioned to modernize the Paris Observatory and build the royal stables at Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Sèvres, and he was finally elected a member of the Académie d’Architecture in February 1791.30 Renard was imprisoned during the Terror, but with the fall of Robespierre he survived and under the Directoire found himself favored by the prince de Talleyrand, minister of foreign affairs.31 Renard would die in his official apartment in Talleyrand’s Paris hôtel in January 1807. That the Metropolitan’s plan for Rambouillet was attributed to the architect Bonnard can probably be explained by the fact that Bonnard succeeded Renard as architect to Talleyrand and thus likely inherited a number of Renard’s drawings.

The Château de Rambouillet was ultimately not touched during the considerable work carried out at the domain under the comte d’Angiviller’s direction. Beginning in 1784 nearly nine hundred workers were employed to build sumptuous stables for five hundred horses, a large kennel, an experimental farm, a chicken coop and pheasantry, a menagerie, and for Marie Antoinette the most celebrated project, a pleasure dairy
emerges as a member of a generation of architects formed by the Académie Royale d’Architecture and strongly influenced by their Roman training. The careers of many of them were cut short by the French Revolution just at the moment they reached artistic maturity.

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NOTES

1 Archives Nationales, Paris, MC/ET/XVI/848; “Vente au roi, à titre privé, par le duc de Penthièvre du domaine de Rambouillet,” December 29, 1783.
2 Cueille 2005, pp. 2–3.
3 A plan for the main floor, left wing, dated 1708, is in the Fonds Robert de Cotte, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Va 78b t. 1, R. de C. 1339, 1340; Fossier 1997, no. 265.
4 For a view of this aspect of the château, see Jacques Rigaud (1681–1754), Vue du château de Rambouillet prise de l'avant-cour appartenant à S.A.S Mgr le Duc de Penthièvre, ca. 1760, pl. 96, in Vues du château de Rambouillet, Recueil de gravures de la collection de Grosseuvre 150, Musée des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon (www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/01-001258-2C6NU0VZDZDZ.html). Rigaud’s Vue du parterre de Rambouillet from the same series of etchings is in the Metropolitan Museum (53.600.1248).
5 “La reine est allé voir le château qui est gothique, & lui a fort déplu.” Bachaumont 1784, p. 52.
7 Willk-Brocard 1995, p. 139.
8 “Un pavillon . . . construit sur une grande pièce d'eau . . . [lequel] sera simplement destiné à des fêtes particulières que le souverain donnerait”; Pérouse de Montclos 1984, p. 125. The drawings are in the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, Pra 79.
10 Turgot recommended Renard to Angiviller while Renard was a fellow at the Académie de France in Rome. Letter from Angiviller to Turgot, October 13, 1774; Montaiglon and Guiffrey 1904, p. 45; Baudez 2012, p. 118.
11 Archives Nationales, Paris, O1 1095, fol. 407.
12 He gave these in gratitude to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture and the Académie Royale d'Architecture. Letter from Renard read at a meeting of the Académie de Peinture, November 29, 1783; Montaiglon 1889, p. 175, and Montaiglon and Guiffrey 1905, p. 389.
14 Observations of commissioners of the Académie Royale d’Architecture, April 27, 1779; Montaiglon and Guiffrey 1904, pp. 431–32.
17 The follies, including a pavillon à la turque, baths, a Gothic tomb, and a chinoiserie pavilion, have disappeared but are reproduced in Krafft 1829, pls. 93–95.
18 “J'ai sous les yeux trois projets qui furent présentés au roi par feu M. Renard, l'un des architectes contrôleurs de ses bâtiments.” Boutard 1813, p. 3.
19 Figures 2 and 3, belonging to Renard’s descendants, were exhibited at the Galerie De Bayser, Paris, November 12–27, 2015; Willk-Brocard and Gady 2015, pp. 30, 74, nos. 55, 56. The Bibliothèque de l’Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art acquired its seven drawings at the Piasa sale, Dessins anciens; Tableaux et sculptures des XIXe et XXe siècles, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, April 12, 2013, lots 82, 85, from Renard’s descendants. Bibliothèque de l’INHA

drawing OA 771 (6), not illustrated in this article, shows together on one sheet the elevations that are depicted here in figures 6 and 7.
20 Renard’s drawing of the Villa Farnese at Caprarola still belongs to Renard’s descendants.
21 Cojannot 2012, p. 90.
22 Pinon 2007, p. 34.
26 “Si l’on avoit su s’arréter à ce projet, et que les temp eussent permis de l’exécuter, jamais la cour de France n’auroit eu de demeure à la fois si agréable et si régulière.” Boutard 1813, p. 4.
27 “Le roi a trouvé le devis des bâtiments trop considérable, & a dit qu’il falloit attendre.” Bachaumont 1784, p. 52.
29 Renard designed the glass lantern for the ceiling of the Salon Carré, which was built in 1789; Sahut 1979, pp. 18–19; McClellan 1999, pp. 58–60.
31 A spectacular portrait of Talleyrand by Pierre Paul Prud’hon entered the Metropolitan Museum’s collection through the generosity of Mrs. Wrightsman (1994.190); Tinterow 2005.
32 The Metropolitan Museum has a jatte écuelle from the Sévres service (1997.518); Schwartz 2002.
REFERENCES


