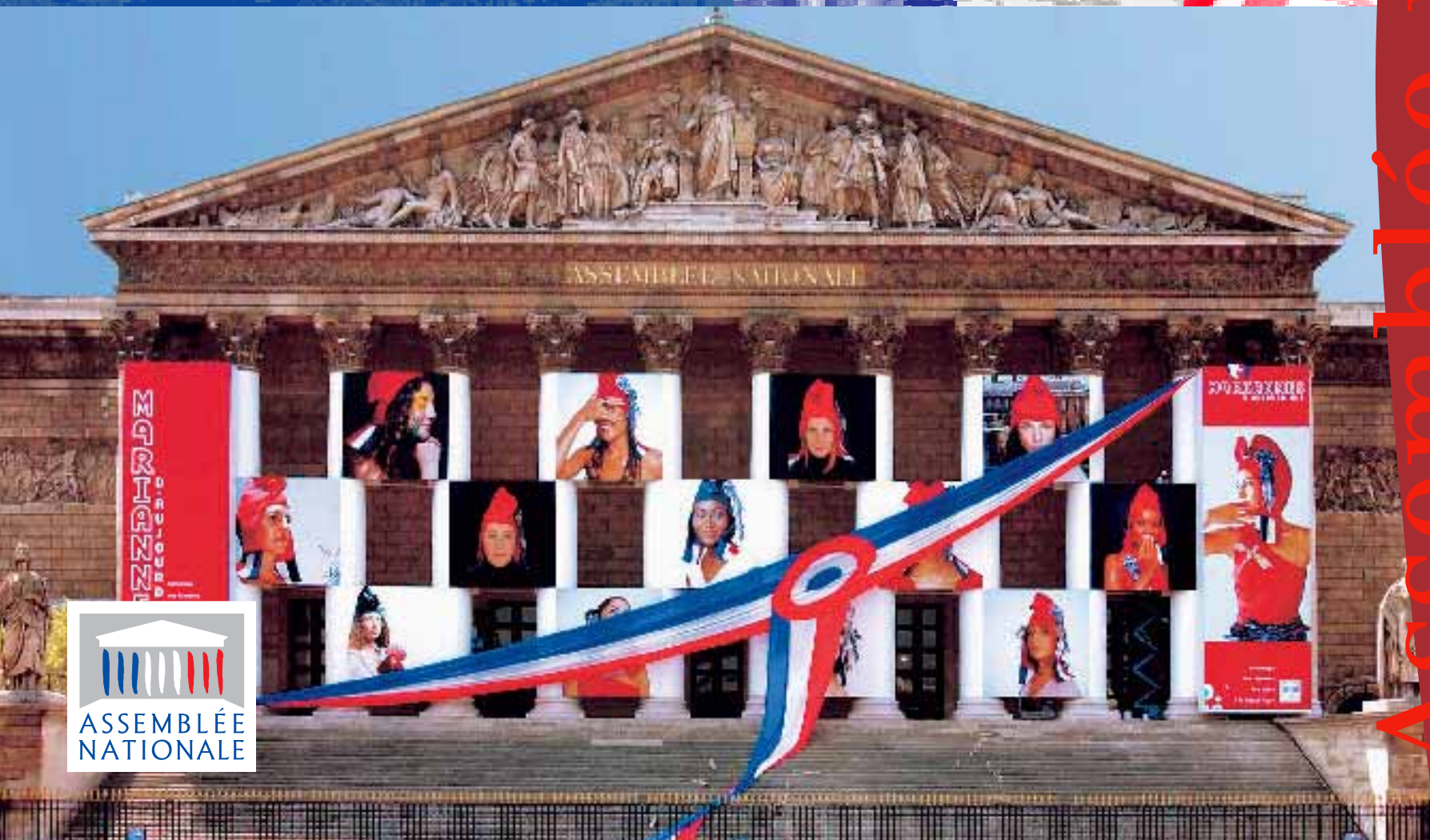
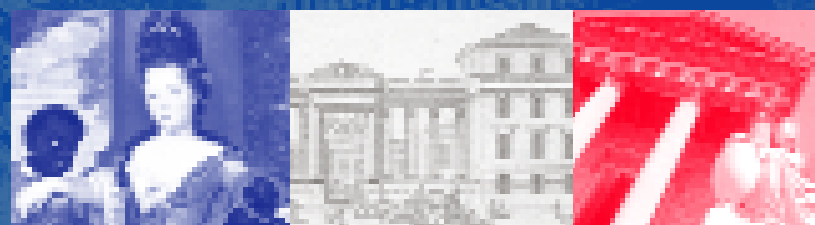
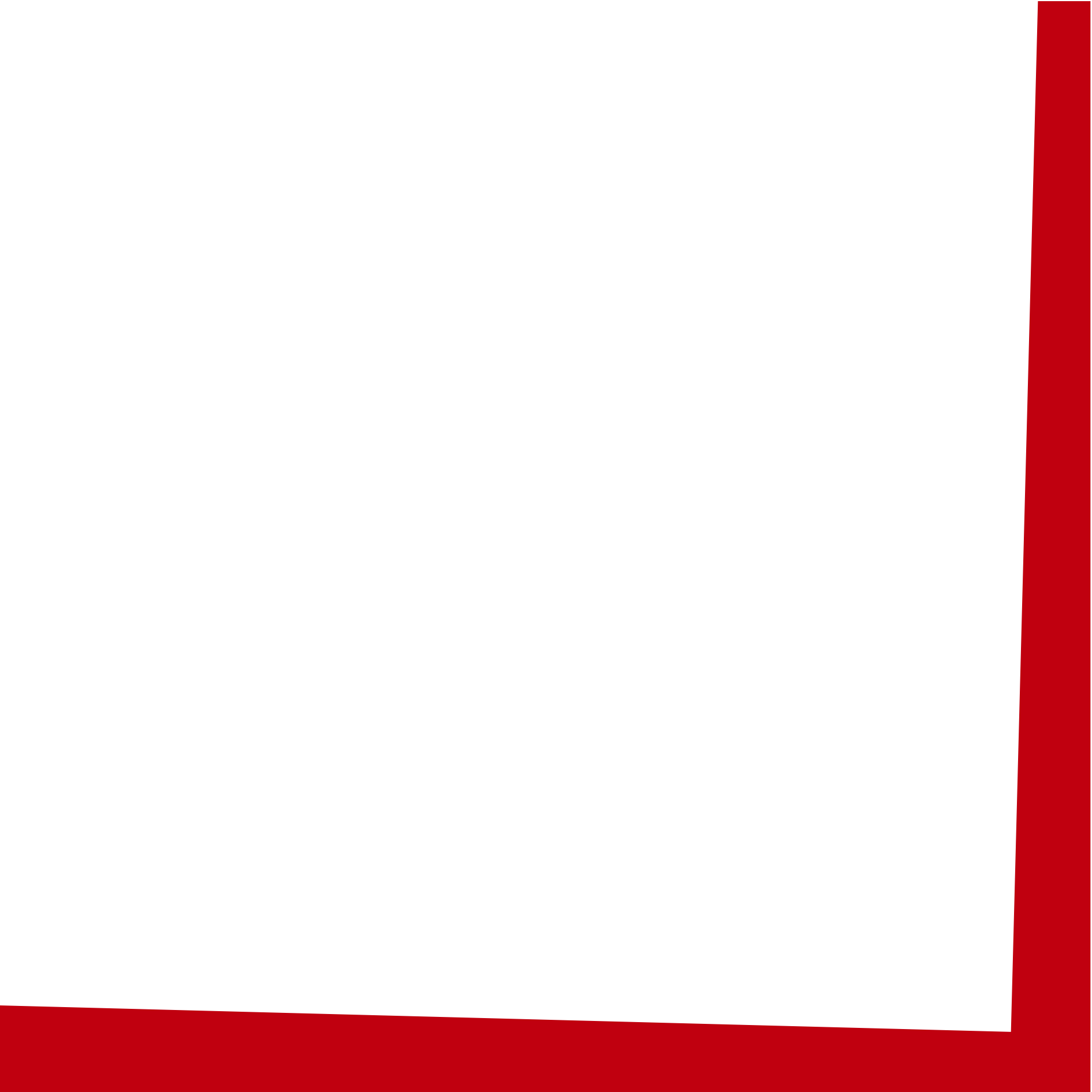


# PALAIS BOURBON

A palace for democracy



Assemblée nationale



# PALAIS BOURBON

A palace for democracy







4

Palais Bourbon









# SUMMARY

Palais Bourbon, a palace for democracy



## 1<sup>st</sup> PART

page 9

### BEFORE THE REPUBLIC

A country residence on the outskirts of Paris

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PART

page 17

### THE REVOLUTION AND THE EMPIRE

From princes' palace to legislative temple

## 3<sup>rd</sup> PART

page 25

### FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE III<sup>RD</sup> REPUBLIC

The Chamber moves into the palace

## 4<sup>th</sup> PART

page 37

### PALAIS BOURBON TODAY

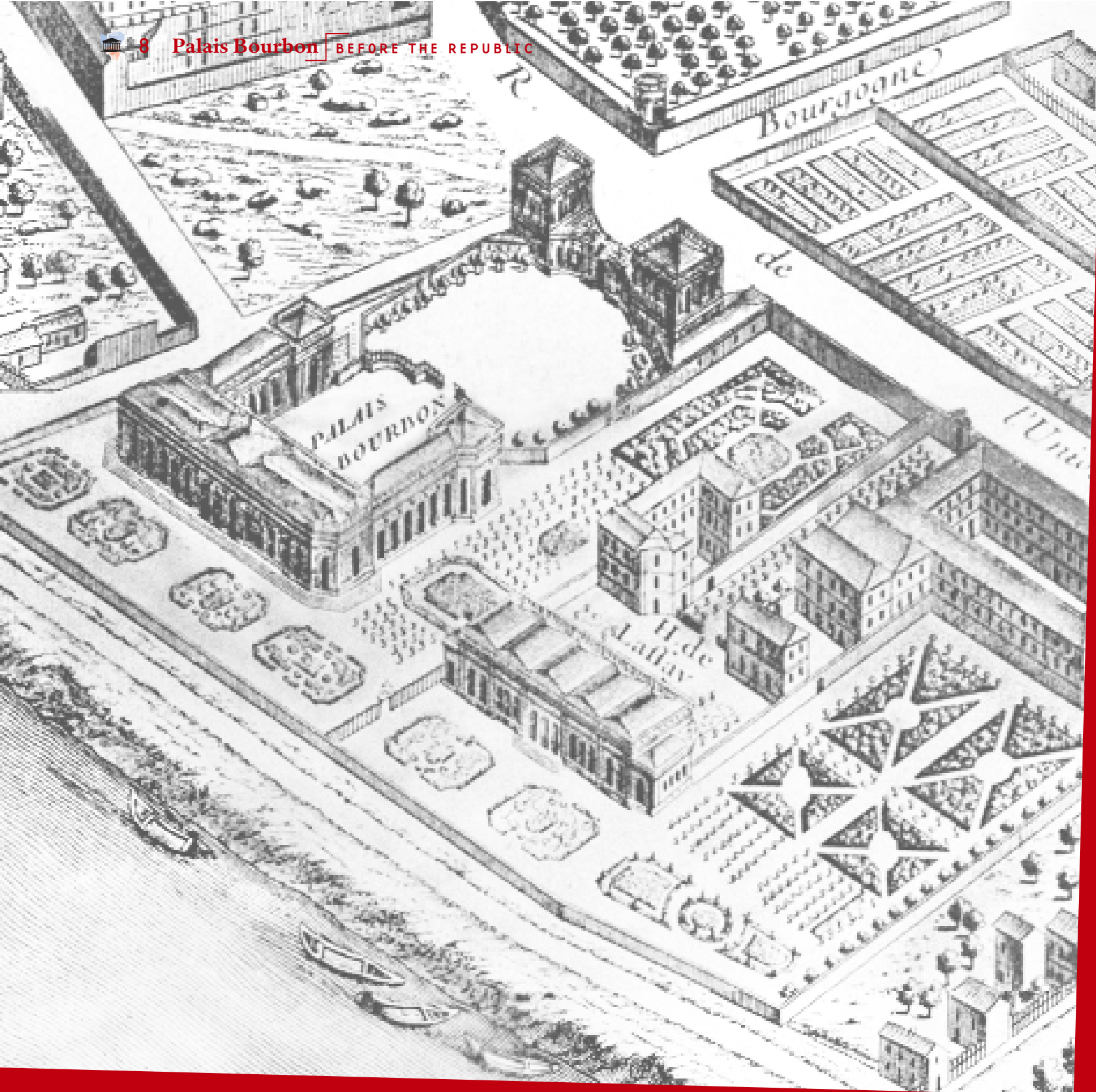
A town in the town



8

Palais Bourbon

BEFORE THE REPUBLIC



1<sup>st</sup> PART

## BEFORE THE REPUBLIC

**A country residence  
on the outskirts of Paris**

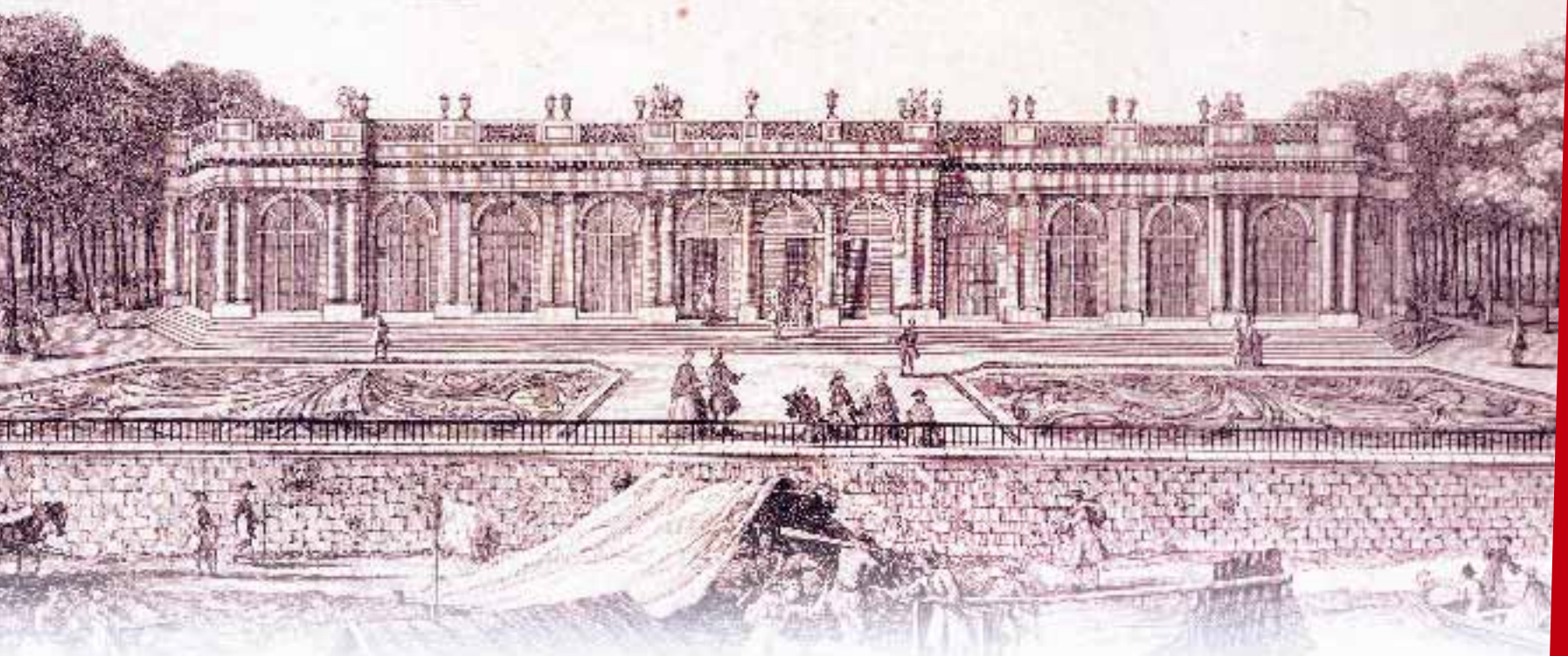
Before being declared national property under the Revolution, Palais Bourbon was one of the capital's most fashionable aristocratic residences. Constructed between 1722 and 1728 for Duchess de Bourbon, then bought by Prince de Condé, it still today keeps many traces of its early days.

In 1720 Duchess de Bourbon, the legitimated daughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, bought several building plots on the banks of the Seine at the so-called 'Grenouillère' locality - the present site of Palais Bourbon. History remembers that it was under the influence of Marquis de Lassay, her close confidant, that she made this purchase and approved in 1772 the construction of two contiguous palaces: the first on the western side for the marquis, the second, a few dozen metres to the east, for herself.



› *Duchess de  
Bourbon*





› *The facade of Palais Bourbon in Duchess de Bourbon's day*

The duchess and the marquis wanted not just to make a statement, in the Parisian landscape, of their rank but also of their belonging to a refined elite abreast of the fashions and artistic trends of the day. The site itself was by no means chosen by hazard: since the second half of the 17th century, the Pré-aux-Clercs, a countrified district on the left bank, had been attracting the capital's most elegant aristocracy which indulged here in the construction of pieds-a-terre surrounded by large wooded grounds. Between 1650 and 1740, a network of mansions, palaces and gardens therefore came into existence between Rue des

Saints-Pères and the Invalides hospital - which society chroniclers were later to call the 'faubourg Saint-Germain', an elegant and green antechamber to the big city.

To design her future mansion here, Duchess de Bourbon called on some of the most prominent architects of the Regency. First, the Italian Giardini was approached, on the advice of Marquis de Lassay, it is said, to draw the overall plans of the palace. Then, after the death of this architect, Jacques V Gabriel and Jean Aubert were called in to finish the site.



## BY ITS LINES AND ITS PROPORTIONS, THE 'FIRST' PALAIS BOURBON WAS OPENLY INSPIRED BY THE GRAND TRIANON

Once the palace was finished in 1728, chroniclers dwelt on its striking similarity with the Grand Trianon at Versailles. Some saw in this similitude the duchess's determination to recall her filiation to Louis XIV, even though everyone already knew that. More likely, the similarity can be explained by the predominant influence of Jean Aubert who was a disciple and admirer of Jules Hardouin Mansard, the designer of the Grand Trianon, which the duchess had always liked anyway.

Even more than the external aspect, the interior layout of Palais Bourbon and its aura of luxury were the talk of the town. Period engravings depict for us a rococo decor of extraordinary wealth, with a multitude of gilt features, medallions and alcoves. This luxury also bordered on the audacious: it was the duchess's desire that the private apartments should be as large as the state rooms - a considerable innovation for the time.

What is left today of this initial Palais Bourbon? Materially very little: only a stretch of wall and a few windows opening onto the Jardin des Quatres Colonnes have resisted the continual modifications undergone since these early days. Visitors to the Assembly seeking a trace in these walls of the original style must therefore turn to Hôtel de Lassay whose Regency appearance has been infinitely better preserved than that of its prestigious neighbour.

To say that the only remains of the original building in today's are a few stones and windows would however be an oversimplification. To begin with, the original name 'Palais Bourbon' has strangely resisted all subsequent upheavals, despite its decidedly royal sound.

› *Duchess de Bourbon in court dress*







The Assembly also owes to the initial palace its rectangular layout around a courtyard and a forecourt opening onto Place du Palais Bourbon, which layout has been scrupulously respected by the successive architects who redesigned the premises. Lastly, apart from its architecture, it undoubtedly owes to the 18th century building an essential and indefinable factor: its ambience, a mixture of comfort and solemnity which, despite the passing of centuries, continues to pervade

As new owner, Prince de Condé appeared to find it hard to adapt to the palace inherited from his grandmother. Her refined and intimate style scarcely seemed to match the young warrior prince's martial character. Above all the residence appeared cramped to a man who was one of the very first dignitaries of the kingdom and whose imposing lifestyle required a palace far larger than the pleasant country house he had inherited.

### FROM 1764 ONWARDS PRINCE DE CONDE, GRANDSON OF DUCHESS DE BOURBON, UNDERTOOK TO BUILD ALL OVER THE 'BOURBON STREET BLOCK'

the premises, perpetuating the memory of its first occupant, Duchess de Bourbon. After Duchess de Bourbon died in 1743 the fate of the palace remained uncertain until 1756 when Louis XV bought it, anxious as he was to preserve this beautiful building opposite the Place de la Concorde which he was laying out to his own glory. This passage into royal hands was to be short: in 1764 Prince de Condé, grandson of Duchess de Bourbon, returned from the Seven Years War in which he had won renown. Out of gratitude, the king let him have Palais Bourbon for the symbolic price 'of the land and the mirrors'.

Therefore for a quarter of a century the prince spared no effort to modernise the palace and, above all, to increase its surface

> *Prince de Condé, grandson of Duchess de Bourbon*

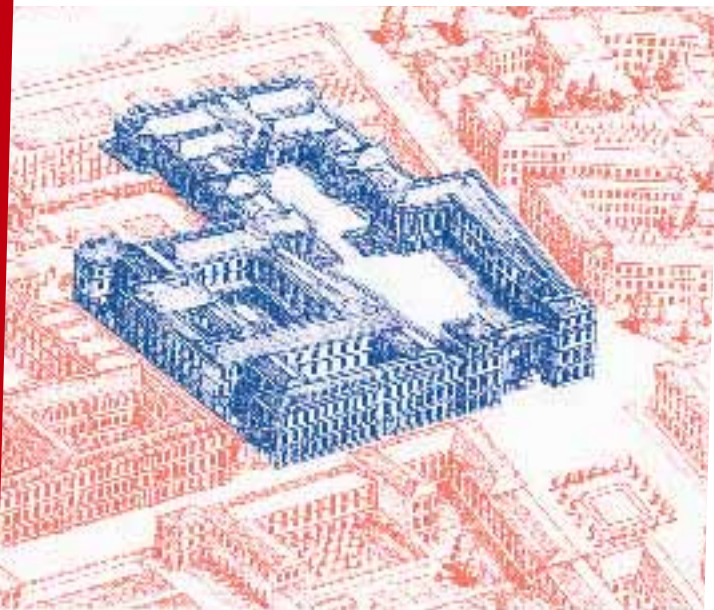






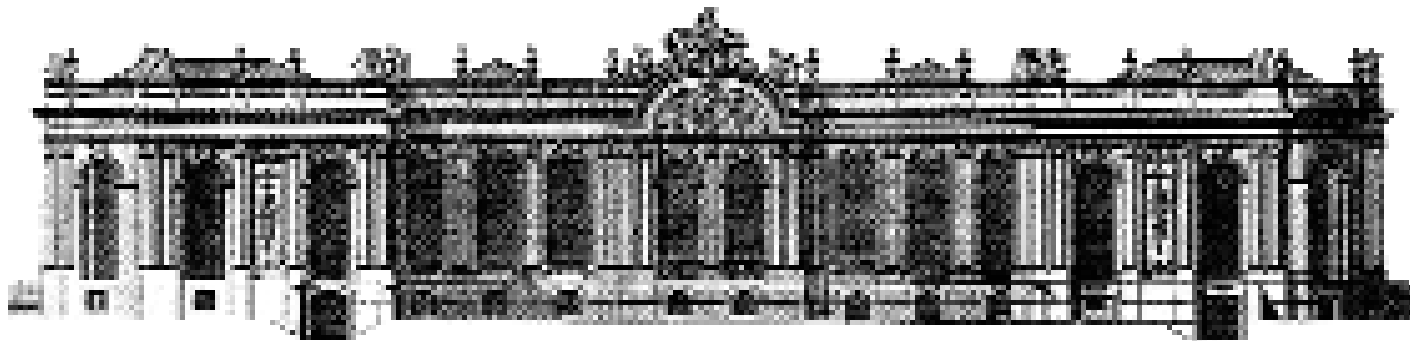
› *The curtain colonnade designed by Le Carpentier*

area by adding annexes and service quarters to the central building. The modest country mansion was replaced by a compound which, between 1765 and 1789, rose from the ground to form the Bourbon street block as we know it today.



Under the guidance of the architects Barreau de Chefdeville and Le Carpentier, the two wings of the palace were extended and prolonged by walls towards Place du Palais Bourbon to enclose the courtyard. At their end, two grand pavilions were built on each side of the entrance porch forming a triumphal arch. In accordance with the wishes of the prince, this porch is part of an imposing 'curtain colonnade' allowing passers-by to admire the palace courtyard from outside.

On the western side of the main courtyard a series of new buildings, in turn enclosing courtyards today called the Sully, Montesquieu and d'Aguesseau courtyards, were built to house the prince's retinue. With the two little annexes to Hôtel de Lassay, they line an understatedly elegant alley forming a perfect counterpoint to the imposing courtyard of Palais Bourbon.



› *The facade on the courtyard side in Prince de Condé's day*

As years went by, the prince's building mania extended even beyond the palace compound. In order to fund the renovation of the latter, he had indeed bought in 1769 land immediately to its south with a view to launching a large scale real estate operation that was to give birth from 1787 to Place du Palais Bourbon.

### **IN 1789 PRINCE DE CONDE FLED FRANCE WITHOUT HAVING SEEN HIS PALACE COMPLETED**

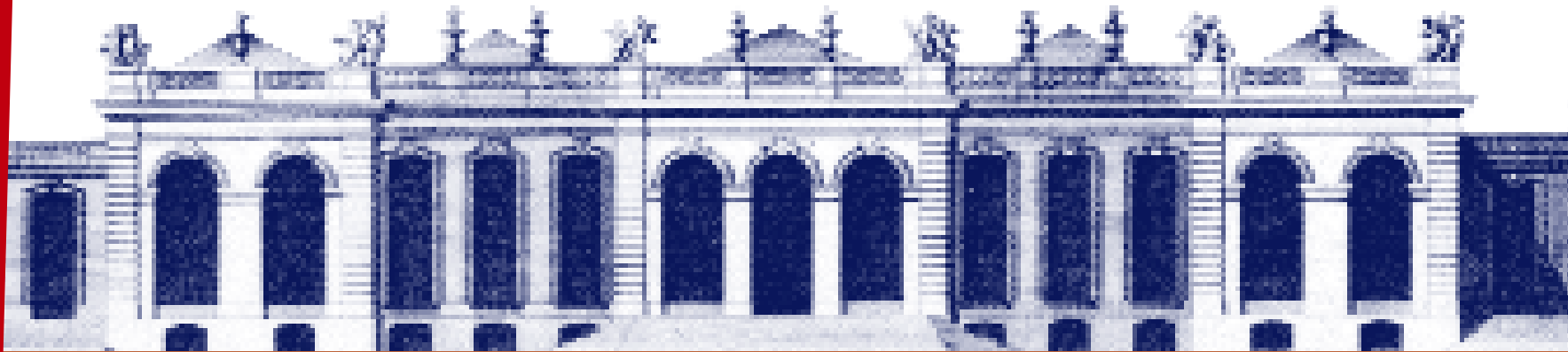


The building of this square was to form the prince's ultimate real estate ambition. When, on 18 July 1789, alerted by the storming of the Bastille, he fled France, Palais Bourbon as he had imagined it was not completely finished despite twenty-five years work and twenty-five million francs expenditure. As for Place du Palais Bourbon, it had barely been started: it was not until 1814, on his return from exile, that he could view his work at last completed.

But although he had then recovered ownership of all his property, he was unable to enjoy using it. During his years of exile, the Republic and then the Empire had profoundly modified 'his' Palais Bourbon, turning it irrevocably into parliamentary headquarters.

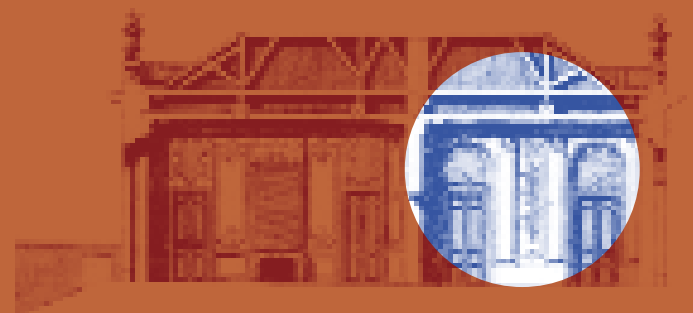
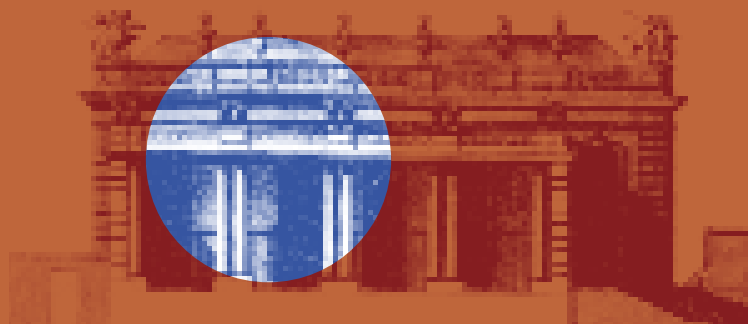


*Plan de la façade de l'Hôtel de Lassay du côté de la rivière*



## HOTEL DE LASSAY: PALAIS DE BOURBON'S 'LITTLE BROTHER'

Hôtel de Lassay, today residence to the President of the National Assembly, was built at the same time and by the same architects as Palais Bourbon. It was Duchess de Bourbon's desire that her friend and confidant, Marquis de Lassay, should reside in her immediate vicinity, in a palace almost similar to hers, albeit considerably smaller. Unlike its 'big brother', Hôtel de Lassay has not undergone any major changes since being built. A visit to the ground floor of Hôtel de Lassay (the first floor was added under the July Monarchy) therefore provides a fairly good idea of the atmosphere of Palais Bourbon in the century of Enlightenment, before its 19th and 20th century 'renovations'.







## 16 Palais Bourbon

FROM PRINCES' PALACE TO LEGISLATIVE TEMPLE





2<sup>nd</sup> PART

## THE REVOLUTION AND THE EMPIRE

From princes' palace  
to legislative temple

On 21 January 1798, the Council of the Five Hundred was able to hold its first sitting at Palais Bourbon. The hemicycle had been specially built in what was still merely an aristocratic palace, profoundly affecting the harmony of the building. It was not until the Empire that it started to look harmonious again and slowly acquired the appearance of an official building.



Abandoned from the start of the Revolution in July 1789 by Prince de Condé, Palais Bourbon remained deserted for some time before being declared national property in 1791. It then served successively as a prison, a storehouse for military convoys, and as premises for the public works board. In this latter connection, its neighbour, Hôtel de Lassay, housed for a few months the public works school at the very time when it changed name to become Ecole Polytechnique.

› Deputy of the Council of the Five Hundred



No matter how prestigious Polytechnique may be, many then thought it was strange that the Bourbon compound should not be assigned a more important use, all the more so as the buildings were new. Therefore, when in autumn 1795 the Thermidorian Convention sought a building that could house the Council of the Five Hundred, the assembly that was to succeed it, Palais Bourbon was quite naturally chosen. In this context of the setting-up of new institutions, Palais Bourbon met an obvious ideal of moderation. The building indeed had

At the same time as it opted for Palais Bourbon, the Convention appointed the architects Gisors and Lecomte to construct a chamber there. Under pressure, the latter accomplished the feat of completing their task in less than two years. The day after the inauguration, on 17 November 1797, the gazettes unanimously praised the technical performance and the undeniable architectural success of this first chamber.

### **A FIRST HEMICYCLE WAS COMPLETED IN 1797. ALTHOUGH HAILED AS AN AESTHETIC SUCCESS, ITS TECHNICAL QUALITIES PROVED TO BE LESS THAN MEDIOCRE**

several merits. First, it is situated at a respectable distance from Palais du Luxembourg where the Directors were to be housed. Therefore the separation between the executive power and the legislative power was clearer than under the Convention when deputies, committees and ministers were housed pell-mell in the halls of the Louvre. Second, the compound the palace forms with Hôtel de Lassay is lined on its four sides by wide avenues. It could therefore be more easily protected by the National Guard in the event of an insurrectional uprising. Last, it had the immense merit of being located in the heart of the peaceful Saint-Germain district, at a respectable distance from the east of Paris and its unpredictable sources of revolutionary unrest.

The impression of balance is enhanced, chroniclers were to emphasise, by the layout of the deputies' benches in a hemicycle, in the manner of a Roman theatre - great progress in comparison with the impractical rectangular or elliptical halls that had until then housed the revolutionary assemblies.



› The President's desk, which was also Lucien Bonaparte's.





Gisors and Lecomte also commissioned the erection of six statues of legislators from classical antiquity - Solon, Lycurgus, Cato... - who, with their apparel of white marble and dark green hangings, lent the hall sobriety and solemnity deemed perfectly adapted to the deputies' mandate.

The negative side of this aesthetic success, and as a result of the urgency in which the building was designed, it rapidly proved ill-adapted and above all abnormally fragile. Behind the marbles and the beauty of the lines, cracks, leaks, defective ventilation and mediocre acoustics very soon became apparent.

Like the initial Palais Bourbon, this first chamber, which was to be destroyed under the Restoration, is known to us only through engravings and period records. Except for the legislators' statues that have today found refuge in the Salle des Quatre Colonnes, only one notable element has crossed time to reach us intact today: the ensemble, designed by Lemot, formed by the speaker's tribune and the President's desk.

› Gisors and Lecomte's hemicycle

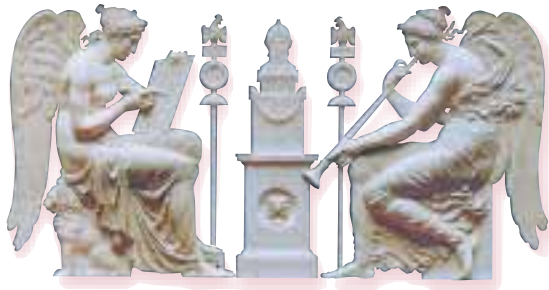


## THE PRESIDENT'S DESK AND SPEAKER'S TRIBUNE GLORIFY, EVEN IN THEIR SMALLEST DETAILS, A FERVENT DEMOCRATIC IDEAL

Both the desk and speaker's tribune are truly remarkable. Voluntarily small (1.63 metres wide by only 94 centimetres high) so as not to over dominate the speaker's tribune, the President's desk presents a wealth of details expressing a powerful democratic ideal. Its mahogany structure is decorated with four strictly identical female heads in bronze reproduced from a proposed Temple to Equality designed by Durand and Thibault. Although raised to ensure the President's authority during debates, the desk is carefully positioned to be lower than the highest row of benches in the hemicycle, thereby demonstrating that its occupier is the 'primus inter pares' - planner and organiser, rather than actual director of the Assembly.

› Front of the President's desk with four identical figures, inspired by Durand and Thibault, symbols of Republican equality.





Lower than the desk, the speaker's tribune is also laden with Republican symbols. Made of griotte and white marble, it bears in its centre the famous relief by Lemot featuring two allegories: on the left 'History writing the word Republic' (a word which was to be erased under the Empire) and on the right 'Fame, blowing her trumpet, publishes the main events of the Revolution'. Between these two figures, a pedestal decorated with a head of Janus, (symbolising respect for the past and confidence in the future) bears a bust of the Republic framed by standard poles surmounted by the Gallic cock, symbol of vigilance.

## IN 1806 NAPOLEON INSPIRED THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'POYET'S COLONNADE' WHICH WAS TO BECOME THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S SYMBOL

When the Consulate and then the Empire succeeded the Directory, Palais Bourbon had been profoundly transformed, like the country itself, but to the detriment of its overall coherence. To find the space necessary for the construction of the hemicycle, the facade inherited from the initial palace had been metamorphosed by Gisors and Lecomte who blocked its openings and added a heavy attic. The result - a colonnade punctuated by blind openings and surmounted by a strange 'sugar loaf' roof - appealed all the less to the Napoleonic taste for order and rigour as the townscape around the palace was taking form in a spectacular manner.

Place de Bourbon, Prince de Condé's project that was started in 1787, had indeed been completed in 1804. Before his departure the prince had even obtained the commitment that Rue de Bourgogne should be aligned with the exact axis of the palace. On the Seine side, Pont de la Concorde, finished with stones from the Bastille, now connected Palais Bourbon to the former Place Louis XV. At the end of Rue Royale lastly, the construction of the Madeleine church, started in 1764, was recommenced with a view to making it a 'temple to glory' devoted to the Emperor's major feats of arms.



› The facade built under the Revolution (on the left) was regarded as insufficiently balanced. It was destroyed in 1806 and replaced by the colonnade designed by the architect Poyet.

To better integrate the building into this extraordinary urban ensemble and also to correct the inharmonious impression given by the facade, the Corps législatif commissioned in 1806 the architect Bernard Poyet, an acquaintance of Lucien Bonaparte, to entirely rethink the external appearance of Palais Bourbon on the Seine side.

Bernard Poyet's answer was a classical style colonnade. Artistically there was no surprise: Imperial Rome then formed the mandatory reference, so the Corinthian style was chosen for the twelve columns. The statues decorating the flight of steps also glorify very classically the power of law and of the State: under the watchful eye of Pallas and Themis sit four high

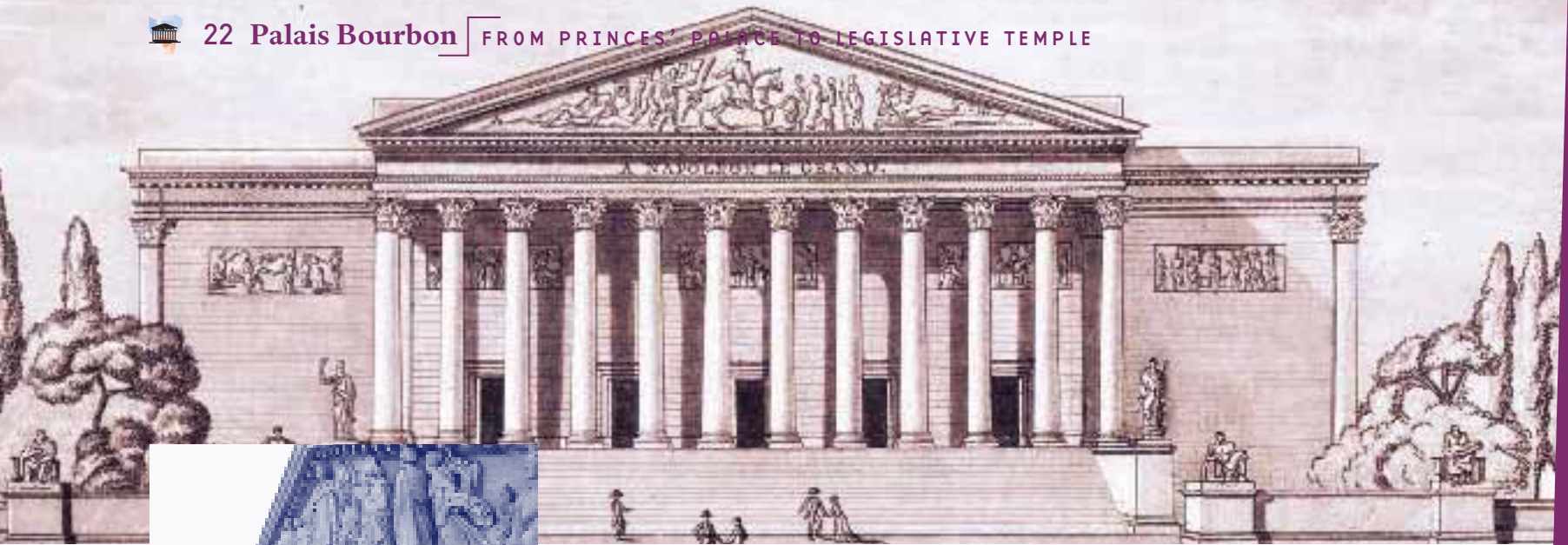
officials of the monarchic State whose heritage was now claimed by the Empire, each personifying a virtue of political action: Sully the reformer, L'Hospital the conciliator, d'Aguesseau the unifier of law, Colbert the organiser of the economy. Higher up, the pediment, which was to be hammered when the Bourbons returned to power, pompously represented 'His Majesty the Emperor returning from the Austerlitz campaign, received by the president of the Corps législatif and the deputation.'

Aesthetically unsurprising, the colonnade imagined by Poyet was, on the other hand, technically full of





## 22 Palais Bourbon FROM PRINCES' PALACE TO LEGISLATIVE TEMPLE



› Initially, the pediment to Palais Bourbon depicted a scene to the glory of Napoleon, (above) which was erased and then replaced under the July Monarchy by an allegory celebrating the French national genius (on the left)

**THE COLONNADE JUTS OUT WITH RESPECT TO THE CHAMBER AND IS HIGHER THAN THE PALACE THAT IT FRONTS. IT IS MERELY AN IMMENSE TROMPE-L'ŒIL.**

audacity and innovations. The first prowess resulted from the very positioning of the edifice. As the challenge was to integrate Palais Bourbon in an already existent townscape, Poyet decided to align his 'screen' not on the axis of the building to 'be clad', but on axes furnished by external elements: Pont de la Concorde and the facade of the Madeleine. This choice led to the screen jutting out 17 degrees from the chamber. Second trompe-l'oeil imagined by Poyet, the thirty-two step 'flight of steps-cum-podium' supporting the

edifice, does not meet any technical necessity except that of raising the colonnade to make it visible in its entirety from the opposite bank of the Seine, despite the convexity of Pont de la Concorde.





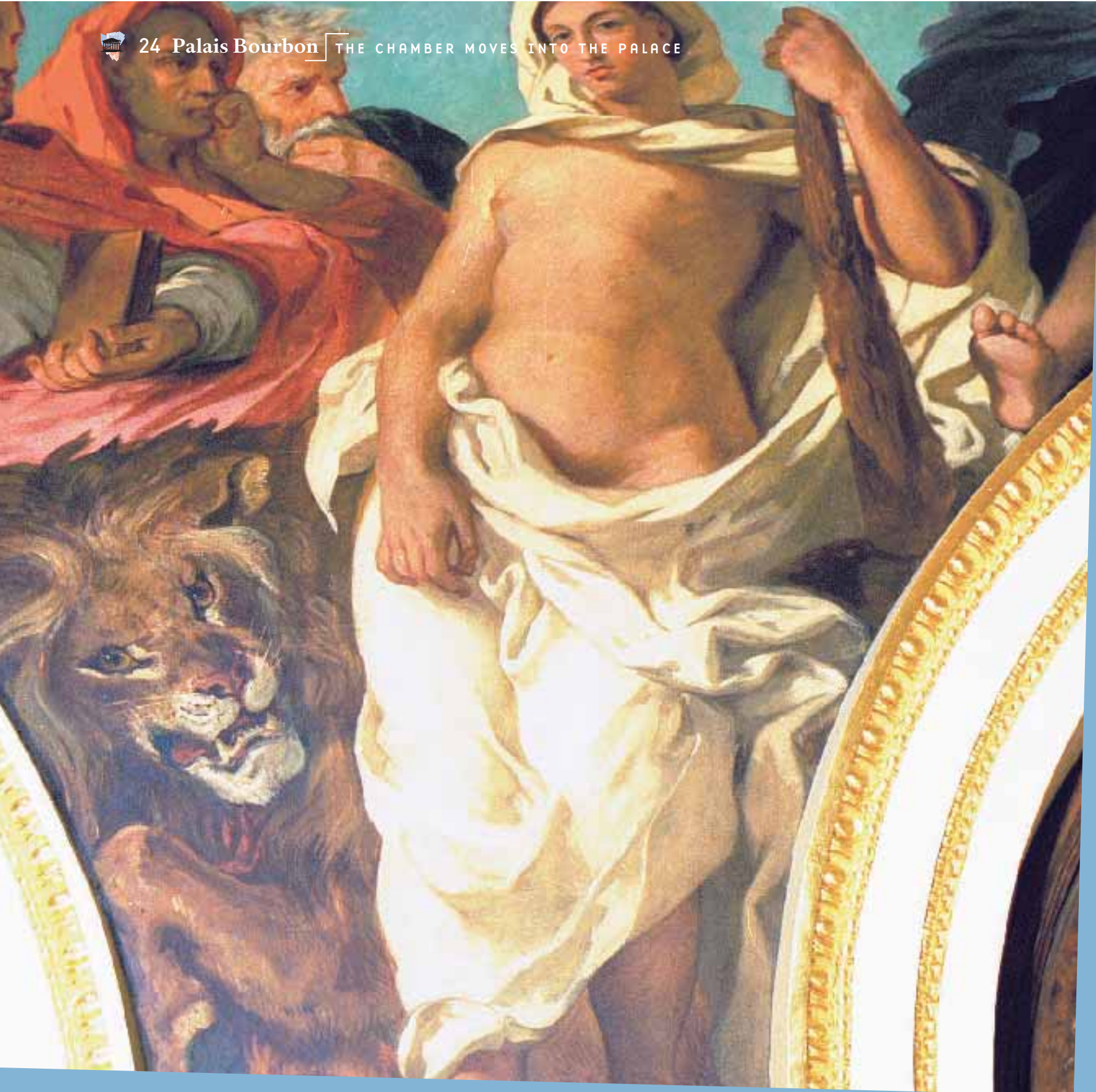
According to legend, Poyet's ingenious colonnade was not unfortunately to the liking of Napoleon to the glory of whom it had nevertheless being constructed. In a report published in 1891 on the heritage of the Chamber, the deputy and future State secretary for Fine Arts, Antonin Proust, mentioned the following anecdote which has become famous: *'The Emperor Napoleon found [the colonnade] so horrible that one day he publicly said he regretted he was no longer an artillery officer who could target his canons against this ridiculous screen.'*

## THE REPUBLICAN GUARD: TRADITION AND SECURITY

With its uniform and aura of prestige, the Republican Guard forms part of the heritage of Palais Bourbon. A unit commanded by a general is traditionally made available to the President of the Assembly. In 'field dress' it pays tribute to him at the beginning of each sitting. Dress uniform, which has remained almost unaltered since this elite corps was created by Louis-Philippe under the name of the National Guard, is however worn for receptions of foreign personalities. Apart from these prestige missions, the Republican Guard ensures daily security at the Assembly by supervising entries and participating actively in the reception of the public.











### 3<sup>rd</sup> PART

## FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE III<sup>RD</sup> REPUBLIC

### The Chamber moves into the palace

Back in power in 1814, the Bourbons were forced to maintain the parliamentary institution which, over the years, confirmed and increased its power. Palais Bourbon, in its very structures, was to benefit from this confirmation of parliamentarism.

From 1828 on, a vast renovation programme of the central body of the building was launched. Taken over and amplified by the July Monarchy, the site was to mobilise the who's who of French fine arts, chief among whom was Eugène Delacroix. Palais Bourbon as we know it today came into existence.





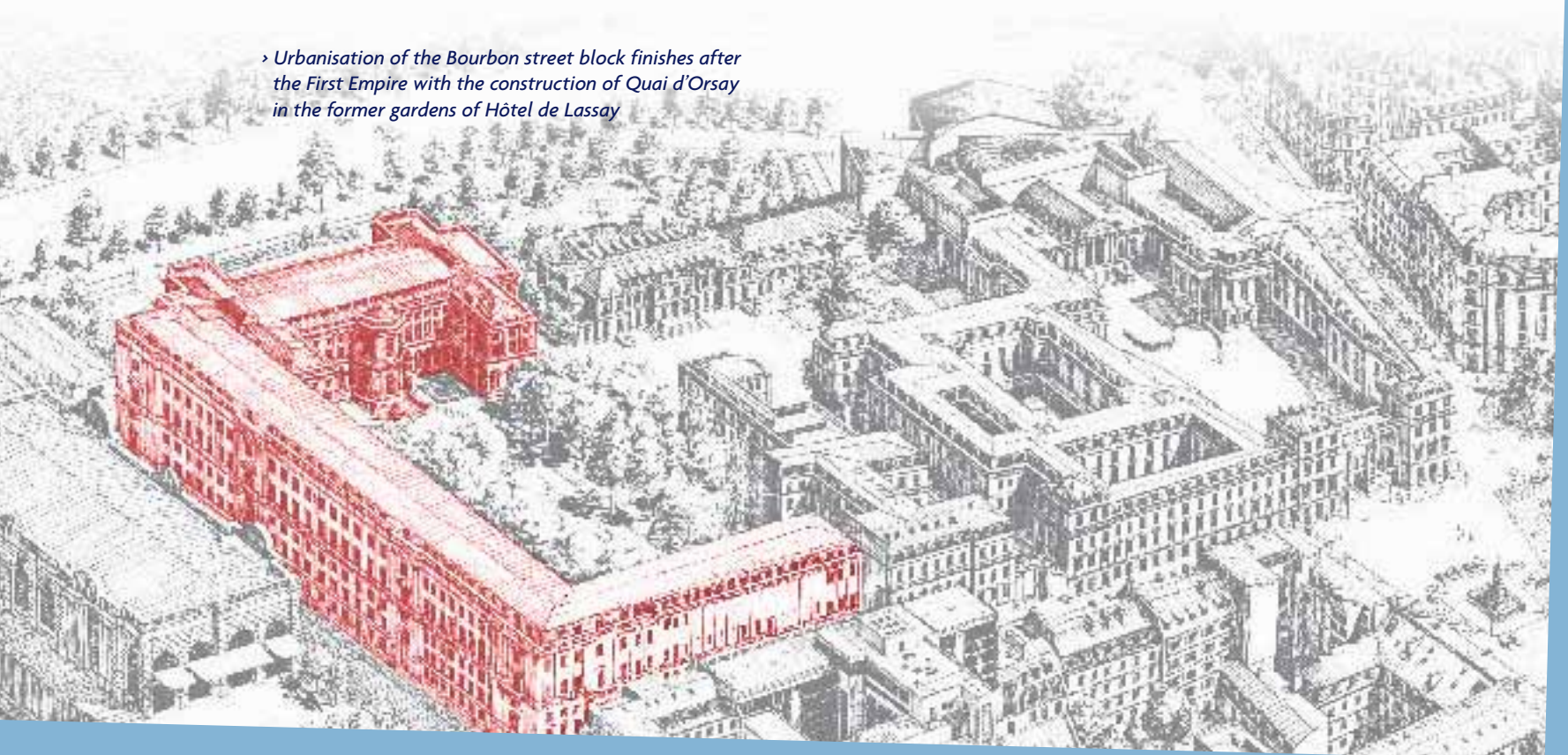
## IN 1827, THE STATE ACQUIRED PALAIS BOURBON AND COMMISSIONED THE ARCHITECT JULES DE JOLY TO TRANSFORM IT INTO A WORTHY SEAT FOR PARLIAMENT.

Back from exile, Prince de Condé took back possession of the Bourbon street block with the intention, apparently, of carrying out a new series of works to erase the traces left by the revolutionary period. Yet he soon became convinced of the impossibility of such an undertaking, which would involve destroying the colonnade and the chamber. He therefore took up quarters in Hotel de Lassay and, in 1816, consented reluctantly to lease to parliament 'the big palace and the two courtyard wings.' The royal will was therefore realised, Louis XVIII having, shortly after acceding to power, issued simultaneously two orders returning the palace to Condé and assigning it to the Chamber of Deputies.

Yet the presence of the Corps législatif in Palais Bourbon nevertheless appeared threatened. The refusal of the Condé family, even after the death of the prince, to renew the lease, combined with the advanced state of dilapidation of the chamber, led the high officials of the Corps législatif after 1820 to seriously contemplate the removal of the Chamber to other premises.

While the premises of the Institut, quai Conti, then those of the Conseil d'Etat, quai d'Orsay, were being considered as possible locations, Louis-Henri-Joseph de Bourbon, the inheritor of Prince de Condé, finally resolved in 1827 to sell the part of the

› *Urbanisation of the Bourbon street block finishes after the First Empire with the construction of Quai d'Orsay in the former gardens of Hôtel de Lassay*





› *Salle des Quatre colonnes, one of the few rooms in Palais Bourbon inherited from the original building, is today one of the main meeting points between parliamentarians and the media.*

palace rented to the Corps législatif. By removing the question mark over the continued presence of the Chamber in Palais Bourbon, this decision dispelled the government's last hesitations about an in-depth renovation of the premises.

April 1828 saw the commencement of a vast worksite under the guidance of the architect Jules de Joly, which lasted more than twenty years. The governments of the Restoration and then of the July Monarchy ploughed huge sums of money into it, calling on the most famous names in French architecture, sculpture and painting of the day.

Comparable in scope to the work undertaken by Prince de Condé from 1760 to 1780, this second site had an aim which, retrospectively, appears very complementary. The prince had built up the street block and given it many outhouses and secondary buildings; Jules de Joly, for his part, was to remodel the centre of the compound, namely Palais Bourbon itself, to transform it into a building of suitable dimensions and splendour for its parliamentary occupant.

While the alarming state of the hemicycle inherited from the Revolution was the prime motive which convinced the public authorities of the need to renovate the palace, the studies carried out by Joly from April 1828 onwards were therefore not limited, far from it, to the chamber alone. The aim was no longer that of 1795 - the urgent construction of a hemicycle in the middle of a palace. In contrast, a renovated hemicycle was to serve as the centre of a fully-fledged legislative palace with its State rooms, concourses and meeting rooms and, of course, its library.



› *'The liberator of the territory', painted in homage to Adolphe Thiers by Jules-Arsène Garnier, dominates the decor of the Conferences Room.*





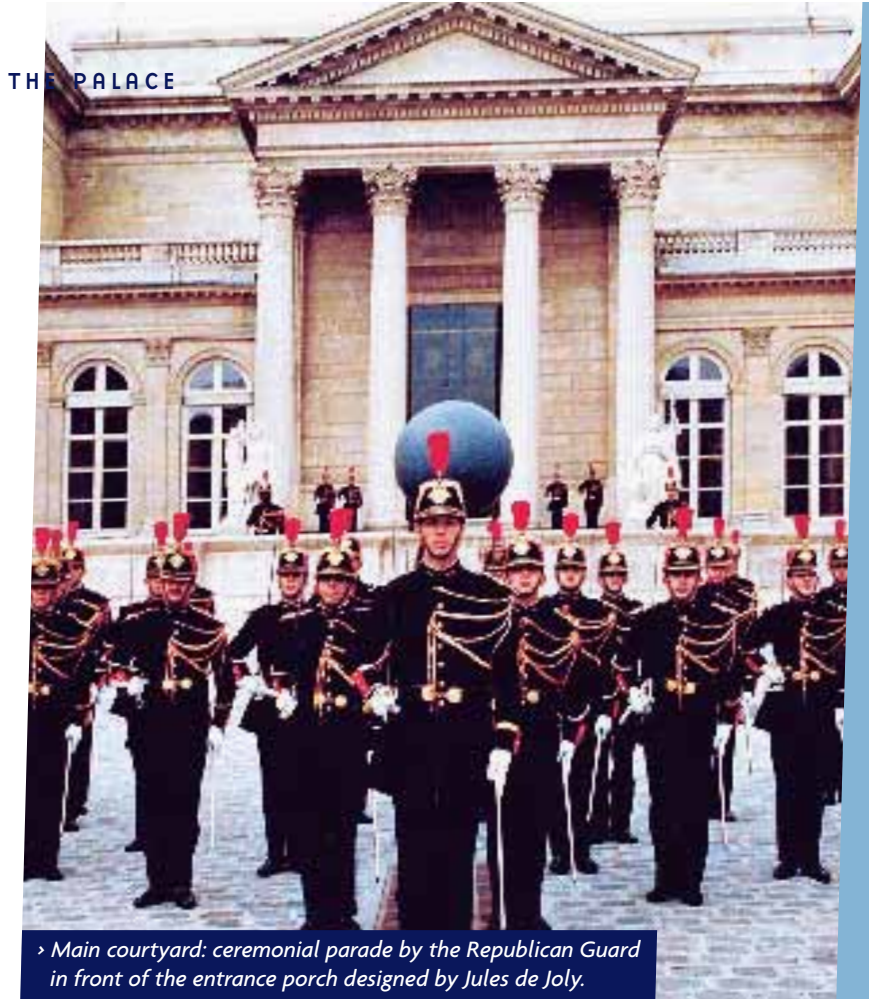
Ambitious as Joly's aims may have been, the latter was wise enough however to keep, whenever he could, the strong points of the existing building. For instance he left untouched Poyet's colonnade and the Empire rooms adjoining it - the Salon de l'empereur and Salle des gardes. The architect was even so scrupulous as to include in his plans for the new chamber the guidelines set down thirty-three years earlier by Gisors and Lecomte: layout of the hemicycle, marble colonnade, red draperies and leathers ...

Rather than destroying and replacing, Jules de Joly took great pains to add, superimpose, and complete - as he was to do so in 1843 for Hôtel de Lassay to which he added a first floor without altering the Regency ground floor - extending in particular Palais Bourbon by the construction of a spectacular series of rooms on an area taken from the main courtyard.

## PALAIS BOURBON:

### IN JULES DE JOLY'S FOOTSTEPS

The first of Jules de Joly's additions, a porch with four Corinthian columns, was erected on the courtyard side as the internal counterpart of Poyet's colonnade but on a smaller scale. It dignifies the entrance to the building and conceals from the outside the glass roof providing light to the chamber. Having crossed the porch, the visitor enters Salon Casimir Périer whose solemn aspect reflects its initial purpose of serving as a place of reception for the king at the commencement of the new term. Flanked by four statues of personalities personifying moderation in politics (General Foy, Mirabeau, Bailly, Périer), the Salon conveys by means of its sober decor and harmonious proportions an image of the reconciliatory, rational and reasonable nature of Louis-



› Main courtyard: ceremonial parade by the Republican Guard in front of the entrance porch designed by Jules de Joly.

Philippe's regime. Of interest, on the back wall there is a bas-relief commemorating the sitting of the States-General of 23 June 1789 and Mirabeau's retort to Marquis de Dreux-Brézé ('We are here by the will of the people and shall not leave except at the point of the bayonet.'). which was laid in 1889, under the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic, on the occasion of the centenary of the Revolution.

Salon Casimir Périer leads to two series of rooms surrounding the hemicycle to the east and to the west. Coincidence of the orders or deliberate will of the designers? Those placed to the east/right of the chamber - Salon Abel de Pujol, Conferences Room, library - appear to be mainly devoted in their themes to glorifying the monarchic tradition, History, and the



› The bas-relief by Dalou commemorating the sitting of the States-General on 23 June 1789



› Jules de Joly's Palais Bourbon testifies to the taste of the Romantic 19<sup>th</sup> century for 'historic' architecture, especially in the classic Salon Casimir Périer (above) and the neo-medieval style Conferences Room (at top).

unchanging character of the social order, the more conservative side of the regime's ideology, whereas in contrast those to the west/left - Salon Delacroix, Salle des Quatre Colonnes, Salle des Pas perdus - extol industry, progress, and the dynamic forces on which the July Monarchy intended to base its longevity.

First of the three rooms situated to the right, Salon Abel de Pujol, named after the painter to whom we owe its decoration, is characteristic of the traditionalist trend. The four coffers enhancing its ceiling feature allegories extolling, in a neo-medieval vein, the centuries-old alliance between the monarchy and God. The aim here is implicitly to convince that the rule of law is a notion that greatly preceded the Revolution and the Republican idea. The Salic Law of the Franks, the Capitularies of Charlemagne and the Enactments





› *Henri IV's statue  
in the Conferences  
Room*

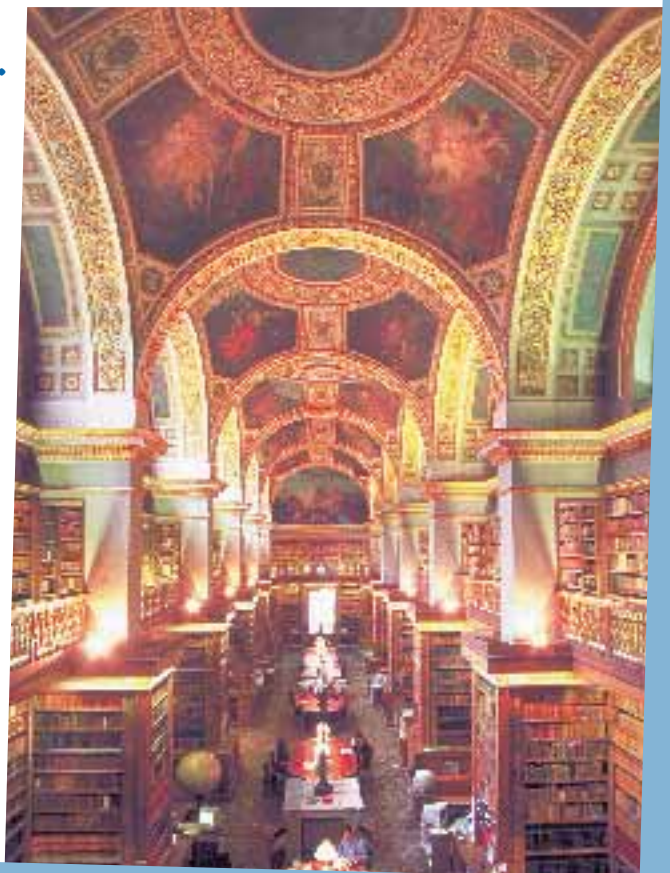
fourth and last scene, 'The Constitutional Charter of 1830', which undoubtedly forms the real central theme of the room. A few metres further on, paintings by François-Joseph Heim decorating the Conferences Room offer an even more pronounced example of the neogothic style, extolling an idealised Middle Ages, in which the monarchic order and the dynamism of the trading bourgeoisie complement one another to form a society at once peaceful and prosperous. The scenes of 'Louis VI the Fat freeing communes' or of 'Louis XII organising definitively the accounts chamber' thus alternate on the ceiling with various medallions depicting 'Prudence', 'Justice', 'Temperance'... Between two doors, a statue of Henri IV evokes, in the same vein, a popular and good-natured monarchy heedful of the well-being of its subjects. The only modern touches in this 'troubadour' decor typical of French Romanticism, a bust of Marianne and a painting paying homage to the great Gambetta, were added under the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic.

At the end of this series of rooms, the library, painted by Eugène Delacroix, is laden with historical references like its neighbours. However, on entering it, the visitor feels above all a sudden change. Here there is no moderation and no restraint. On the contrary, an amazing profusion of scenes, colours and

## **FORTY-TWO METRES LONG AND FEATURING ON ITS WALLS ONE OF THE GREATEST MASTERPIECES OF FRENCH PAINTING, PALAIS BOURBON'S LIBRARY IS EXTRAORDINARY IN MORE RESPECTS THAN ONE.**

perspectives is seen. The dimensions of the hall of course contribute to this impression of opulence: more than forty-two metres in length, it is surmounted by an imposing vault, in turn complemented by five classic domes.

Yet the monumental character of the library obviously results to an equal extent from Delacroix's immense inspiration in decorating it. The contrast with the two previous rooms already appears in the subjects chosen: while, by adopting 'Humanity's quest for knowledge and information' as the theme, the great Romantic painter chose a historical topic like his confrères Heim and Pujol, the theme nevertheless appears all the more ambitious than the tame Medieval scenes of his confrères as it depicts only scenes drawn from classical antiquity, mythology or the







› Eugène Delacroix: *'Attila tramples Italy and the Arts'*

biblical universe. In order to preserve the nobleness and power of the ensemble, Delacroix indeed radically dismissed any reference, even indirect, to a modernity deemed too commonplace, and limited himself very strictly to religious or Greek or Roman subjects.

For instance, between the culs-de-four placed at the two extremities and illustrating the eternal combat between barbarity ('Attila tramples Italy and the Arts') and civilisation ('Orpheus civilises the Greeks and teaches them Arts and Peace'), a series of scenes are depicted, from the bible ('Adam and Eve', 'Captivity in Babylon') or classical antiquity ('Alexander and Homer's poems', 'Demosthenes practicing oratory by the sea, facing the waves'), which evoke irresistibly, by their inspiration and their treatment, the spirit of Renaissance fresco painters. In short, the five domes are each

devoted to one of the five basic branches of knowledge - Theology, Legislation, Sciences, Poetry, History - , picturesque and dreamlike reflections of the information contained, a few dozen metres below, in the thousands of volumes lining the library shelves.

Change in perspective in the suite of rooms starting from Salon Casimir Périer and surrounding the hemicycle on its left-hand side: even if the decors remain here, in their general aspect, classical - particularly that of Salle des Quatre colonnes, very soberly decorated in the style of classical antiquity - , progress, modernity, and the industrial world clearly appear to be the dominating themes here. For instance, Salon Delacroix, initially Salle du Trône, extols the dynamic forces on which the July Monarchy was based: Justice and Defence, of course, but above all Agriculture and even Industry.



## 1833-1848: DELACROIX AT PALAIS BOURBON



‘And it’s a painter so unsure of his work who has been chosen to decorate an entire room in the Palais de la Chambre des Députés, and one of the biggest orders of our day has been entrusted to such a painter!’ (Le Constitutionnel of 11 April 1834). When in 1833, Eugène Delacroix was commissioned to decorate Salle du trône, the press showed only surprise incomprehension and hostility. Appointed at the instigation of Adolphe Thiers, minister for public works and former

art critic, Delacroix was not admittedly, unlike his rivals Heim or Vernet, either a member of the Institut or even a partisan of the academicism professed by it.

Quite rapidly however critics hailed the audacity of the painter’s choices. Even if the imposed topic - ‘The dynamic forces on which the Nation is based: Justice, Industry, War, Agriculture’ - appears to require realistic treatment, Delacroix indeed refused to make overly direct references to progress as he was to do so later in the library, he drew inspiration exclusively from classical iconography. Inspired by the example of the great fresco painters of the Renaissance, he







above all always made his paintings fit into the surrounding architecture, painting the pillars in grisailles so that they would merge with the stone of the walls. He also increased to maximum extent the intensity of his colours to compensate the insufficient light in the room. In October 1836, Théophile Gautier was able to praise the inspiration and nobleness of the result: 'The style is so elegant and fluid that you feel as though you are in a Renaissance hall decorated by an artist brought from Florence.'

In 1838 this success allowed Delacroix to apply for the decoration of the entire building, but he obtained only that of the library. Thiers had just left the government and this time his influence did not overcome the persistent hostility of the official circles, three members of which shared the rest of the programme: Horace Vernet in Salle des Pas Perdus, Abel de Pujol in Salle des Distributions and François-Joseph Heim in the Conferences Room.







Even more directly, the vault painted a few metres from there by Horace Vernet in Salle des Pas Perdus appears to echo Guizot's exhortation 'Get rich!'. Behind characters leaning from their balconies, the 19th century Paris townscape can be seen, with its busy boulevards and, in the background, its factory chimneys. This amazing realism does not moreover rule out a certain lyricism: dominating part of the decor, a 'Steam Genie', embodiment of the benefits of Progress, looms up alongside a powerful locomotive belching out steam...



› The famous ceilings of Salle des Pas Perdus, painted by Horace Vernet

## TOO SOLEMN FOR SOME, TOO 'FRIVOLOUS' FOR OTHERS, THE HEMICYCLE HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF UNCEASING DEBATE SINCE ITS INAUGURATION.

At the centre of this series of rooms, the hemicycle unveils its red and gold decor. Since 1832, the year it was completed, a number of voices have deplored the excessively incongruous character of its decor, especially the presence of elements - red draperies, Ionic columns - that may inopportunately be seen as theatrical. Other critics have addressed the dimensions of the hall which, with its 545 sq. m (i.e. 3% of the total surface area of the Assembly's premises), was from the outset insufficiently large for the distinguished nature of its function.

However this vision of too intimate a hemicycle, confined yet comfortable, fades away when you look up from the benches and glance all around the hall. At the top, a large glass roof dominates a ceiling featuring more than a hundred

coffers and edged by an impressive frieze painted by Evariste Fragonard which depicts, between medallions, five figures of major legislators: Justinian, Solon, Lycurgus, Numa,





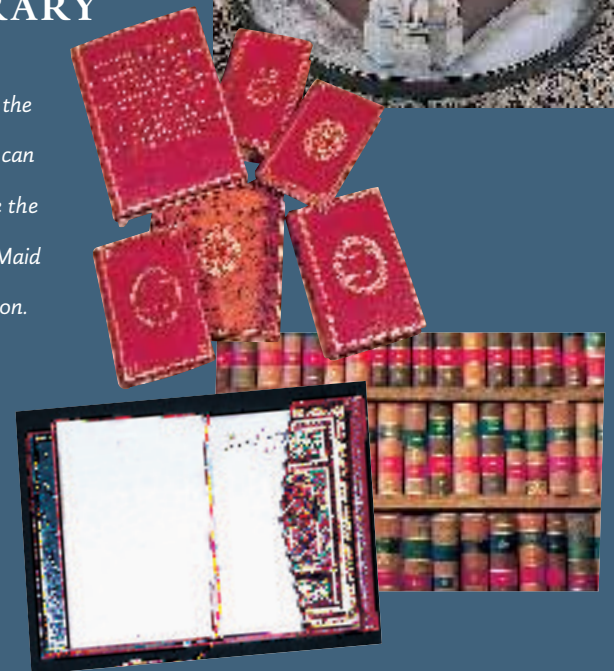
Charlemagne. On the opposite side, behind the speakers' tribune, a large triumphal arch decorates the hall's back wall, which houses in its niches a series of statues. Directly above the President's desk, a bas-relief chiselled by Roman depicts 'France spreading its influence over sciences, arts, trade and agriculture'. A few metres further up, added

under the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic, a Gobelins tapestry inspired by Raphaël represents the School of Athens, evoking the Greek origins of democracy. Lastly, on each side of these central scenes, an impressive set of six statues can be seen, granting all its solemnity to the ensemble. To the right, the power of the State is glorified by 'Public order' sculpted by Pradier, itself surmounted by 'Justice' and 'Force'. On the left, 'Liberty', by the same Pradier, surmounted by 'Eloquence' and 'Prudence', extols the indissociable whole formed by the parliamentary regime and the rule of law.



## THE TREASURES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LIBRARY

*The National Assembly library houses more than 800,000 volumes, making it the fourth French library for the number of books. Among its rarest items, mention can be made of the manuscript of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions or else the original minutes of Joan of Arc's trial in Rouen (opposite), which transcribe the Maid of Orleans' answers to the questions of the court presided over by Bishop Cauchon.*











## 4<sup>th</sup> PART

# PALAIS BOURBON TODAY

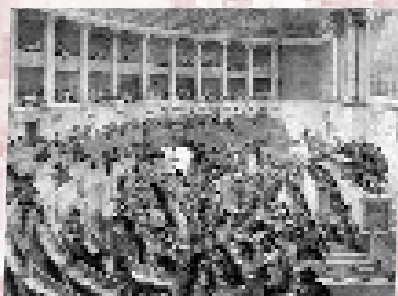
## A town in the town

With the return of the Republic in 1875, it was once again regretted that the Chamber did not have the benefit of a purpose-built building. Ambitious reconstruction and removal projects succeeded one another but, until the beginning of the 1960s, never came to fruition, delaying all the more the effective modernisation of Palais Bourbon. At last started under the V<sup>th</sup> Republic, this modernisation is today all the more impressive. New premises were built and there is a policy of openness towards contemporary art and of systematic computerisation, making Palais Bourbon today a real town in the town, spectacularly combining technology and heritage.



## THE HEMICYCLE AND THE COLONNADE ARE TO BE DESTROYED!

Too comfortable or not functional enough, excessively formal or insufficiently solemn...: in two hundred years of parliamentary life, Palais Bourbon has not been spared



criticisms, particularly on the part of the deputies themselves. This dissatisfaction, which was a constant of parliamentary life until the 1960s, was particularly rife during the first years of the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic when, back from Versailles, the 578 deputies had to relearn how to live in a hemicycle

designed for 440 occupants. Symbolising this feeling of discomfort, a parliamentary report, drafted in 1887 by deputy Margaine, emphasised the disquieting evolution of the mortality curve of deputies and did not hesitate, in conclusion, to highlight the insalubrity of the old Palais Bourbon as the undeniable cause of this wave of deaths.

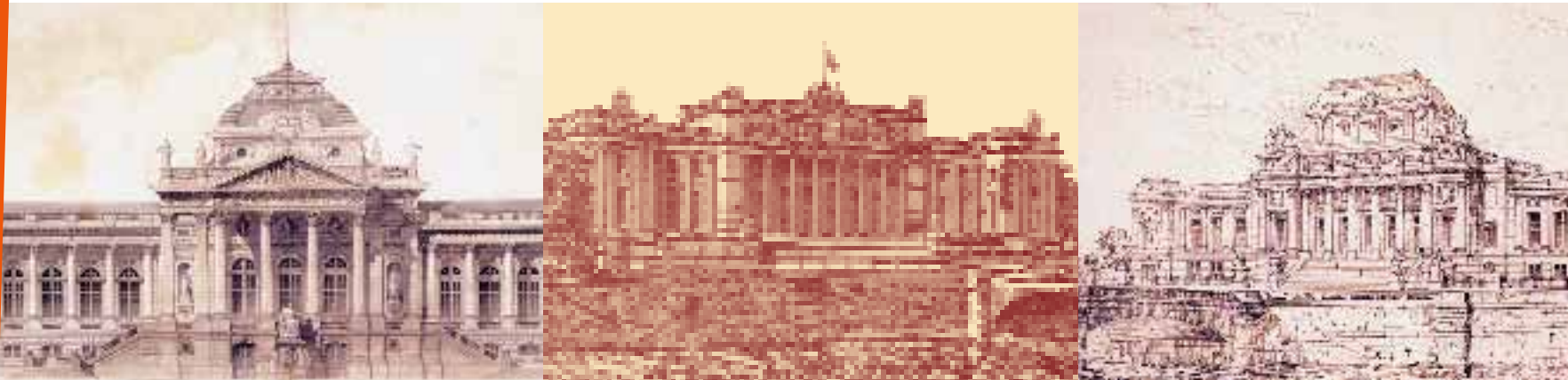
The main targets of these criticisms were understandably the chamber and especially its Napoleonic screen which, according to a parliamentary report of the day, '*seems to make the chamber the temple of obscurity and darkness*'. In the years before the First World War a succession of

spectacular facade projects were thus presented to the Bureau with a view to replacing Poyet's austere colonnade with constructions deemed more worthy of parliament. Designed for the most part in the industrial architecture style that had inspired Gare d'Orsay and Grand Palais, these projects were abandoned, to the relief of many, at the outbreak of the First World War.

## THE ASSEMBLY LEAVES PALAIS BOURBON

As time went by criticisms became more focused on essentials: it was not so much the hemicycle which hindered the quality of parliamentary work as the global insufficiency of premises which, since the 18th century, had barely been customised to house a modern administration. After the First World War, the Chamber of Deputies therefore started to look for new premises to suitably house its committees and departments as the complexity of parliamentary work increased. In 1932, it was decided to construct a building in Allée de la Présidence to house the quaestors. Simultaneously, a 200 seat hemicycle - the present Salle Colbert - was built as a meeting place for the largest parliamentary group.

› On the eve of the First World War there were many projects for new facades but none were realised.



Despite this first effort, space remained too rare and the Assembly had to resolve to break 'the unity of place' which had hitherto confined parliamentary activity to the street block comprising Palais Bourbon and Hôtel de la Présidence. In 1974, 101 Rue de l'Université, opposite Hôtel de Lassay, was inaugurated. Today called 'Immeuble Jacques Chaban-Delmas', it provides each parliamentarian with an individual work area. After the purchase in 1983 of the building at 233 Boulevard Saint-Germain, the opening, in 2002, of 3 Rue Aristide Briand has provided the necessary space for the deputies, groups and administrative departments ensuring the daily operation of the Assembly.



› Salle Colbert, Palais Bourbon's other hemicycle





## WITH AN INTERNET SITE, HIGH-SPEED CABLING AND A TV CHANNEL, PALAIS BOURBON HAS TODAY BECOME A COMMUNICATION CENTRE.

Initially confined to the hemicycle, the Assembly has therefore, with the passing of decades, become a small town in its own right with a unique atmosphere. There are even a few shops for the deputies, which accentuate this impression of autonomy. Visitors can admire an art nouveau refreshment room laid out in 1904 behind the chamber. Mention should also be made of the hairdresser's and post office next to the library, and the tobacconists and newsstand close to the Rotunda, without forgetting the imposing lifts - most of these picturesque installations dating from the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic. A few art nouveau or art deco touches are thus added to Palais Bourbon's Romantic decor.



› The tobacconists and newsstand

The Assembly can be proud of these symbols of conviviality because thorough modernisation of its infrastructures has never been neglected over the past forty years. The advent of the V<sup>th</sup> Republic in 1958 may appear retrospectively as a watershed. The new Constitution drastically reduced the number of standing committees and immediately brought about a far-reaching restructuring of the premises. The opening, in 1992, of Salle Lamartine formed the last symbolic stage of thirty years of efforts to install in the Assembly's basement a network of meeting rooms adapted to the requirements of today's debates. Also at basement level, a complementary three level car park was excavated at the end of the 1970s at the site of the main courtyard which was then re-laid in its original state.



› The clock in the refreshment room

Without at all impairing a centuries-old heritage, new information and communication technologies have also entered Palais Bourbon in force. Since 1999, all the Assembly buildings have enjoyed high-speed cabling allowing the

Without at all impairing a centuries-old heritage, new



› Salle Lamartine



› The Defence Committee's room.

deputies and their staff to have direct and immediate access to modern information sources. Hosting an Internet site ([assemblee-nationale.fr](http://assemblee-nationale.fr)) visited yearly by two million Internet users, Palais Bourbon has also had its own TV channel since March 2000, La Chaîne Parlementaire-Assemblée nationale, which broadcasts from the Assembly itself parliamentary debates, news and political fora. The marble and gilt decor therefore now hides a multitude

of intensely active wires of our day and age. In order to bring the building even more spectacularly into today's world, the National Assembly Presidency has, since the end of the 1980s, opened the doors of Palais Bourbon wider to contemporary art, thereby reviving the tradition of artistic patronage started in the 19th century which saw the who's who of French fine arts contribute to the building's decoration. By such continuous

### **A SYMBOL OF PALAIS BOURBON'S REGENERATION, THE ASSEMBLY HAS REVIVED ITS PATRONAGE TRADITION BY BRINGING CONTEMPORARY ART INTO ITS WALLS.**



efforts the National Assembly today appears foremost among the public institutions open to contemporary creation. The first highlight of this new policy was the bicentenary of the 1789 Revolution, on the occasion of which the Assembly placed two large orders. The first of these gave Palais Bourbon

of intensely active wires of our day and age. In order to bring the building even more spectacularly into today's world, the National

efforts the National Assembly today appears foremost among the public institutions open to contemporary creation. The first highlight of this new policy was the bicentenary of the 1789 Revolution, on the occasion of which the Assembly placed two large orders. The first of these gave Palais Bourbon



› *Rights of Man sphere*

a work recalling the universal and timeless nature of the Rights of Man proclaimed in 1789

by the Constituant National Assembly. Following an international competition in which some of the most famous names of plastic arts took part, Walter de Maria's project was selected. Referring to the universal scope of these rights, the sculptor designed a black granite monolithic sphere laid on a white marble parallelepiped, itself surrounded by a hemicycle where the seventeen articles of the Declaration of Human Rights and its preamble are engraved. Decorating the main courtyard, where visitors can today admire it, the sphere contains, invisible to the naked eye, a gilt

bronze heart symbolising the human, emotional and sensitive dimension of Human Rights.

The second of the Assembly's orders for the bicentenary can be seen in the nearby underground station renamed 'Assemblée nationale' for the occasion.

The selected proposal is distinguished by its originality and determination to convey a civic message to citizens in the midst of their daily activities. In this evolutive work, plastician Jean-Charles Blais has drawn over brightly coloured large adverts a silhouette symbolising the presence of deputies, thereby modernising the cladding of the former 'Chambre des députés' station.

› *'Assemblée nationale' underground station.*





But it is undeniably inside the National Assembly that the presence of contemporary works between classical paintings and statues surprises the visitor. It is here that the Assembly's determination to maintain in its walls a living and innovative heritage can best be seen. Hervé di Rosa's painting - a racy frieze, depicting in a style close to that of the comic strip a refreshing vision of citizenship, displayed in the corridor leading the public to the chamber - is the most colourful example of such works. Further on, in the rotunda which now bears his name, the painter Alechinsky has placed in the midst of the marbles and stuccoes an unexpected touch of vegetal poetry, covering the walls of the small room with flowers, leaves and branches, which are topped by free verse by poet Jean Tardieu: *'Men seek light in a fragile garden with shimmering colours.'*



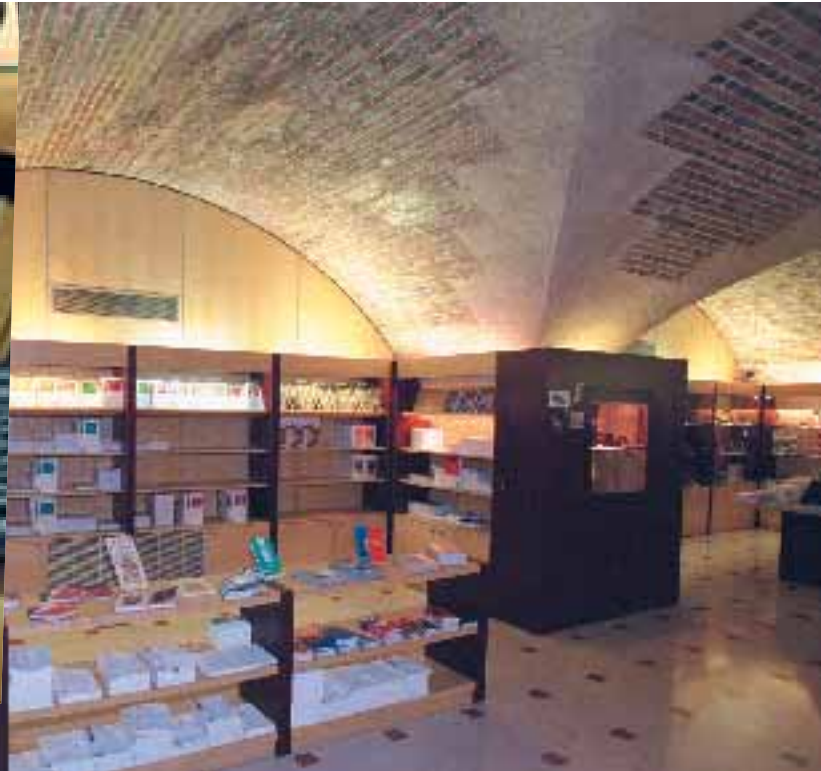
› Olivier Debré: *'Ocre rayé des Tilleuls'*  
(oil on canvas)

› Alechinsky rotunda



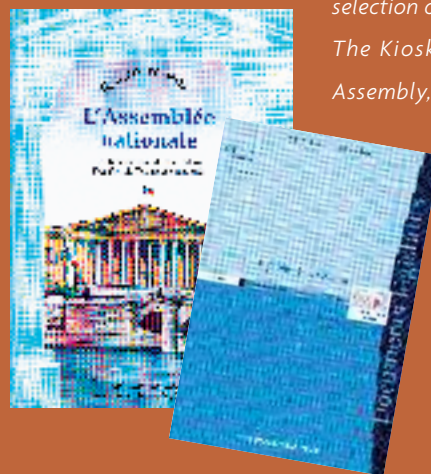
› Richard Texier: *'La Suite des droits de l'homme'* (tapestry, detail)





## A 'KIOSK' TO BE COMPLETELY IN THE KNOW!

*The National Assembly is continuing to create in its premises new areas facilitating the reception and information of the public. Example: the 'Kiosque de l'Assemblée' open to all on Rue Aristide-Briand, close to the gardens in front of the refreshment room. All parliamentary publications can be consulted and bought here, such as reports, legislative documents, and a selection of political and historic works.*



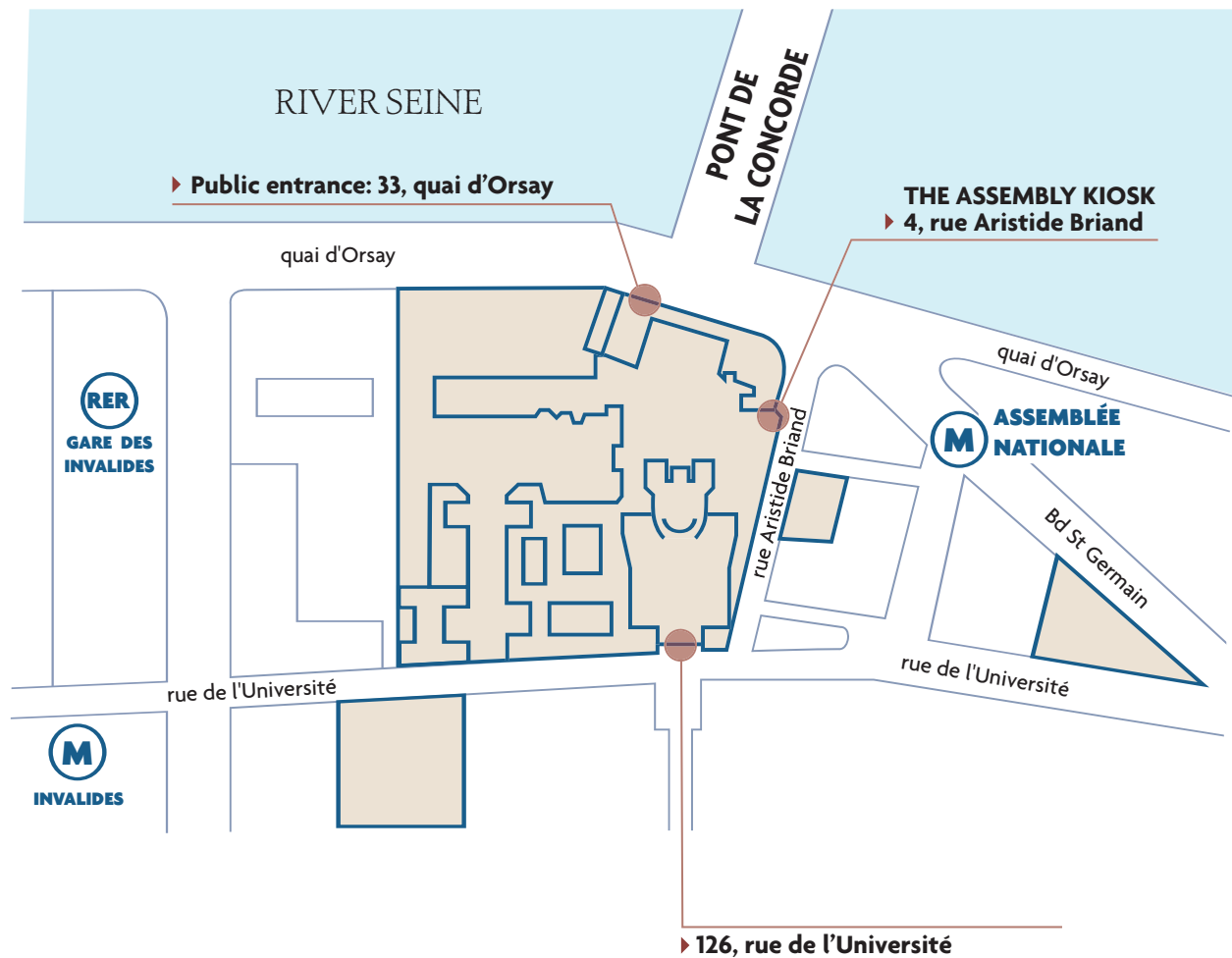
*The Kiosk, selling souvenirs and gifts related to the National Assembly, also comprises an interactive consultation area where, among other sources of information, the Assembly website and many CD-ROMs edited by the Assembly can be consulted.*







## ENTRIES TO PALAIS BOURBON

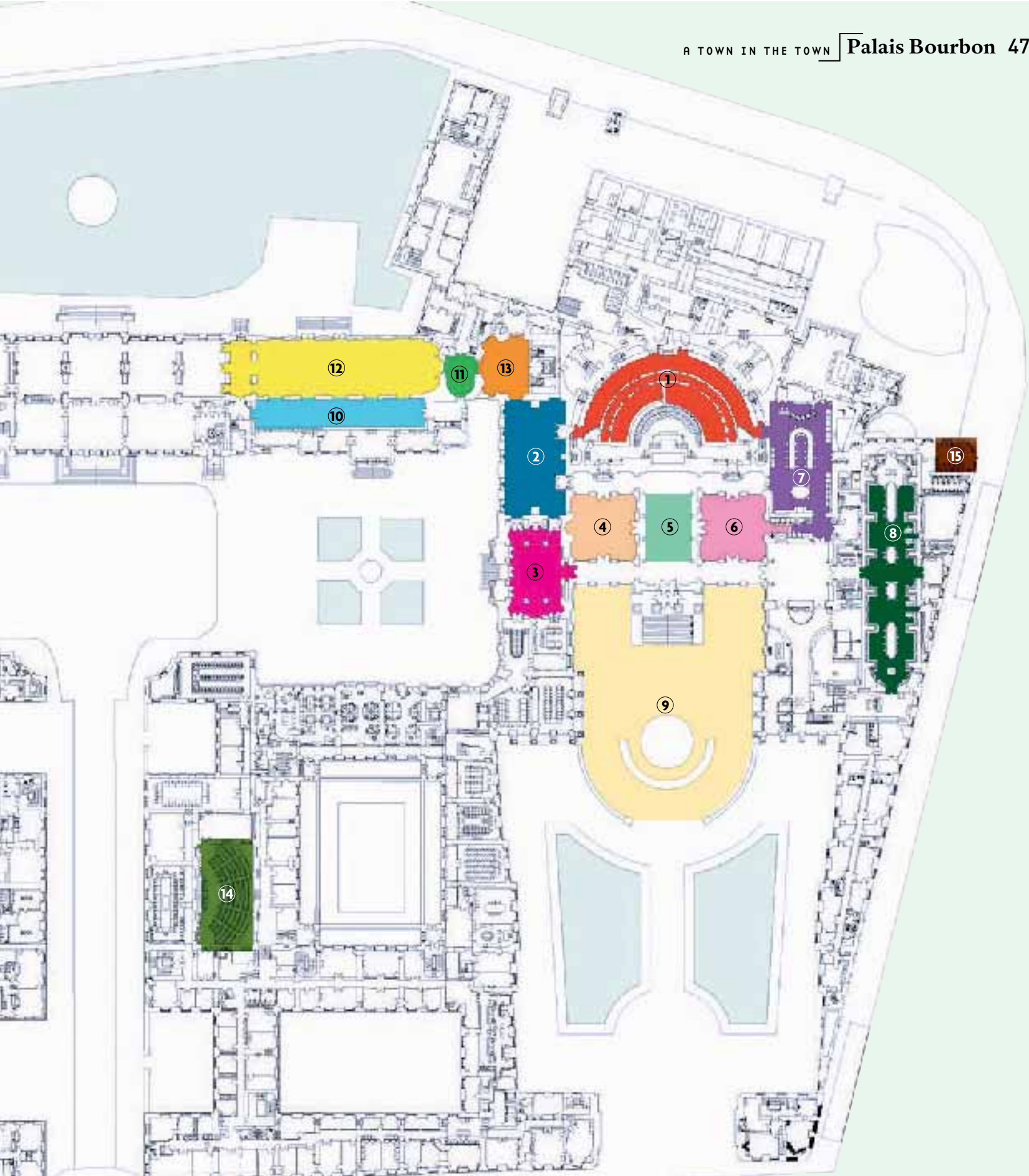


### PHOTO CREDITS:

ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE, RÉUNION DES MUSÉES NATIONAUX COVER AND P11,  
ILLUSTRATIONS © ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE / PIRÈS-TRIGO: COVER, P13 AND P26, MARC CAMUS/ETC P36



- 1 - Hemicycle
- 2 - Salle des Pas Perdus
- 3 - Salle des Quatre colonnes
- 4 - Salon Delacroix
- 5 - Salon Casimir Périer
- 6 - Salon Pujol
- 7 - Conferences Room
- 8 - Library
- 9 - Main courtyard
- 10 - Tapestries Gallery
- 11 - Alechinsky rotunda
- 12 - Galerie des fêtes
- 13 - Rotunda
- 14 - Salle Colbert
- 15 - Kiosk







**Secretariat-General of the National Assembly**  
**Communication and multimedia information department**

126, rue de l'Université - 75007 Paris  
Tel: 33 (0)1 40 63 69 81 - fax: 33 (0)1 40 63 55 60  
[www.assemblee-nationale.fr](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr)