

THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 1686, was a festive day in Paris. At one o'clock in the afternoon, trumpeters heralded a procession of city officials who wound their way from the Hôtel de Ville to the new Place des Victoires where they joined a party of dignitaries that included the Dauphin, his wife, and the Duc d'Orléans (Fig. 1). The king, Louis XIV, had planned to be in attendance, but illness kept him at Versailles.

The object of their attention was a gilded bronze statue of the monarch by Martin Desjardins that had been commissioned by the Maréchal de La Feuillade, a prominent military figure and intimate of the court (Catalog: Paris,

Fig. 1. Paris, inauguration of the Place des Victoires, 28 March 1686. Engraving by Nolin. (BN Est. Va 230e; photo, BN.) The Dauphin is seated on the reviewing stand. The view does not show the fictive architecture erected to suggest the appearance of the buildings Mansart designed to frame the *place*.



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Fig. 2. Paris, Place des Victoires. Engraving by N. Poilly. (BN Est. Va 230e; photo, BN.)

Place des Victoires). In a ceremony modeled on ancient Roman rituals, the city fathers dedicated the statue by circling it three times to the accompaniment of fanfares and fusillades. The participants then returned to the Hôtel de Ville for a banquet and a fireworks display.¹

The statue portrayed Louis XIV in his coronation robes being crowned with laurel by a Victory. A Cerberus squirmed underfoot and chained captives, allusions to the king's vanquished enemies, crouched at the base of the pedestal. *VIRO IMMORTALI* proclaimed the principal inscription, and other inscriptions and bas-reliefs set out the deeds by which the monarch had secured his reputation for posterity.

Since construction of the townhouses lining the *place* barely had begun, canvas mock-ups of their facades suggested the effect envisioned by the architect, Jules Hardouin-Mansart (Fig. 2, Pls. I, II). In contrast to the haphazard and congested character of most Parisian streets in the late seventeenth century, the Place des Victoires offered disciplined open space framed by monumental architecture. Glittering in the sunlight by day and the illumination of powerful lanterns by night, the statue and its setting proclaimed the magnificence and power of Louis XIV to all passersby.

Seventy-nine years later, on 26 August 1755, Gaspard-Louis Rouillé d'Orfeuil, royal intendant of the *généralité* of Champagne, presided over festivities dedicating a royal statue and *place* in Reims (Catalog: Reims). The statue, by Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, portrayed Louis XV in Roman military dress (Fig. 3). The monarch's left hand rested on the scabbard of his sword, and his right hand was

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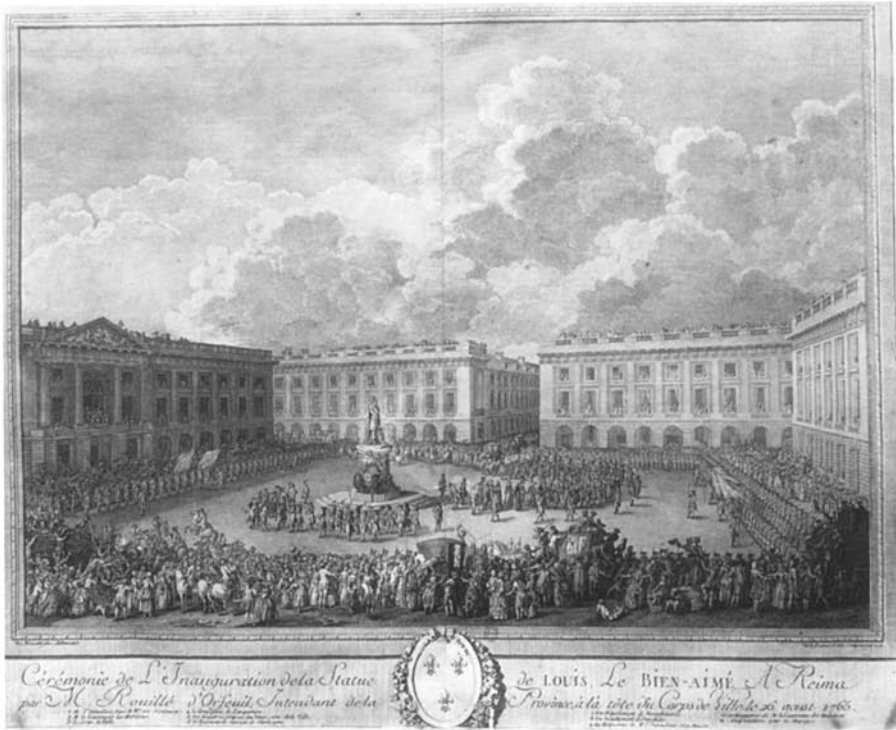


Fig. 3. Reims, inauguration of the Place Louis XV (Place Royale), 26 August 1765. Engraving by Varin, 1772, after Van Blarenberghe. (BN Est. Hennin Qb 1765; photo, BN.) The intendant of the ministry of finance, Rouillé d'Orfeuil, bows to the statue. Behind him are the *lieutenant-général des habitants* and the members of the municipal council.

outstretched palm down in a gesture of protection. On one side of the pedestal a woman portraying Government gently led a lion by the mane, and on the other a contented man sat amidst attributes of abundance. The inscription on the front of the pedestal praised the king for his benevolent rule:

A LOUIS XV
LE MEILLEUR DES ROIS QUI
PAR LA DOUCEUR DE SON GOUVERNEMENT
FAIT LE BONHEUR SES PEUPLES²

At the time of the dedication, the buildings framing the Place Louis XV, designed by Legendre, the district engineer of the Corps Royal des Ponts et Chaussées, were in various stages of completion. Their uniform facades were a simplified interpretation of those at the Place des Victoires, but whereas the buildings of the Parisian *place* were private residences, those at Reims housed the Hôtel des Fermes (tax bureau), shops, and residences.

An *amateur* of the arts examining the two *places* during the ancien régime would have noted both the generic similarities of their architecture and the

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striking differences in their portrayal of their respective subjects. In Paris, Desjardins presented Louis XIV as a triumphant conqueror attaining glory through war and aggressive domestic actions. At Reims, however, Pigalle defined Louis XV's glory in terms of peace and good government.

Another difference between the two *places* was the relationship of the royal statues and their surroundings. The Place des Victoires was first and foremost a setting for the royal statue; its location in Paris had been determined more by the timely availability of the site than by any particular need for a *place*. The Place Louis XV at Reims, on the other hand, was an integral component of a master plan that linked the city's principal thoroughfares with the central markets.

The Place des Victoires in Paris and the Place Louis XV in Reims are paradigms of the *places royales* honoring Louis XIV and Louis XV built or proposed in at least twenty-five French cities during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period the term *place royale*, frequently used as a place-name in the early seventeenth century, acquired a specific meaning as a particular type of public space created to glorify the reigning monarch.³ In its purest form, a *place royale* was distinguished from other types of *places* by the presence of a statue of the king amid buildings of uniform and ennobling design; in practice, however, limited financial resources often precluded elaborate architectural settings. *Places royales* typically were acts of homage conceived by courtiers and officers of the crown and financed from provincial or municipal treasuries. Their planning required the cooperation of a constellation of government officials, financiers, architects, and sculptors, and their construction had a strong impact on the shape, function, and economy of the cities in which they were built.

Before the 1680s, statues of French monarchs, freestanding or in relief, could be found in a variety of public locations in French cities including the courtyards and portals of town halls, bridges, and triumphal arches, but not in *places* designed especially for their display. In 1679, for example, visitors to Paris could see a bas-relief of an equestrian statue of Henri IV on the facade of the Hôtel de Ville and a pedestrian statue of Louis XIV in the courtyard, busts of Louis XIV on the Porte St.-Antoine and the Pompes du Pont Notre-Dame, and a family group of Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, and the future Louis XIV on the Pont au Change.⁴ More imposing were the equestrian statues of Henri IV on the Pont Neuf and Louis XIII in the Place Royale (Place des Vosges).

The equestrian statue of Henri IV had been commissioned from Giovanni Bologna around 1604.⁵ It arrived in Paris in 1614 and was erected on a platform adjacent to the Pont Neuf on the western tip of the Île de la Cité where it could be viewed from the bridge, the Seine, the Louvre, and the Place Dauphine, which was then under construction (Fig. 4). Germain Brice, the author of a popular eighteenth-century guide to Paris, described the statue's emplacement and the triangular Place Dauphine as discrete elements with separate dedications.⁶ The statue honored the king, the Place Dauphine honored the heir to the throne, and the bridge and the buildings demonstrated the crown's devotion to the welfare of the bourgeoisie. Architectural writers of

Voie et perspective du Pont neuf de Paris

1. la Place du Châtelet de bronze 2. le Pont Neuf 3. le Collège des quatre Nations 4. le Cours de la Reine 5. l'Arc de la Conférence 6. la Galerie des Louvres 7. la Galerie des Feuillants

the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries criticized the simple brick and stone facades of the Place Dauphine as an undignified backdrop for a royal statue, and royal and municipal architects offered numerous projects calling for their demolition and replacement with more monumental structures.⁷

The architecture of the Place Royale, known today as the Place des Vosges, met with similar objections (Fig. 5). This *place*, named *royale* in honor of its patron, Henri IV, did not possess any monumental sculpture until 1639, when Cardinal Richelieu had an equestrian statue of Louis XIII erected in the center.⁸ Jacques-François Blondel and other architectural writers of the eighteenth century, such as Jean-Louis de Cordemoy and Abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier, criticized the facades of the townhouses as inelegant and complained that the vast dimensions of the *place* dwarfed the statue.⁹

The solution to such discordances was to plan statue and *place* as an ensemble. French patrons and artists knew from literary texts, numismatic evidence, and ancient ruins that sculpture and architecture had been employed to great effect in the fora of imperial Rome, and they sought to reinterpret these monuments in French terms. Allusions to imperial Rome also reinforced the political message of *places royales* by depicting Louis XIV and Louis XV as equals of the ancients, leading France into another golden age.

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Excerpt

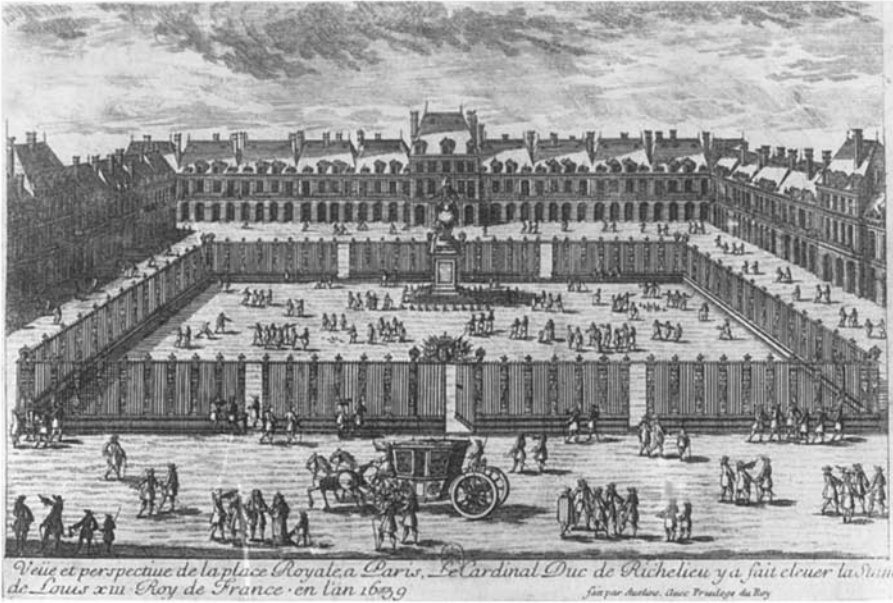
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Fig. 5. Paris, Place Royale (Place des Vosges). Engraving by Aveline. (BN Est. Va 251; photo, BN.)

The first examples of this effort were the Place des Victoires and the Place Louis-le-Grand (Place Vendôme) in Paris. They were designed in 1685 under the direction of Jules Hardouin-Mansart, the *premier architecte du roi*, at the peak of a six-year period between 1683 and 1688 when at least twenty projects for statues of Louis XIV were proposed for public *places* in cities throughout France. The high costs of the sculpture, site acquisition, and architectural settings forced the abandonment of most projects, but nine cities overcame these obstacles. Caen, Poitiers, and Le Havre made do by erecting statues in existing *places* with few or no improvements to the surrounding buildings, but Paris, Lyon, Dijon, Pau, Montpellier, and Rennes undertook new or specially remodeled settings (see Catalog).

This campaign of *place* building was initiated by the Marquis de Louvois, the minister who had succeeded Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1683, and was channeled through a circle of courtiers including the Maréchal de La Feuillade and a number of royal governors. It lost momentum in the wake of the War of the League of Augsburg, which began in 1688, and came to a halt with the death of Louvois in 1691.

With few exceptions, the planning of the statues and their settings was directed by Mansart and the architects of the Bâtiments du Roi. Although leading sculptors such as François Girardon, Etienne Le Hongre, and Martin Desjardins executed the statues, they worked from schematic designs supplied by the Bâtiments and were subject to Mansart's authority. Mansart employed a limited set of forms for the compositions of the statues and building facades. This practice may have been in part a pragmatic response to the large number

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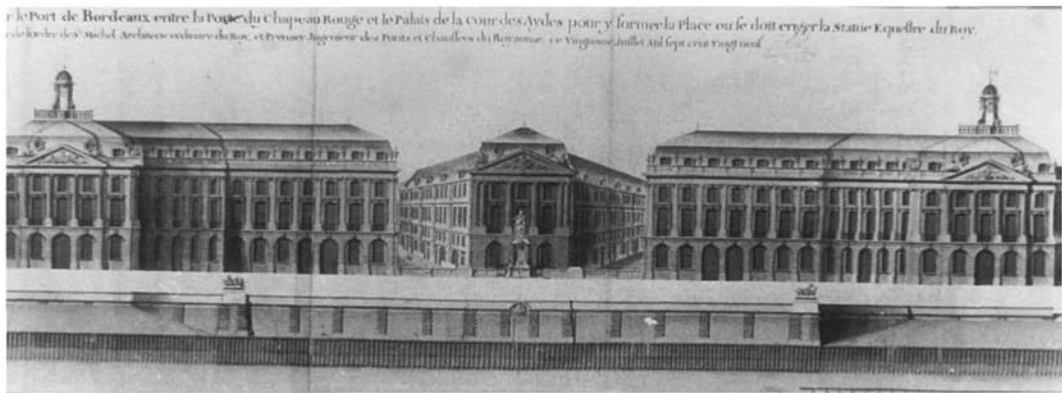


Fig. 6. Bordeaux, Place Louis XV (Place de la Bourse). Drawing for the principal elevation signed by Jacques Gabriel, 20 July 1729. (AN N III Gironde 40-1; photo, author.)

of commissions that allowed little time for experimentation, but it also projected a consistent image of the monarch and established the *place royale* as a distinct class of royal monument.

Louis XV’s directors of the Bâtiments did not pursue the building of *places royales* with the vigor of Louvois, but a variety of other sponsors including courtiers, intendants of the ministry of finance, municipal officials, and private speculators initiated projects in at least twelve cities during his reign. Of these, six were realized in Bordeaux, Rennes, Paris, Nancy, Reims, and Valenciennes (see Catalog). Authority over their design was not as centralized as it had been in the 1680s, but architects and sculptors generally continued to observe the conventions Mansart had established. By doing so, they maintained the distinct identity of the *place royale* and reinforced its dynastic associations.

The first Place Louis XV (Place de la Bourse) was dedicated in Bordeaux in 1743 (Fig. 6; Catalog: Bordeaux). It was conceived by Claude Boucher, the provincial intendant, and designed by Jacques Gabriel, the *premier architecte du roi*. The equestrian statue of Louis XV at its center was realized by Jean-Louis and Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne from schematic designs by Gabriel. The formal characteristics of the architecture and the statue recalled the Place Louis-le-Grand in Paris, but their functional and iconographic programs were innovative.

Boucher and Gabriel planned the Place Louis XV as an integral part of the commercial life of the city and envisioned it as the first stage in the transformation of Bordeaux from a walled, inwardly directed city to an efficient seaport. The building program included customs offices, a stock exchange, offices for merchants, and residences. The notion of setting the royal statue amidst such commonplace activities troubled a number of officials and *amateurs* of architecture in Bordeaux and Paris, but the program of sculpture displayed in the buildings’ pediments provided a response by linking the grandeur of the monarch to the economic prosperity of his subjects.

Five years after the dedication of the Place Louis XV in Bordeaux, the

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Bureau des Marchands of Paris, the municipal council, ostensibly inspired by the victorious conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession, voted to erect a statue of the king at a site of his choosing (Catalog: Paris, Place Louis XV). As the Bureau considered the wording of the commission, Charles François Paul Lenormant de Tournhem, director of the Bâtiments du Roi, convened a special session of the Académie Royale d'Architecture and asked the members to draw up proposals for the site and design of the *place royale*.

The request was extraordinary. Previously, the planning of *places royales* had been handled through controlled channels. Although officials had occasionally solicited counterproposals from a few carefully chosen artists or architects, competitions on such a scale were unknown in France. Interest in the planning of the *place royale* rapidly spread beyond the confines of the academy. From the summer of 1748 to the spring of 1750, when Louis XV made his final decision on the site, architects, engineers, and *amateurs* debated the issue in salons, pamphlets, and journals such as the *Mercur de France* and the *Journal des Trévoux*.

Scholars have recorded nearly 150 projects for the *place*.¹⁰ Some were presented in the form of measured drawings, but others were represented by three-dimensional cardboard models, quick sketches, or written descriptions. Their quality and practicality vary widely, but as a group they offer a rich sampling of mid-eighteenth-century thought regarding the form and meaning of *places royales*. They also reveal broader ideas on city planning. Many designers used the *place* as a point of departure for studies of streets, markets, and water supplies, the construction of a new city hall and other military and governmental buildings, and comparisons of the city's overall appearance with other European capitals.

The king's decision to build the Place Louis XV at the western edge of Paris on the undeveloped Esplanade between the Tuileries gardens and the Champs-Élysées was fiscally prudent but drew criticism for failing to take advantage of an opportunity to redevelop a portion of the city center. Following a second competition in 1753 limited to academicians, Louis awarded the commission to Ange-Jacques Gabriel who had succeeded his father as *premier architecte du roi* (Fig. 7). Bounded on the south by the Seine River, on the east and west by the greenery of the Tuileries gardens and the Champs-Élysées, and on the north by two colonnaded buildings inspired by the Louvre, the Place Louis XV (Place de la Concorde) originally had a suburban character that troubled critics who otherwise found much to admire. In 1765, for example, two years after the dedication of Edme Bouchardon's equestrian statue of the monarch, Marc-Antoine Laugier wrote:

The new *place* of Louis XV will be, after all, grand and beautiful, but to call it a *place* is less than accurate. It is not one of the city's crossroads, it does not even appear to be within the city walls. Surrounded by gardens and bosquets, it merely suggests an embellished esplanade in the midst of an agreeable countryside from which various palaces can be seen in the distance.¹¹

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Fig. 7. Paris, Place Louis XV (Place de la Concorde). Engraving by Née after Lespinasse, 1782. (BN Est. Va 277; photo, BN.) The bird's-eye view looks from the Champs-Élysées towards the gardens and palace of the Tuileries.

These remarks were not simply quibbles over terminology. Laugier and others believed that a *place royale* was an urban space and that the suburban Place Louis XV inappropriately mixed genres like a painting that was neither a history painting nor a landscape and, thus, violated artistic decorum.

The *places royales* honoring Louis XV designed for provincial cities maintained these distinctions and responded to many of the issues articulated during the Paris competition of 1748–50. Like the Place Louis XV in Bordeaux, they beautified their cities and facilitated aspects of daily life such as commerce, communication, and public administration.

Louis XV died in 1774, and with his grandson's accession to the throne architects and government officials in Paris, Nancy, Brest, and Nantes, and other cities soon began to think of planning *places royales* honoring Louis XVI.¹² During the initial stages of the French Revolution financial difficulties posed more formidable obstacles than politics. In 1790, for example, three projects had been proposed for Paris, and Nantes had begun construction of a Place Louis XVI.¹³ Such initiatives did not cease until the dissolution of the monarchy on 10 August 1792, but then royal images were expunged with vengeance. Throughout the realm, statues were toppled and their *places* rededicated to the Revolution.

Despite these changes and others made in the nineteenth and twentieth cen-

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turies, it is possible to reconstruct the original or intended appearance of most *places royales* through engravings, published descriptions in guidebooks and periodicals, and documents in governmental archives. Thanks to the royal bureaucracy's penchant for thoroughness, missing records from one unit of government often are preserved in copies or summaries recorded by another link in the chain of command. Much can be learned also from the comments on *places royales* in published treatises on sculpture, architecture, and public administration.

The first book to address the installation of royal statues in public *places* was the *Traité des statues* by François Lemée published in 1688.¹⁴ Dedicated to the Maréchal de La Feuillade, the patron of the Place des Victoires, the book compares the *place* and its statue to the ancient monuments of great men and celebrates Louis XIV as the worthy successor to the emperors of Rome.

Three years later, Charles-Augustin Daviler offered some general principles for the planning of *places* with royal statues in his *Cours d'architecture*.¹⁵ The Abbé Cordemoy's *Nouveau traité de toute l'architecture ou l'art de bâtir* of 1714 adopted a similar approach with more extended treatments of the proportioning of statues within *places* and of the surrounding architecture.¹⁶

Nicolas Delamare's encyclopedic treatise on civic administration, the *Traité de la police* (1713–38), recognized *places royales* as a class of public *places* distinct from those built for commerce or for ceremonies of state or religion.¹⁷

I call them thus because of the dignity of their purpose, and because they serve to embellish great cities: they also merit this distinction on account of their prominent sites, their size, and the beauty and symmetry of the edifices accompanying the precious monuments displayed therein for the admiration of the Universe.¹⁸

He went on to explain that while the other two classes of *places* had been developed out of necessity, this was not the case for *places royales*: "We must, on the contrary, regard them as the fruits of the peace and tranquility among nations."¹⁹ Thus, for Delamare, and for subsequent commentators in the eighteenth century such as Blondel and Laugier, *places royales* were first and foremost royal monuments.²⁰

The most important publication on *places royales* is the beautifully illustrated compendium that Pierre Patte published in 1765, entitled *Les Monumens érigés en France à la gloire de Louis XV*.²¹ Patte (1723–1814) was an architect who built little, yet achieved a distinguished reputation as an authority on construction, city planning, and theater design through his technical and theoretical writings, editing, and compilations.²² *Les Monumens érigés en France* illustrates and criticizes the Place Louis XV (Place de la Concorde) in Paris and the *places royales* built or planned in honor of the monarch in Bordeaux, Valenciennes, Rennes, Nancy, Reims, and Rouen. A decade earlier, Blondel, Patte's close friend, had introduced critical commentary to the traditional French compendium of buildings in his *Architecture française*, and Patte applied this method for the first time to an aspect of town planning.²³

Patte dedicated his book to the Marquis de Marigny, the director of the Bâtiments du Roi, with the hope of inspiring him and other officials to under-