

PARIS,
VERSAILLES
AND THE
FRENCH PORTS

...It was some day in August, I cannot remember exactly which, but between the 15th and the 20th, a cloudy, cold, wet morning. I had left the fair sky of Provence and Italy; and I had never experienced such dirty fog, especially in August. Entering Paris through the wretched suburb of Saint Marcel and travelling on in this kind of stinking muddy sepulchre through the suburb of Saint Germain on my way to the inn, I felt my heart contract in anguish so much that in all my life I do not remember having felt such sadness for such a trifling cause. All that haste, all that longing, such mad dreams of my ardent fantasy — and then to find myself plunged into a fetid sewer. When I alighted at the inn I was already completely disillusioned, and had it not been for my extreme fatigue and the no little shame I should have incurred, I would have left again at once. Wandering all around Paris, as I did later, increasingly confirmed my disappointment: the meanness and clumsiness of the buildings, the ridiculous petty pomp of the few houses with any pretensions to be considered mansions, the dirtiness and Gothicism of the churches, the barbaric construction of the theatres at that time, and the many, many disagreeable things which met my eyes, not to mention the bitterest sight of all, the appallingly badly featured and be-plastered faces of the hideous women: all these things were not sufficiently compensated for by the beauty of the many gardens, the elegant and well-frequented public walks, the good taste and infinite number of fine carriages, the sublime façade of the Louvre, the innumerable entertainments, almost all of them good, and by other such things.

Vita, Giornali, Lettere, Florence, 1861.

VITTORIO ALFIERI

August 1767

...I went to Versailles. Like all other royal country residences, this is in a very bad situation. They like to overcome nature. What was Versailles in the time of Louis XIV? A hunting lodge built by Louis XIII in the middle of a bog. Now it is a city of 80,000 souls. The royal palace is vast, beautiful and astonishing. The garden is supreme of its kind. O, sojourn of the Muses and the Graces, how will you look in the springtime? Although the trees and plants are almost bare and withered, yet it pleases me beyond words. One thing among many others that has particularly enchanted me is a kind of grove shaped into a maze, in which from time to time there are small open places where fine lead statues represent the fables of Aesop or act as fountains. This in summer must be heavenly.

Carteggio di Pietro e di Alessandro Verri, dal 1766 al 1797, Milan, 1923.

PIETRO VERRI

1767

...The palace of Versailles, one of the objects of which report had given me the greatest expectation, is not in the least striking: I view it without emotion: the impression it makes is nothing. What can compensate the want of unity? From whatever point viewed, it appears an assemblage of buildings; a splendid quarter of a town, but not a fine edifice; an objection from which the garden front is not free, though by far the most beautiful. The great gallery is the finest room I have seen; the other apartments are nothing; but the pictures and statues are well known to be a capital collection. The whole palace, except the chapel, seems to be open to all the world; we pushed through an amazing crowd of all sorts of people to see the procession, many of them not very well dressed, whence it appears that no questions are asked. But the officers at the door of the apartment in which the king dined made a distinction, and would not permit all to enter promiscuously.

Travels in France and Italy, London, 1794.

ARTHUR YOUNG

May 1787

...The gardens of Versailles themselves are delightful. I have not yet mentioned them, and this is the time to do so. Vast in extent and varied in the different parts, on all sides there is a profusion of precious works in marble, original statues by famous contemporary artists and exact copies of the most prized figures by the ancients. Everywhere well-kept and ornamented avenues lead from shady, rustic corners; there are richly decorated pools, pleasingly designed parterres, magnificent fountains and jets of water reaching to amazing heights. The Orangery is a masterpiece: the number and size of the trees is wonderful, considering the climate which is naturally hostile to orange-trees; but the principal glory of these enchanting gardens are the groves.

These form a series of rooms or halls, which are not open to everyone; they can be seen by following the court on fête days or on the arrival of some illustrious foreigner, otherwise they are closed. Some persons, by grace and favour, are given a key to them. I had the good fortune to possess one, so I could examine them at my ease and give my friends the opportunity of enjoying them.

The groves number twelve in all: the *Salle de Bal*, the *Girandole*, the *Colonnade*, the *Dômes*, the *Encelade*, the *Obélisque*, the *Étoile*, the *Théâtre d'eau*, the *Bains d'Apollon*, the *Trois Fontaines*, the *Arc de Triomphe* and the *Labyrinthe*. In these groves are to be seen masterpieces of sculpture and architecture. The two most notable are the Bassin d'Apollon and the Colonnade. In the first there is a group of three figures in white marble, unique for their size and perfection; in the other there is a circular peristyle of thirty-two columns of various choice marbles.

Mémoires, Paris, 1787.

CARLO GOLDONI
May 1771

BREST

...The entrance to the roadstead is very narrow and winding, which has given it the name of Goulet (narrows). Seen from the opening of the bay, Brest stretches out in a pleasing fashion; its planning and its rising curve make it seem of far more notable size than it is in reality, and the works of fortification alternating with gardens and pretty little villas contribute to a fascinating prospect; and this in fact suggested to the celebrated Vernet one of his finest paintings. At the entrance to the port there is a flying bridge, which is a cabin holding five or six persons, suspended by pulleys from a cable which moves it from the coast to the fort or from the fort to the coast by means of a rope and drum mechanism. Besides commerce, which thrives by the advantages of the harbour facilities of Brest, there is a flourishing trade in fishing for sardines and mackerel.

Guide des Voyageurs en Europe, Weimar, 1784.

HEINRICH AUGUST OTTOKAR REICHARD
1740

LA ROCHELLE

...The city of La Rochelle is the capital of the province of Aunis. Although it is not of great antiquity, it acquired fame in the wars of religion during the last century. The first houses were built there to prevent the sporadic incursions of the Normans. The Protestants acquired the mastery of the city during the last century, and when the English and Dutch incited them to rebellion, because the sea facilitated the arrival of reinforcements they were sending, they drew down upon themselves the indignation of the Sovereign Prince and of Cardinal Richelieu for building a jetty of 747 paces long reaching out to sea.



La Rochelle surrendered on 29 October 1628. The King ordered that its fortifications should be razed to the ground, except for those which were judged to be necessary for the defense of the port, which was closed by a chain which goes from one tower to another.

Voyage historique de l'Europe, Paris, 1693.

BAYONNE

...Bayonne is by much the prettiest town I have seen in France; the houses are not only well built of stone, but the streets are wide and there are many openings which, though not regular squares, have a good effect. The river is broad, and many of the houses being fronted to it, the view of them from the bridge is fine. The promenade is charming; it has many rows of trees, whose heads join and form a shade delicious in this hot climate. In the evening, it was thronged with well-dressed people of both sexes: and the women, through all the country, are the handsomest I have seen in France. In coming hither from Pau, I saw what is very rare in that kingdom, clean and pretty country girls; in most of the provinces, hard labour destroys both person and complexion. The bloom of health on the cheeks of a well-dressed country girl is not the worst feature in any landscape. I hired a chaloup for viewing the embankment at the mouth of the river. By the water spreading itself too much the harbour was injured; and the government, to contract it, has built a wall on the north bank a mile long, and another on the south shore of half the length. It is from ten to twenty feet wide, and about twelve high, from the top of the base of rough stone, which extends twelve or fifteen feet more. Towards the mouth of the harbour it is twenty feet wide and the stones on both sides cramp together with irons. They are now driving piles of pine sixteen feet deep for the foundation. It is a work of great expense, magnificence, and utility.

Travels in France and Italy, London, 1794.

ARTHUR YOUNG
August 1787

ANTIBES

...Antibes is situated on a neck of land, which runs out into the sea and becomes a kind of peninsula. The open sea breaks against its southern side; on the western is a large bay, in which any fleet may ride safe against the land winds; the eastern side, which looks towards Nice, is formed into a very good harbour by the help of a long mole built with large stones; and a chain of hills surrounds the town on the north.

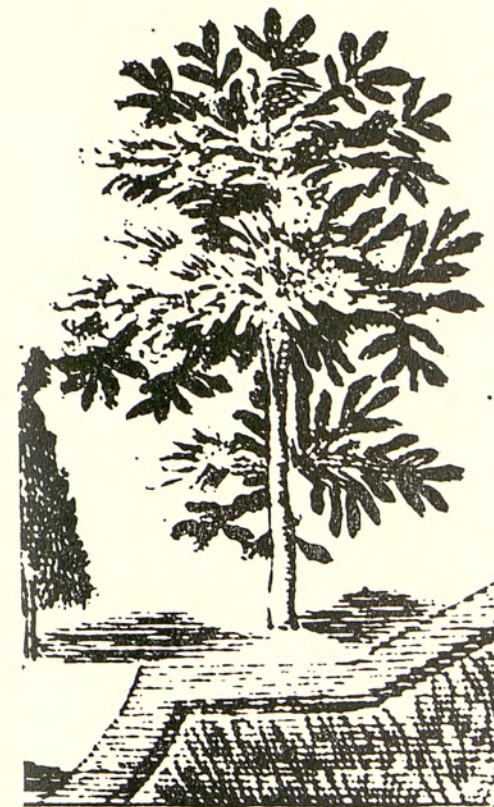
Those hills are very fruitful, and yield vast quantities of the best wine and oil; but they have so absolute a command over the town, as would render its spacious fortifications of little use, was Antibes vigorously besieged by land. A battery of only twenty guns would, I think, demolish in a very few days the three great bastions on that side, in spite of the high cavaliers over them, and the castle with four small bastions that has been erected opposite to the harbour.

A Journey from London to Genoa, London, 1770.

JOSEPH BARETTI
November 1760

SCHAFFHAUSEN

...We passed hastily through Zurich, in our way to Schaffhausen, for although I had been assured that the cataract of the Rhine was 'but a fall of water', it had excited so tormenting



a curiosity, that I found I should be incapable of seeing any thing else with pleasure or advantage, till I had once gazed upon that object.

When we reached the summit of the hill which leads to the fall of the Rhine, we alighted from the carriage, and walked down the steep bank, whence I saw the river rolling turbulently over its bed of rocks, and heard the noise of the torrent, towards which we were descending, increasing as we drew near. My heart swelled with expectation — our path, as if formed to give the scene its full effect, concealed for some time the river from our view; till we reached a wooden balcony, projecting on the edge of the water, and whence, just sheltered from the torrent, it bursts in all its overwhelming wonders on the astonished sight. That stupendous cataract, rushing with wild impetuosity over those broken, unequal rocks, lifting up their sharp points amidst its sea of foam, disturb its headlong course, multiply its falls, and make the afflicted waters roar — that cadence of tumultuous sound, which had never till now struck upon my ear — those long feathery surges, giving the element a new aspect — that spray rising into clouds of vapour, and reflecting the prismatic colours, while it disperses itself over the hills — never, never can I forget the sensations of that moment! when with a sort of annihilation of self, with every past impression erased from my memory, I felt as if my heart were bursting with emotions too strong to be sustained. — Oh, majestic torrent! which hast conveyed a new image of nature to my soul, the moments I have passed in contemplating thy sublimity will form an epocha in my short span! — thy course is coeval with time, and thou wilt rush down thy rocky walls when this bosom, which throbs with admiration of thy greatness, shall beat no longer!

What an effort does it require to leave, after a transient glimpse, a scene, on which, while we meditate, we can take no account of time! Its narrow limits seem too confined for the expanded spirit; such objects appear to belong to immortality; they call the musing mind from all its little cares and vanities, to higher destinies, and regions more congenial than this world to the feelings they excite. I had been often summoned by my fellow travellers to depart, had often repeated 'but one moment more', and many 'moments more' had elapsed, before I could resolve to tear myself from the balcony.

We crossed the river, below the fall, in a boat, and had leisure to observe the surrounding scenery. The cataract, however, had for me a sort of fascinating power, which, if I withdrew my eyes for a moment, again fastened them on its impetuous waters. In the background of the torrent a bare mountain lifts its head encircled with its blue vapours; on the right rises a steep cliff of an enormous height, covered with wood, and upon its summit stands the castle of Lauffen, with its frowning towers, and encircled with its crannied wall; on the left human industry has seized upon a slender thread of this mighty torrent in its fall, and made it subservient to the purposes of commerce. Foundries, mills, and wheels are erected on the edge of the river, and a portion of the vast bason into which the cataract falls is confined by a dyke, which preserves the warehouses and the neighbouring huts from its inundations. Sheltered within this little nook, and accustomed to the neighbourhood of the torrent, the boatman unloads his merchandize, and the artisan pursues his toil, regardless of the falling river, and inattentive to those thundering sounds which seem calculated to suspend all human activity in solemn and awful astonishment; while the imagination of the spectator is struck with the comparative littleness of fleeting man, busy with his trivial occupations, contrasted with the view of nature in all her vast, eternal, uncontrollable grandeur.

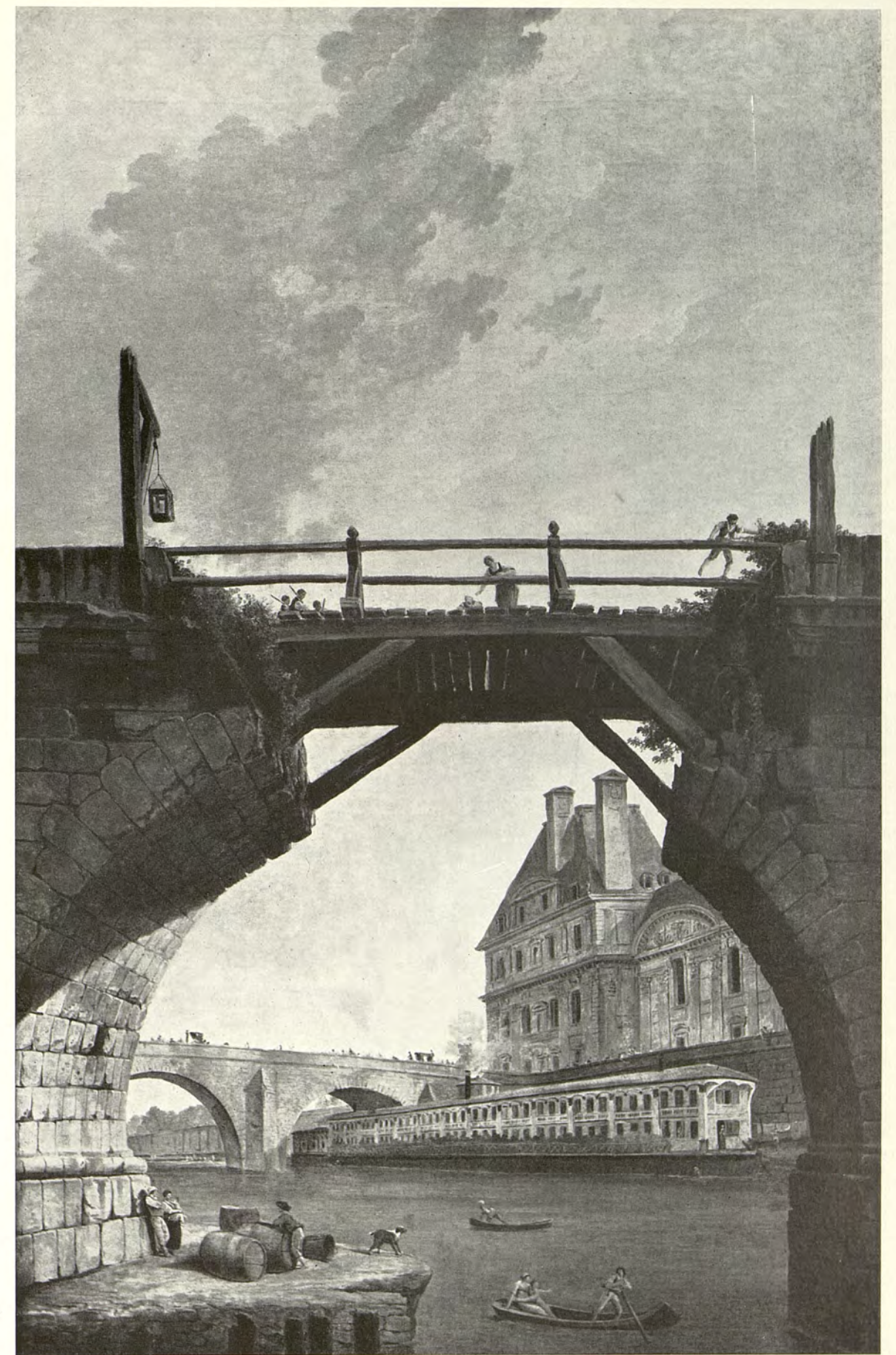
We walked over the celebrated wooden bridge at Schaffhausen, of which the bold and simple construction is considered as an extraordinary effort of genius in the architect.

A Tour in Switzerland, London, 1798.

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS
1798

226. HUBERT ROBERT: *The Vigiers Baths at Pont-Royal*. Paris, Banque de France.

The ruined arch of an imaginary bridge frames this view of the Pont-Royal and the corner pavilion of the Louvre. Between the bridges is the floating establishment of Vigiers' Baths, one of several such institutions which appeared in Paris in the second half of the century.





◁ 227. JEAN-BAPTISTE RAGUENET: *Pont-Marie*. Paris, Musée Camondo.

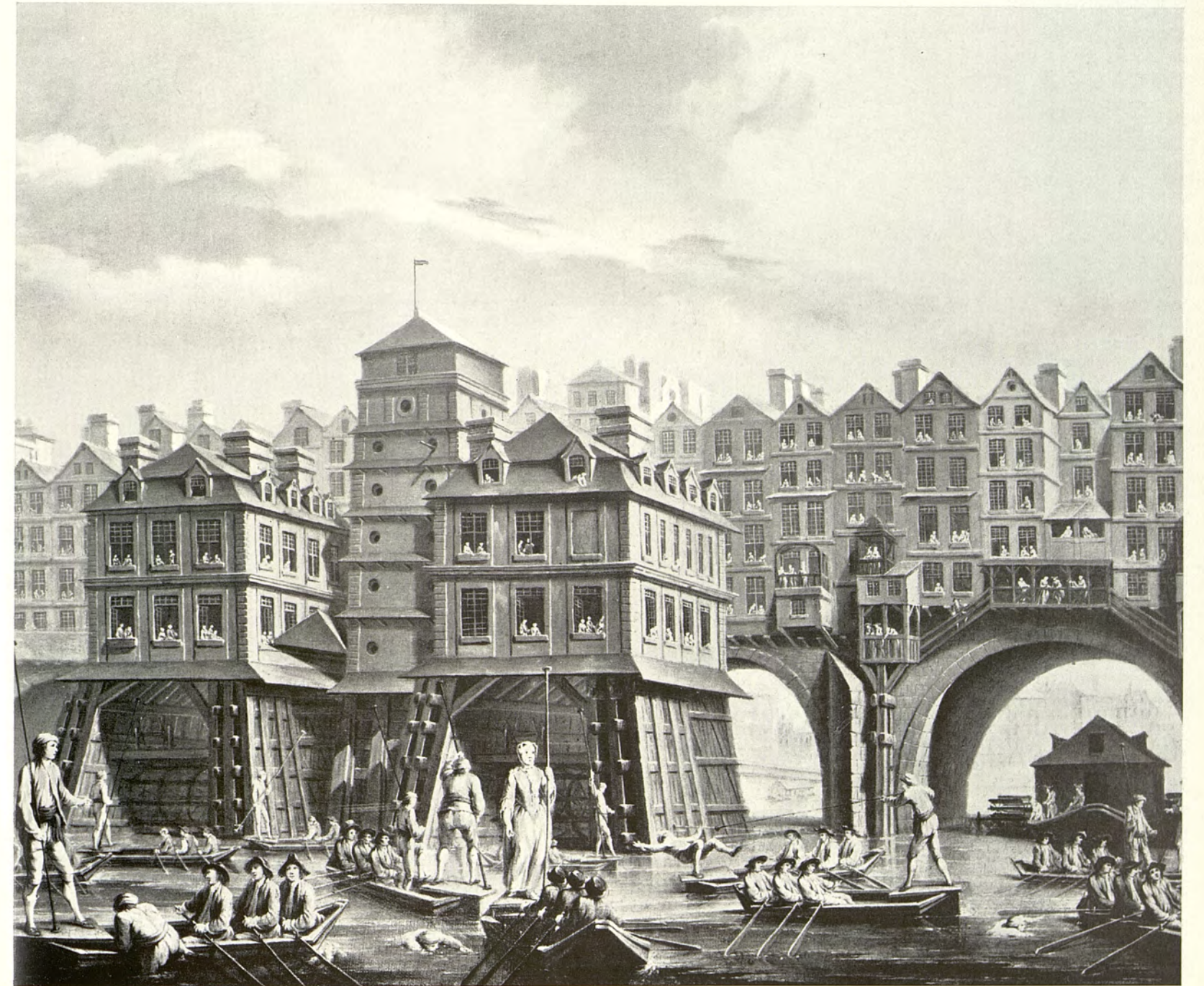
This view of the Pont-Marie, which was built in the seventeenth century and here still bears the old buildings which were later demolished, is from the right bank of the Seine looking north-west. On the left is the Quai d'Anjou, on the Ile St. Louis.

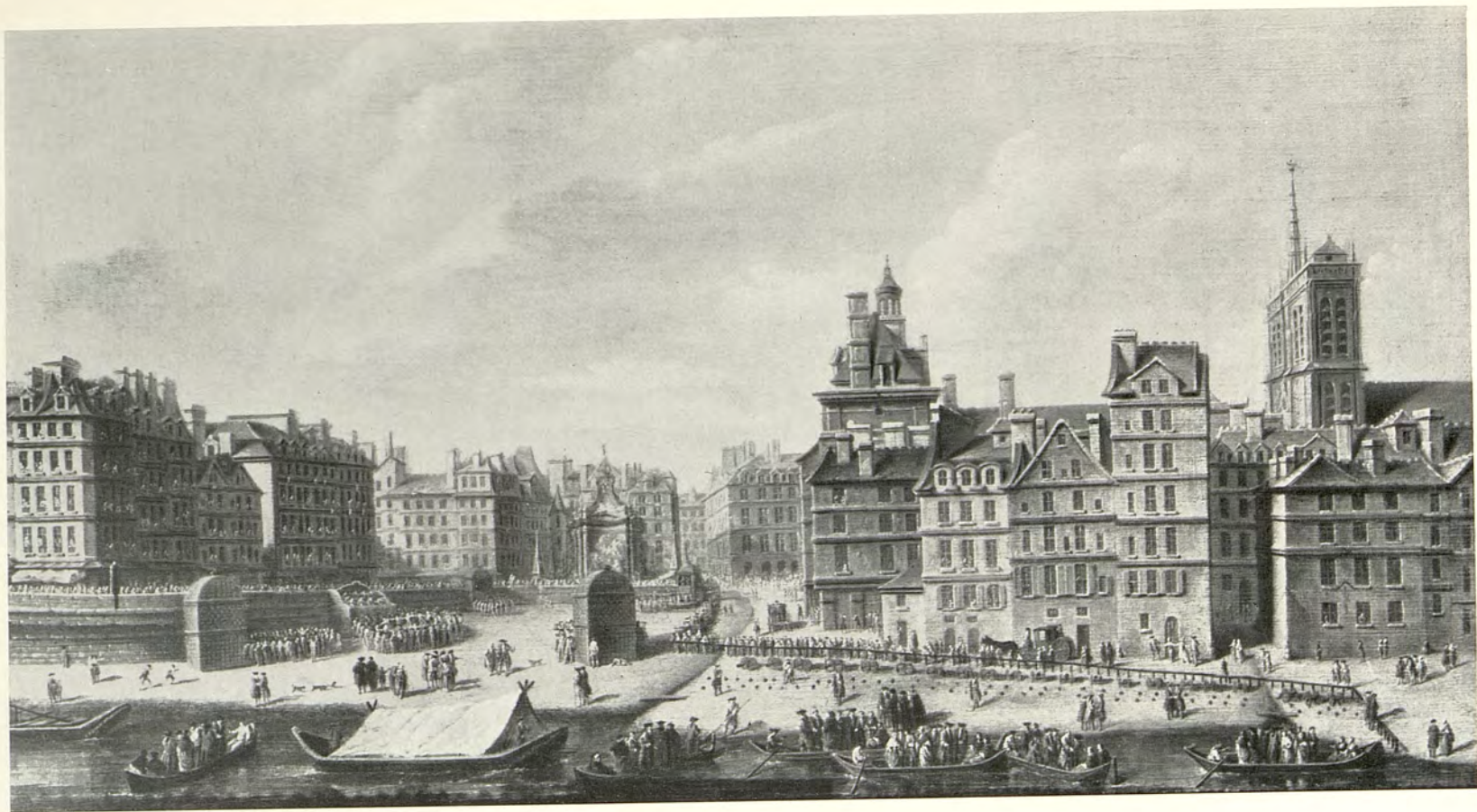
◁ 228. JEAN-BAPTISTE RAGUENET: *Pont-Neuf*. Paris, Musée Camondo.

The view from the Quai de l'Horloge, on the Ile de la Cité, shows only part of the long bridge, together with the right bank of the Seine, the Palais du Louvre and the tower of St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

229. JEAN-BAPTISTE RAGUENET: *Boatmen's Festival by the Pont de Notre-Dame* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

A view of the bridge of Notre-Dame, one of the oldest in Paris, with the buildings which were demolished in 1786.





◁ 230. JEAN-BAPTISTE RAGUENET: *Celebrations in the Place de Grève for the birth of a Princess* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Place de Grève, now Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, from the Seine. The square was later the scene of executions.

◁ 231. LOUIS-NICOLAS DE LESPINASSE: *View of the Port-au-Blé* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

The old 'Port-au-Blé' was in the seventeenth century one of the most active of the Paris river ports. On the left is the Ile de la Cité and the bridge of Notre-Dame with its houses which were demolished in 1786.

232. JEAN-BAPTISTE RAGUENET: *House at the sign of Notre-Dame* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Raguenet and his son Nicolas constituted, between 1750 and 1755, a kind of factory of views of Paris for foreigners. This painting, of 1751, shows a house which faced Place de Grève.





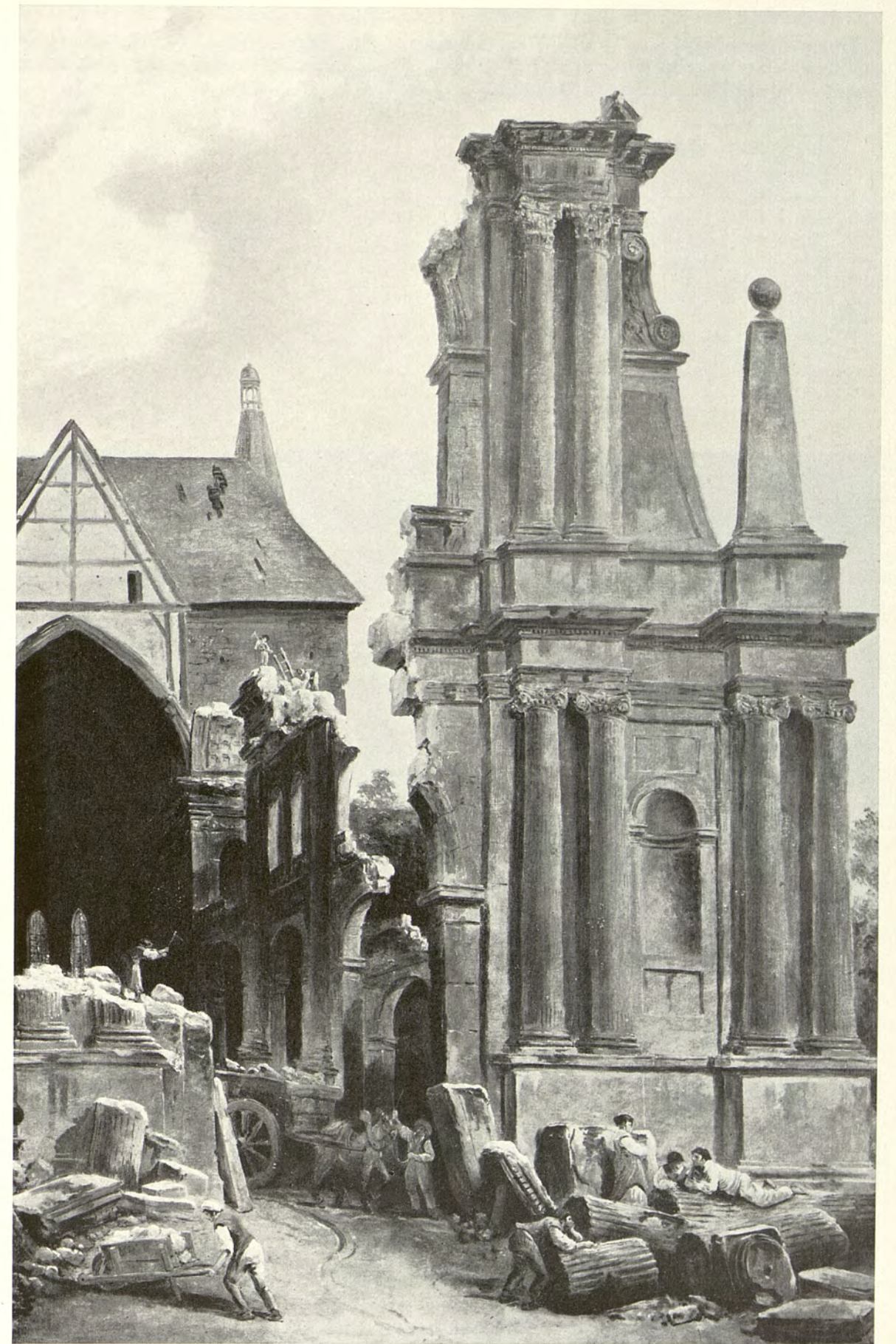
◁ 233. PIERRE-ANTOINE DEMACHY: *View of the Seine*. Paris, Private collection.

The view from the Vert-Galant, below the Pont-Neuf, showing the Louvre and the Pont-Royal on the right bank and the old Hôtel de Nevers and a corner of the Palais de l'Institut on the left.



⌋ 234. PIERRE-ANTOINE DEMACHY: *The Church of Ste. Geneviève on the occasion of its opening*. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

The church, which later underwent transformation, is the present Panthéon. On the left is the tower and old façade of St. Etienne-du-Mont.



235. HUBERT ROBERT: *Demolition of the Church of the Feuillants (detail)*. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

The church of the Reformed Cistercians which lay between Rue St. Honoré and the north terrace of the Tuileries, built by François Mansart in 1624, was demolished in 1804.

236. HUBERT ROBERT: *The Bassin d'Apollon at Versailles* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Robert was commissioned by Louis XV to rearrange the part of the garden of Versailles known as the 'Grove of Apollo' and he painted this view during the time when he was directing the work there. The central group of statues, showing Apollo in the home of Thetis tended by nymphs, is by François Girardon.



237. HUBERT ROBERT: *A Fire at the Opéra* (detail). Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

The painting shows the fire at the Opera House seen from the Palais-Royal. Fire broke out on 8 June 1781 in the Opéra which had been built within the perimeter of the Palais-Royal by the architect Moreau and completed in 1770. In this view the Opéra is hidden by the buildings of the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais-Royal, built for Richelieu but altered for Louis-Philippe d'Orléans between 1752 and 1760. On the left, behind the curtain of smoke, are the houses of Rue des Bons-Enfants.



238. PIERRE-ANTOINE DEMACHY: *Clearing away masonry between St. Germain l'Auxerrois and the Louvre Colonnade* (detail). Paris, Private collection.
The painting shows some of the demolition work carried out at the time of the Revolution. The view is dominated by the façade of the Louvre which appears among the ruins and on the left, across the Seine, is the Institut de France.



239. HUBERT ROBERT: *View of the Bassin d'Apollo* (detail). Versailles, Musée National de Versailles et des Trianons.
The painting shows the work of reconstruction of the gardens at Versailles in 1775 and in particular the rearrangement of the present Bassin d'Apollo. The trees of the former wood are being cut down, and one of the groups of the Horses of the Sun is already in its place. In the background is the front of the palace.



240. LOUIS-GABRIEL MOREAU THE ELDER: *Place Louis XV from the Seine* (detail). Paris, Private collection.
Place Louis XV, now Place de la Concorde, seen from the Seine, with the equestrian statue of the King by Edmé Bouchardon in the centre which was installed in 1663 and demolished by decree of the Legislative Assembly in 1792. At the corners of the square are four edifices which were intended as bases for statues, and in the centre of the view are the two buildings of the Garde-Meuble by Jacques-Ange Gabriel.

241. JOSEPH VERNET: *Marseilles* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.
In October 1753 the Surintendance aux Bâtiments du Roi, on the suggestion of M. de Marigny, commissioned from Vernet a series of views of the ports of France which were to comprise a total of 24 paintings. At the request of Vernet, who found the travelling inconvenient and the remuneration insufficient, the number was reduced to 15, which he executed between 1754 and 1765.





242-243. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Dieppe* (details). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

The view of Dieppe was the last of the series of French ports painted by Vernet and is dated 1765.

244. JEAN-FRANÇOIS HUE: *The Port of St. Malo*. Paris, Musée de la Marine.

Since the series of views of French ports remained incomplete on the death of Vernet, Hue was designated to complete the undertaking and painted seven of them. The roads of the port of St. Malo are seen from the Anse des Sablons, St. Servan.



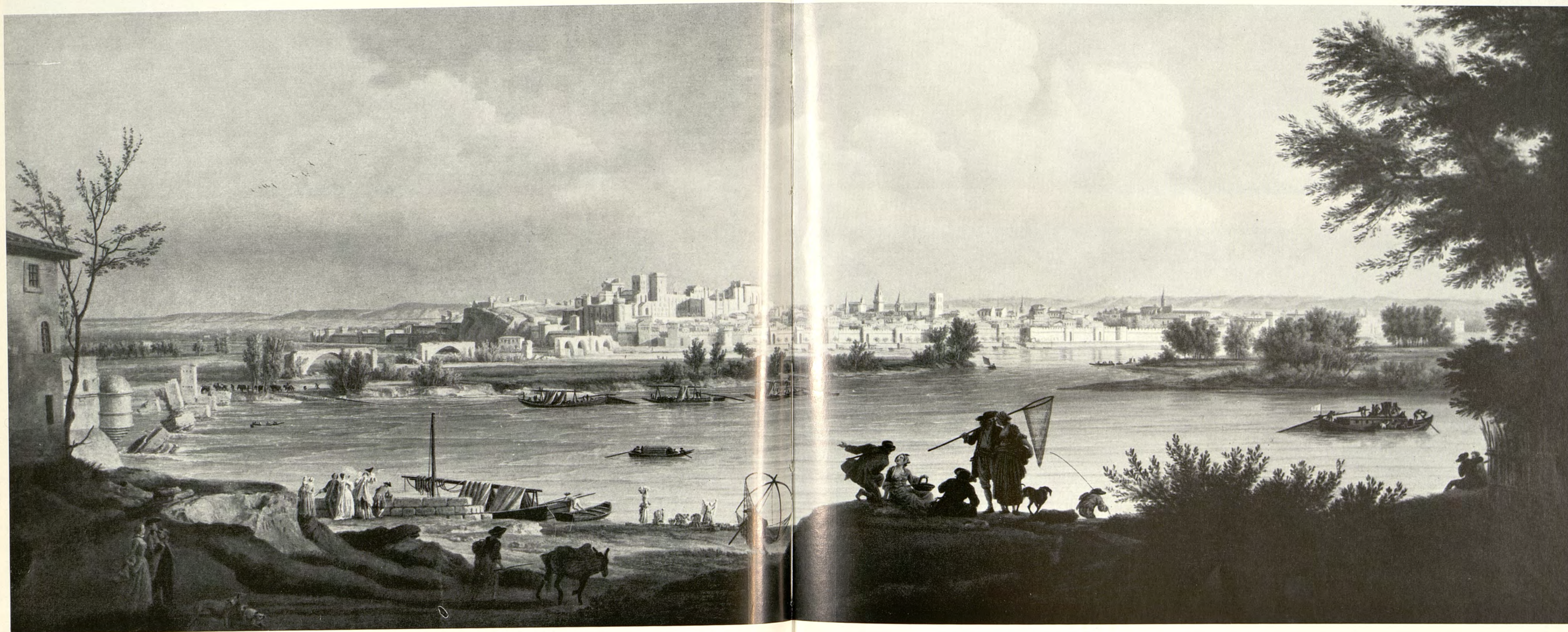
245. JEAN-FRANÇOIS HUE: *The Port of Brest*. Paris, Musée de la Marine.

Painted in 1794, the scene in the foreground shows the engineer M. Sautet demonstrating to the Representatives of the People the design of a ship under construction.



246. JOSEPH VERNET: *View of Avignon*. London, Private collection.

One of Vernet's finest views shows the city of Avignon dominated by the massive Papal Palace, from the right bank of the Rhône near Villeneuve. Commissioned by M. Peillon in 1751 it was painted during the artist's visit to Avignon from July to October 1756.





◁ 247. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of La Rochelle* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

The two towers on the left of the view are the famous towers at the entrance to the harbour. On the right is the Porte de la Grosse Horloge, on the left in the background is a ship on its side for the keel to be caulked.



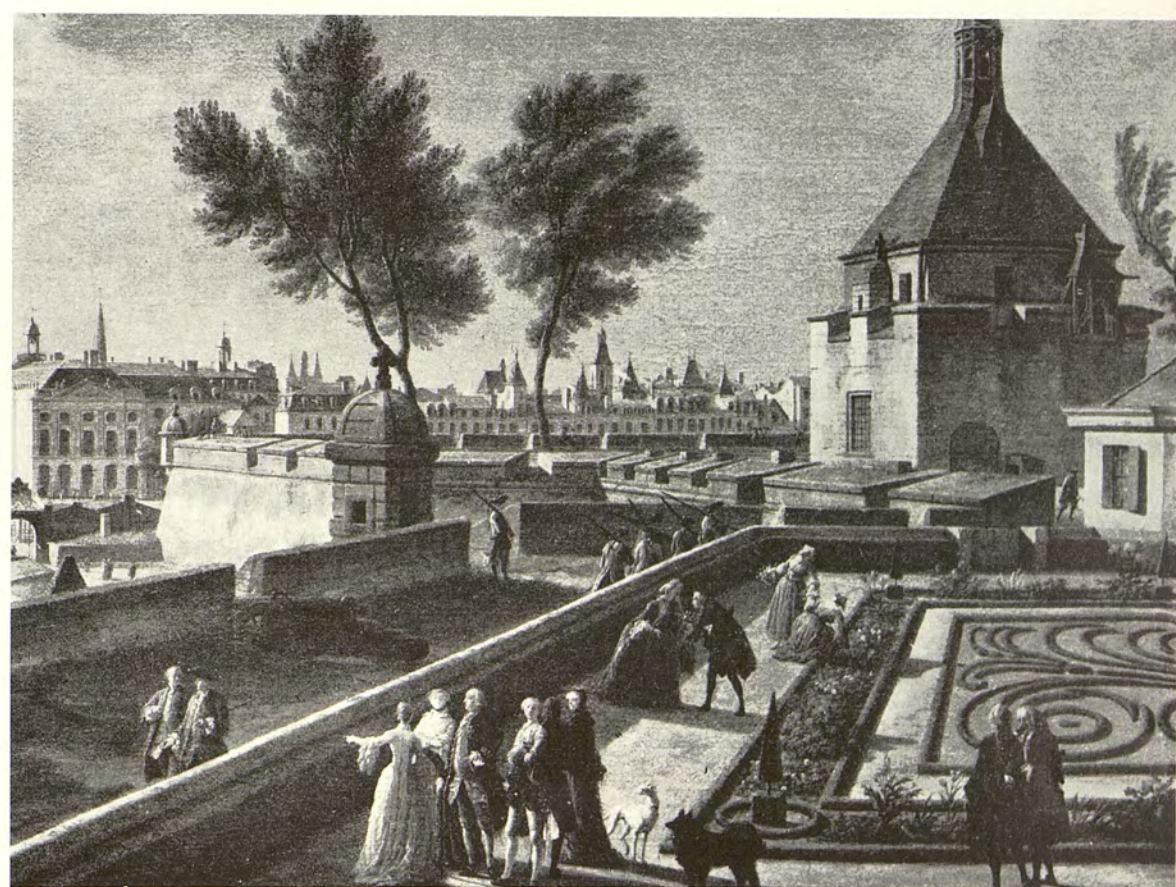
249. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Bayonne* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

This second view of Bayonne is the twelfth in the series of French ports and was painted in 1761. It shows the port from the Allées Boufflers near the 'porte de Mousserolles'.



◁ 248. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Rochefort*. Paris, Musée de la Marine.

The view of Rochefort is the last but one of Vernet's series of French ports and was painted in 1762.



250. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Bordeaux* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

A detail from one of the two views of Bordeaux, the tenth in the series of ports, this shows the city from the Château de la Trompette and was painted in 1759.



◁ 251-252. JOSEPH VERNET: *View of the City and Port of Toulon* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

This view, the fifth in the series of the ports of France, is from a viewpoint halfway up the mountain which rises behind the city. In the foreground is a 'belvedere' much frequented by the townspeople, in the distance are the city and the spacious roadstead. The painting is signed and dated 1756 and is the second of three views of Toulon.



253. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Antibes* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

The painting is signed and dated 1756. It is the seventh of the series of ports, and shows Antibes from its hinterland.



254. JOSEPH VERNET: *The Port of Sète* (detail). Paris, Musée de la Marine.

Signed and dated 1757, this is the eighth of the series of ports painted by Vernet. The port is shown from the sea, from behind the jetty.



255. JOSEPH VERNET: *Schaffhausen* (detail). Private collection.
The view shows the Rhine Falls at Laufen Castle, near Schaffhausen. The painting is signed and dated 1779 and, with another view of the Falls from the opposite bank of the Rhine, was painted for Girardot de Marigny.



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