

International Conference ó Call for Abstracts

The Modern Architect's New Knowledge Antoine Desgodets, Combining Theory and Practice

I/- Tentative Biography of a Stranger Called Desgodets

Antoine Desgodets is known to us mostly through *Les Edifices Antiques de Rome*, his major academic work commissioned by the King, but also thanks to *Les Loix des Bâtimens*, a posthumous legal work introducing a new discipline. But precious little do we know of the man himself. Beyond the fact that his father was a cabinetmaker, what do we know of the family he was born into or the one he founded? What resources could we rely on to write his biography? Newly discovered archives from a Parisian solicitor's office should definitely be delved into.

Did Desgodets keep up relations with the building trades, or did he seek to remove himself from them in a constant motion towards the heights of the royal entourage? What do we know of his life before he entered the Académie, in particular before he turned twenty? Or of the protection allowing him to live in Rome, unaffiliated with the Académie de France, or of when he was held captive by pirates in Algiers? Likewise, it would be interesting to investigate the reasons that led him to the Académie Royale d'Architecture, where he was the first real architect, after a line of scientists, F. Blondel although he was also an architect and the La Hire family. Who did he rub shoulders with, in what networks? With men of science or techniques in learned societies, with senior architectural firms or younger architects, with bankers or speculators, with higher civil servants (Superintendents, Ministers) or lesser ones, with provincial, foreign (in particular Swedish) or Parisian circles, with the artistic world or the world of tradesmen?

II/- A Theoretician's Practical Work

Desgodets started out as a civil servant, as Controller of the Royal buildings in Chambord and afterwards in Paris. His work at the time could be defined more precisely by examining other similar careers, the nature and missions they involved (building site management and monitoring, draughtsman, professional quantity surveying, upkeep of buildings, etc.)

He also had an architect's career, when he built an edifice for nuns on the Val-de-Grâce hospital's grounds, rearranged the Château of Vaudreuil, or designed some ordinary houses on Parisian streets (Rue du Bourg l'Abbé, Rue Montmartre). But his activities as an architect are relatively unknown: did he design projects on his own, or on the behalf of a studio, did he also manage and supervise the works?

Thanks to his great drawing capacities, he left to posterity a large number of plans and elevations in many collections of prints. His recognisable style allows experts to rightfully attribute them: whether they represented built or unbuilt projects, surveying work, printed or unprinted knowledge tools, or job-site drawings, the array of Desgodets' production turns out to be bountiful and deserves specific attention.

The architect also worked as a surveyor. Like many of his coevals who sat in the Académie Royale d'Architecture, he presented technical reports, for example on how to repair the collapsed bridge of Pirmil in Nantes. Analysing all of his technical contributions at the Académie and comparing them with his coevals' presentations could help to assess the actual

role of the Académie in the technical and constructive developments of the time. Likewise, the tight links between his collaborations and the wider range of the Académie's activities on the one hand with the courses he gave on the other should be analysed, more specifically regarding the themes he chose to approach in the courses.

III/- Theoretical Writings of a Building Practitioner

Antoine Desgodets' major work, *Les Edifices Antiques de Rome Dessinés et Mesurés Très Exactement* (Paris, published by Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1687), has been the subject of many publications and, over the last few years, of several critical editions. It is now time to shift focus to his mission in Rome, to the way Desgodets worked, and to the book's good fortune, both in France and abroad where it was republished, commented and even translated. Now is just the right time to fully gauge the influence of this work, described as major in the history of Western architecture.

Once he became a teacher at the Académie, Desgodets engaged in hitherto unknown fields of architecture and in that respect could be considered a highly innovative theoretician. It would be interesting to study how Desgodets' four courses expanded on his predecessors who left a trace (F. Blondel, Ph. de La Hire) or even on earlier architecture treatises: was the link he established between theory and practice really new, or did it merely confirm a situation existing since the late seventeenth century? How were his courses approached, renewed or shortened by the teachers following him at the Académie, or beyond there at the Ecole des Arts, the free schools or in private studios? Did his courses carry remain references for those that followed? During the nineteenth century what did the top engineering schools, the Beaux-Arts, the Arts et Métiers and the Arts Décoratifs schools maintain of Desgodets' work? Analysing the manuscripts (transcribed, copied or autograph) pertaining to the orders, *commodité*, *toisé* and easements reveals how Desgodets produced these texts and figures (novelty or tradition of their sources) and to what end (to contain the competition from building contractors, to establish a professional ethics, to have them serve as models). What is more, the impact of the courses cannot be overlooked as they changed the nature of architecture itself, and of architects who from then became *õmodernõ*. Naturally, prospective participants are more than welcome to take part in analysing the courses which are now available online.

We would not be satisfied with a French analysis only for either of these fields and we feel that foreign points of view, both theoretical and practical, are indispensable to our research.

Application for the Conference

We encourage researchers from all the disciplines concerned with the emblematic figure of Antoine Desgodets and his work to submit 20-minute paper abstracts. The proposal, in French or in English, should include:

Éa title followed by the name(s) of the author(s) and institutional affiliation(s);

Éan abstract of 500 words maximum that should mention the sources consulted;

Ésix key words;

Éa short curriculum vitae (no more than one page) indicating contact information, status, laboratory affiliation if relevant, as well as a list of most important or most recent publications.

Prospective speakers should submit proposals by e-mail (rcarvais@noos.fr) **no later than 30 June 2014**. Two members of the Scientific Committee will evaluate each proposal. The results of these deliberations will be communicated before **15 July 2014**.

The Conference should take place in Paris (ENSA Paris-Malaquais and INHA) during two days, on **Monday 24 and Tuesday 25 November 2014**.

Scientific Committee

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Potential Partner Institutions: ENSA Paris-Malaquais, CNRS, Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, ANR, INHA, BnF, Collège de France.