

Yvonne Rickert, Herrscherbild im Widerstreit. Die Place Louis XV in Paris: ein Königsplatz im Zeitalter der Aufklärung, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York (Georg Olms) 2018, 425 S. (Studien zur Kunstgeschichte, 209), ISBN 978-3-487-15538-8, EUR 84,00.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, Oxford

This book deals with the place de la Concorde in Paris in its original form as the place Louis XV, a spacious square of about 250 by 170 metres on the right bank of the Seine marked off with architecture on only one side, the side opposite the river, and on the other sides by sunken ditches. The buildings on the north side are divided by the rue Royale which leads directly to the church of the Madeleine. The square was then, and is now, bordered to the east by the Tuileries Gardens and to the west by the Champs-Élysées. However, instead of the obelisk and fountains we know today, the original square was designed to surround and frame a life-size bronze equestrian statue of Louis XV. All that remains of this statue, after its destruction in the French Revolution, is the king's right hand.

The book begins by describing the concept of the »place royale« as established by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, namely, a square with regular architecture in the middle of which is a statue of the king. A prime example of this is the place des Victoires in Paris, built in 1686 after the Treaty of Nijmegen and glorifying the victorious Louis XIV. The original statue, melted down in 1792, depicted a standing Louis XIV in coronation robes, trampling on a Cerberus representing the defeated Quadruple Alliance of the Netherlands, Austria, Spain and Lorraine. These territories were represented again on the base of the statue in the guise of four slumped figures depicting defeat, resignation, anger and hope.

The equestrian statue of Louis XIV currently to be seen in this square dates to 1822 and returns to the conception of the victorious king by showing him in Roman dress on a rearing horse. Rickert's main point in the book, made again and again, is that Louis XV wished to be presented not as a victorious general but rather as a victorious king of peace. After Louis accepted the offer of the city of Paris to erect a statue to him, there was great difficulty in finding the right site, in arriving at the final plan for the square and in identifying an architect and a sculptor. The king gave up part of the site which was in his own possession, Ange-Jacques Gabriel was chosen as the architect and Edme Bouchardon as the sculptor.

The monument was commissioned after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 which ended the War of the Austrian Succession and caused France to lose territory. It was cast in 1758 during the Seven Years' War, which ended in 1763 with France's defeat and the loss of even more territory. The monument was inaugurated on 21 June 1763 with a festival of peace which, the author says, was meant to distract attention from France's lack of diplomatic success (p. 165). The festival included a »Te Deum«, a firework display, theatrical performances and what the author calls a joust which seems to have taken place on the Seine, though she does not go into details.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris | publiée
par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

She does go into great detail to demonstrate the very divergent opinions expressed during the planning stage, exemplified, for instance, by plans that were not realized, and the equally varied and often critical judgements of the monument once it had been unveiled. The openness of the square on three sides, at that time in a part of the city not yet built up, made it, as she says, a stage on which to present the statue of the king (p. 86) and both plan and monument can be regarded as forward-looking and innovative. Instead of a plinth surrounded with defeated enemies, as Louis XIV's was in the place des Victoires, Louis XV's statue was supported by four caryatids representing respectively Strength, Justice, Love of Peace and Prudence.

It seems, however, that the king's subjects would have preferred a monument presenting a victorious general rather than a king of peace. They were, however, expected to celebrate the peace in 1763 by illuminating their houses and were informed of the correct joyful behaviour they were to exhibit by means of an *Ordonnance de Police* posted around the city beforehand (p. 161). As discussed in the final chapter of the book, the place Louis XV is an indicator of the relationship between this monarch and his subjects.

The volume is beautifully produced, of the standard we expect from the publishing house of Olms; indeed, with its 106 illustrations, of which 31 are in colour, it is extraordinarily lavish for the book version of a doctoral dissertation accepted by the University of Marburg in 2015. It includes an appendix of 69 pages of documents, correspondence, travellers' accounts, poems, literary and journalistic pieces relating to the place Louis XV. While it gives full and exhaustive detail about the planning and execution of the monument and the square in which it was set, it betrays its origins as a thesis in its repetitious and plodding style.

The text could have been shortened by cutting out such frequent signposting phrases as »Es wird nun ausführlicher darzulegen sein ...« (p. 41) and »Die bereits angedeuteten möglichen Funktionen der Anlage gilt es nun genauer zu betrachten« (p. 94) and it is a great pity that no native speaker of English could have been found to correct the four-page English summary, which is riddled with mistakes and infelicities. However, the book relates an interesting chapter in the history of Paris during the *ancien régime* and demonstrates with a wealth of pictorial and textual source material the intertwined roles of city, king and subjects in the design, execution and reception of such a prominent space and carefully considered monument in the period before the Revolution swept at least the latter away.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris | publiée
par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)