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“ Claude Jean-Baptiste Jallier de Savault, Unrealized project for the Place Louis XVI, plan, ca. 1785, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Brest ”

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However, the streets were, for the most part, laid out in straight lines because Brest developed beyond its historic castle as a military town. It was a town desired and constructed to serve the interests of those in power: a strategic port.⁵ At the end of the 18th century, a project to build a royal square was considered. It was proposed with gusto (but never carried out) by Jallier de Savault in a bid to *embellish* the city: a term used at the time to refer to urban developments that were as functional as they were symbolic.

A few beautiful monuments, such as the arsenal buildings built by Choquet de Lindu, grabbed the attention of travellers stopping over in Brest, but few seemed able to compete with the majestic harbour which mesmerised everyone’s gaze. The people of Brest could observe it from the Cours Dajot, a planted promenade which was laid out at the end of the century above the port. A statue of the King, which was never installed, was also meant to show him contemplating the ocean.

This drawing presents an urban embellishment project imagined by the architect Claude Jean-Baptiste Jallier de Savault (1739–1806) at the end of the Enlightenment period. The spectacular project he proposed to carry out included installing the royal statue, donated by the ‘Etats de Bretagne’ (The Estates of Brittany) in 1784, at the tip of the castle’s peninsula.

One glance at the title of this plan is all it takes to grasp the symbolic and practical problems that its development would cause. First of all, its purpose was to honour the king as liberator of the seas, crowned with glory at the end of the American War of Independence: the statue would therefore “hold dominion over the port, the roadstead and the Goulet”. In the spirit of the time, this type of monument was seen as a true incarnation of the monarch and it is easy to understand why placing his statue at the heart of the kingdom’s largest arsenal would indeed help to glorify his image as the heroic supreme commander of the Navy.

There were also the practical challenges of making this royal square coexist with the “establishments planned by the Navy”. Warehouses, which were to be built below and in front of the castle would intermingle with this monumental project in a skillful interweaving between public and military spaces.

However, the risks incurred by this rather original form of cohabitation finally prompted the Naval administration’s decision to abandon the project, which was strongly disapproved of by the population, even before the Revolution broke out.

Yvon Mullier-Plouzenec

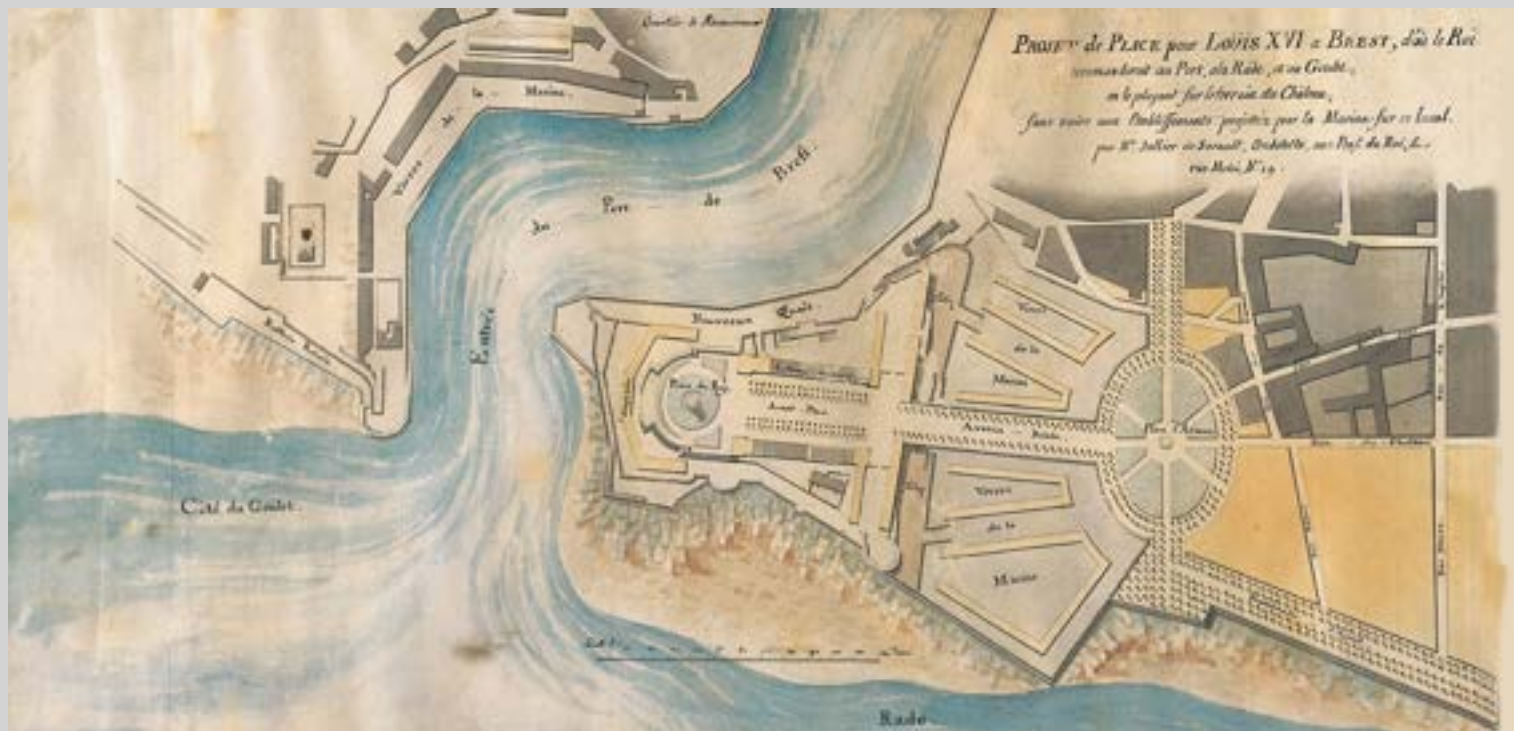


Fig. 9: Claude Jean-Baptiste Jallier de Savault, Unrealized project for the Place Louis XVI, Brest, plan, ca. 1785, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Brest.