

# The library of Jean Rodolphe Perronet

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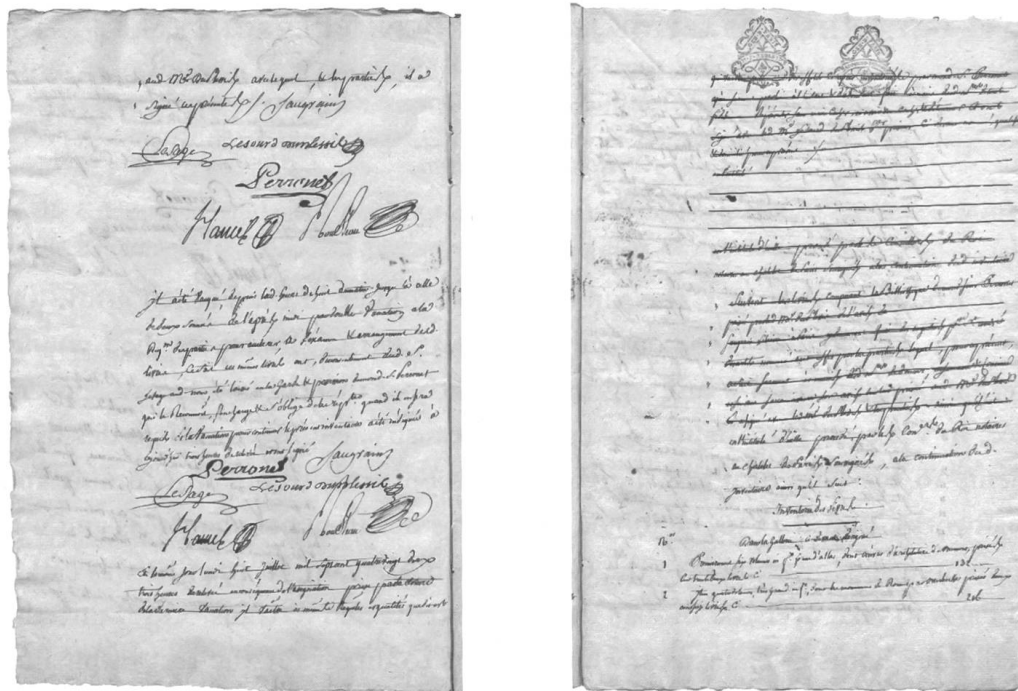
## THE LIBRARY OF JEAN RODOLPHE PERRONET

*Robin Middleton*

Jean Rodolphe Perronet, the son of a Swiss soldier in the French army, was born on 25 October 1708, at Suresnes, near Paris. His father died young. Perhaps intended for a military career, Perronet instead became an apprentice, in 1725, to Jean-Baptiste-Augustin Beausire, engineer, maître des bâtiments to the ville de Paris. Perronet was concerned there with drains and roadworks. But in 1736, he joined the Corps des Ponts et chaussées and was appointed sous-ingénieur to the Généralité d'Alençon. In 1747 he was called to Paris to take over the Bureau des dessinateurs and to transform it into the École des Ponts et chaussées, which he was to direct for the rest of his life. However, he was also a very active engineer. By 1750 he had been promoted to Inspecteur général, by 1763 he had become Premier ingénieur. He was responsible for a number of canals, in particular the Canal de Bourgogne, but is best remembered as a builder of bridges – the Pont de Neuilly, the Pont de Sainte-Maxence, the Pont Louis XV (Pont de la Concorde) and the Pont de Nemours. He revolutionized the design of bridges. He almost doubled the ratio of span to support in the design of bridge arches, flattening them so that they acted more like continuous beams. He was the most celebrated engineer in eighteenth century Europe.

It has long been known that Perronet bequeathed his library to the École des Ponts et chaussées, but the books have not been identified. However, Claude Vacant, author of a new biography, *Jean Rodolphe Perronet (1708–1794)*, published in 2006, discovered an inventory and a will that provide a great deal of new information relating to the library, an analysis of which is offered here. (ill. 1–5 and plate/Tafel VI)

A summary of Perronet's books, in 59 bundles, was drawn up on 8 July 1782, three days after the death of his wife, Antoinette-Charlotte Besson, in her apartment in the rue Saint Honoré, Versailles (Archives nationales, Minutier central, étude LXVIII, liasse 600). Perronet and his wife were married in community of property. His library was housed in his apartment in the École des Ponts et chaussées, then in a grand hôtel designed by Libéral Bruant at



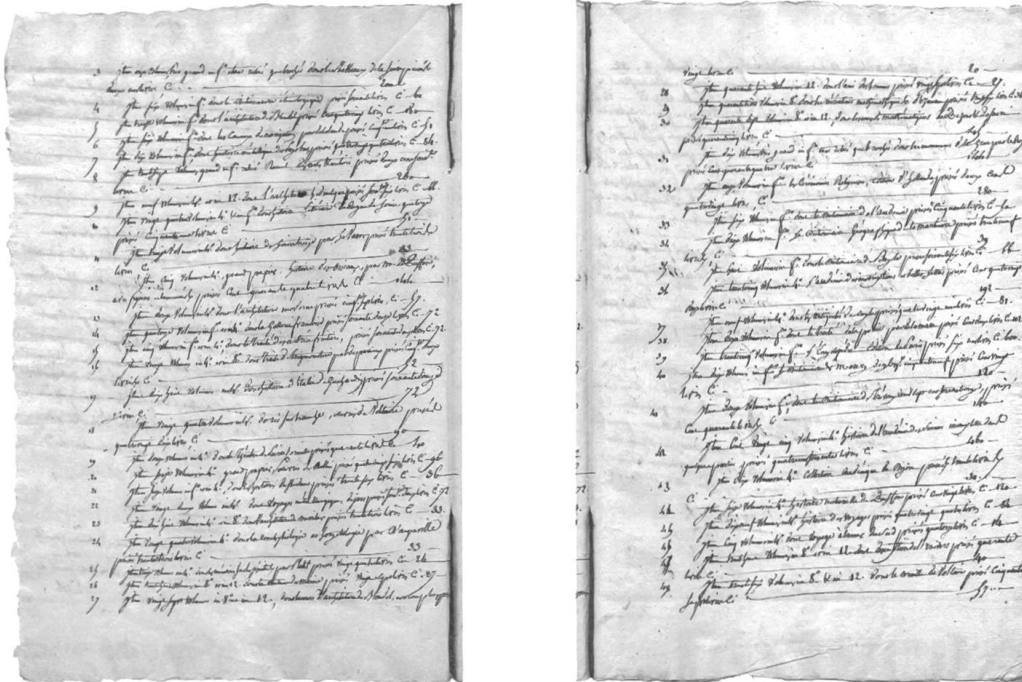
Ill. 1 and 2: Inventory of Jean Rodolphe Perronet's books, held at his wife's house at Versailles, as of 8 July 1782 (Archives nationales, Minutier central, étude LXVIII, liasse 600), first page verso (first page recto, cf. plate/Tafel VI) and N° 1-2 (r)

1 rue de la Perle, in Paris. The assessor was Lesourd-Duplessis, assisted by Claude-Marin Saugrain, book dealer of the quai des Augustins, Paris. They counted 1324 volumes, estimated at 5366 livres. There were 205 atlas or folio volumes; 19 in f° or 4°; 394 in 4°; 71 in 4°, 8° or 12° and 635 in 8° or 12°. Though the books were grouped, as noted, in 59 bundles, with only one title recorded for each, it is possible to identify as many as half of the books. Many of these are multiple sets or serials. Inevitably, the resulting analysis is incomplete, yet it sheds significant light on Perronet's preoccupations and interests.

He held runs of at least six periodicals:

A long run, it would seem, of the *Bibliothèque choisie pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle*, a compilation of extracts from books and journals, both French and foreign (with translations provided), edited by Jean Le Clerc, issued twice, subsequently four times a year, from 1703 to 1713, from Amsterdam, amounting in all to 28 volumes in 12°. Perronet might have held up to 26 of these.

An almost complete run of the *Journal économique*, a serious periodical focused on commerce and agriculture, closely aligned to the Physiocrats,



Ill. 3 and 4: Inventory of Jean Rodolphe Perronet's books, held at his wife's house at Versailles, as of 8 July 1782 (Archives nationales, Minutier central, étude LXVIII, liasse 600), N° 3–27 (l) and N° 28–48 (r)

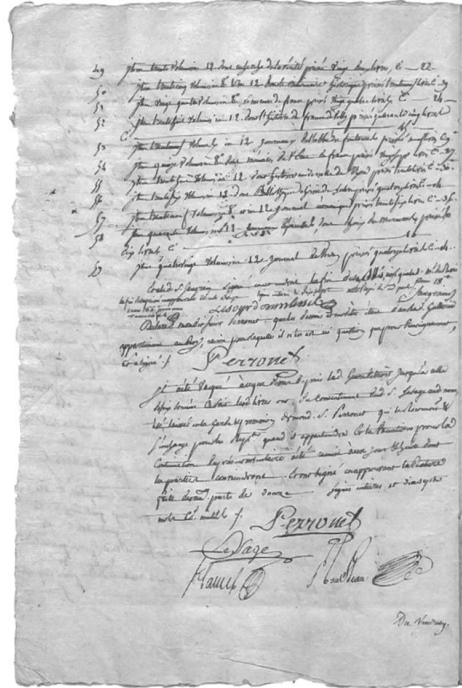
though it frequently disagreed with them, issued from 1751 to 1772, in 43 volumes (23 in 12°, 15 in 8°). Perronet held 39 of these.

He subscribed, as one might expect, to the *Mercure de France*, though he held only 24 volumes, probably dating from after May 1778 when it was taken over by Charles-Joseph Panckoucke and reactivated. This was issued in six volumes in 8° each year.

Perronet also owned 40 volumes, in 12°, of some similar, unspecified journal – “journal de pareille, dont choix du Mercure” – which might relate to the journals, no less than ten of them, taken over at that time by Panckoucke and attached to the *Mercure* – the *Journal de politique et de littérature*, for example, or the *Journal de Bruxelles*.

Perronet also held 24 volumes of the *Suite de la clef du cabinet des princes de l'Europe*, commonly referred to as the *Journal de Verdun*, in fact the Paris edition of a journal started in Luxembourg in 1704, distributed throughout Europe. This was halted in 1773 with the suppression of the Jesuit order, though it appeared briefly thereafter. Two volumes were issued each year.

The most remarkable of Perronet's journals was the *Suite des nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, a rabid, quite venomous Jansenist tract, which first began to



III. 5: Inventory of Jean Rodolphe Perronet's books, held at his wife's house at Versailles, as of 8 July 1782 (Archives nationales, Minutier central, étude LXVIII, liasse 600), N<sup>o</sup> 49–59

appear on a regular basis in 1728, edited from 1732, through to his death in 1761, by the Abbé Jacques Fontaine, known as Fontaine de La Roche, but continuing even afterwards, its spleen much reduced, to 1803. This clandestine journal was condemned from the start by the Archbishop of Paris, and its printers repeatedly raided, but all to no avail. It was eagerly and widely read. Though the Jesuits were its prime target, it attacked the Encyclopaedists equally vigorously. The full run comprised 76 volumes, of which Perronet held 39.

Perronet held long runs, likewise, of several academic publications:

125 volumes of the *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences. Avec les Mémoires de Mathématique & de Physique*, published from 1702 onwards, a volume each year, usually bound in two books. Although Perronet's set was incomplete in parts, it was estimated at 460 livres.

37 volumes of the *Description des arts et métiers faites ou approuvés par MM. de l'Académie royale des sciences*, published from 1761 onwards (thus making up an almost complete set), estimated at 260 livres.

35 volumes, estimated at 192 livres, of the *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres; avec les Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de cette académie*, published from 1729 onwards, usually two books each year.

Ten volumes of the *Mémoires de l'Académie de Dijon*, issued from 1769, and related publications, together estimated at no more than 30 livres.

The highest priced item in the inventory was the *Encyclopédie; ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers ...* in the Paris edition of 1751 to 1777, complete with supplements, in 35 folio volumes, assessed at 600 livres.

This was reinforced by at least seven other dictionaries:

Louis Moréri's *Le grand dictionnaire historique*, first issued in 1674, but revised and enlarged in numerous later editions, extending to ten folio volumes by 1759, which is the number held by Perronet;

Gilles Ménage's *Dictionnaire étymologique, ou origines de la langue française*, a new edition of which, in a single folio volume, was issued in 1694, and, further enlarged, in two folio volumes, in 1750;

*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, first issued in 1694 in two folio volumes, maintaining this format through to its fourth edition of 1762;

Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, first issued in 1697 in two folio volumes, republished many times;

*Dictionnaire universel françois et latin* (the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*), the first edition of 1704 in three folio volumes, increasing to eight by the sixth edition of 1771, which was the one held by Perronet;

Bruzen de La Martinière's *Grand dictionnaire géographique et critique*, published first in nine books in ten volumes, between 1726 and 1739, but appearing in subsequent editions in sets of six and even 13 volumes. Perronet seems to have held the first edition.

The last of the dictionaries recorded is listed simply as "dictionnaire historique", in 8° or 12°, which might be one of the many summaries or compilations from the dictionaries of Moréri and Bayle, such as the Abbé de Bonnegarde's *Dictionnaire historique et critique, ou Recherches sur la vie, le caractère, les moeurs & les opinions de plusieurs hommes célèbres* published in Lyon in 1771, four volumes in 8°. However, there are any number of alternatives, beginning with Antoine-Baudeau Somaize's *Le grand dictionnaire des Précieuses, historique, poétique ...*, published in two volumes in 8° in 1661, running through a roster of eighteenth century examples – Jean-Jacques Fillassier's *Dictionnaire historique d'éducation*, published in Paris in 1724, two volumes in 8°; Nicolas-François-Joseph Eloy's *Dictionnaire historique de la médecine*, published in

Liège in two volumes in 8°, in 1755; Antoine de Lévis's *Dictionnaire portatif, historique et littéraire des théâtres*, published in Paris in 8° in 1763; Aubert de La Chesnaye des Bois's *Dictionnaire historique des mœurs, usages et coutumes des François*, published in Paris in three volumes in 8° in 1767; and at least three by Jean-François de La Croix, the *Dictionnaire historique des Saints personnages*, of 1762, two volumes in 8°, and of 1772, two volumes in 12°, the *Dictionnaire historique et portatif des femmes célèbres* of 1769, three volumes in 12°, and the *Dictionnaire historique des sièges et batailles mémorables* of 1771, three volumes in 8° – or possibly one of the highly popular dictionaries, running into numerous editions – Jean-Baptiste Ladvocat's *Dictionnaire historique portatif contenant l'histoire des patriarches* first issued in Paris in 1756, in 8°; Alexandre Savérien's *Dictionnaire historique, théorique et pratique de la marine*, first issued in 1758 in two volumes in 12°, or Jean-Raymond de Petity's *Le manuel des artistes et amateurs, ou Dictionnaire historique et mythologique des emblems, allegories, énigmes, devises, attributs et symboles ...*, first issued in four volumes in 12° in 1770. Perhaps the cataloguer chose to pinpoint one of the rarer dictionaries – Joseph Valla's *Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et critique*, published in Soissons between 1758 and 1759, six volumes in 8°; François Morenas's *Dictionnaire historique portatif de la géographie sacrée*, published in Paris in 1759, one volume in 8°; the *Dictionnaire historique des auteurs ecclésiastiques*, published in Lyon in 1767, one volume in 8°; François Sabbathier's *Dictionnaire historique et critique des antiquités grecques et romaines* published in Yverdon in 1775, nine volumes in 12°, or, just possibly, Vincent-Bernard Tscharner's *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique de la Suisse*, published in Neufchâtel in 1775, two volumes in 8°. Speculation is, of course, futile.

No classic texts are recorded, very few modern literary works; no more than the *Théâtre de Pierre Corneille*, usually issued in volumes in 12°, but described here as in 4°, thus the Geneva edition of 1774, in eight volumes, and the *Collection complète des œuvres de M. de Voltaire*, in 24 volumes also in 4°, gilt-edged, which again indicates a Geneva edition, of 1775, valued at 90 livres. Shelved separately was “le Corneille de Voltaire” in 8° or 12°, no doubt Voltaire's *Commentaires sur Corneille*, a separate volume of which was published as a supplement to the 1768 edition of Voltaire's works in 8°. A “recherche de la vérité”, in 12°, is listed, probably one of the many editions in two to four volumes, in 12°, of Nicolas Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité*, first published in 1674; though it could, just, be identified as René Descartes's *La recherche de la vérité par les lumières naturelles*.

There are a number of histories and surveys, from the broadest in scope to the particular:

Allain Manesson-Mallet's *Description de l'univers, contenant les différents systèmes du monde*, first published in Paris in 1683 in five volumes in 8°;

Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville's *L'histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales. La lithologie et la conchyliologie*, first published in two parts in one volume in 4°, in 1742, but in two volumes in 4° in the editions of 1755, 1757, 1760 and 1780. Perronet's volumes were in 4°.

George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, issued first in 15 volumes in 4°, between 1749 and 1767, with seven supplementary volumes to follow, from 1774 to 1789. Perronet held 16 of these volumes. He also held five volumes in 4° of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux*, which again indicates the first edition, initiated in 1770, finishing with ten volumes in 1786.

Victor de Riquetti de Mirabeau's *L'ami des hommes, ou traité de la population*, first issued in Avignon, in 1756, in two volumes in 4°, though it appeared in a 12° edition, in five volumes, in the same year and was followed by many similar. Perronet held a 12° edition.

Jacques-Auguste de Thou's *Histoire universelle ... depuis 1543 jusqu'en 1607*, first published in French, in part, in 1659, in three folio volumes, in full, in 16 volumes in 4°, in 1734, and in numerous subsequent editions, usually in 4°. Perronet's copy was in 12°, which suggests that he had no more than the *Abrégé*, a ten-volume edition of which was first issued, in 12°, in 1759.

Antoine Banier's and Jean-Baptiste Le Mascrier's *Histoire générale des cérémonies, moeurs, et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, first issued in Paris in six folio volumes in 1741, though Perronet held the Amsterdam edition of 1743, in eleven folio volumes, estimated at 280 livres.

"oeuvres de Rollin", in 16 volumes in 4°, large format. Charles Rollin's writings were not available in a collected edition at this time, though his principal works, *De la manière d'enseigner et étudier les belles-lettres*, the *Histoire ancienne des Egyptiens, Carthaginois et Assyriens* and the *Histoire romaine depuis la fondation de Rome jusqu'à la bataille d'Actium* were readily available in a number of editions, all in 8° or 12°; however, in the middle of the century these works were issued, exceptionally, by Vve. Estienne in Paris, in 4° – *De la manière d'enseigner ...* in 1740, in two volumes, the *Histoire ancienne ...* also in 1740, in six volumes and the *Histoire romaine ...* in 1752, in eight volumes, together making up 16 volumes in 4°.



François Guichardin's *L'histoire d'Italie*, a translation of Francesco Guicciardini's *L'istoria d'Italia* of 1561, which first appeared in French in a folio volume in 1568 and again in 1577. A London edition of three volumes in 4° was published in 1738, which corresponds to Perronet's holding.

Paul-François Velly's *Histoire de France*, first published in 30 volumes in 12° between 1755 and 1786; later revised and published in even more extensive editions, though the original readily fits the description in Perronet's inventory.

Michel Le Vassor's *Histoire du règne de Louis XIII, roi de France et de Navarre*, first published in ten volumes in 12° in Amsterdam, between 1700 and 1711, and in a similar format in six subsequent editions, though, as Perronet held a 4° edition, it was perhaps the one first published in six volumes, again in Amsterdam, in 1757.

Simon Goulart's *Mémoires de l'Etat de France, sous Charles Neufiesme. Contenant les choses plus notables, faites et publiées tant par les Catholiques que par ceux de la Religion, depuis le troisieme Edit de pacification fait au mois d'Aoust 1570, iusques au regne de Henry troisieme*, first published in Meidelbourg in 1576, and, revised, in 1578 and 1579, in three volumes in 8°.

Claude-François Lambert's *Histoire littéraire du règne de Louis XIV*, published in Paris in 1751 in three volumes in 4°.

Pierre-Curel Platel's (i.e. Père Norbert of Bar-le Duc's) *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint-Siège*, published in Lisbon in 1766 in one volume in 4°.

Gerard von Loon's *Histoire métallique des XVII provinces des Pays-Bas, depuis l'abdication de Charles-Quint, jusqu'à la paix de Bade en 1716*, published in its French edition in the Hague, in five folio volumes, between 1732 and 1737.

Gabriel Jars's *Voyages métallurgiques, ou recherches et observations sur les mines et forges de fer ... en Allemagne, Suède, Norvège, Angleterre et Ecosse*, published in Lyon in three volumes in 4° between 1774 and 1781.

Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau's *Traité des arbres fruitiers*, published in Paris in two volumes in 4° in 1768.

"les histoires des fluides" in folio or 4°, though the entry might be read otherwise, which could refer to Jean-Baptiste-Michel Bucquet's *Mémoire sur la manière dont les animaux sont affectés par différens fluides aériformes, méphitiques* first published in Paris in 1778, one volume in 4°, but this is completely uncertain. Likewise undeciphered is "la gallerie françoise", also in folio or 4°, relating perhaps to a volume of portraits, such as Charles Perrault's *Les hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siècle. Avec leurs portraits au*

*naturel*, first issued in two folio volumes in 1696 and 1700, but this, once again, must be regarded as highly uncertain.

Three titles, at least, bear witness to Perronet's interest in exploration and travel, most evidently the Abbé Antoine-François Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages, ou nouvelle collection de toutes les relations de voyages par mer et par terre qui ont été publiées jusqu'à présent ...*, a translation of John Green's *A new general collection of voyages and travels ...*, which began to appear in Paris, in 4°, in 1746, continuing through to 1770, by which time 19 volumes, together with an atlas, had been issued. This would appear to be Perronet's holding. He also had Amédée-François Frézier's *Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud aux côtes du Chili et du Pérou*, published both in 1716 and in 1732 in one volume in 4°, and, closer to home, Jean-Benjamin de Laborde's *Tableaux topographiques, pittoresques, physiques, historiques, moraux, politiques, littéraires de la Suisse*, published in five folio volumes between 1780 and 1788, though by 1782 Perronet would have received only one complete volume.

Mathematical and engineering works no doubt formed a considerable part of Perronet's library, though not too many are listed:

Jacques Audierne's *Traité complet de trigonometrie*, of 1756; Etienne Bezout's *Cours de mathématiques*, first issued between 1764 and 1769 in six volumes in 8°, but running thereafter to many further editions, as also Jacques Ozanam's *Recréations mathématiques et physiques*, first issued in 1694 in two volumes in 8°, but appearing in many eighteenth century editions in three or four volumes in 8°. Engineering proper is represented by Bernard Forest de Belidor's *Architecture hydraulique*, first published in two volumes in 4° between 1737 and 1739, but increasing to four and even five volumes in subsequent editions; and Joseph-Jérôme le François de La Lande's *Des canaux de navigation, et spécialement du canal de Languedoc*, issued in Paris in a large folio volume in 1778. Perronet's own publications are not listed, though he no doubt owned them in their various editions. To these books one may add two works concerned with building regulations and customs, Nicolas Delamare's celebrated *Traité de la police*, beginning in 1705, running to four folio volumes by 1738, and Julien Bodreau's *Coutumes du pais et comté du Maine*, published in Mans, in one volume in 12° in 1657, and, much revised, in two volumes in 12° the year after. There were other reworked editions to follow.

More books on archaeology and architecture are recorded than on engineering, though they make for an equally haphazard array – the Comte de

Caylus's *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines*, issued in seven volumes in 4° between 1752 and 1767; Julien-David Leroy's *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, but whether in the first edition of 1758 or the enlarged edition of 1767, one cannot judge; Bonaventura von Overbeke's *Les restes de l'ancienne Rome*, the French edition of his work, published in Amsterdam in 1709; the *Cours d'architecture* of both François Blondel and Jacques-François Blondel, the former initially issued in five parts, usually bound in two folio volumes, between 1675 and 1683, followed by a second edition in 1698, the second of the *Cours* issued in nine volumes in 8°, between 1771 and 1777; Augustin-Charles d'Aviler's *Cours d'architecture*, first issued in three volumes in 4° between 1691 and 1693, but revised and reissued on at least six occasions in the years that followed, in both 4° and 8°, in varying numbers of volumes (Perronet's volumes were in 8°, which suggests that the 1710 edition was in two volumes); Charles-Antoine Jombert's *Architecture moderne*, published in two volumes in 4° in 1764; and Gabriel-Pierre-Martin's *Recueil de plusieurs parties d'architecture*, issued between 1763 and 1767, in one, two or three folio volumes, depending on the number of plates selected.

Though the titles recorded in the inventory make for a haphazard array, they reveal that Perronet subscribed to a number of well-informed and highly political journals and that he took the strongest interest in the religious controversies of the period. He was clearly closely aligned to the academies, in particular, as one would expect, to the Académie royale des sciences. He emerges as a very proper man of the Enlightenment.

In April 1787, Perronet moved from the rue de la Perle to the pavillon Moreau, on the south-western edge of the Place Louis XV, and there, on 24 February 1794, three days before he died, he dictated his final will (Archives nationales, Minutier central, étude XLV, liasse 646). He left most of his property to his illegitimate son, Pierre "dit Vigor", an engineer of the Ponts et chaussées and inspecteur du pavé de Paris, but he assigned his models of bridges and machines, housed in the École des Ponts et chaussées, moved by then to the rue Saint-Lazare, and all his books to his students – "Je donne et lègue aux élèves des Ponts et chaussées les livres composant ma bibliothèque et mon buste en marbre avec son piédestal". His bust and its pedestal, by François Masson, are now in the main amphitheatre of the École nationale des Ponts et chaussées at Champs-sur-Marne, his books, no doubt number-

ing many more than those listed in the 1782 inventory, can only in part be traced in the library of the school. No final inventory seems to have been made, and no list of their accession has been found.