

## Architecture in Paris in the Second Half of the Fourteenth Century: the Middle Ages Seen through the Eyes of Accountants

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Art historians agree that the court of the Valois Kings and princes did much to support artistic and architectural creation at the end of the fourteenth century. The uneasy peace which followed the signing of the treaty of Brétigny (1361) allowed Charles V then Charles VI to launch a great number of ambitious projects in Paris. They renewed and developed buildings dating from the reigns of their predecessors Philip Augustus, Louis IX and Philip the Fair. Charles V fortified the northern extension of the city and worked on the Bastille which guarded access from the east. He also renovated the *Louvre* and the *Palais de la Cité* while guarding a particular place in his heart for his Paris residence, the *Hôtel Saint-Paul*. His crowning achievement however was the completion of the *donjon* of Vincennes and the construction of its outer defences. Major projects were set in motion by the great royal princes: Jean, Duke of Berry, Philip the Bold, Louis of Anjou and Louis of Orléans. Major provincial towns saw the construction of sumptuous buildings displaying the glory of the reigning family. Paris, centre of power par excellence also benefited from their prodigality. The younger princes undertook to restore their private mansions for example. Thus the emergence of the Valois dynasty and the renewed importance of royal power was made manifest in stone. The King encouraged great figures beyond the Valois family, Beauvais and La Grange for example, to take an active part in the revival and the enrichment of Parisian architecture, followed thereafter by the entire aristocracy, both lay and church.

Paradoxically, few monuments from Charles V's Paris have survived. The disorder into which the capital sank in 1411 and then the loss of interest in the capital by the monarchy until the sixteenth century, led to the disappearance of many buildings. Given this state of affairs, the existence of financial documents produced on site, is of fundamental importance when studying these buildings. Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, most of the available material has been edited, but there is a crying need for a typological and a critical approach lacking in the published monographs. Quite simply the major problem is the fragmentary survival of the financial records. Originally the Paris exchequer contained an enormous number of documents. To-day there are occasional ledgers, estimates, scraps of paper, receipts, certificates, etc. Lack of care when considering the form and content of these documents can lead to an erroneous appreciation of the people, the procedures and the financial activities involved in building sites. This is particularly important because it helps to see to what extent the patron of the project actually interfered in its execution.

Two examples help to illustrate this approach to the sources. They had in common the style of organisation applied to the King's Works by the master of works Raymond Du Temple. They are

the college of Dormans-Beauvais, an important site for which we have the site accounts and the *Hôtel de Nesle*, principal residence of Jean of Berry (**fig.1**). This was a grand aristocratic building but few documents survive.

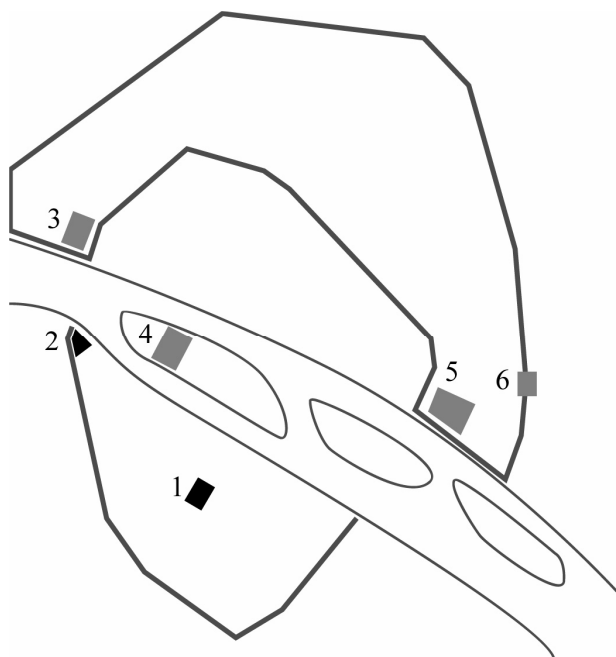


Figure 1. Map of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Paris. 1. Collège Dormans-Beauvais; 2. *Hôtel de Nesle*; 3. The *Louvre*; 4. *Palais de la Cité*; 5. *Hôtel Saint-Paul* (king's residence); 6. The *Bastille*.

### **BUILDING THE COLLEGE DORMANS-BEAUVAIS (1378-1384)**

It was not the done thing in fourteenth and fifteenth century Paris to build on open ground. Given that they were often set up in existing buildings, it has been said that there is no particular college architecture. Having been created, they were often installed in a fine building belonging to the founder, additional construction being rapidly added. Examples include the college of Navarre which was placed in a large house given by Queen Jeanne next to the Saint-Germain-des-Prés gate before settling finally on Mount Saint-Geneviève. The college-de-Fortet moved to a new site after only three years on its first site. And there is the college Dormans-Beauvais. It was established by Jean of Dormans, Chancellor of France and Cardinal-Bishop of Beauvais, in the Clos-Bruneau, in a hotel which belonged to him. There was a chapel, but its replacement was the priority of Jean of Dormans' executors. They began the building of a new one on the 16 April 1375. It was dedicated on the 29 April 1380. In comparison, new buildings for the college were begun between the 19 June 1381 and completed by the month of January 1384 (**fig.2**).

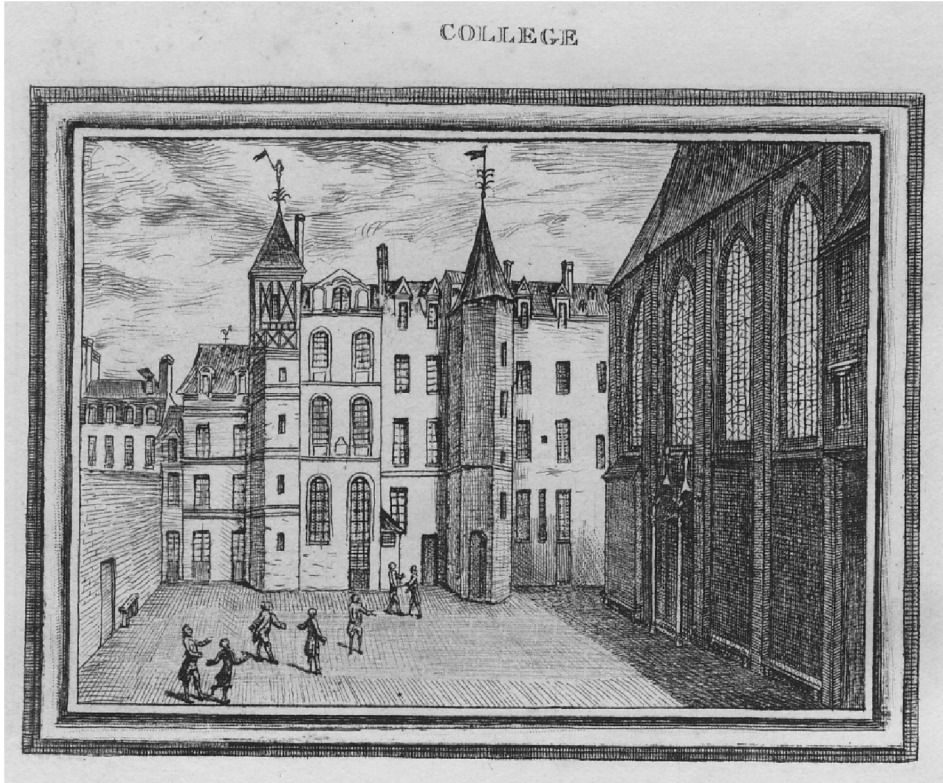


Figure 2. The college and the chapel of Dormans-Beauvais (Chapotin 1870).

### **The primary sources and what they can tell us**

The new building has dedicated accounts, separate from those of the college itself. The chapel accounts are kept with the executors accounts of Jean of Dormans (Arch. nat., MM 355 ff. 117(v)-139(v)). Those relating to the building of the college are at the beginning of the first accounts book of the procurator of the college (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>).

The accounts are of great interest for the understanding of the workings of a Parisian building site in the second half of the fourteenth century. In both cases, the original documents, used to establish the accounts have been lost, but certain documents (estimates, contracts, minutes of visits) concerning the college were copied or resumed in the accounts. It is nonetheless possible to understand the chronology of the site from the recorded expenses. The chapel accounts are less detailed because they were on scraps of paper handed to the Paymaster, while the minor expenditure concerning the new college buildings are given in detail. However, so far as the construction work (building and carpentry) is concerned, it is possible to see what was planned but there is nothing about the building site itself. For example, apart from incidental details, it is difficult to gauge how

many workers there were on site. In June 1382, when building work was moving at full speed, the college invited the principal workers to dinner. The left-overs were gathered up and offered to the poor labourers of whom there were more than 24 (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 10(r)). While we know that fixed prices and piece work were preferred by the master of works (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 4(r)), we have no information about the actual wages.

If the accounts do not give us a clear view of architectural or aesthetic choices, they do sometimes help us to see the shadow of the expert at work. But what did he do? Was he an architect who gave broad instructions to specialised masons, stone-cutters and master carpenters, who took the detailed decisions? Or was he a master of works, actually directing the site, taking detailed decisions as work progressed?

### **The money**

The founder gave bags of coin to the financier Palissant. The construction of the chapel was financed as follows: 49% came from Palissant, 48% from the college, the remainder coming from the selling on of building material. Financing the new college buildings was even more difficult. Only 74% came from the sum deposited with Palissant, 9% was advanced by the Bishop of Paris. During the building work the paymaster was short of money and had to trouble the Bishop of Paris once again, this time to borrow 8% of the total. After the main building work was finished a final loan of 9% of the total was successfully sought.

### **Organising the site**

Two of the seven executors were put in charge of the building work. The first, Gérard d'Urlus, one of the King's secretaries and notaries, canon of Rheims and Rouen, principal executor (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 139(r)) was in charge of building the chapel, paying the workers and purchasing the necessary materials. He was paid to negotiate the price of materials, to make payments and to supervise the accounts. The second, Clément de Soilly, canon of Soissons, notary and Royal clerk, was general overseer (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 120(r)). On site every day, he kept an eye on the workers and dealt with daily expenses (scraps of paper on which were edited contracts and agreements) accounts of which he sent regularly to the paymaster (20 of these were sent in the period from the 16 August 1375 to 29 April 1380 [Arch. nat., MM 355, ff. 120(r)-121(r)]). There was a clear demarcation between paymaster who supervised from a distance and was in charge of negotiating major contracts (Arch. nat., MM 355, ff. 121(v)-138(r)) sometimes with the agreement of other executors and his assistant. The latter was actually on site and dealt with daily expenditure. He really held the purse strings.

Raymond Du Temple, Royal master mason, took the technical decisions and produced the drawings. His contemporary Jacques of Chartres, the Royal carpenter was in charge of everything to do with wood. We do not know if the former was master of works of the chapel site. He was present

during the negotiations for the stonework (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 128(v)), he visited the work in progress but he did not oversee it on a daily basis (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 129(r)).

The organisation of the construction of the lodgings for the bursary boys was different. Work did not begin once the chapel had been dedicated. In May 1380, the college had the future site cleared of obstructions (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 175(r)). On the 9 October 1380, in the presence of the mason Michel Salemon, the Bishop of Paris and Jean de Colombes asked three experts to prepare a written estimate of what it would cost to build the college lodgings (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 170(r)). It was much later, on the 19 June, that the Bishop of Paris and Mile of Dormans nephew of the founder, met on site where the direction of the works was given to Raymond Du Temple, the money being handled by Barthélemy Palissant (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 2(r)).

Why was there a break in construction between the completion of the chapel and the building of the college? The commission visited “the place where the building has begun”. Is this a reference to the old buildings, the chapel or does it mean that the new works had begun but that they were unhappy and consequently transferred control to Raymond Du Temple.

On 16 July 1381, he drew up contractual documents, which were accepted on the 7 September 1384 by the building gang which had dealt with the stonework. Other problems may have had their importance, such as a neighbour’s refusal to sell a house whose demolition had to be undertaken before building began, a problem only resolved by the death of the neighbour (Arch. nat., H<sup>3</sup> 2785<sup>1</sup>, f. 2(r)) The death of Gérard d’Urlus in May 1380, followed by that of Charles V in September no doubt led to the absence of Mile of Dormans and the principal executors.

When they returned, a new site organisation was put in place. Clément de Soilly replaced Gérard d’Urlus. The accounts were examined on the 30th and 31st January 1384 by six men including Raymond Du Temple (Arch. nat., H3 27852, f. 121(v)). Henceforth, Raymond Du Temple acted as master of work. He oversaw the contracts between the college and the builders, directed the works (Arch. nat., H3 27851, f. 4(v)), measured the stonework actually laid (Arch. nat., H3 27851, f. 6(r)); was present when Jacques de Chartres negotiated for the woodwork (Arch. nat., H3 27851, f. 9(r)), demanded the written estimate for the doors and windows (Arch. nat., H3 27851, f. 12(r)) and made aesthetic judgements.

He was physically present as often as necessary on site, much more often than during the building of the chapel. Why? Perhaps he was not as busy during the minority of Charles VI as he had been during the reign of Charles V. He was no doubt under pressure to finish quickly, particularly from Mile of Dormans. They were also no doubt delighted to have such an able architect in charge of the works.

### **An influential site**

The selling on of raw materials bought for the site may have been of assistance to other constructors. This concerned principally Illand wood intended for the chapel vault and dressed stone. Why was this material resold? Perhaps because there was an initial overestimate of what would be needed. So far as the dressed stone is concerned, it was not sold voluntarily. The town of Paris appropriated a large quantity by order of the Provost and the college made a loss. It received 30 parisian pounds two years late when it had originally cost 42 parisian pounds to buy, and the Provost refused to make up the difference (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 119(v)). So far as the Illand wood is concerned, it was a prestigious material traded internationally. It was sold by Palissant who had bought it at the port of Ecluse in Flanders (Arch. nat., MM 355, f. 130(r)). It had cost 6 parisian pounds 8 shillings the hundred planks including transport to Paris. Several tradesmen working on site bought some. The carpenter Jean Havet paid 10 pounds per hundred planks, the painter Nicolas de Vertus took a few pieces, the woodworkers Etienne de la Nasse et Copin the Carpenter took the offcuts, so did Gérard d'Urlus at a very good price, and the town of Paris at about 10 pounds per hundred planks. In total, about a third of what had been bought was resold. This building site is important not because it innovated but because a number of people and organisations were able to profit from it so as to acquire what was usually a rare material, and in small quantities.

### **THE HOTEL DE NESLE - JEAN, DUKE OF BERRY'S LITTLE KNOWN RESIDENCE.**

Jean of Berry (1340-1416) was the third son of Jean II, brother of Charles V and uncle of King Charles VI. History remembers him as a great patron. He undertook major renovation projects of Royal buildings in major towns in the Duchies of Auvergne and of Berry, and the county of Poitou. Amongst these works were the castles of Mehun-sur-Yèvre, Lusignan and Poitiers; the palaces of Bourges, Poitiers and Riom; the *Sainte-Chapelles* of Bourges and Riom. Jean of Berry also owned residential property in Paris.

After the death in 1380 of Charles V, the Royal princes took on greater importance in the court of the young Charles VI. The increased influence of Jean of Berry was made manifest by an increase in his property portfolio in Paris and the surrounding region. He acquired Bicêtre castle, the manor at Grange-aux-Merciers (1398), and Dourdan and Etampes castles (1400). Further, as a reward for his work in the reconquest of the Saintonge and the Angers area from the English, the late Charles V who thought that his brother did not have a fitting residence in Paris, decided to give him a more substantial Parisian home. The King died just after but on the 25 October 1380, the young Charles VI carried out his father's wishes by giving to the Duke the *Hôtel de Nesles* as a permanent and the *hôtel de Val-la-Reine* as a lifetime gift (Arch. nat., J 185, no. 50). The *hôtel de Nesles* was a gift with strings attached since it was in poor condition and Jean of Berry was to see to its improvement at his own expense. This was done rapidly and by the 1390s the *hôtel de Nesle* was Jean of Berry's principal residence, where his "court" met. Consequently, some of his high officers (his chancellor, treasurer, advisers, secretaries...) settled near the *hôtel* or in the Saint-Germain area. Suppliers such

as butchers also set up nearby (Lehoux 1951). In addition, Jean of Berry made sure that some meetings of the King's council and of the Exchequer were held in his new Parisian home.

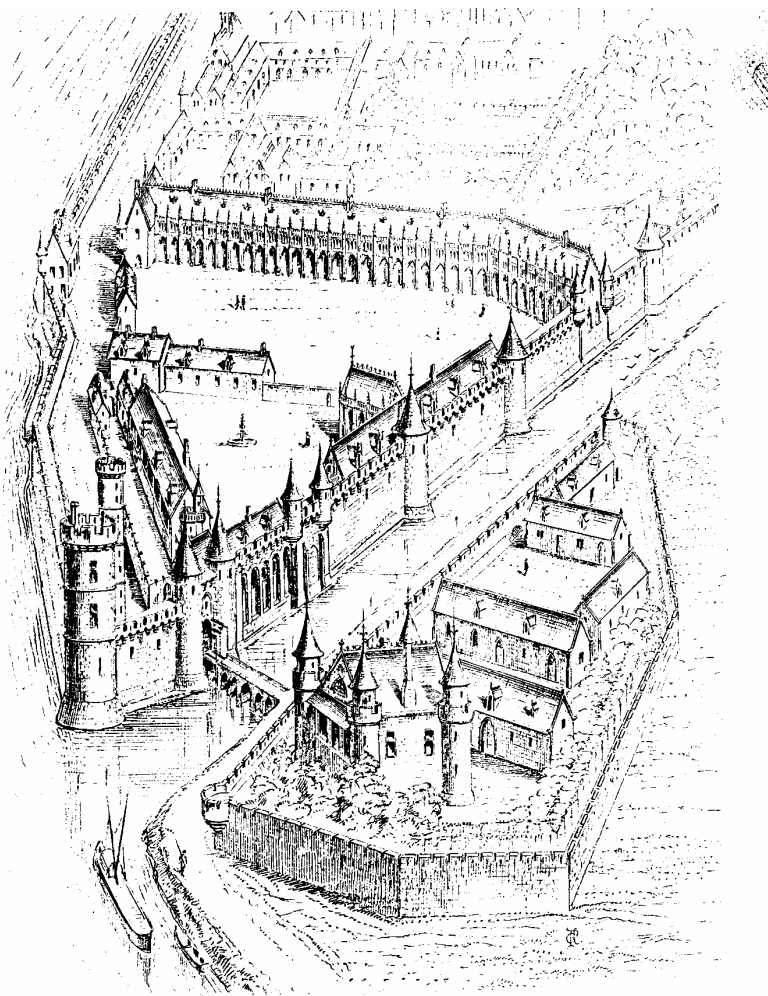


Figure 3. Reconstitution of the *hôtel de Nesle* (Champeaux and Gauchery 1894, fig. 34).

### **Description of the *Hôtel de Nesle***

Nesle was not Jean de Berry's first hotel in Paris. He already owned one on the *rue de l'Echelle du Temple* which he kept until 1388 (Sauval 1724, t. 2 p. 116). The location of the *hôtel de Nesle*, opposite the *Louvre* and near the *palais de la Cité*, gave it a strategic advantage. The *hôtel* was surrounded by the Seine to the north, the church of the Augustinians to the south-east and by Philip Augustus's city walls to the west (fig.3). Legal quirks meant that the owner of the *hôtel de Nesle*

also owned that part of the city wall next to it. Jean of Berry used this detail as a way of increasing his landholding west of the ramparts in Saint-Germain. By acquiring land and a former tile kiln, he increased his land to the Petite Seine (Arch. nat., J 186, no. 57). Philip Augustus' wall nonetheless marked the limit between Paris and Saint-Germain. It cut the residence into two parts, the *hôtel de Nesle* and the *Séjour de Nesle* (Nesle annexe) situated on the land added by Jean of Berry. These two elements were connected by the Nesle gate and a bridge built across the town ditch (BHVP, no. 92282, *factum* of 1688, p. 5 ; Lehoux 1951, p. 48).

To-day it is difficult to describe the vanished residence. At the end of the nineteenth century the historians Alfred de Champeaux and Paul Gauchery attempted a reconstitution based on old drawings (1894, pp. 30-2 and 66-70). Triangular in plan, the *hôtel de Nesle*, like Poitiers castle was built over town ramparts at the confluence of two rivers. Nesle had two courtyards separated by buildings. One part of the building looked down on the Seine and shielded the entrance which was protected by a portcullis from 1405 (Bellaguet (ed) 1841, t. 3 pp. 306-8). A long two-level gallery built over an arcade was built at the south-east. A group of buildings was set against the ramparts and looked down on the crenellated walkway. The *Séjour de Nesle* was an extension similar to those at Poitiers and Mehun-sur-Yèvre, containing barns, stables and gardens. These were protected by a minor crenellated wall. The *hôtel de Nesle* was affected by the Parisian insurrections at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Considered to be the head of the Armagnac party, Jean of Berry was refused entry in 1411 by the revolting Parisians who also set about major residences (Douët d'Arcq (ed.) 1858, pp. 168-9). For example, the ramparts of the *hôtel de Nesle* were partly demolished and the door giving onto the wall was blocked up. Nevertheless, the *hôtel de Nesle* was the duke's principal residence until his death in 1416.

Since Jean of Berry had no rightful heir, his residence reverted to the Crown. The Kings of France used the *hôtel de Nesle*, known as the *hôtel de Nevers* from 1573, then renamed the *hôtel de Guénégaud* (BHVP, no. 92230, *factum* of 1691, p. 5) as a grace and favour establishment. The building however began to fall into decay after Jean of Berry's death. At the end of April 1421 a weaver was found stealing lead came (Longnon 1878, p. 12). The *Séjour de Nesle* was in a state of ruin by the middle of the fifteenth century (Lehoux 1951, pp. 138-9). The residences met its end when it was destroyed by Louis Le Vau acting for Mazarin in the first half of the seventeenth century to make way for the college *des Quatre Nations*.

### **Important works**

Jean of Berry made the *hôtel de Nesle* a modern and comfortable residence equal to his castles and palaces. There was an extensive garden, a royal tennis court known from 1528 (Coyecque 1905, p. 182 no. 894), an aviary (Toulgoët-Tréanna (de) 1889-90, p. 130), a library, galleries, chapels and grand apartments (Sauval 1724, t. 2 p. 117). In addition, from 1386 there was piped water (BnF, NAF 7378, ff. 253(r)-255(v)). Nesle was, from many points of view, one of the most ambitious projects launched by the Prince. It required a high degree of organisation both to amass enough



money and to direct the site. The amount of money spent was considerable, 4 000 francs (3 200 parisian pounds) in 1391 and 9 000 francs (7 200 parisian pounds) in 1393 (Sauval 1724, t. 2 p. 117). These sums were beyond the Prince's usual income. He therefore did what many of his contemporaries did, he used taxes collected for warfare (Chapelot 2001, pp. 339-403). This gave him quick access to large sums of money but had to be a gift authorised by the King himself which had to be renewed every year. Jean of Berry had a special administration which dealt with major building projects. Guy de Dampmartin, his principal Master of Works, directed all the masters of works and workers engaged on sites in the Berry, the Poitou and the Auvergne. He had also to ensure that the paymaster had sufficient funds to complete the work. However his name is absent from the *hôtel de Nesle* site which had been assigned to the Royal Works administration. It was Jean Amyot, the Paymaster General of the Royal Works in the Paris district who did this work (BnF, coll. Clairambault, vol. 4, *pièces* nos. 85-86; BnF, PO 55, *pièces* nos. 11-12; cf. Chapelot 2001, p. 363.). The name of the master of works at Nesle is unknown. However the Royal princes such as Louis of Orléans were in the habit of calling on Raymond Du Temple Principal Royal Master of Works, to deal with their Parisian residences (Taveau-Launay 2001, pp. 323-38). So far as Berry is concerned, given the lack of documents, we can only speculate.

#### **A paucity of primary sources**

Given the complexity of the Nesle works and how long they took, a large number of financial documents and ledgers were produced. The essential one of these documents would have been the detailed accounts similar to that which exists for the college of Dormans-Beauvais. It would have been kept up to date by the master of works or by a specially appointed paymaster. Payments should also be mentioned in the Provost's accounts at one time kept by Jean Amyot. Finally, it is highly likely that the annual gifts from the King to Jean of Berry also appeared in the treasury accounts. Unfortunately nothing remains of any of these documents and ledgers which were probably destroyed during the fire in the Paris exchequer in 1737 (Chapelot O, Chapelot J and Foucher, 2001, p. 446). All that remains are four of Jean Amyot's receipts, two dating from November and December 1388 (BnF, coll. Clairambault, vol. 4 nos. 85-86) and two from the period of August to November 1391 during which the hotel galleries were under construction (BnF, PO 55, nos. 11-12). These documents only indicate dates and amounts and no information whatsoever about the site. So, it is impossible to establish the chronology of this site as it has been for the Poitiers castles for which hundred of accounting documents survive.

We have to fall back on two kinds of secondary sources which nonetheless provide useful information. Henri Sauval (1623-76), is one of those who was able to work on the original documents, and on legal papers. For example, at the end of the seventeenth century, a conflict broke out between the abbot of Saint-Germain and the Comptroller of the Royal Household who was asked for the deeds of the former *hôtel de Nesle* on which had been built the college *des Quatre Nations*. The court proceedings, to be found at the *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris* (BHVP, *facta* nos. 92230, 92279, 92282), were based on archives in the exchequer and bring to

light some interesting elements. First of all, we learn that a series of detailed accounts about Nesle survived the troubles in Paris in the period 1410-18, (BHVP, no. 92282, *factum* de 1688, p. 5). These extracts mention the existence of a main building giving onto the Seine which contains a hall and a gallery which reaches the Nesle tower. The documents also mention the existence of a gallery which has a large number of windows and gives on to the town ditch. This detail is particularly interesting because it disappeared during Louis Le Vau's work before the demolition of the *hôtel* (Arch. nat., NIII Seine 710). Finally, we learn that after the death of the prince, the garden was entirely replanted.

The *hôtel de Nesle* is an excellent example of a major residence about which no documents survives. The historian has to do what he can with chronicles and drawings. However, it is clear that other documents can help when looking for information on site accounts. By their number, the subjects they cover, their survival, legal documents, particularly those concerning the Parlement de Paris remain to be seriously exploited and are very promising.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that the fragmentary state of the documentary evidence, limited as it is to accounting documents and scraps of paper about a few colleges, does not allow us to study in depth the Parisian building market, except by extrapolation. Yet we have learned that the means employed were considerable. The Duke of Berry spent on one year's work (1391) what the college of Dormans-Beauvais spent over a period of five years to build a chapel (4 000 francs, 3 200 parisian pounds). Moreover, it would be interesting to work out how much internal decoration and furnishing cost. This is almost impossible to estimate from the accounts of ecclesiastical building sites.

What are the possibilities for the future? It should be possible to use a larger group of documents such as the legal archives of the *Parlement de Paris* which are difficult of access, for different reasons, not least because they are to be found in Paris, out of Paris and indeed abroad. This problem was already obvious to archivists and historians in the nineteenth century such as E. Boutaric (1878). Mention should also be made of the accounts of the Artois family in the departmental archives in Côte-d'Or, those of the dukes of Burgundy in the departmental archives of the Nord and those of the house of Savoy in Turin. Study of these documents could bring to light hitherto unknown actors or confirm the pre-eminence of those who are already known. There may also be exciting new information about site organisation, finance and the acquisition of building material.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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