

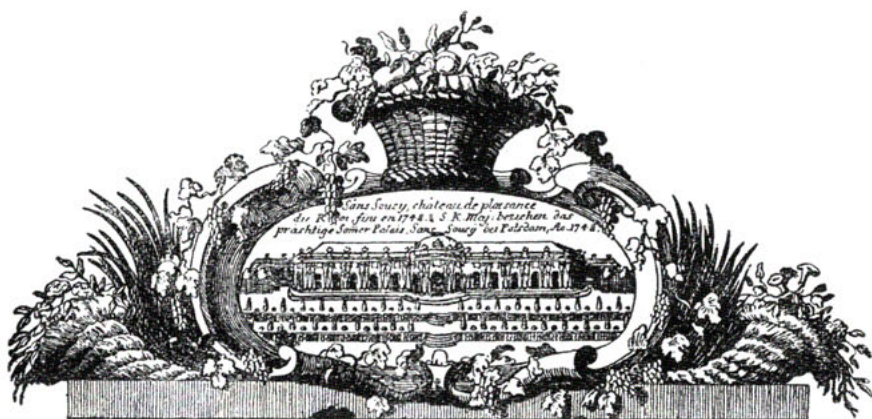
VERWALTUNG DER
STAATLICHEN SCHLÖSSER UND GÄRTEN

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THE PALACE
OF SANSSOUCI



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The History of the Palace

THE EXTERIOR

IN May 1778, while the King of Prussia was in camp, Goethe, with Duke Karl August, visited Berlin and Potsdam. He wrote to Merck about this visit: "A thousand things have dawned upon me. And I have come into close connection with Old Fritz, as I have seen his characteristic manner, his gold, his silver, his marble, his monkeys, his parrots, and his dilapidated curtains, and I have heard his rascals complaining about the great man." By the rascals he meant certain circles of Berlin society; the place, where he came to be intimately acquainted with the King's nature, is Sanssouci. The New Palace is much more regal, the Town Palace in Potsdam has still more brilliant proofs of Frederick's rococo; but Sanssouci, the Summer-house in the vineyards, was for 40 years Frederick's favourite residence: here he died, and the rooms of the house seem to be impregnated with the personal essence of their inhabitant to such an extent, that the great King himself always predominates with the visitor, in spite of the splendid and refined artistic style of the rooms.

Frederick's personality, "the mixture of temperaments, full of strength and contradiction, this combination of energy and wariness, of fire and moderation, of peremptoriness and deliberation, of sudden impulsiveness and tenacious perseverance, of sharpness and tenderness, of light-heartedness and sentimentality, of scoffing and piety, of deep artfulness and bitter truth, of talent, character, genius and self-restraint", has been depicted in

all its details by historical writings; a delineation of his character by Ludwig Tieck, published just a hundred years ago, emphasizes the contrast in the King's different periods of life, of which the visitor of Sanssouci becomes aware: "It is touching", says one of the King's admirers in the "Country Party", "to follow this brilliant personality: how vigorously and in what a heroically careless manner the youth acts in his first war, with what surety the man in the second, and how great the sovereign in the third and most fearful one. But now the unclouded aspect of life was transformed for him, and unfolded its dark gloom, and its shadows of death. The victor, whom all Europe admired, returned to his quiet home as a man prematurely aged, his body shattered and ill, tired of life, disgusted with his achievements and subsequent glory, to heal the wounds of his state as a legislator, still to make use of his life in untiring activity, in unrestricted, laborious work, even if not to enjoy it." In his old age he characterized his human development himself: "Mais il est des hochets pour tout âge l'amour pour les adolescents, l'ambition pour l'âge mur, les calculs de la politique pour les vieillards." The plan for the small palace in the vineyards was made in his youth: in Sanssouci that exceedingly merry Rheinsberg idea of a Bacchus temple as a punch-bowl, borne by twelve colossal satyrs, seems to have been realized, and above the entrance to the King's Antechamber there stand the significant lines:

Que l'aube à son brillant retour
Sous ces lambris nous trouve encore
Disputant de vers et de l'amour
Et de nouveau voyons éclore
Pour prémices d'un plus beau jour
Les fleurs, les plaisirs et l'aurore.

But after a few years of brilliant conviviality Sanssouci was for decades a quiet place of refuge for the King, where he lived as an "old anchorite" with his books and for his work; as a presentiment as it were, he had had the lines of Chaulieu inscribed above the other door of the Antechamber;

Je sème encore de quelques fleurs
Le peu de chemin qui me reste.

The builder of the vineyard-house is the radiant young King, as Pesne's pictures show him; but the Hermit of Sanssouci is not "Old Fritz" the idol of his whole country, whose outward appearance has been handed

down to posterity by pictures made in his old age, it is the stoic of olden times, matured by the terrible experiences of the great war, superior to all human things, whose peculiarity seems only to be restored to us by the well-preserved plaster mask, taken after his death.

On January 13th 1745 the King signed the order-in-council for the erection of the small palace on the topmost terrace of the vineyard of Sanssouci. The plans for the whole construction reach further back. *The Vineyard*

Before the Brandenburger Tor, on the place, that has still retained its name, Frederick William I. had already his "Marly", a kitchen-garden with a frame-work pavilion; here the King held his shooting-matches and his bowling-competitions, the tedious amusements, which are spoken of in Crown Prince Frederick's correspondence with his sister Wilhelmine. At the north of Marly was formerly the "Desert Hill", covered with oak-trees, then allowing an extensive view all round across the Havel landscape near Potsdam. (Compare Knobelsdorff's picture in the third Cavalier's Chamber.) In Autumn 1744 Frederic had the south slope of this "Desert Hill" arranged in terraces, and planted with grape-vine, and choice fruit-trees; on the topmost terrace the vineyard-house was erected, to which he gave the name of Sanssouci in 1746.

A plan by the King's own hand for the terrace (Ill. 2) construction has been preserved. (Copy on the desk in the Library.) The plan contains in its characteristic features the whole building as far as it was carried out: the terraces in a foreshortened sketch, at their foot the fountain, on the topmost terrace the palace; the main building "de pierre de taille", in the ground-plan nearly in its present shape, adjoining it the low side-wings "de briques", in front of these the arcades with the pavilions, and behind the palace the half-circle of pillars. The palace alone is shown in a second sketch of the King's (illustration page 7), corresponding almost entirely to the present building, and containing several interesting remarks. In the centre of the garden-front of the main building there is the projecting elliptic Marble Hall, behind it, facing the pillared forecourt, the oblong Entrance Hall. The right half contains the King's apartments, "Pour le roy", the left half, the visitor's rooms, "Pour les étrangers". In the King's Bed Chamber we read: "same proportions as in Potsdam"; in the round chamber: "like at Rheinsberg", in the pillared forecourt: "colonade Canelée corintien mais le reste comme à Rheinsberg". The sketch indicates the King's conservative inclination to see repeated in other places, what has once pleased him. For the bedroom he wants the same proportions as in the bedroom in the Town Palace, which had been restored shortly before;

*The King's
Plans*