The Author of the Architecture Moderne of 1728

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The Architecture Moderne of 1728 differs from most architectural books published during the preceding decades by refraining advisedly from any discussions on the Orders or other theoretical problems related to them. Its avowed aim is to fix attention on questions of planning and also on practical subjects such as construction, specifications, cost, and bylaws. It is pointed out in its preface that for the last sixty years no comprehensive study on planning had been published, which remark must have been made with the third edition of Pierre Le Muet’s Manière de bien bastir of 1663 in mind, a book which undoubtedly had served as model for the new publication. By dealing once more with the subject of planning the Architecture Moderne offers an important contribution to the architectural literature of the time, so that to know its author’s name should be of some interest.

The book was published anonymously by Claude Jombert. Barbier in his Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes attributes the work to Charles Etienne Briseux (1680–1754), who is known as the architect of the still extant Hotel d’Augny (No. 6 Rue Drouot, today the Mairie of the IX arrondissement) and as the author of two books on architecture.1 Barbier took this piece of information from La France littéraire of 1769.2 Most public libraries, trusting Barbier’s authority, have the book catalogued under Briseux and this attribution is generally accepted by all dictionaries and biographies, as for instance by Querard, Michaud, Brunet, Bauchal, Lance, Thieme-Becker, and most recently by the Dictionnaire de Biographie Française. Modern scholars on the whole follow these authorities, but doubts have occasionally been voiced, as for instance by Cassirer, who rejected Gurlitt’s attribution to Briseux without, however, proposing the name of another author.3 Kimball, who in 1943 left the question of authorship open, named Jean Courtonne as the author of the Architecture Moderne in the revised edition of 1949.4 This attribution was probably determined by the fact that illustrations of four buildings, designed by Courtonne, and this attribution is generally accepted by all dictionaries and biographies, as for instance by Querard, Michaud, Brunet, Bauchal, Lance, Thieme-Becker, and

1. L’Art de bâtir des maisons de campagne (Paris, 1743), and Traité du beau essentiel dans les arts . . . (Paris, 1752). Bauchal and Thieme-Becker give the date of birth as 1660. This is quite improbable since Briseux would have been 90 when he built the Hôtel d’Augny, and 92 when he published his Traité du beau. The date of the second edition of the Architecture Moderne is 1764, not 1754, as stated in Thieme-Becker.
made clear his responsibility not only for these buildings but also for all the other designs as well as the text, in the same way as he made it clear when he referred to his own buildings in a manuscript for another—unpublished—book.\textsuperscript{5} The inclusion of Courtonne’s designs can, it seems, be explained differently. Apparently Jombert acquired the firm of Jacques Vincent, for some copies of the \textit{Traité de la Perspective} have Jombert’s name and address glued over those of Vincent.\textsuperscript{6} Instead of the assumption that Courtonne had something to do with the \textit{Architecture Moderne}, it seems more feasible to suppose that Jombert tried to make the most of a bargain by adding to the new publication the recently acquired and attractive plates of Courtonne’s buildings.\textsuperscript{7}

It is rather strange that the attribution to Briseux by \textit{La France littéraire} should ever have been given credence, because the name of the artist responsible for this substantial collection of designs for houses was clearly stated by Jombert’s son Charles Antoine when, in 1764, he published the second greatly enlarged edition of the \textit{Architecture Moderne}. In the \textit{Avertissement} he recounts that this treatise originated from a collection of engravings representing sixty different designs, and adds: ‘Elles sont du dessein et de la composition de M. Tiercelet, Architecte.’\textsuperscript{8} His father, he says, acquired these plates in 1726 and, intending to make a book out of them, approached various architects. However, the treatises which these architects submitted fell short of his expectations and also failed to do credit to the designs which they purported to describe. It is not quite clear whether Jombert père reproduced these various treatises in spite of their shortcomings or, which is more likely, adopted the course followed by his son for the second edition—namely, to make use of only that which he approved, the material of which now forms the first volume.

Still, the real value of the \textit{Architecture Moderne} is to be found in the second volume containing the collection of designs for houses ranging from very small dwelling houses to elaborate mansions, and it is for that collection that Tiercelet had been named the author. Nothing is so far known of him except that the widow of an architect Gilles Tiercelet died on 29 March 1763 and that an Augustin Claude Tiercelet, also an architect, died on 5 May 1769.\textsuperscript{9}

The latter wrote in 1758 to the Marquis de Marigny asking to be admitted to the Académie d’Architecture. The document reads: ’Claude Augustin Tiercelet, age de 33 ans, fils de Gilles Tiercelet, architecte Entrepreneur des Bâtiments à Paris qui a composé l’Architecture Moderne en 1728 en deux tomes a l’honneur de vous représenter que depuis l’age de 12 ans il a travaillé à l’architecture.’\textsuperscript{10}

The son’s attribution of the \textit{Architecture Moderne} to his father is corroborated by an authority as well informed as Jacques François Blondel. In his \textit{Architecture Françoise} of 1752 he refers to Tiercelet as the author of the \textit{Architecture Moderne}, also stating that Tiercelet took Le Muet’s book as model. Two years later he again lists the \textit{Architecture Moderne} under Tiercelet’s name when recommending text-books to his students; he repeats this again in 1763, namely, still a year before Charles Antoine Jombert had recounted in the \textit{avertissement} of the second edition the history of the original edition. On this new list of books, submitted to the Academy to supplement their existing library, the ’Architecture moderne par Tiercelet 2 vol. in 4°’ is followed by ’Architecture de Briseux 2 vol. in 4°’.\textsuperscript{11}

Again, in 1772, Blondel talks of ‘Architecture moderne ou l’Art de bien Bâtir, mis au jour bien avant le nôtre, par feu

6. So for instance the copy in the Avery Library, Columbia University.
7. Jombert also uses the frontispiece of Courtonne’s book, blotting out the dedication to the Duc d’Antin by pasting over it a piece of paper with the new title.
8. Actually the collection could have consisted of 56 designs only, as the last 4 were those of Courtonne. Of the total of 143 plans, elevations, and sections, 14 are by Courtonne.
10. Paris, Archives Nationales O1 1909 (2) fol. 19. It follows from this document that Gilles Tiercelet must have died before 1758.
M. Tiercelet. . .12 While Blondel's reference to Architecture Moderne and Tiercelet is explicit enough, the citation of Briseux's book is very vague, yet, at the same time, probably gives an indication of how the confusion between the two authors could have arisen. The correct title of Briseux's book is: L'Art de bâtir des Maisons de Campagne and the alternative title of the Architecture Moderne is: ou l'art de bien bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes. . . .

Perhaps one should be cautious and follow the example of the Katalog der Ornamentstichsammlung der Staatlichen Künstbibliothek, Berlin (Berlin, 1939, No. 2397), which lists the first edition of the Architecture Moderne under the name of its publisher Claude Jombert, naming—probably the only library to do so—Tiercelet as designer, but this seems to magnify without much justification the publisher’s rôle as a compiler. Since the main value of the Architecture Moderne, and its most original and creative part, lies undoubtedly in the collection of designs for houses, it would be only right to give back this work to its author, Gilles Tiercelet.