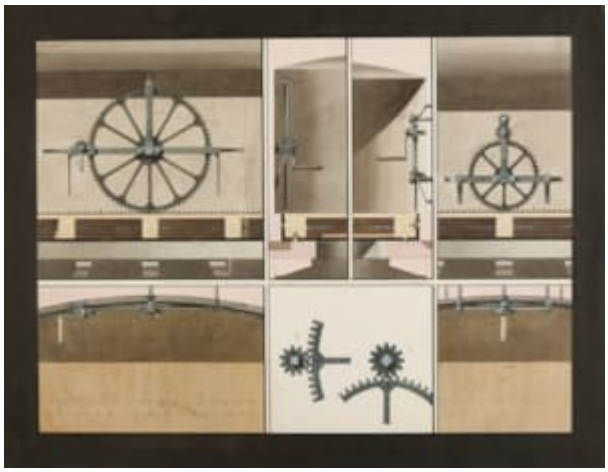

19th Century FRENCH SCHOOL

Study for the Refortification of Paris: Designs for a Cogwheel for a Revolving Floor

Pen and black ink and watercolour, within a fictive drawn mount.

Numbered *PL-43.em* in red ink at the upper left.

Variously lettered and numbered in red ink, and with a scale in feet (*piedes*) in red ink at the centre.

366 x 497 mm. (14 3/8 x 19 5/8 in.) [image]

445 x 573 mm. (17 1/2 x 22 1/2 in.) [sheet]

The present sheet may be included among a group of designs for elements of the refortification of Paris executed in the second decade of the 19th century. Several designs for a ring of detached forts surrounding the city were submitted to Napoleon in 1813 by the Central Committee on Fortifications, but the Emperor decided against implementing these designs for fear of causing undue alarm among the citizens of Paris. Napoleon's decisive defeat at Leipzig in October 1813, and the subsequent occupation of Paris by coalition forces, led French engineers to further study ways of constructing defences at strategic points around the city in the future.

This large drawing appears to show a novel design for a revolving, circular wooden floor that could be turned with a hand-operated cogwheel. Such movable floors would have been used within fortified towers, to allow cannons to be rotated in any direction to fire through embrasures in the walls of the structure.

By the same hand as the present sheet, and of similar technique and dimensions, are two closely-related drawings that were likewise at one time in the collection of the 1st Duke of Wellington; one depicting a plan and section of a rotating wooden floor equipped with cannons, and another showing a plan, elevation and section of a fortified round tower with a revolving floor.

The military commander and statesman Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), retired

from the army after his decisive victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. He then went into politics, later serving two terms as Prime Minister. The Duke assembled a large collection of fine and decorative arts, including paintings (mainly Dutch and Flemish Old Masters), furniture, sculpture, silver, porcelain and militaria, much of which was kept at his London residence of Apsley House.