

# The Story of the Emperor of China: A Beauvais Tapestry Series

EDITH A. STANDEN

*Consultant, Western European Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

DETAILED RECORDS of the tapestry manufactory at Beauvais before 1723 have not survived, so that an account of any early series has to be put together from odd scraps of information. First the content must be determined, that is, how many tapestries made up the series and what their subjects were. For the Story of the Emperor of China, this has been done by Adolph S. Cavallo in his catalogue of tapestries in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,<sup>1</sup> but he lists one subject, Gathering Tea, of which no tapestry has ever been found and which may never have existed.<sup>2</sup> His other titles are the Audience of the Emperor, the Emperor on a Journey, the Astronomers, the Collation, Harvesting Pineapples, the Return from the Hunt, the Emperor Sailing, the Empress Sailing, and the Empress's Tea. The sets seem usually to have been composed of six pieces like that in the Bavarian National Collection and one owned by the Comte du Manoir in 1925.<sup>3</sup>

Two of the subjects are always found as wide panels, the Audience of the Emperor (Figures 1, 2) and the Return from the Hunt (Figure 3); except for the figures, the two compositions are the same. There are many extant examples of the Audience and few of the Return from the Hunt, presumably because customers did not want two such similar designs in a single set and, of the two, preferred the livelier Audience. The latter is in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 1); the Musée National of Compiègne (Figure 2); the Residenz Museum, Munich (from the Bavarian National Collection); the Hermitage, Leningrad; the Wernher collection at Luton Hoo (where, most unusually, it is paired with the Return from the Hunt); the M. H. de Young Museum, San Francisco; the Louvre (two examples); and the Banque de l'Union Parisienne, Paris (a very wide version, with three people behind the chariot on the left and an extra man on the far right).<sup>4</sup> One from a private

1. Adolph S. Cavallo, *Tapestries of Europe and of Colonial Peru in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston, 1967) pp. 170–176.

2. The first published appearance of the title is in Jules Badin, *La Manufacture de Tapisseries de Beauvais* (Paris, 1909) p. 15, note 2. The subjects of the series are listed as “L’Audience du prince.—Le Prince en voyage.—Les Astronomes.—La Collation.—La Récolte des Ananas.—La Récolte du thé”; this information was presumably derived from the *registres de fabrication* of sets made in 1724 (Badin, *Manufacture*, p. 56). Possibly the last two titles were used for a single design, the Harvesting Pineapples, which is known from several extant examples; neither pineapples nor tea bushes would have been familiar objects at Beauvais in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

3. Albert Maumené, “Le Château de Juaye,” *La Vie à la Campagne* 22 (January 1, 1925) pp. 20–23.

4. Max Ferrier, *Le Palais de Compiègne* (Paris, 1959) pl. 89; Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie, the Vision of Cathay* (New York, 1962) pl. 38; N. Biroukova, *Les Tapisseries françaises de la Collection de l’Hermitage* (Leningrad, 1974) no. 57; M. Urwick Smith, *The History and Treasures of Luton Hoo, the Wernher Collection* (1966) pp. 11, 12, illus. on dining room wall; *European Works of Art in the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum* (Berkeley, 1966) p. 158; Eveline Schlumberger, “La collection Grog au Louvre,” *Connaissance des Arts* 261 (November, 1973) pp. 116, 117. Other examples are listed in the unpublished notes of the late Hubert Delesalle; I am grateful to Mme Delesalle for the opportunity to study these notes.

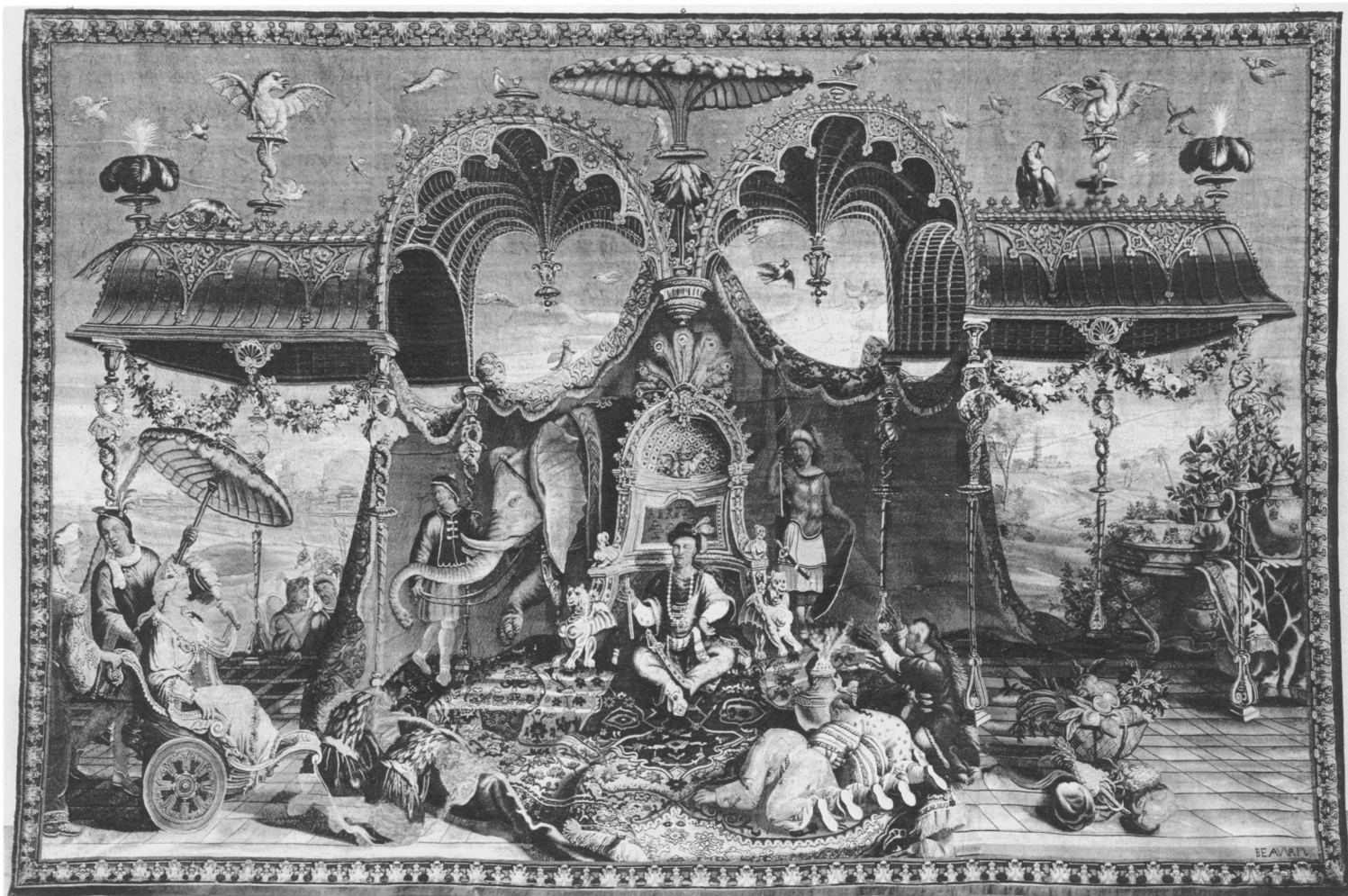


FIGURE 1

The Audience of the Emperor. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 48.7

collection was exhibited at Caen in 1965<sup>5</sup> and others are recorded in 1958 and 1971;<sup>6</sup> one is in the Singraven collection, Denecamp, Holland. Many have been sold at auction, so that at least fifteen are known to exist.

The richly dressed woman in the chariot on the left is presumably the empress; she appears in other tapestries of the series. The figure of the emperor and his throne have been adapted from the title page to Johan

Nieuhof's *Legatio Batavica* (Figure 4), first published in 1665. The rug at his feet is perhaps Near Eastern, but the vases on the far right are related to Chinese originals; throughout the series, the ceramics reflect a familiarity with the Chinese porcelains then being imported into France, but the textiles have no trace of any Chinese patterns. The elephant behind the throne, though it appears to be African, would have seemed appropriate at the time; Nieuhof mentions the breeding of elephants in China.

The Return from the Hunt, as has been mentioned, is less frequently met with. An example belongs to the

5. Hotel d'Escoville, Caen, *J. B. Blin de Fontenay*, exhibition catalogue (1965) no. 5.

6. *Le Dix-septième Siècle français* (Paris, 1958) pp. 136, 328; Dario Boccara, *Les Belles Heures de la Tapisserie* (Paris, 1971) p. 137.

FIGURE 2

The Audience of the Emperor.  
Wool and silk tapestry, French  
(Beauvais), late seventeenth  
century. Palais de Compiègne

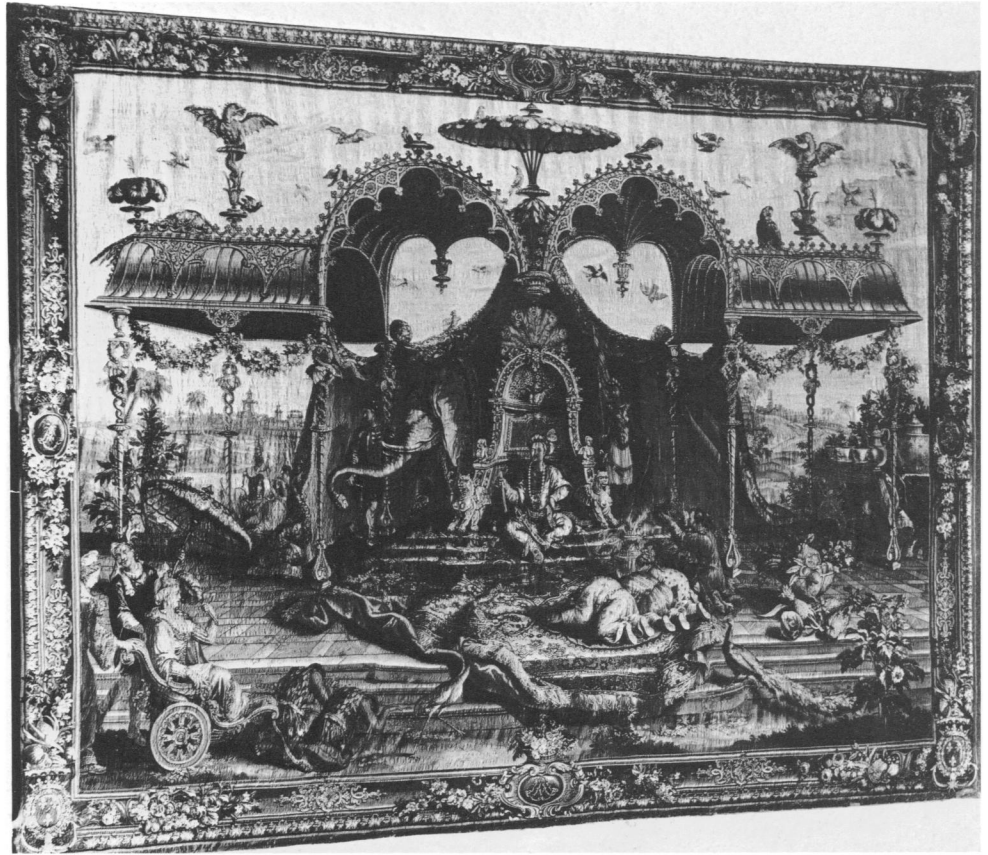


FIGURE 3

The Return from the Hunt.  
Wool and silk tapestry, French  
(Beauvais), late seventeenth or  
early eighteenth century.  
Owned by the city of Paris

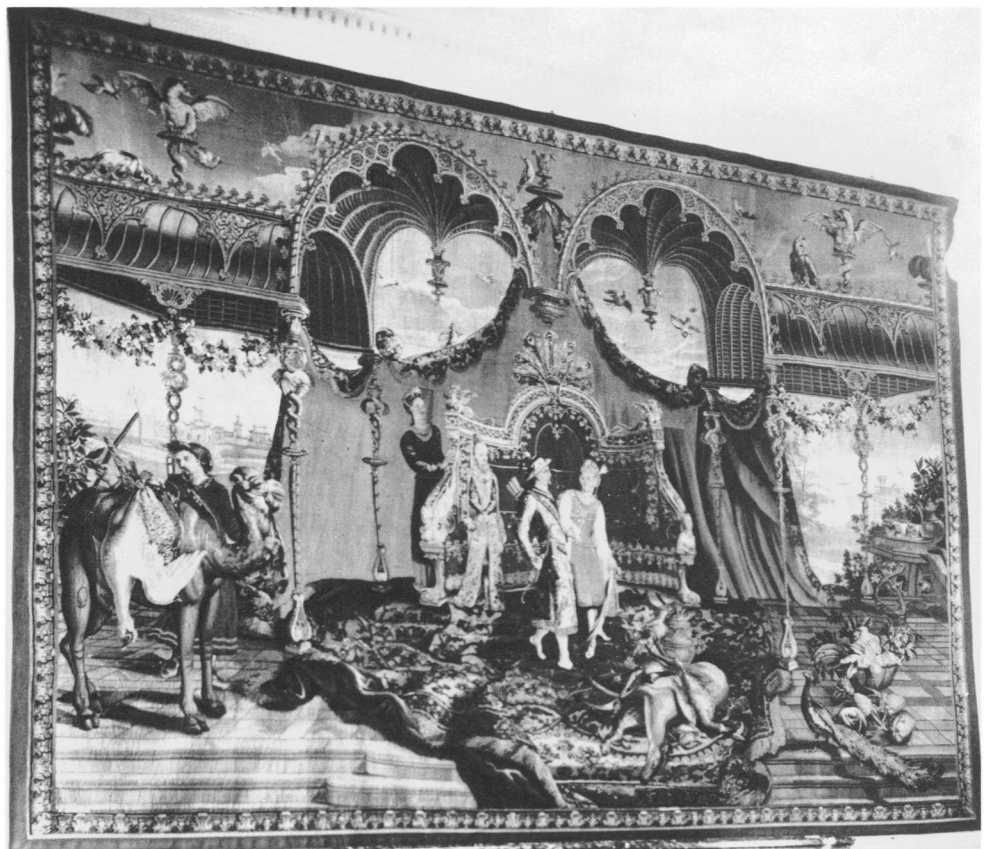




FIGURE 4

Frontispiece of Johan Nieuhof, *Descriptio Legationis Batavae* (Amsterdam, 1668). The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library

city of Paris (Figure 3)<sup>7</sup> and there is one at Luton Hoo. The subject was included in the set made for the Comte de Toulouse, which will be described later. A tapestry showing the central portion only was sold at the Palais Galliera, Paris, May 30, 1973, no. C, and three pieces making up the complete design from the collection of the Baronne de Gargan were sold at the Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, May 6, 1904, no. 70. Another example was in the Comtesse de F . . . sale, Galerie Charpentier, Paris, December 5, 1959, no. 130. The central couple are presumably the emperor and the empress.

A subject that could be woven as a wide panel or as

a square one is the Astronomers, of which at least fifteen examples are known. The wide ones, such as that in the Francis L. Kellogg collection, New York (Figure 5), have a temple on a hill at the left, with an astronomer standing at the foot of its steps; this composition is often added to the main scene of the Emperor on a Journey. The Astronomers is in the collection of the city of Paris; the Munich Residenz Museum;<sup>8</sup> the Musée de Tessé, Le Mans;<sup>9</sup> the Musée Leblanc-Duvernay, Auxerre; and in many private collections as well.

It has long been recognized that the astronomers are the Jesuit missionaries who taught European science to important Chinese.<sup>10</sup> As one of them, Father Ferdinand Verbiest, wrote in 1678, "our holy religion, under the starry cloak of astronomy, is easily introduced among princes and governors of provinces."<sup>11</sup> The man with a long white beard in the tapestry may be Father Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), though the creature on his mandarin square is a winged dragon rather than the white crane proper to a mandarin of the first class, his Chinese rank.<sup>12</sup> The figure is clearly related to the portrait of Schall in Athanasius Kircher's *China Monumentis* (Figure 6), first published in 1667; the mandarin square in the print, however, seems to show a white swan. The print is thought to be derived from an original portrait made by a European in Peking.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the astronomical instruments in the tapestry

7. Juliette Niclausse, *Tapisseries et Tapis de la Ville de Paris* (Paris, 1948) no. 56.

8. Hans Thomas and Herbert Brunner, *Residenz Museum, Munich* (Munich, 1967) p. 48.

9. Chanoine Marquet, *La Cathédrale du Mans*, (Le Mans, 1954) p. 40, illus. p. 48. The tapestry is called "Les Jésuites enseignent les mathématiques et l'astronomie aux Chinois." It is said to be on loan to the museum from the cathedral.

10. Oskar Münsterberg, *Bayern und Asien im XVI., XVII. und XVIII. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1895) p. 11. The author speaks of a *Tenture chinoise* after Boucher, but he describes the Astronomers from the earlier series in Munich. The seated man is identified as Father Schall, and the emperor Shun Chi (d. 1661) is also said to be present. The man on the temple steps in the background was identified as Father Schall by Henri Cordier, *La Chine en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1910) p. 39.

11. Quoted, in French, from the original Latin in J. C. Gatty, *Voie de Siam de Père Bouvet* (Leiden, 1963) pp. xv, xvi.

12. George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants* (Notre Dame, 1962) p. 349. Schall was also entitled to wear a red button on his hat.

13. Alfons Vöth S. J., *Johann Adam Schall von Bell S. J.* (Cologne, 1933) pp. 351, 352.





**FIGURE 5**  
The Astronomers. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Collection of Francis L. Kellogg, New York

**FIGURE 6**  
Father Schall, print from Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis* (Amsterdam, 1667). The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library



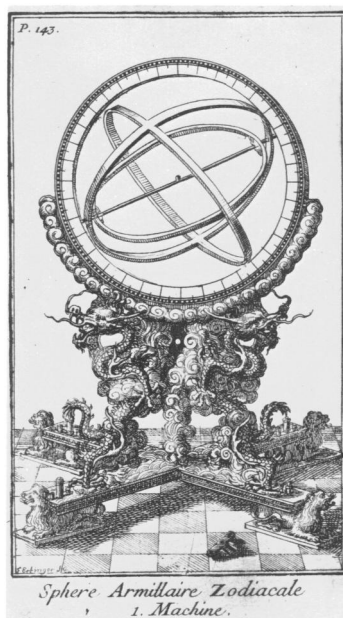


FIGURE 7  
Armillary sphere, print from Louis Daniel Le Comte, *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l'Etat présent de la Chine* (Paris, 1697–1700). New York Public Library

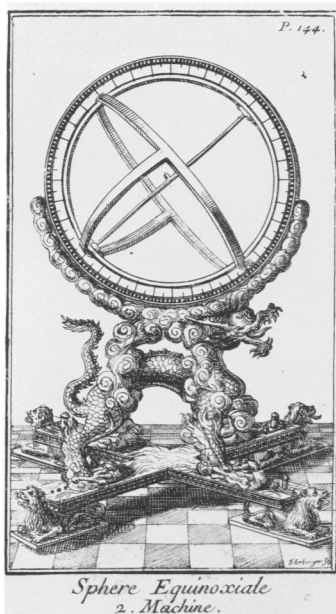


FIGURE 8  
Equinoctial sphere, print from Le Comte, *Nouveaux Mémoires*. New York Public Library

may have been designed from descriptions of the pieces made in China to the instructions of Father Verbiest in 1673.<sup>14</sup> The one on the right could be the ecliptic armillary sphere (Figure 7), but mounted on the single dragon of the equinoctial armillary sphere (Figure 8). The celestial globe in the center, also supported by dragons, appears with the other two instruments in the

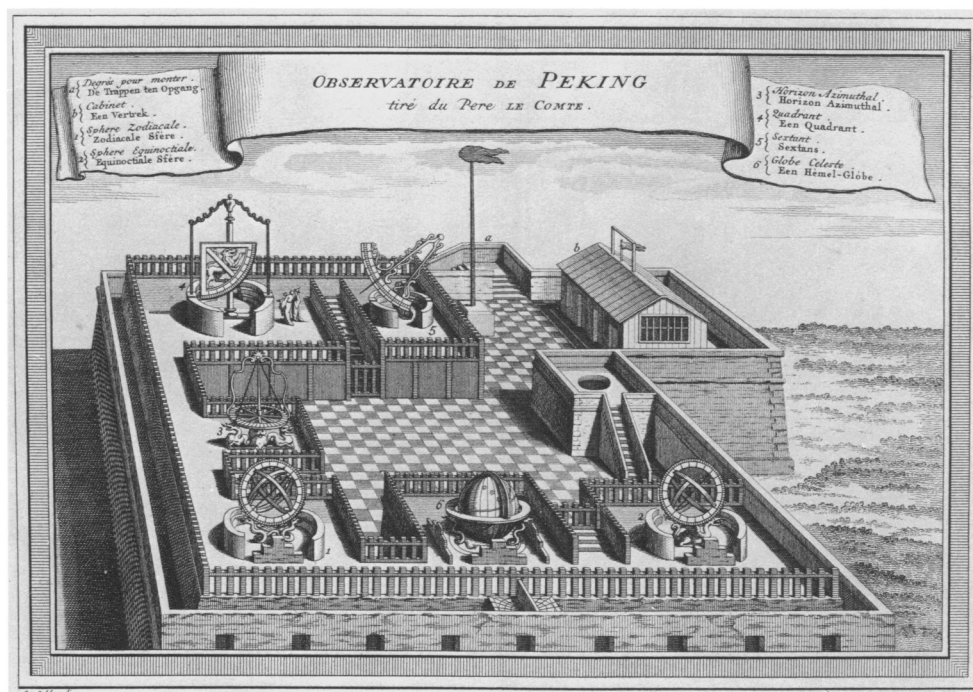


FIGURE 9  
Peking Observatory, print copied from Le Comte, *Nouveaux Mémoires*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Print Room, gift of Albert TenEyck Gardner, 50.506.31

foreground of the engraving made by Melchior Haffner for Verbiest's *Astronomia Europaea* (Figure 9), published in 1687; all three pieces are still preserved in Peking.<sup>15</sup>

14. This was noticed by Gatty, *Voiege*, p. LXXIII, note 5.

15. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge, 1959) III, pp. 451, 452, figs. 157, 158, 173, 176, 190, 191.

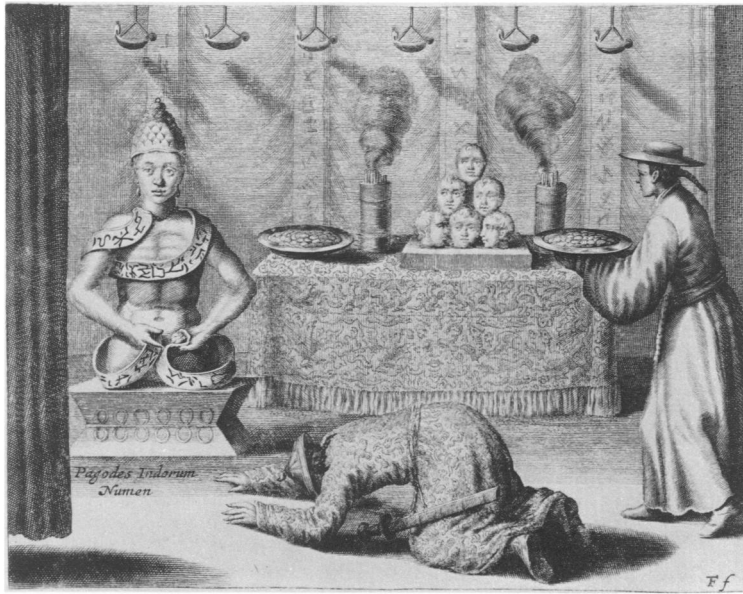


FIGURE 10

Idol Worship, print from Kircher, *China Monumentis*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library

Telescopes, conspicuous in the tapestry, were taken to China by the Jesuits; Father Schall wrote a treatise on them in Chinese. The standing man with a drooping mustache and a mandarin square behind the globe may be the emperor. The kowtowing figures seen on the left here and saluting the emperor in the Audience are derived from another Kircher illustration (Figure 10).

Another frequently found subject is the Emperor on a Journey. The example in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 11), is a narrow upright, but usually the temple from the Astronomers is added on the left and two or more horsemen on the right to make a wide panel. There are examples at Compiègne, in the Hermitage, the Louvre, and the Auxerre museum, as well as in private collections and sales.<sup>16</sup>

The pose of the emperor is again like that of the figure on Nieuhof's title page (Figure 4), and his feet rest on a Near Eastern rug, but his costume shows that the artist also knew the portrait of K'ang Hsi in Kircher's *China Monumentis* (Figure 12). He has been made appropriately older, as K'ang Hsi was only thirteen when the book was published. How the Chinese represented this emperor is shown by a portrait in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 13). The horsemen who accompany the emperor in the tapestry resemble mounted soldiers in

the illustrations of Nieuhof's *Legatio Batavica*, but cannot be said to have been copied from them.

The Collation is found in the Munich Residenz Museum (Figure 14), the collection of the city of Paris, the Auxerre Museum, and the Wine Museum of the Baron Philippe and Baroness Pauline Rothschild at Mouton.<sup>17</sup> With examples in private collections and sales, at least fifteen pieces are known to exist. The peacock feathers in the emperor's hat are again reminiscent of Nieuhof's title page (Figure 4) and the servants, though less ferocious, have some resemblance to the warriors that flank the emperor in the print. The empress, facing the emperor across the table, is clearly the woman in the chariot of the Audience. The vases on the buffet at the left are Chinese, though the method in which they and the platters are displayed is purely European. The exotic stringed instrument, however, is like an Indian sitar.

Two tapestries that are always upright panels are the Emperor Sailing and the Empress Sailing. The Emperor Sailing is in the Louvre (Figure 15)<sup>18</sup> and seven or eight others have been reported. The Empress Sailing is rarer. There were examples in the collection of King Louis Philippe; the Leo Spik sale, Bad Kissingen, June 10, 11, 1960, no. 245; the Comtesse de F . . . sale, Galerie Charpentier, Paris, December 5, 1959, no. 129 (Figure 16); and in a sale at the Palais Galliera, March 7, 1967, no. 152.

The Empress Sailing shows once more that the de-

16. A full list, with references, is given in Cavallo, *Tapestries*, p. 175. His eighth example ("Private collection, United States") is the Astronomers in the Kellogg collection (Figure 5) and numbers ten and eleven (Schloss Hermsdorf and Hermitage) are the same tapestry, as the Hermitage has acquired four of the five pieces of the Hermsdorf set (Biroukova, *Tapisseries*, nos. 57-60). Cavallo omits one Louvre example, acquired with the Grog collection in 1973, and the piece at Auxerre. A tapestry in the Château de Champs shows the composition, in its large format, reversed and somewhat simplified; it is probably a German adaptation, though it is closer to the original than most of the German versions of other pieces in the series. An Audience with a typical German border that was in a private collection in Athens in 1972 is also very close to the Beauvais original, reversed and simplified. For the German tapestries, see Cavallo, *Tapestries*, p. 176, and *China and Europa*, exhibition catalogue (Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin, 1973) p. 215, no. J20.

17. "Baron Philippe de Rothschild's tapestry at Mouton," *Connoisseur* 155 (1964), p. 120, illus.

18. Roger-Armand Weigert, *French Tapestry* (London, 1962) pl. LVI.



FIGURE 11

The Emperor on a Journey. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry U. Harris in the name of Mrs. Edwin S. Webster and Mr. and Mrs. Henry U. Harris, 63.1352 (photo: courtesy Museum of Fine Arts)

signer had looked at Nieuhof's *Legatio Batavica*; the boy standing on one leg on a pole and the man playing a double pipe are taken from an illustration of entertainers (Figure 17).<sup>19</sup> Two of the dancing rats and mice are also found on the tapestry. The pagodas and other buildings in the background, the dragon on the rooftop

19. The man in the print is not playing a pipe, but performing an unpleasant trick: "Filamenta per hirquos oculorum infigere, ut naribus emungerentur, & utraque extremitate prehensa serram, lacrimis guttatim decidentibus, ducere, frequens." Johan Nieuhof, *Legatio Batavica* (Amsterdam, 1668) *pars ultima*, p. 23.



FIGURE 12

The Emperor K'ang Hsi, print from Kircher, *China Monumentis*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library

and the palm tree seen in this plate and elsewhere in the book have obviously been noted by the tapestry-designer and used on other pieces of the series; he would have seen similar things in Kircher's *China Monumentis*. In Nieuhof, also, he could have found buildings with uptilted eaves and bells hanging from them, like the temple in the left background of the Astronomers





FIGURE 13  
The Emperor K'ang Hsi. Colors on silk, Chinese, nineteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 42.141.2



FIGURE 14  
The Collation. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Schloss Nymphenburg, Bavaria

(Figure 5).<sup>20</sup> But in neither of these books could he have seen anything like the architectural setting that makes a framework for the figures on the Emperor Sailing and the Empress Sailing, or for the very similar structures of the Audience and the Return from the Hunt. The inspiration for these fantastic arches and vaults is clearly and astonishingly late Gothic architecture—a

strange anticipation of the mixed Gothic and chinoiserie style in England a hundred years later.<sup>21</sup>

20. Such as the pagodas of Teywanmiao and Sinkocien. Otto Pelka, *Ostasiatische Reisebilder im Kunstgewerbe des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1924) pl. 15, no. 28, pl. 20, no. 39.

21. Cavallo, *Tapestries*, p. 173, speaks of the roof of the palanquin in the Emperor on a Journey as having a "Chinese-Gothic" dome.



FIGURE 15  
The Emperor Sailing. Wool and silk tapestry,  
French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early  
eighteenth century. The Louvre, Paris

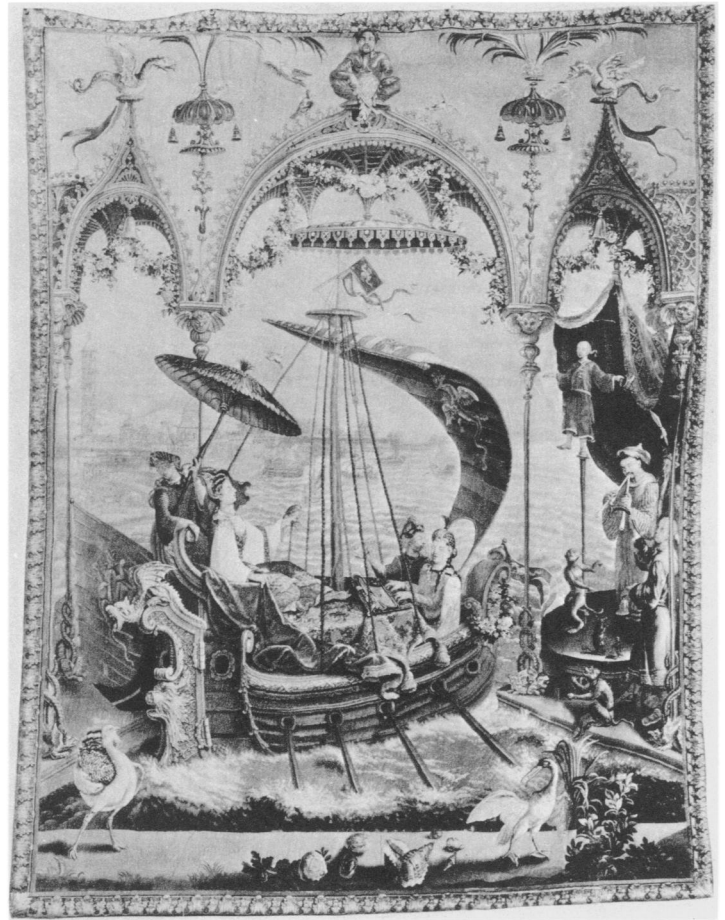


FIGURE 16  
The Empress Sailing. Wool and silk tapestry,  
French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early  
eighteenth century. Location unknown (sold,  
Galerie Charpentier, Paris, December 5, 1959,  
no. 129)

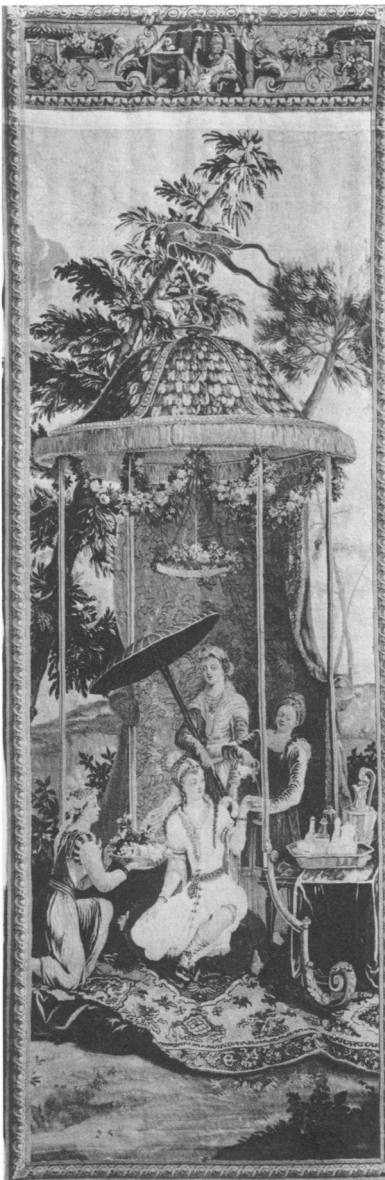


FIGURE 17  
Chinese Entertainers, print from Nieuwhof *Descrip-  
tio*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library

The Empress's Tea is found in the Louvre (Figure 18), the Hermitage, the Munich Residenz Museum, Luton Hoo, and several auction sales, some ten examples in all. Harvesting Pineapples is in the collection of the city of Paris, the Hermitage, the Auxerre Museum (Figure 19), and several private collections and auction sales. The woman with a fan on the left is perhaps the empress. The pineapple is described in seventeenth-century books as having been brought to China from Brazil via the East Indies.

FIGURE 18

The Empress's Tea. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The Louvre, Paris



The most usual border for the series is that seen on Figures 1, 3, 5, 11, 16, and 19: small acanthus leaves in dull yellow and red brown, simulating a carved wooden frame. The chinoiserie border of Figure 15 and two other pieces in the Louvre is frequently used on the series known as the Grotesques de Berain;<sup>22</sup> the seated fig-

22. It is found on a set of five pieces in the John M. Schiff collection, on loan to the Metropolitan Museum since 1957. An example of its use on another series is a Vertumnus and Pomona in the Lewisohn sale, Parke-Bernet, May 17, 1939, no. 298.

FIGURE 19

Harvesting Pineapples. Wool and silk tapestry, French (Beauvais), late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Musée Leblanc-Duvernay, Auxerre (photo: Phéliphot-R. G. Phéliepeaux)



ure at the sides is taken from the Nieuhof title page (Figure 4), like the emperor in the Audience (Figure 1), but here the parasol over his head is retained. The border of the set of six in the Bavarian National Collection (Figure 14) is also found on the four pieces in the Hermitage and the fifth piece of the same set that was with them in Schloss Hermsdorf near Dresden in 1904;<sup>23</sup> it may be the one mentioned in a Beauvais list of 1724 as “d’un dessein nouveau” and in an inventory of 1732 as by Rolly, one of the artists at the manufactory in 1724.<sup>24</sup>

Several elaborate borders were made for commissioned sets. The first weaving is described in a memorandum by Philippe Behagle, head of the manufactory from 1684 until his death in 1705, as including gold thread and “vendu par M. d’Isrode à Monseigneur le duc du Maine, vingt mil livres”; two others are listed as sold to d’Isrode for 14,000 and 10,000 livres and one as made for the Comte de Toulouse for 10,565 livres; since all brought in a profit of 33 per cent or more, the last three were either smaller or without gold, perhaps both.<sup>25</sup>

The Duc de Maine’s set with gold thread, most unusual at Beauvais, has not been identified, but that made for the Comte de Toulouse has survived, at least in part. In 1718 it was in his château of Rambouillet, when it was described in an inventory as “l’histoire du roi de la Chine, sur trois aunes et demi de haut, manufacture de Beauvais, faite par Behagle.” Six pieces were in the *antichambre du roi*, three in the *chambre du roi*, and one in a storeroom above the stables.<sup>26</sup> Six of these are certainly no. 8 in the sale of the tapestries owned by King Louis Philippe (Toulouse’s descendant, through

his mother) on January 25–27, 1852; their height, 4.20 m., corresponds to three and a half aunes,<sup>27</sup> and three of them are said to have had the arms and initials of the Duc de Penthievre, Toulouse’s son, in the borders. The subjects were the Empress’s Tea, the Journey, Collation, Astronomers, Return from the Hunt, and Gathering Pineapples. Two more tapestries of the series, the sailing scenes, were no. 13 in the sale; they had the Penthievre arms, but were only 3.55 m. high. Two wide tapestries of the set, an Audience (Figure 2) and another Journey were not in this sale, as they belonged to the empress Eugénie. She placed them in the Palace of Compiègne, where they remain; the arms on them are those of the Comte de Toulouse, with the anchors that indicate his position as head of the navy. Six pieces of this set are recorded as having been owned by the duchess d’Uzès and brought to America to be sold in 1926.<sup>28</sup>

Another commissioned set is mentioned in a list of tapestries made between 1722 and 1724 as “6 pièces du dessein des *Chinois* pour Monseigneur le Garde des Sceaux.”<sup>29</sup> This official was Fleuriau d’Armenonville, appointed in 1722. Five pieces of this set, the Journey, Audience, Astronomers, Collation, and Harvesting Pineapples, were in the Château de L . . . sale, Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, March 12, 1937, nos. A–E; the Journey was looted from M. Jansen in World War II,<sup>30</sup> and the Collation was in a private collection in Paris in 1964.<sup>31</sup> The rich borders include d’Armenonville’s arms and emblems of his office. Two portières with the same arms and new designs by Jacques Vigoureux-Duplessis were added to this set; they were signed by the artist and dated 1724.<sup>32</sup> In early 1975 they were owned by a Paris dealer, but they were destroyed by

23. Cornelius Gurlitt, *Beschreibende Darstellung der älteren Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Königreichs Sachsen* . . . XXVI, *Amtshauptmannschaft Dresden-Neustadt* (Dresden, 1904) p. 21.

24. Badin, *Manufacture*, pp. 18, 19, 26. Nothing more is known of this artist.

25. Badin, *Manufacture*, pp. 12, 13. The memorandum must have been written after 1692, as it mentions the Duchesse du Maine, who was not married until that year. Surprisingly, great emphasis is laid on the profit Behagle was making; tapestries are listed that cost forty-five livres a square aune and were sold for sixty-four. Presumably the memorandum was written for a prospective purchaser of the manufactory. “M. d’Isrode” must have been an agent or a dealer.

26. Montié and de Dion, “Quelques documents sur le Duché-pairie de Rambouillet,” *Mémoires et Documents publiés par la Société archéologique de Rambouillet* 7 (1886) pp. 208, 227.

27. The *aune de France* (1.19 m.) was used at Beauvais for memoranda, registers of the king’s gifts, etc.; the *aune de Flandres* (.7 m.) was used in the *registres de fabrication*. Hubert Delesalle, “Aunes de France et aunes de Flandres,” *Revue de Métrologie* (March, 1964) pp. 95–98.

28. “Vom amerikanischen Kunstmarkt,” *Cicerone* 18 (1926) pp. 271, 272.

29. Badin, *Manufacture*, p. 18.

30. Commandement en Chef français en Allemagne, *Répertoire des Biens spoliés en France durant la Guerre 1939–1945* (Berlin, 1947) p. 354, no. 107. illus.

31. J. F. B. Watson, “The Paris collections of Madame B. 2: French eighteenth-century objects of art,” *Connoisseur* 155 (1964) p. 72.

32. Badin, *Manufacture*, p. 19; Madeleine Jarry, “Chinoiseries à la mode de Beauvais,” *Plaisir de France* 41 (May, 1975) p. 56.



fire later in the year.

A Journey and an Emperor Sailing, sold at the Hôtel Drouot, December 10, 1948, nos. 76, 77, have the arms of the elector Clement Augustus, Archbishop of Cologne; they are said to have been given to him by Louis XV. The arms are at the top of the central field of each tapestry; those on the Emperor Sailing are cleverly incorporated into the upper part of the arch spanning the scene. The Journey was sold again at the Palais Galliera December 1, 1966, no. 104, from the Baron de Rothschild collection.

Who designed the series? The already quoted Behagle memorandum says "quatre illustre peintres" and de Mérou's list of 1731 names "les sieurs Batiste, Fontenay et Vernansal."<sup>33</sup> "Baptiste" was the name by which his contemporaries called Jean Baptiste Monnoyer. His only Salon entry, four paintings of flowers exhibited in 1673, was catalogued as by "M. Baptiste"<sup>34</sup> and paintings of his signed with this name are known.<sup>35</sup> He went to England in 1690, so that the work on the Story of the Emperor of China must have been carried out before that date;<sup>36</sup> perhaps this is why the second artist named is also a flower painter, called in to take Monnoyer's place.<sup>37</sup>

This second designer listed by de Mérou, the flower painter Jean Baptiste Blin (Belin or Blain) de Fontenay, was Monnoyer's pupil and son-in-law. Flowers are certainly important in the tapestries, but they are not the

most conspicuous components of the designs. It seems probable that the chief designer of the tapestries was the third artist named, Guy Louis Vernansal the Elder. Two examples of the Collation, in fact, are signed: Vernansal Inv. et Pint;<sup>38</sup> much the same wording is found on a painting of 1700 by Vernansal in the Orléans museum.<sup>39</sup> Most of Vernansal's other known works for tapestry weaving could not have been signed in this way, as he did not both design and paint them. It was after sketches by Berain that he made the cartoons for the borders of the Conquêtes de Charles XI;<sup>40</sup> at the Gobelins, where he was a "peintre ordinaire," he copied Le Brun's Story of Alexander in reverse for *basse-lisse* weaving and carried out other similar tasks. Enlarging paintings was apparently his specialty; he was frequently paid for such work at Versailles and elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> He was fairly successful, however, being a professor at the Academy and an exhibitor at the Salons of 1699 and 1704. The Swede, Daniel Cronström, tried to lure him to Stockholm in 1699, but he was making 3000 to 3500 livres a year and the Swedish king was evidently unable to pay him as much.<sup>42</sup>

Another instance is known, however, of original compositions for tapestries undertaken by Vernansal. In 1704, he signed an agreement to make designs for twenty *basse-lisse* tapestries for a Danish official in Copenhagen, whose representative in Paris was Jean Berain. The contract called for one piece to be:

33. Badin, *Manufacture*, pp. 13, 21.

34. *Collection des Livrets des Anciennes Expositions . . . Exposition de 1673* (Paris, 1869) p. 34.

35. Michel Faré, *Le Grand Siècle de la Nature Morte en France* (Fribourg and Paris, 1974) p. 290.

36. In February, 1690, Monnoyer took leave of the Academy for three or four months; in 1692, he wrote that he was still away. Though he is supposed to have returned to France, he is believed to have left again immediately. Faré, *Grand Siècle*, pp. 299, 308. He went to England to work on the decoration of Montagu House and died there in 1699. Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England I* (London, 1962) p. 255. Monnoyer's eldest son, also called Jean Baptiste, was a battle painter. Faré, *Grand Siècle*, pp. 290, 323. Biroukova, *Tapisseries*, nos. 57–60, attributes a share in the Story of the Emperor of China to "A. Monnoyer le Jeune, dit Baptiste." This is presumably Antoine Monnoyer, who was a flower painter and sometimes signed his works "Antoine Monnoyer Baptiste," but he was not born until 1677 and would probably have been too young to have worked on this tapestry series. Faré, *Grand Siècle*, pp. 316–323.

37. It has been suggested that "Baptiste" might be Jean Baptiste Martin (Cavallo, *Tapestries*, p. 170). But this painter was

known as "Martin des Batailles" and his title at the Gobelins Manufactory was "premier peintre de conquêtes du roi." There is no evidence that he was ever called Baptiste.

38. One was in a private collection in New York in 1923; see *Antiquarian* 1 (September, 1923) p. 2. It was owned by the Berlin dealer Hermann Ball in 1928, *Cicerone* 20 (1928) p. 45. The other was in a sale at the Palais Galliera, May 30, 1973, no. G.

39. Jennifer Montagu, "The painted enigma and French seventeenth-century art," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968) p. 320, pl. 78c. The subject of the painting is "Sainte Bathilde vendue au maire du palais Archambault devient la femme de Clovis II"; it is also an "enigma," standing for porcelain imported into Europe, but, except for the turban worn by the man selling the saint, there is nothing to connect the picture with the East.

40. John Böttiger, *La Collection des Tapisseries de l'Etat suédois IV* (Stockholm, 1898) p. 85, note.

41. Eugène Thoisson, "Notes sur les artistes se rattachant au Gatinais: les Vernansal," *Réunion des Sociétés des Beaux-Arts des Départements* 25 (1901) p. 117.

42. *Les Relations artistiques entre la France et la Suède, 1693–1718* (Stockholm, 1964) p. 225.

2 aulnes et demie 6 pouces de haut [about ten feet] et de 20 pouces et demi de large [about one foot nine inches] composée d'architecture, figures et ornements; cette pièce servira pour les 19 autres pièces de tapisseries, sauf pour le sujet du milieu qui sera différent.

Vernansal was to be paid 1000 livres for the basic design and 150 livres for each of the nineteen varied centers. The tapestries were to be woven by Gilles Bacor, called "Maître tapissier aux Gobelins" in the contract, but who probably had a workshop elsewhere in Paris.<sup>43</sup> Though these unusually narrow tapestries must have been very different from the Story of the Emperor of China, the scheme, an architectural setting with varied central subjects, is like the one Vernansal used for the Audience and the Return from the Hunt, as well as for the two sailing scenes. The Bacor tapestries have not been identified, but perhaps they showed something of the wild imagination manifest in the Story of the Emperor of China, which is entirely absent in Vernansal's paintings.

There is no way to find out who the fourth "illustrious painter" may have been, if, indeed, he ever existed.

Nowhere in the scanty records is there a clear indication of when the Story of the Emperor of China was designed and first woven. The Behagle memorandum already quoted mentions four weavings of the series, but it could have been written at any time between 1692 and 1705. In 1732, an inspector's report included the statement that "le dessein des Chinois, qui est un des plus agréables de la manufacture, est si usé qu'on n'y distingue presque plus rien."<sup>44</sup> It has been suggested that the origin of the series is connected with the return to France from China of the French Jesuit, Father Joachim Bouvet, in 1697,<sup>45</sup> but, if this is true, the elder Monnoyer could not have been one of the designers, as he was then in England. Father Bouvet's return in 1697 did, indeed, arouse great interest, but the arrival

of the Siamese ambassadors in 1684 and 1686 and the departure of the French missionaries in 1685 had also been matters of much public concern with the Far East.

It is quite possible that an event in the autumn of 1684 caused the series to be undertaken. The *Mercure Galant* of September in that year informed its readers that the "Empereur des Tartares s'est rendu maistre de toute la Chine, à la reserve de l'Isle de Formose" and then printed a long letter describing the visit of a missionary and one of his congregation:

Vous serez sans doute bien aisé d'apprendre que le Pere Couplet Iesuite est de retour de la Chine, où il estoit allé travailler aux Missions, & qu'il en a amené un jeune Indien de Nanking, Capitale de la Province du mesme nom. . . . Bien que la Pere Couplet soit de Malines, & qu'il ait demeuré vingt-quatre ans, parmi les Chinois, chargé de la conduite de soixante grandes Eglises composées de plus de soixante mille Chrétiens, il parle bon François, & avec sa riche taille, il porte bien la caractère d'un Héros de l'Evangile dans sa 62. année. Le jeune Chinois qu'il a amené parle assez bien Latin, & s'appelle *Mikelh Xin*.<sup>46</sup> Ils allerent le quinze de ce mois à Versailles, où ils eurent l'honneur de saluer Sa Majesté. Ils virent ensuite jouer les eaux, & se trouverent le lendemain au dîner du Roy. Le jeune Indien estoit en ses habits Indiens, ayant une riche Veste de Brocard d'or fond bleu, avec des figures de Dragons, & un visage affreux sur le haut de chaque manche. Il avoit par dessus une espee de Tunique de soye verte. Sa Majesté après avoir entendu ses Prières en Langue Chinoise, luy fit servir une Assiette sur la Table, pour voir la propreté, & l'adresse des Chinois à manger avec deux petites Baguettes d'ivoire à quatre pans, & d'un pied de long, qu'ils tiennent dans la main droite, entre deux doigts.

Later the Chinese with two Jesuits visited "M. Hubin, Emailleur du Roy, si connu dans toute l'Europe par son travail des yeux artificiel," who demonstrated to them "la nécessité de la pesanteur de l'air." The

43. Daniel Wildenstein, *Documents inédits sur les Artistes français du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1966) pp. 157, 158. For the Bacor family of weavers, see Weigert, *French Tapestry*, p. 163.

44. Badin, *Manufacture*, p. 78.

45. Gatty, *Voyage*, p. LXXII, note 5. A summary of scholars' opinions on the date of the series is given in Cavallo, *Tapestries*, pp. 172, 173. The "unpublished letters in the Metropolitan" there mentioned are communications from P. A. Jehl in 1958; he believes the series was not started until 1697 and that the Jesuit in the Astron-

omers is Father Verbiest. This is unlikely, as Verbiest does not wear a mandarin square in the engraving showing him with Father Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall included in J. B. du Halde, *Description . . . de l'Empire de la Chine* (Paris, 1735) III p. 78. Only Schall is dressed as a mandarin. Probably the tapestry designer was not attempting to depict any particular Jesuit, just as the emperor in other tapestries of the series is not a portrait of Shun Chi or K'ang Hsi.

46. The name is given elsewhere as Michael Chin Fo-Ts'ung.

Chinese showed portraits on Chinese taffeta, including one of Confucius; “cette sorte de Peinture n’a point de corps,” comments the narrator. The eighty million Chinese characters, the eleven meanings of the word *po*, and the idol with three heads, of “*Confusius, Xequiam, & Tauzu*,” were discussed. “Ils adorent aussi le Diable. . . . C’est pourquoy sa figure est sur la Proüe de leur Navires, & la Veste de Brocard d’or du jeune Indien a cette mesme figure sur le haut de chaque manche.”

The *Mercuré Galant* recorded another incident the following month:

Comme les Chinois ne sont pas moins polis que sçavans, & que la galanterie est en usage chez eux, celui-cy voyant que Monsieur le Duc [Condé] examinoit son Habit avec quelque sorte de curiosité, prit la liberté de la luy offrir, encore qu’il ne connust pas ce Prince pour ce qu’il étoit. Monsieur le Duc le refusa, mais il ordonnast qu’on prist sa mesure pour lui en faire un à la Française, voulant qu’on le fit très-magnifique, & qu’on le luy portast de sa part; afin qu’estant de retour en son Pays, il pust s’habiller comme l’on s’habille en France.<sup>47</sup>

Father Couplet’s chief purpose in returning to Europe was to obtain more missionaries for China. One of his most enthusiastic supporters was Louis XIV’s legitimized son, the Duc de Maine. Father Bouvet wrote of him:

Car aiant appris pars les discours du P. Couplet, qu’il y avoit tant de choses rares & curieuses dans la

Chine, il ne cessa de dire qu’il falloit y envoyer des Jésuites François pour s’en informer particulièrement. Il en parla même plusieurs fois au Roy; si bien qu’il eut beaucoup de part à tout ce dessein, & que la dernière résolution qui fut prise de nous envoyer pouvoit estre considérée comme son ouvrage.

The young duke (he was only fifteen) received the missionaries before they left and gave them a scientific instrument that he had had made for his own use.<sup>48</sup> It will be remembered that the first set of the Story of the Emperor of China was acquired by the duke. Father Bouvet states that he was interested in the scientific aspect of the enterprise, but does not mention any concern for the proselytizing activities of the missionaries; the Astronomers tapestry shows no indication that the scientists are Christians. The series was possibly commissioned by the Duc de Maine or by M. d’Isrode to be sold to him; the first set was, as has been mentioned, unusually rich and expensive.

Whether it dates from 1685 or 1697, the series shows the characteristics of the first form of chinoiserie. The Chinese are portrayed as dignified human beings, engaged in normal, even if occasionally exotic, occupations. Among these, it may be noted, war is not included; the contrast with the Gobelins Story of Louis XIV is striking. The Chinese here are not pretty, playful, and whimsical as Watteau would make them, and they are far indeed from the comic caricatures of later eighteenth-century artists, for some of whom there was little difference between chinoiserie and singerie.

47. Quoted from the Lyon edition in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

48. Gatty, *Voilage*, p. 16.