

A Lost Opportunity for the Musée de Versailles, 1852

DANIEL MEYER

Conservateur en chef, Musée National du Château de Versailles

WHEN LOUIS-PHILIPPE decided to transform the Château de Versailles into a museum, his concern was not to refurbish the residence of his predecessors (except for the rooms that he reserved for himself and the queen)¹ but to evoke the history of France through as many paintings as he could find and commission. One result of this campaign was that the cartoons for the tapestry series *L'Histoire du Roi*, executed under Louis XIV, were hung in the State Apartments.

One room was given special treatment: Louis XIV's bedroom, called the *Grande Chambre* since 1737. Louis-Philippe thought that this room, which is in the middle of the château on the courtyard side, should serve as a symbol of the former monarchy, and he decorated it with elements of the regalia that Napoleon III later transferred to the Louvre during the installation of the Musée des Souverains (Figure 1).

The idea of an historical restoration suited the king's taste. He had known the room as a young man during the last years of Louis XVI, and he must have remembered the richly sculpted and gilt *lit à la duchesse* and especially the wall hangings brocaded on a crimson ground.² (This may be why he agreed to reuse the fabrics made under Louis XVIII for the throne room at the Tuileries.)³ The wooden parts of the bed were ordered from Alphonse Jacob, as were the armchairs,⁴ and these pieces were gilded by Pauwels.⁵ They were constructed to accommodate the installation of some tapestries whose purchase had been authorized by the comte de Montalivet⁶ on the assumption that they were those made for Louis XIV.⁷ The bed curtains were of white Gros de Naples brocaded with gold fringe.⁸ We will not elaborate on the rest of the furniture and objets d'art, which must have been

luxurious and eye-catching,⁹ but the whole may have appeared to clash somewhat, especially the mixture of gold brocade and tapestries.

This explains why experts, particularly Eudoxe Soulié (curator at that time)¹⁰ gradually tried to give some unity to this ensemble, as we can see from the following purchase request addressed to the Directeur Général des Musées de France. We will quote the request in its entirety.¹¹

Versailles

25 janvier 1852

à Monsieur le Directeur Général,¹²

Monsieur le comte, une collection de tapisseries anciennes doit être vendue par la Maison d'Orléans le 28 de ce mois au domaine de Monceaux.¹³ Parmi ces tapisseries il y en est deux suites [Figure 2] qui conviendraient admirablement pour la décoration des grands appartements du Palais de Versailles et j'ai l'honneur de vous proposer d'en faire l'acquisition.

La première suite exposée sous le n° 9 se compose de 6 pièces brodées au petit point sur canevas. Une de ces pièces représente Louis XIV costumé en empereur romain et entouré de divers attributs. Deux autres faites pour être placées en regard représentent un jeune prince et une jeune princesse dont les traits rappellent ceux du duc et de la duchesse de Bourgogne; deux autres pièces représentent des Dames de l'époque de Louis XIV avec les attributs du Printemps et de l'Été. Enfin la dernière d'une exécution et d'une conservation admirables offrent [*sic*] des attributs guerriers. Ces tapisseries exécutées sur fond d'or et entièrement brodées à la main remplaceraient avec avantage dans la chambre du lit de Louis XIV, la tenture de fond et les rideaux du lit qui appartiennent à l'époque de l'empire.¹⁴ On a exposé sur cette tenture deux copies anciennes mais assez faibles qui, richement encadrées¹⁵ induisent le public en erreur et lui fait croire que se sont là les tableaux qui décourageaient autrefois la chambre de Louis XIV. Les rideaux du lit sont dégarnis de leurs franges en or qui ont été volées en 1850.¹⁶ En plaçant dans les panneaux de chaque côté du lit les deux pièces qui offrent les portraits du Duc et de la

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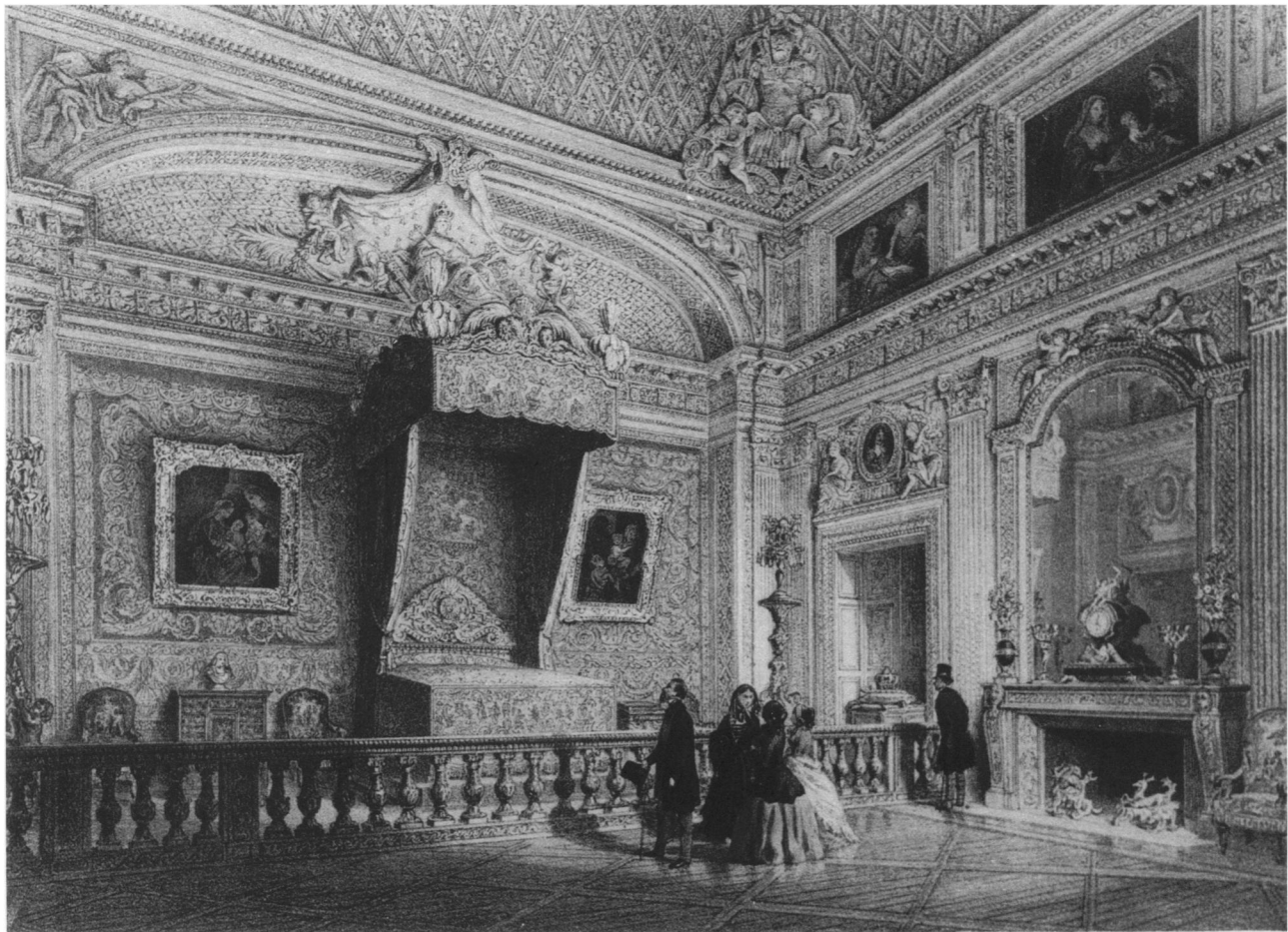


Figure 1. Louis XIV's bedroom as reconstituted by Louis-Philippe. Engraving by Arnout, ca. 1850 (author's collection)

MAISON D'ORLÉANS.

CATALOGUE

DES
TAPISSERIES ANCIENNES
DES GOBELINS (XVI^e ET XVII^e SIÈCLES) ET AUTRES

TAPIS

provenant de la succession du feu roi Louis-Philippe,

DONT LA VENTE AURA LIEU
Rue de Chartres-du-Roule, n° 4.

AU DOMAINE DE MONCEAUX
Le Mercredi 28 Janvier 1852,
heure précise de midi.

Par le ministère de **M^r BONNEFONS DE LAVIALLE**, Commissaire-priseur,
rue de Choiseul, 11.
Assisté de **M. ROUSSEL**, Expert, rue du Dragon, 33.
Chez lesquels se distribue le présent Catalogue.

EXPOSITION PUBLIQUE
Les Dimanche 25, Lundi 26 et Mardi 27 Janvier 1852,
de midi à quatre heures

PARIS
IMPRIMERIE DE A. GUYOT ET S^r
rue Neuve-des-Mathurins, 18.




Figure 2. Title page of the sales catalogue of Louis-Philippe's collection

Duchesse de Bourgogne et en remplaçant les rideaux par les deux tentures analogues qui représentent des personnages de la cour, cette décoration s'harmoniserait avec la tenture du lit qui est également brodée au petit point et à la main. Les deux autres pièces trouveraient facilement place dans les grands appartements.

La seconde suite exposée sous le n° 6 se compose de cinq pièces représentant des conquêtes de Louis XIV. Ces tapisseries paraissent avoir été exécutées d'après des compositions gravées par Sébastien Leclerc, connues sous le nom de petites conquêtes et dont les planches se trouvent à la Calcographie du Louvre. Les sujets qu'elles représentent ne sont rappelés à Versailles que par des peintures de petites dimensions et bien inférieures comme intérêt historique. Dans ces tapisseries au contraire les personnages sont de grandeur naturelle et leurs costumes sont exécutés avec un soin particulier. La peinture ne peut donner avec autant de précisions les détails des broderies et des harachemens. Les tableaux de Van der Meulen transportés de Versailles au Louvre ont laissé dans les grands appartements des vides que ces tapisseries rem-

pliraient d'une manière beaucoup plus convenable que des peintures car toutes ces places se trouvent entre les fenêtres et à contre-jour.

L'acquisition de ces tapisseries pourrait être faite sur le crédit accordé pour acquisition d'objets d'art et je pense qu'une somme de 3.000 francs suffirait pour assurer au Musée de Versailles la possession de ces précieux morceaux.¹⁷

The reasons why the Musée de Versailles failed to acquire these tapestries remain unknown, for the comte de Nieuwerkerke's answer has not come down to us. It could not be found in the Archives of the Direction des Musées de France or in the curatorial archives at Versailles. It would seem that the purchase proposal was not even submitted at the meeting of the committee of curators in January 1852. The probable explanation for this is that all furnishings were still under the jurisdiction of the Mobilier National and that the curator at Versailles had very little say in these matters. In any case, the idea of replacing gold brocades on a crimson

ground and Gros de Naples curtains with tapestries may have been attractive, but it was in fact further removed from their ancien régime appearance than Louis-Philippe's attempted restoration would have been. As for the tapestries between the windows in the State Apartments, they would have created a break with the painted cartoons for the *Histoire du Roi* series, which were on the back and side walls.

The interest of this letter lies more in the history of the works in question than in the iconography of the embroidered hangings. The two series sought by the curator of Versailles had been inherited by Louis-Philippe from his mother, the dowager duchesse d'Orléans, widow of Philippe-Égalité. In the inventory made after her death, the *Conquêtes* series (erroneously attributed therein to the Gobelins) are listed under number 9, and the others under number 2.¹⁸ They were among the possessions restored to the daughter of the duc de Penthièvre, and their provenance is easily identified by the coat of arms of the comte de Toulouse, which appear on all the



Figure 3. Tapestry from Louis XIV's *Conquêtes* series with the comte de Toulouse's coat of arms. Woven at Beauvais in Bégale's atelier and representing *The Sortie of the Dôle Garrison in 1674*, 17th century. Musée National du Château de Versailles, gift of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, MV 4694 (photo: Versailles)



Figure 4. *Allegory of War*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. Musée National du Château de Versailles, MV 4134 (photo: Versailles)



Figure 5. *Portrait of Louis XIV with Allegory of Air*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1946, 46.43.4

pieces in the *Conquêtes* series (in the eighteenth century they were in the Paris townhouse of this last surviving son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan)¹⁹ and on two embroidered tapestries (which were in the Palais-Royal during the July Monarchy). As late as 1887 there was a cardboard label sewn onto the back of the piece then called an *Allegory of Peace* that read "Palais-Royal, tenture no. 2."²⁰

Not having been purchased by Versailles, the *Conquêtes* (Figure 3) passed into the collection of the duc de Rochefoucauld-Doudeauville, and later belonged to Baron James de Rothschild. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, a descendant of the latter, donated them to the Musée de Versailles in 1970, when Géraud Van der Kemp, then the Conservateur en Chef de Versailles, was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts.²¹

The petit-point tapestries, after passing into the Grandjean Collection, were sold at the 1887 Sée auction as lots 6 to 11. Purchased by Bradley Martin of New York for 45,000 francs, they were later acquired by French and Company, New York. Four pieces were purchased by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and—as Eudoxe Soulié once hoped for Louis XIV's bedroom—they now decorate the alcove of a room devoted to furniture from that king's reign. Of the remaining two tapestries, one found its way to the Banque de France in 1965—near its original home—and the sixth went the same year to occupy the place of the royal throne in the Salon d'Apollon at Versailles (Figure 4).²²

What these tapestries represent is the second point of interest in Soulié's letter. The *Conquêtes* series poses no problems, for the subject matter is



Figure 6. *Portrait of the duc du Maine with the Allegory of Fire*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1946, 46.43.3



Figure 7. *Portrait of Mademoiselle de Nantes as Spring*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1946, 46.43.1

clearly shown on the tapestries themselves. On the other hand, while the petit-point embroideries present a certain unity in their ornamentation, they seem to be inspired by a variety of themes and are described in different terms in the various inventories.

In 1821, in the inventory of the duchesse d'Orléans's estate, the only mention is of "une tenture complete en point de canevas composé de six pièces représentant des tableaux fond or."

In an 1852 inventory the description is precise enough, even though it seems partially incorrect:

N° 9—Une tenture, tapisserie sur canevas au petit point.

Une pièce représentant le roi Louis XIV lançant la

foudre, petite nature. Louis XIV est costumé en empereur romain, coiffé de la grande perruque; il se trouve au milieu d'un entourage sur fond or très-riche, composé d'armes, de fruits, de palmes. Au-dessus de sa tête est figuré le Soleil.

Une pièce représentant probablement le duc de Bourgogne; il est costumé en général romain, tenant en main un bâton de commandement fleurdelysé; il est placé sur un fond de paysage avec entourage analogue au précédent, rempli d'objets d'arts, de sciences, d'armes. Cet entourage est de même sur fond or.

Une pièce représentant probablement la duchesse de Berry en Flore: on remarque dans l'entourage les Gémeaux, le Bélier et le Taureau; entourage avec attributs de jardinage, fleurs et feuillage sur fond or.

Une pièce représentant une dame assise, en costume du temps de Louis XIV; un jeune homme à ses genoux lui présente une guirlande de fleurs. La scène est sur



Figure 8. *Portrait of Mademoiselle de Blois as Summer*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1946, 46.43.2

un fond de paysage avec entourage analogue aux précédents sur fond or.

Une pièce représentant des attributs guerriers fort bien composés et se détachant sur un très-beau fond or artistement brodé; cette tapisserie est fort belle et d'une couleur très-remarquable.

Une pièce représentant une dame de la cour de Louis XIV en Cérès; l'entourage laisse voir trois signes du zodiaque: la Vierge, le Lion et l'Écrevisse; il est de même brodé sur un fond d'or.

Ces six pièces sont fort rares; il est probable qu'elles ont été faites à la Cour; elles sont entièrement brodées à la main, bien conservées et exécutées d'après d'assez bons dessins.

Hauteur de chaque pièce	4m	40c
4 pièces, largeur de chaque	2	80
2 id. id.	2	90
Ensemble 17m linéaires.		

In his letter to the comte de Nieuwerkerke, Soulié repeated the descriptions of the catalogue but substituted the duchesse de Bourgogne for the duchesse de Berry.

In 1887 the six tapestries were divided into three themes: the piece acquired by the Banque de France representing a woman seated with a young man at her feet was considered to be the *Allegory of Peace*, a companion piece to the *Allegory of War* that is now at Versailles. On the basis of the ornaments, the signs of the zodiac, and the figures, two of the remaining four were identified as *Summer*, personified by Ceres, and *Spring*, personified by Flora. The last two, numbers 10 and 11 in the Sée catalogue, were called *Louis XIV as a Child* and *Louis XIV as Jupiter*.

At the time of their sale to the Metropolitan Museum, the figure of Spring was identified as Mademoiselle de Blois and that of Summer as Mademoiselle de Nantes. The young prince was called the comte de Vexin.²³ Only the figure of Louis XIV brandishing a lightning bolt retained its unquestionable identification.

Who are the actual subjects represented? If, according to tradition and as the technique of these works seems to argue, the six needlepoint tapestries were executed in the atelier Saint-Joseph, then the identity of the individuals portrayed, apart from Louis XIV (Figure 5), should be looked for among members of Madame de Montespan's immediate family. According to R. A. Weigert, that atelier worked for the favorite's children after 1690.²⁴ This date rules out the possibility of identifying the young prince as the comte de Vexin, for he was born in 1672 and died in 1685, and there is no reason to identify this personage as Louis XIV or the duc de Bourgogne. On the other hand, the motifs of armor and bombards and the salamander attribute that frame the medallion and the figure holding a commander's baton with a helmet nearby (Figure 6) could lead one to identify him as the duc du Maine, in whom great military hopes were placed. Furthermore, he was the Colonel of the Grisons and, more pertinently, Grand Master of Artillery. Note that the allegorical embroidery of *War* has the same ornamental motifs.

As symbols of Renewal and Wealth, the two pieces representing Spring (Figure 7) and Summer (Figure 8) must surely portray two daughters of Madame de Montespan. It may be thought, as Edith A. Standen suggested by comparing it to a painting still at Versailles (Figure 9),²⁵ that *Spring* portrays Ma-

demoiselle de Nantes, while *Summer* is the blonde Mademoiselle de Blois.²⁶

As for the sixth tapestry, which can be considered either as an *Allegory of Earth* or as an *Allegory of Peace* (Figure 10), it presents the coat of arms of France with brisure of bastardy and is decorated with “un jeune homme agenouillé aux pieds d’une dame à qui il présente une guirlande de fleurs,” according to the description in the Sée sales catalogue. The female figure may be identified as Mademoiselle de Blois (cf. her portrait as Thetis, Figure 11). It is tempting to identify the young man as her husband, the duc de Chartres, the future duc d’Orléans and regent of France, but he may be the comte de Toulouse, the last son of Louis XIV and Madame de

Montespan. This embroidery is the one still remaining in the former Toulouse townhouse.

I would be inclined to see in the set of six pieces from the Louis-Philippe sale a fairly old though heterogeneous set, for number 10 in the catalogue mentions: “Quatre pièces de tapisserie au canevas non terminées, l’une est la reproduction du Louis XIV foudroyant, les fonds ne sont pas faits; une autre représente l’Automne sous la figure de Bacchus, les fonds restent à faire; une troisième devait représenter l’Hiver.” The fourth piece is not described and no measurements are given.

This description may help us to explain the series in Paris and New York and confirm the fact that number 2 in the dowager duchesse d’Orléans’s in-

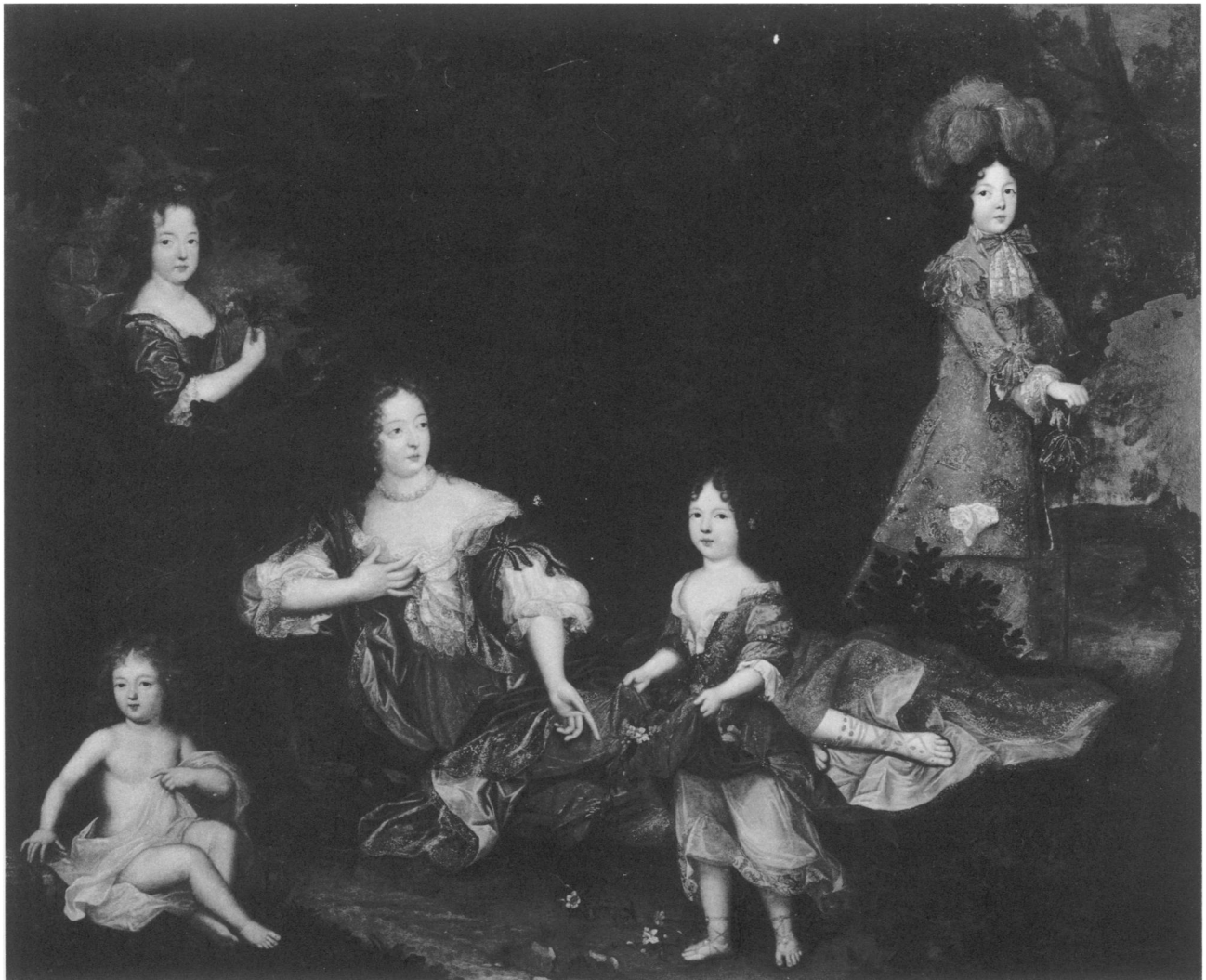


Figure 9. *Madame de Montespan and Her Children: Mademoiselle de Nantes, comte de Toulouse, Mademoiselle de Blois, duc du Maine.* French school, 17th century. Musée National du Château de Versailles, MV 8237 (photo: Musée de Versailles)



Figure 10. *Allegory of Peace with Portraits of Mademoiselle de Blois and the duc de Chartres or the comte de Toulouse*, embroidered hanging. French school, 17th century. Paris, Banque de France (photo: Banque de France)



Figure 11. *Portrait of Mademoiselle de Blois as Thetis*. French school, 17th century. Musée National du Château de Versailles, MV 3739 (photo: Musée de Versailles)

ventory (number 6 in the Louis-Philippe sale) was a falsely reconstituted series. As *Autumn* and *Winter* were never completed, they must have become separated from *Spring* and *Summer*. Did these works feature coats of arms? Were the figures portraits of the legitimate princes? Without having seen them, one can only pose the question.

As for the *Louis XIV Hurling a Lightning Bolt*, which reproduces identically the one in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, I would like to venture a purely hypothetical connection. On April 6, 1978, at Christie's in London, an *Apotheosis of Louis XIV* in petit point, identical to the Metropolitan's piece (except for a few color details, such as the butterflies) came up for auction. The provenance was not given,

and the tapestry would have had to be seen in order to ascertain whether the background of the medallion had been filled in.

All of these digressions around a "missed" acquisition show that the problems of the curators at the Musée de Versailles have not changed much over the last century. Very knowledgeable in French history, as his *Notice du Musée Impérial de Versailles* demonstrates, Eudoxe Soulié was very perceptive in the development of his museum when he requested—in vain—the purchase of works that would have been an homage to the ruler who was restoring the Bourbon palace.

Translated from the French by Jean-Marie Clarke

NOTES

1. Daniel Meyer, "L'Ameublement des Petits Appartements de la Reine à Versailles sous Louis-Philippe," *Antologia di belli arti* 31/32 (1987) pp. 28–49; a similar article on the king's private apartment is in preparation.

2. These hangings had been delivered on Mar. 22, 1785, under order no. 54, dated Jan. 3, 1785, registered under no. 4656 (see particularly *L'Inventaire de Versailles (1785–1787)*, Archives Nationales O¹ 3469, p. 15).

3. Arch. Nat. AJ¹⁹ 631, fol. 6v–10v. Chantal Gastinel-Coural, "Le décor textile de la Salle du Trône des Tuileries, 1841–1848," *Le Dossier du Musée des Tissus I* (Lyon, 1987).

4. Jacob fils, cabinetmaker, 44 rue de Bondy, Paris (see Arch. Nat. O⁴ 1519 and AJ¹⁹ 631, fol. 8v, for the armchairs and fol. 10v for the bed).

5. Pauwels, gilder, 4 faubourg Poissonnière, Paris (see Arch. Nat. O⁴ 1519 and AJ¹⁹ 631, fol. 8v, 10v).

6. Arch. Nat. AJ¹⁹ 631, fol. 7v., 8v.

7. Correspondence of the Garde-Meuble dated Oct. 19, the comte de Montalivet "autorise à acheter le lit du Louis XIV moyennant 10,000 francs à condition qu'il soit bien complet." (Arch. Nat. AJ¹⁹ 548).

8. Arch. Nat. AJ¹⁹ 631, fol. 7v.

9. See *Inventaire de 1849*, preserved at the Musée National du Château de Versailles. Daniel Meyer, "L'Ameublement de la chambre de Louis XIV à Versailles de 1701 à nos jours," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (Feb. 1989) pp. 81–104.

10. Eudoxe Soulié (1817–76) was appointed "conservateur-adjoint chargé du service de Versailles" in Feb. 1850, replacing the painter Théodore Salmon; Soulié became conservateur in 1867.

11. Archives du Musée National du Château de Versailles, *Correspondance du Conservateur I* (1852) pp. 74–75.

12. Alfred-Émilien, comte de Nieuwerkerke (1811–92), Directeur Général des Musées de France in 1840, Surintendant des Beaux-Arts in 1863, was well known because of his liaison with Princesse Mathilde.

13. This was the former estate of Philippe-Égalité. Under the Restoration it was given back to the duc d'Orléans (the future Louis-Philippe) and his sister Madame Adélaïde. The present-day Parc Monceau occupies more than a third of the former park. For its history, see *Heures du Parc Monceau*, exh. cat., Musée Cernuschi (Paris, 1981). After Louis-Philippe's death, some of his possessions were given to his heirs, who placed certain pieces in the Monceau residences they had inherited after Madame Adélaïde's death in 1847. Among these pieces were "les tapisseries anciennes et tapis . . . provenant de la succession du feu Roi Louis-Philippe" whose sale took place at "rue de Chartres du Roule, n^o 4 [today's rue de Courcelles, between rue de Monceau

and the boulevard de Courcelles] au Domaine de Monceaux . . . par le Ministère de M^e Bonnefous de Lavielle, Commissaire-pri-seur, rue de Choiseul 11."

14. In fact, they date to the Restoration period.

15. These were two Holy Families, one Flemish, after Rubens (Musée de Versailles [MV] 7033), and the other Italian, after Andrea del Sarto (MV 7034). Their frames are at present used as surrounds for the portraits of Stanislaw Leszczynski (MV 3717) and his wife, Catherine Opalinska (MV 3718).

16. The loss was reported by guards on Apr. 18, 1850 (see Archives du Musée National du Château de Versailles, *Registre de correspondance du régisseur*).

17. See minutes of the sale preserved at the Archives de la Seine (D 48 E³44). My thanks to Maître Tailleur, the successor to Maître Bonnefous de Lavielle, who allowed me to see this document. The *Conquêtes* went for 1,940 francs and the petit-point tapestries for 3,301 francs. Soulié was optimistic when he asked for 3,000 francs.

18. There are several copies of this inventory. I consulted the one in the Bibliothèque Marmottan (no. 3019), brought to my attention by Christian Baulez, conservateur at Versailles.

19. See especially Piganiol de la Force, *Description de Paris* (Paris, 1765) III, pp. 259–261.

20. See the sales catalogue of the Sée collection citing "magnifique tapisseries dont . . . six du temps de Louis XIV au petit point, avec rehauts d'argent." Hotel Drouot, May 23, 1887, Maître Paul Chevallier, auctioneer, 10 rue de la Grange-Batelière.

21. For studies of these tapestries, see my article in *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* (Paris, 1970), and the article on the Manufacture de Beauvais by Jean Coural, administrateur of the Mobilier Général, in *Les Monuments Historiques de France* (Paris, 1977).

22. See Alice M. Zrebiec, "Textile Arts," *MMAB* (Spring 1989) pp. 27–37.

23. Madame de Montespan had six children by Louis XIV, four of whom survived: the duc du Maine (1670–1736); Mlle de Nantes (1673–1710), who married Louis III de Bourbon-Condé; Mlle de Blois (1677–1749), who married Philippe II d'Orléans, future regent of France; and the comte de Toulouse (1681–1737).

24. See R. A. Weigert, "La retraite de Madame de Montespan," *Bulletin de la Société d'Étude du XVII^e siècle* (1950) nos. 7 and 8, pp. 220–221.

25. Comparison made by Béatrix Daule, conservateur, Musée National du Château de Versailles.

26. Edith Appleton Standen, *European Post-Medieval Tapestries and Related Hangings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1985) II, pp. 665–674.