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# A Reflection of the Sun: The Duke of Marlborough in the Image of Louis XIV

BY ROBERT WELLINGTON

*This article investigates the influence of Louis XIV imagery on medals and tapestries commissioned by the first duke of Marlborough and his supporters from 1703 to 1711. To commemorate the martial ascendancy of Britain, Marlborough and his allies employed models of representation developed for the Sun King by his image-makers to document his history visually. Here this is argued to be an act akin to spoliation — the theft of artefacts by a victor as symbolic enslavement of the vanquished enemy — ironically revealing the abiding influence of French culture on British material histories of the early eighteenth century.*

When John Churchill, duke of Marlborough, routed Louis XIV's armies in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) he claimed the spoils of victory, taking a thirty-tonne marble bust of his adversary from Tournai and installing it on the façade of Blenheim Palace as a trophy (figure 1). The sculpted portrait of the Sun King that once dressed the *Porte Royale* of Tournai citadel dates from the late 1660s — the crowning decoration of sophisticated fortifications designed by Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban in 1668 to protect this strategic town once on the northern border of France (now in Belgium).<sup>1</sup> From above the main entrance to the citadel, the young King's likeness looked out in nonchalant defiance of those who might seek to breach borders of his recently expanded realm. It portrays Louis XIV as a 'great man of history' dressed as an ancient Roman general, the inheritor of the glories of the classical past, while the voluminous wig places him firmly in his time as a man of fashion.<sup>2</sup> The mask of Apollo on his breastplate with its radial lines of a sun-disc is a reference to his emblem.<sup>3</sup> Louis XIV took the sun as his devise as it was the greatest of all the astral bodies — just as the sun casts its light across the world, Louis XIV's magnificence is boundless,

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- 1 Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban's fortifications at Tournai were begun in 1668, while the bust in question is after Jean Warin's famous marble portrait produced in competition with Gianlorenzo Bernini in 1665. On Vauban's fortifications, see Jean-Denis G.G. Lepage, *Vauban and the French Military Under Louis XIV: An Illustrated History of Fortifications and Strategies* (Jefferson, 2009). On Warin's bust, see Robert Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV: Artifacts For a Future Past* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2015), ch. 6.
- 2 On the 'great men' model of history, see Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History; Six Lectures Reported, with Emendations and Additions* (New York, 1859); and Robert A. Segal, ed., *Hero Myths: A Reader* (Oxford, 2000).
- 3 The first medal with a sun emblem that Warin produced for Louis XIV was struck in 1658, bearing the inscription NEC POTIOR NEC PAR ['neither better nor equal']. A jetton with the same image as this medal but with the inscription NEC PLURIBUS IMPAR appeared the same year. Hendrik Ziegler has shown that an emblem that appeared Julius Wilhelm Zingref's book of 1619 likely inspired this device. Louis XIV took a radiant sun over a globe with the inscription NEC PLURIBUS IMPAR as his emblem for the grand tournament in Paris in 1662. This device was subsequently used for the reverse of several medals struck in the 1660s and 1670s and for many of the King's commissions. See Hendrik Ziegler, *Louis XIV et ses ennemis. Image, propagande et contestation* (Paris, 2013), pp. 29–35; Sylvie de Turckheim-Pey, *Médailles du grand siècle: histoire métallique de Louis XIV* (Paris, 2004), pp. 24–5; and Robert W. Berger, *The Palace of the Sun: The Louvre of Louis XIV* (University Park, PA, 2003), p. 15, n. 22.



FIGURE 1 *Louis XIV*, ca. 1668, marble, from the Porte Royale in the citadel of Tournai, now located on the garden-side façade of Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (Image courtesy of the Author)

borderless. In its original location, gazing out from the fort at Tournai, this bust made global historical claims to power for its patron. But in its new setting atop the south façade of Blenheim Palace in rural Oxfordshire, it became something quite different: *spolia* of a man whose reputation was established by his very opposition to these assertions of universal puissance.

Spoliation — the theft of artefacts by a victor as symbolic enslavement of the vanquished enemy — has an ancient lineage.<sup>4</sup> Roman generals would denude the buildings of conquered cities and incorporate the objects and images into the decorative schemes of their palaces; an act that scholars have likened to ritual cannibalism. Just as the cannibal consumes the flesh of the enemy as a means to absorb their power, looted cultural trophies are reincorporated into new settings to demonstrate the cultural dominance of those who have taken them.<sup>5</sup> Since ancient times, trophies of enemy arms and captured standards have been the most transparent means to represent a disempowered enemy stripped of their weapons and symbols of fealty to another authority. Such iconography was used to great effect on the garden façade of the palace of Versailles, the silhouette of the chateau articulated with trophies, each with a central cuirass surrounded by standards and weapons of the Sun King's enemies. When works of art are taken as *spolia*, the transfer of cultural power is implied. The Eastern winged Lion and Classical Greek horses prominently displayed in the Piazza San Marco in Venice, for example, represent the apogee of Venetian control of the Mediterranean through the physical translation of important artefacts to its capital city. The looting of the monumental portrait bust of Louis XIV from the citadel of Tournai by Marlborough was an act of symbolic enslavement and disempowerment of his formidable enemy. The translation of this statue from what was once a site of the

4 On the history of *spolia*, see Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, eds., *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham and Burlington, 2011).

5 The point was well made by Beat Brenk: 'When someone removes the hide of a building or tears out its innards, he resembles a cannibal. A cannibal does not devour his enemies mainly because he wants to nourish himself but because he hopes that in so doing he will acquire his destroyed enemy's strength. Therefore, he eats human flesh not so much because he is hungry or because he prefers human flesh to a sirloin steak but rather for ideological reasons. Consequently, ideology plays a far greater role with cannibals than aesthetics.' Beat Brenk, 'Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics Versus Ideology,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 41 (1987), pp. 103-09.

French king's power to Blenheim Palace, the architectural expression of Marlborough's ascendancy, symbolizes a transfer of historical agency from France to England.

That contemporaries considered the portrait of a living man to be the locus of his power is testament to the extraordinary success of the cultural policies instituted by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's *surintendant des bâtiments du roi* [superintendent of royal works].<sup>6</sup> Colbert reinvigorated the French luxury industry, founding manufactories for everything that would be needed for the decoration of noble residences: tapestry and furniture, glass, lace, textiles, and so on. In 1665, he became Superintendent of Finance too, enabling him to impose restrictions on the importation of foreign goods to boost the French economy and to ensure that French aristocrats would 'buy local'. These policies had far reaching effects, and by the end of Louis XIV's reign, French fashion and design was envied and emulated across Europe.

Not only did Colbert's policies enable him to enrich the Crown, they also facilitated his plans to commemorate Louis XIV in every aspect of the fine and decorative arts. Taking inspiration from the material remains of the ancient world, Colbert saw the arts as the ideal vehicle for promoting his monarch, not only to those living under his rule, and to foreign friends and rivals, but also to posterity.<sup>7</sup> He established a 'Petite Académie' of humanist scholars to devise inscriptions for the King's palaces and public monuments, and to advise artists and craftsmen on subjects and iconography for royal commissions.<sup>8</sup> Whether directly, or through the veil of allegory, Louis XIV, his virtues, the grandeur of his residences and the history of his reign was the subject of medals, paintings, tapestries, equestrian monuments, the marquetry inlays of furniture, embroidered textiles and much more besides. By these means the new French decorative arts industry became inextricably linked to the image of Louis XIV.

Historical agency, the representation of those who determined the path of history, was central to the narrative of Louis XIV's rule played out in the objects and images commissioned to decorate his palaces.<sup>9</sup> Despite the many talented military men and Court officials who led the armies and enacted the policies that buttressed his power, Louis was represented as the absolute monarch and pre-eminent historical agent of France.<sup>10</sup> The King's image-makers depicted him as the actor responsible for greater or lesser military and diplomatic victories, the establishment of academies, the declaration of edicts, indeed all momentous events. The King was always shown to be the 'agent and actor of a history in the making'.<sup>11</sup> By the early eighteenth century a vast body of Louisquatorzian iconography was established in every available medium — prints, medals, paintings, sculptures, furniture, and tapestries — to document

6 Jean-Baptiste Colbert was Surintendant des Bâtiments du Roi from 1 January 1664. He was supremely influential in every discipline of the arts, as the building and maintenance of the King's palaces, royal spectacles, fêtes and carousels were all part of his remit. See Jules Guiffrey, ed., *Comptes des bâtiments du roi sous le règne de Louis XIV*, 5 vols (Paris, 1881–1901), i:ix. See also the catalogue of the exhibition held to celebrate the tercentenary of Colbert's death: 'Colbert: 1619–1683', Hôtel de la Monnaie (Paris, 1983). On Colbert's political influence, see Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2011).

7 See Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV*.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–44.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–5.

10 As Roger Mettam persuasively argued, the notion of the monarch's absolute power gives a false impression of the political reality of Louis XIV's France that was, in fact, governed by a variety of interested social, political, and ecclesiastical groups. Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford and New York, 1988). Nevertheless, Louis XIV's image-makers ensured that he was always represented as the absolute authority. On this see Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV*, pp. 52–5.

11 Louis Marin 'Classical, Baroque: Versailles, or the Architecture of the Prince,' Anna Lehman, trans., *Yale French Studies*, vol. 80 (1991), p. 171.

the triumphal history of his reign. Such was the success of the ‘fabrication of Louis XIV’ that even his rivals sought to emulate him.<sup>12</sup>

This article investigates the influence of Louis XIV imagery on the visual histories of the duke of Marlborough. Medals and tapestries commissioned during Marlborough’s triumphant campaigns on the continent from 1703 until his dismissal in 1712 are the focus of this paper. The Duke’s commissions from this period in particular expose the intertwined cultural histories of the British Isles and France. To commemorate the martial ascendancy of England, Marlborough and his supporters employed models of representation developed for the Sun King. Ironically, this strategic act of spoliation also reveals the influence of French culture in its rival nation; an early example of the francophilia that would be an abiding influence on British culture throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

John Churchill came from an old gentry family whose fortunes took a downward turn in the English Civil War.<sup>14</sup> Cavaliers who backed Charles I, the Churchills were forced to pay heavy recompense by the Parliamentarians, leaving them almost penniless. They rose again in the Restoration under Charles II. The Crown could offer them little financial reward, but their children were given offices at court. John and his sister Arabella were placed in the household of the duke of York (later James II). Arabella would later become his mistress; their son, the duke of Berwick, became one of Louis XIV’s greatest marshals after the Stuart king went into exile in France following the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688. Berwick followed in the footsteps of his uncle, and received his military training in the service of the Sun King.

No doubt John Churchill developed an admiration for French culture when he first saw action on the field as an officer in an English company allied to France in the Franco-Dutch War (1672–8). When England officially removed its support from this campaign, Churchill remained on the continent in one of the few battalions left behind. He was thus formed as a military man under the auspices of Louis XIV’s army during the French King’s years of triumph. Churchill’s service was exemplary, and Louis XIV personally thanked him for his gallant conduct at the siege of Maestricht.<sup>15</sup> After his return to England, Charles II recognised Churchill’s military acumen, and made him colonel of the King’s Own Royal Regiment of Dragoons. This position along with his other Court offices gave him a handsome pension and enabled him to live with his young wife Sarah in style and comfort.<sup>16</sup> At the same time that John received his elevation in the King’s household, his wife Sarah Churchill (née Jennings) was given the office of Lady of the Bedchamber to Princess Anne, the duke of York’s younger daughter, who had recently married the Prince George of Denmark.<sup>17</sup> Anne had been infatuated with the brilliant Sarah since childhood, so much so that she insisted they call each other by the pet names ‘Mrs Morley’ (Anne) and ‘Mrs Freeman’ (Sarah) to

12 This famous formulation is borrowed from the title of Peter Burke’s monograph: *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, 1992).

13 On the topic of the influence of French culture in Britain in the eighteenth century, see Marc Fumaroli, *When the World Spoke French*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York, 2011); and Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748–1815* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000). See also Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 87–8, 165.

14 Of the many biographies written about the first duke of Marlborough, Winston Churchill’s remains the most complete account of his life published to date: Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, 2 vols, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London; Sydney; Toronto; Bombay, 1947).

15 *Ibid.*, p. 90–91.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 164–5.

17 On Sarah, duchess of Marlborough, see Frances Harris, *A Passion for Government: The Life of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough* (Oxford, 1991); David Green, *Sarah Duchess of Marlborough* (London, 1967); and Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, vol. I, chapters 7 & 11.

dispense with formalities and treat each other as equals.<sup>18</sup> It was this intimacy with the future queen that would ensure the Churchills would be key players in the politics of the British Isles, lending their considerable accomplishments to the struggle to preserve the Protestant monarchy.

John and Sarah proved to be both allies and adversaries of the Stuart monarchy. For betraying James II to back William of Orange in the 'Glorious Revolution', Churchill was made earl of Marlborough at the new king's coronation in 1689.<sup>19</sup> William gave him the position of Captain-General of the British army, but this title soon amounted to nothing. William offered his new earl few opportunities to distinguish himself in politics or on the battlefield, as all of the best positions at Court were given to his Dutch favourites, and his British subjects soon grew weary of what they perceived to be foreign control. With John agitating against the Dutch in Parliament, and the heir apparent to the British throne, Anne, deeply under his wife Sarah's influence, William and Mary grew suspicious of the Marlboroughs (as the Churchills were now styled).<sup>20</sup> For his perceived intrigues, Marlborough was stripped of his offices in 1692. He even spent a short stint in the Tower of London when his enemies tried to frame him for a Jacobite plot to return James II to the throne.<sup>21</sup> Much to Queen Mary's chagrin, throughout John's fall from grace, Anne refused to dismiss Sarah from her service. Indeed, the Princess would remain immovably loyal to the Marlboroughs for the next two decades.

When Anne ascended the throne in 1702, she rewarded her intimate friend, Sarah, with the most coveted Court offices: Mistress of the Robes, Keeper of the Privy Purse and Groom of the Stole.<sup>22</sup> The earl of Marlborough was made Captain-General of Land Forces, and this time the position afforded him near autonomous control of the British army in the coming war. The same year that Anne came to power, England formed an alliance with the Dutch and the Holy Roman Empire to remove Louis XIV's grandson from the Spanish throne. The resulting War of the Spanish Succession would rage for over a decade, and it was during this campaign that Marlborough was made a duke in England, and raised by the Emperor to the ranks of the highest European nobility, as prince of Mindelheim.<sup>23</sup>

When he returned to London between campaigns on the continent, Marlborough observed the protocols of his new position. As the Genoese ambassador noted, he had taken to holding the most princely of morning rituals, the *levée*:

Every morning when he is in London he has in his antechamber gentlemen of the first quality including ambassadors and Ministers of foreign princes; he dresses, even shaves and puts on his shirt, in public; yet he behaves in a manner calculated to offend no one, at least by words, and affects a gentle and gracious air with all.<sup>24</sup>

The account of this ceremony suggests that by 1707 the duke of Marlborough, prince of Mindelheim, had become the centre of an alternative Court. Ever the pragmatist, the duchess of Marlborough cared little for titles and honours.<sup>25</sup> But for all his admirable qualities

<sup>18</sup> Green, *Sarah Duchess of Marlborough*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>19</sup> Churchill, *Marlborough*, p. 377.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 355ff.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>22</sup> On these offices see Harris, *A Passion for Government*, pp. 87-8.

<sup>23</sup> Churchill, *Marlborough*, pp. 891-2.

<sup>24</sup> Report of the Genoese envoy: *Relazioni di Ambasciatori Sabaudi, Genovesi e Veneti, 1693-1713*, cited in Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. I, p. 300.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, *A Passion for Government*, p. 96.

and a modest, gentle and graceful manner, her husband delighted in the pomp and ceremony that his titles afforded him. No doubt it was the Duke's love of magnificence that inspired his first commissions of works of art to celebrate his military victories in the Louis XIV style.

By the time the duke of Marlborough led the Allied forces to victory at Blenheim in 1704, Louis XIV had set the political agenda of Europe for fifty years, and established the terms by which his history was communicated visually.<sup>26</sup> Absolutism as a structure for the representation of the Bourbon monarch ascribed historical agency to a single figure. In contrast, under the constitutional monarchy in England following the 1689 Bill of Rights ratified by William and Mary, the portrayal of the monarch as sole historical agent was not as closely controlled as it had been in France. Adopting the model of visual histories produced for the depiction of absolute monarchy, the duke of Marlborough became prone to criticism from his opponents in England who accused him of harbouring ambitions to take the crown.<sup>27</sup>

The objects and images that celebrate Marlborough's campaigns against the French in the War of Spanish Succession must be considered within the context of national history making in the British Isles. This was a decisive moment that defined Great Britain as a formidable military power in Europe. It coincided with the union of Scotland, England and Wales in 1707; a United Kingdom that would assert itself on the world stage in the century to come.<sup>28</sup> As the first duke of Marlborough's descendant Sir Winston Churchill famously averred, Marlborough's victory against the French at the battle of Blenheim 'changed the political axis of the world'.<sup>29</sup> The 'glittering fabric' of a solar system with the Sun King at its centre was torn apart.<sup>30</sup> But the British monarch, Queen Anne, did not have the charisma and gravitas of her French counterpart. Her consort Prince George of Denmark was timid and sickly, and her only son to survive infancy died at the age of eleven. So it fell to Marlborough, a minor noble raised to the position of extraordinary power as the Captain General of the British army, to construct an historical identity for this United Kingdom.

The campaign to create a triumphal image of the Duke began in 1703, when the hope for a swift end to hostilities in Europe were proven unlikely and support for the campaign cooled in the British Isles. To promote the campaign to the British, the Lord Treasurer, Sidney Godolphin, commissioned a medal to celebrate some of the minor victories that Marlborough had already won (figure 2).<sup>31</sup> At that time the Captain-General had secured the minor towns of Bonn, Huy and Limbourg — feats that even the Duke admitted would 'make very little noise in the world'.<sup>32</sup> John Crocker's medal presents Marlborough in the most triumphant terms. The inscription, SINE CLADE VICTOR ['victory without slaughter'], retells the easy capitulation of rural towns to Allied forces as an act of noble virtue by a magnanimous general who triumphed without unnecessary bloodshed. The obverse bears the portrait of Queen Anne, coiffured and bejewelled in contemporary style, while the reverse is an equestrian portrait of Marlborough as a Roman general. Before him the contested region is

26 On this topic, see Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*; and Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV*.

27 See Matthew Hargraves, 'The Public Image of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, 1702–1708', in Mark Hallett, Nigel Llewellyn, and Martin Monroe, eds., *Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture, 1660–1735* (New Haven, 2016), pp. 133–46.

28 See Linda Colley, *Britons*.

29 Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. I, p. 882.

30 *Ibid.*

31 On this medal see Hargraves, 'The Public Image of John Churchill', pp. 133–6.

32 John Churchill to Sidney Godolphin, 26 July 1703, cited in William Coxe, *Memoirs of John, Duke of Marlborough*, 3 vols. (London, 1847), vol. I, p. 127. See Hargraves, 'The Public Image of John Churchill', p. 133.



FIGURE 2 John Croker, *SINE CLADE VICTOR* [victory without slaughter], 1703, silver medal  
(Image © the Trustees of the British Museum)

personified as a kneeling woman wearing a mural crown. She proffers three keys representing the captured towns on a salver to the General who reaches to accept them with his left hand, his right firmly clutching the baton of command.

Without the context of the inscription and the portrait of the British queen on the face of the medal, one might be forgiven for mistaking the figure on horseback to represent Louis XIV. This was not the first time that the formula of Roman armour combined with a fashionable high wig (so closely associated with the Sun King) was used by his contemporaries; William III was often portrayed in a similar garb on his medals. Louis XIV had set the standard for the representation of military triumphs, particularly in medals, more of which were struck to commemorate his reign than any other figure in history.<sup>33</sup> Louis XIV's image-makers codified the visual language of triumph which would be used by the Sun King's friends and enemies alike. Representations of victory that adopt and adapt the iconography of the adversary is a complex form of cultural appropriation that lays claim to a transference of power from the vanquished to the vanquisher. Croker's medal is a portrait of Marlborough modelled on Louis XIV, the British Captain-General quite literally claiming the mantle of his adversary.

Contemporaries were quick to notice that this medal transcends the normal codes of royal precedence, a particularly sensitive issue with a woman on the throne unable to lead her armies in person.<sup>34</sup> Marlborough may have represented the Queen on the battlefield, but he was not a prince of royal blood, he had no legitimate claim to autonomous power — quite the opposite in fact. He attained his position through royal favour, and many thought him an arriviste elevated beyond his station. One satirical pamphlet lampooned the medal for its overblown imagery with a ribald couplet: 'Good Queen Besse [Elizabeth I] herself would always ride / And scorn'd to lett her subjects get astride.'<sup>35</sup> These lines praise the Virgin Queen for the tight control she held of her nobles and her virtue alike. The inference is

33 On the medals of Louis XIV, see Josèphe Jacquot, *Médailles et jetons de Louis XIV d'après le manuscrit de Londres*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1968); Mark Jones, *Medals of the Sun King* (London, 1979); Sylvie de Turckheim-Pey, *Médailles du grand siècle: histoire métallique de Louis XIV* (Paris, 2004); Yvan Loskoutoff, ed., *Les médailles de Louis XIV et leur livre* (Rennes, 2016); and Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV*, chapter 2.

34 See Hargraves, 'The Public Image of John Churchill', pp. 135-6.

35 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 135.



plain, so the satirist claimed: this medal showed Anne cuckolded by her favourite's husband, Marlborough, who now overstepped his position.

The problem of ascribing historical agency to figures other than the monarch was well known to members of the Académie Royale des Inscriptions (known as the Petite Académie) responsible for the design of Louis XIV's medals. When discussing plans for a medal to represent the conquest of Dunkirk in 1646 by the duc d'Enghien (later styled the Grand Condé), it was argued that the prince responsible for this victory should not be represented in person. In the minutes of their meeting they noted, 'acts carried out under the reign of the King must not be attributed to another person, especially in his medals.'<sup>36</sup> The Petite Académie resolved the problem of the Dunkirk medal by presenting the episode in purely allegorical terms. Queen Anne's medal-makers took a different approach for the next medal struck to celebrate Marlborough's achievements (figure 3). While the reverse of that medal still represented the Captain-General in person, he is shown in the middle of pitched battle before the Danube, and the field marshal's baton has been replaced by an officer's sword.<sup>37</sup> This time Marlborough is celebrated for his personal engagement in the field of combat as an exemplary soldier and not a quasi-monarch, no doubt in response to the controversy created by the earlier medal.

Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Blenheim in August 1704 knocked Bavaria out of the war and destroyed Louis XIV's hopes of a fast resolution to the conflict. As a reward for this triumph, Queen Anne made Marlborough a duke and granted him land and a substantial stipend to build the vast palace of Blenheim in Woodstock, Oxfordshire.<sup>38</sup> A grand ducal palace required fine trappings, and among the first of several series of tapestries that Marlborough commissioned from the Brussels workshop of Judocus de Vos was a copy of Charles Le Brun's *History of Alexander* series.<sup>39</sup> What a fascinating choice for a British duke to make: a copy of a set of tapestries that were so closely bound up with the personal narrative of his rival!

The story of Louis XIV's commission of Le Brun's *Alexander* series reveals the development of Sun King's artistic taste and self-representation.<sup>40</sup> In 1661, soon after the twenty-two year old Louis XIV had declared that he would rule without a principal minister, Le Brun was called to

36 Wellington, *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV*, pp. 53-4.

37 As Lydia Hamlett has persuasively argued, the choice to depict Marlborough as a good soldier in the melee of battle as a riposte to his critics would be used again later by Louis Laguerre for the murals at Marlborough House. Hamlett, 'Rupture through Realism: Sarah Churchill and Louis Laguerre's Murals at Marlborough House', in Hallett, Llewellyn and Monroe, eds., *Court, Country, City*, pp. 193-214.

38 It has been estimated that Blenheim cost approximately £300,000 to build, £60,000 of which was paid for by the Marlboroughs. Marian Fowler, *Blenheim: Biography of a Palace* (London, 1989), p. 71.

39 The sets of Alexander Tapestries produced at the Brussels workshop of Judocus de Vos included the five main panels design by Charles Le Brun and two supplementary pieces. Another weaving of this series was ordered by Marlborough's ally, General William Cadogan, in the early eighteenth century, and was later hung in the Queen's Gallery at Hampton Court Palace. It may have been this set of tapestries that were used for the set of Nicolo Grimaldi's opera *Cleantes* when it was staged at the King's Theatre in March 1717. On the Alexander tapestries purchased by Marlborough, see Jerry Bapasola, *Threads of History: The Tapestries at Blenheim Palace* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 42-9; and Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor* (New Haven and London, 2007), p. 451. On the Alexander Tapestries in the Royal Collection, see Desmond Shawe-Taylor and Wolf Burchard, *The First Georgians: Art and Monarchy, 1714-1760* (London, 2014), p. 85. The decoration of the set of *Cleantes* was advertised in the *Daily Courant* (London) on 23 March 23 1717.

40 On Le Brun's *Alexander* series, see Donald Posner, 'Charles Lebrun's triumphs of Alexander', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 41 (1959), pp. 237-48; Louis Marchesano and Christian Michel, *Printing the Grand Manner: Charles Le Brun and Monumental Prints in the Age of Louis XIV* (Los Angeles, 2010), pp. 58-77; and Peter Fuhring, Louis Marchesano, Rémi Mathis and Vanessa Selbach, *A Kingdom of Images: French Prints in the Age of Louis XIV, 1660-1715* (Los Angeles, 2015), pp. 64-5.



FIGURE 3 Jan Boskam, *DE. GALL. ET. BAV. ITERVM. AD. DANVB. MARLB. DVCE.* [The French and Bavarians again defeated on the Danube, Marlborough commanding], 1704, silver medal (Image © the Trustees of the British Museum)

Fontainebleau. The painter must have been exceptionally patient and charming, for he managed to create his most celebrated composition under what would have been testing conditions. The King, inspired by a recent translation of Quintus Curtius Rufus' *History of Alexander the Great*, commissioned him to paint a scene from the life of the Macedonian general. Le Brun had the freedom to choose the scene, but the young Louis XIV came to watch the painter at work, dictating which elements of the canvas he should work upon. The result was *The Queens of Persia at the Feet of Alexander*, an *exemplum virtutis* with Alexander as the virtuous prince granting clemency to the women of his Persian enemy, Darius III. Le Brun would go on to paint a further three scenes from the history of Alexander the Great, all of which served as models for a magnificent set of Gobelins tapestries, first woven in the mid-1660s.<sup>41</sup> By the early eighteenth century Le Brun's Alexander tapestries were well known throughout Europe, due to a successful series of prints prized by collectors.<sup>42</sup>

William Parsons spelt out the role that Le Brun's *Queens of Persia at the Feet of Alexander* might play in the instruction of the English elite in the preface to the 1703 translation of André Félibien's description of the painting:

The English Heroes of this Age, and few Ages can boast of Greater, cannot but be hereby Warm'd with the very thoughts only of so Generous and Glorious an Action; And when Fortune shall Favour their Arms (which all True Englishmen must Wish) with Success and Victory, As Doubtless is must do under the Conduct of so Great a Princess as now fills the Throne; It is to be Hop'd that in all Actions on the like Occasion, They will be so highly mov'd by this Great Example of Clemency and Moderation, as to Obtain that Double Victory of Overcoming Themselves, as well as that of Subduing the Enemy.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For the Alexander Tapestries, see Maurice Fenaille, *Etat général des tapisseries de la Manufacture des Gobelins depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours, 1600–1900*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1903), pp. 167–85; Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque*, pp. 347, 365–72; and Charissa Bremmer-David, ed., *Woven Gold: Tapestries of Louis XIV* (Los Angeles, 2015), pp. 101–13.

<sup>42</sup> These prints were regularly listed in newspaper advertisements for auctions and booksellers in London. See for example adverts in the *Flying Postmaster* for Mr Jean Beaulieu, a French bookseller (1 December 1702), and the *Daily Courant* for a sale at Powell's Coffee-House (8 March 1703).

<sup>43</sup> William Parsons, *The Tent of Darius Explain'd; or The Queens of Persia at the Feet of Alexander. Translated from the French of Mr. Félibien by Collonel Parsons* (London, 1703), n.p.

At the time this preface was published, these would-be English heroes were fighting the forces of the man for whom this composition was made. By commissioning a set of Alexander Tapestries to decorate his palace at Blenheim, Marlborough was staking his own claim to the Alexander narrative, and inviting comparison between himself and his rival Louis XIV.

Le Brun's Alexander series were deeply entrenched in the cultural imagination of England at this time. The same year the Duke commissioned his set of Alexander tapestries, George Farquhar referred to the series in his play, *the Beaux' Stratagem*.<sup>44</sup> The sequence in question between the lead Archer, a young beau attempting to snare a rich heiress, and a Mrs Sullen, takes place in a picture gallery: 'But what think you there of Alexander's battles?' asks Mrs Sullen. To which Archer replies: 'We want only a Lebrun, madam, to draw greater battles, and a greater general of our own. — The Danube, madam, would make a greater figure in a picture than the Granicus, and we have our Ramillies to match their Arbela.'<sup>45</sup> Whether or not Marlborough acted on Farquhar's advice we can never be certain, but two years later in 1709, emboldened by further victories against the French, the Duke commissioned a new set of tapestries to celebrate his military prowess.

Despite the distinctly English subject of the *Victories of the Duke of Marlborough* tapestries, this series borrows a composition developed by Flemish artists to document the history of Louis XIV. There are eleven Marlborough tapestries in total, the most spectacular of which is over eight metres in length and commemorates the siege of Bouchain in 1711 (figure 4). Lambert and Philippe de Hondt designed these tapestries with the assistance of another Fleming, Jan van Huchtenburg, who had worked at the Gobelins Manufactory in Paris under his countryman Adam-Franz Van der Meulen.<sup>46</sup> Van der Meulen was called to France in the early 1660s to work on Jean-Baptiste Colbert's project to commemorate the reign of the Sun King in all imaginable media. He toured the towns ceded to France through diplomacy and war to make topographical studies that could later form backdrops to depictions of the King's history. Van der Meulen's collaboration with Charles Le Brun on the design of tapestries for the *Histoire du Roi* cycle included six panels that commemorate military victories, each showing the King raised in the foreground before a panoramic view of the captured territory.<sup>47</sup> The binary composition used for the *Histoire du Roi* tapestries, with a raised, populated frontal plane, and a deep perspective or bird's-eye-view of the territory, borrows from a graphic tradition of chorography, or city views — a compositional format pioneered by Van der Meulen.<sup>48</sup>

Van der Meulen was one among many Flemish artists to live and work at the Gobelins manufactory that Colbert established on the outskirts of Paris. The talented draftsman, painter and print engraver Jan van Huchtenburg worked alongside him in the late 1660s and played an

44 On Farquhar's reference to the Alexander series, see David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century Military Fiction* (Newark, 1990), p. 72; and Hamlett, 'Rupture through Realism'.

45 George Farquhar, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Ann Blake, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney, 2006), p. 86.

46 For Van der Meulen, see Isabelle Richefort, *Adam-François Van der Meulen, 1632–1690: peintre flamand au service de Louis XIV* (Paris, 2004). The little that is known about Jan van Huchtenburg (also Huctenberg or Hugtenburg) appears in an early eighteenth-century dictionary of artists by Arnold Houbraken: *De groote schouburgh der Nederlandsche konstschilders en schilderessen...* (Amsterdam, 1721), vol. III, pp. 251–2. The attribution to Huchtenburg was made by Horace Walpole, see Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque*, p. 471.

47 For the *Histoire du Roi* tapestries, see Fenaille, *Etat général des tapisseries de la Manufacture des Gobelins*, pp. 99–127; Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque*, pp. 349–50, 374–89; and Richefort, *Adam-François Van der Meulen*, pp. 73–83.

48 There were many precedents for the chorographic composition in depictions of siege warfare in the seventeenth century. See Robert Wellington, 'The Cartographic Origins of Adam Franz van der Meulen's Marly Cycle,' *Print Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2011), pp. 142–54.



FIGURE 4 Judocus de Vos workshop, Brussels, designed by Philippe and Lambert de Hondt, and Jan van Huchtenburg, *The Siege Bouchain III*, ca. 1712–15, wool and silk tapestry, 440 x 807 cm (Reproduced with the kind permission of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough, Blenheim Palace Image Library)

important role in the development of the images of Louis XIV's conquests, for which Van der Meulen is best known. After leaving France and returning to his native Haarlem in 1670, Huchtenburg had a long career receiving commissions for prints and paintings from many illustrious patrons. For Marlborough's ally, Prince Eugene of Savoy, he produced a series of ten paintings and numerous prints that celebrate the Prince's victories in the War of Spanish Succession.<sup>49</sup> Not only was Huchtenburg familiar with the events of Marlborough's campaign and the topography of the lands in which they took place, he could claim expertise in this genre through his formative work with Van der Meulen.

Horace Walpole's claim that Huchtenburg 'had a share in the design' of the Marlborough tapestries is supported by the close resemblance of these tapestries to prints that Huchtenburg executed for Van der Meulen.<sup>50</sup> In the *Bouchain III* tapestry, Marlborough is at the centre of the composition on horseback, holding the field marshal's baton of command in his right hand. His senior officers surround him and look in deference in his direction. The Duke's pure-white horse adopts a balletic pose with counterpoised legs front and rear lifted in an exaggerated manner, while the front-left leg rolls slightly at the heel to create a serpentine line through the body of the mount. This composition alludes to the aristocratic bearing of horse and rider, both trained in the equestrian arts, and repeats a formula often used for portraits of nobles in Europe in the seventeenth century.<sup>51</sup> Comparing the central

<sup>49</sup> See Martha Pollack, *Cities at War in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 149.

<sup>50</sup> Walpole's study was based on the notebooks of engraver and antiquary George Vertue (1684–1756), who was active when the Marlborough tapestries were commissioned, and is a fairly reliable source of information. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England: With Some Account of the Principal Artists, and Incidental Notes on Other Arts; Collected by the Late Mr. George Vertue; and Now Digested and Published from His Original MSS.*, vol. 3 (Strawberry Hill, 1763), p. 158.

<sup>51</sup> The most notable example being Van Dyck's equestrian portrait of Charles I with his riding master and equerry Pierre Antoine Bourdon, Seigneur de St-Antoine of 1633, Royal Collection, UK.



group of the *Bouchain III* panel with Louis XIV's party in Van der Meulen's *View of the Town of Lille near the Priory of Fives* (figure 5), the French King is mounted on a horse in a near identical pose, encircled by high-ranking courtiers and military men. Further examination reveals that the figures on horseback in the Marlborough tapestry conform to a series of stock types found in Van der Meulen's compositions, save the portraits, that provide an indexical link to the participants in these historical re-enactments.



FIGURE 5 Jan van Huchtenburg, Adrien-François Bauduins (after Adam-Franz van der Meulen), *Vue de la Ville de l'isle du coste du Prieure de Fives, Et l'armee du Roy devant le place, en l'annee 1667* (detail), 1670 (*View of the town of Lille near the Priory of Fives, and the King's army before the place, in the year 1667*), engraving, 50 x 132 cm (Image © The British Library Board. 561 H 14)

The presence of a dog pursuing a horse and rider to the right in the foreground of the *Bouchain III* tapestry, the cause of much speculation among scholars, is another familiar motif from Van der Meulen's oeuvre. By tradition this hound is thought to refer to General William Cadogan (1675–1726), as a play on his name (*ca-dog-an*), and because he was known to his troops as 'the dog'.<sup>52</sup> This may well be the case (indeed this is the only dog depicted in the Marlborough tapestries), yet the presence of the dog here also points to the origins of the composition in Van der Meulen's genre-forming siege images. When Marlborough's Flemish image-makers Lambert and Philippe de Hondt were commissioned to commemorate his military victories in a new cycle of tapestries, they called upon Huchtenburg to assist with the design. Huchtenburg's impeccable credentials as the engraver of prints commemorating Louis XIV's military triumphs also helped him represent the end of French military supremacy in Europe as an event of cultural significance. Through subtle modification of the Sun King's triumphal imagery, the Marlborough tapestries signal the transfer of both martial and cultural power from France to England.

For Marlborough to be represented in the image of the enemy is a form of cultural appropriation akin to the ancient practice of spoliation. The bust of Louis XIV placed on the portico of the garden façade of Blenheim Palace stands as a metaphor for the cultural appropriations of Louis XIV iconography for the triumphal imagery of the British duke. No doubt his contemporaries understood the overt references to Louis XIV in Marlborough's visual histories, just as they recognised the message behind the looted Tournai bust in its new home in England. Indeed, that is the subject of an English poem, titled *On the King of France his statue brought over by the Duke of Marlborough and plac'd before Blenheim house*.<sup>53</sup> After making an analogy to the stone of the sculpture and the stony rule of Louis, the anonymous author writes:

Hast then & lett the Royall slave be plac't  
To view those trophys that his Ruin rais'd,  
Blenheim the spoil of nations overthrown  
Blenheim, a palace large, a little Town.

'Tis hence our joys in acclamations rise  
Veiwing [sic] a long Campaigns stupendous prize,  
Pleasd to insult the haughty Tyrants throne  
Thô all our scoffs are on his image thrown.<sup>54</sup>

Where the trophies on the garden side façade of Versailles were composed with the empty cuirass of a defeated but unknown enemy, a portrait of 'the Royal slave' at Blenheim makes an explicit link to a particular historical figure, Louis XIV, and all that he represents. The triumphal imagery developed in the early years of Louis XIV's reign, when he was undefeated, is subverted here—the conquering hero and inheritor of the glory and historical agency of the emperors of ancient Rome is transformed into a 'haughty tyrant.'

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque*, p. 476.

<sup>53</sup> Anon., 'On the King of France his statue brought over by the Duke of Marlborough and plac'd before Blenheim house', in a commonplace book, ca. 1712, Osborn C170, James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

The extant fragment of this poem ends with a tantalizing analogy between the Tournai bust of Louis XIV and the mythical Palladium, the wooden statue of Pallas Athena said to have protected the ancient city of Troy:

But Lewis lives, still Lewis in his soul  
 Would drive the Universe & Fate control...  
 So Priam, when the great Palladium gone  
 Was Priam still, tho on a tottering throne.<sup>55</sup>

According to legend, Odysseus and Diomedes looted the Palladium from Troy during the Trojan War. Priam, King of Troy, could no longer hold the city after the statue was taken and the citadel robbed of its divine protection.<sup>56</sup> Aeneas later took the Palladium to Rome where its powers were said to protect the city, facilitating the rise of the Roman Empire. The anonymous author of the poem on the Tournai statue saw correlation between this ancient legend and contemporary events. The portrait of Louis XIV was an icon of power. Just as the ancient city of Troy fell after the Palladium was looted, and the city of Rome would rise after the statue was installed there, Marlborough's translation of the Tournai bust to Blenheim signalled a shift of power from France to Great Britain. Here the message was clear, just as it was in the other objects commissioned to celebrate the triumphs of the duke of Marlborough that have been the focus of this paper, the age of Louis le Grand was over and Great Britain was on the ascendant.

When the duchess of Marlborough selected an artist to paint a series of murals at Marlborough House in London to celebrate her husband's military triumphs and rehabilitate his damaged reputation, she chose a fashionable expatriate French painter.<sup>57</sup> Louis Laguerre, was born to a gardener at Versailles, and named for his godfather, Louis XIV. It is thought that he trained under Charles Le Brun; indeed, his compatriot's commissions from the king of France inspired Laguerre's designs for his British patrons.<sup>58</sup> It might seem strange that the most ardent adversaries of France would choose to celebrate the British victories against that nation by emulating French arts, but this is a peculiar and persistent aspect of the complicated relationship between these neighbouring countries. Despite the continuous enmity of France and Britain in the eighteenth century, French language, arts, clothes, and food continued to be preferred in the fashionable salons of the British elite.<sup>59</sup> A sojourn in Paris was considered an essential part of the education of the English gentleman on his Grand Tour of the continent. When some of these men returned home dressed as foppish 'Macaronis', it was the French elements of their costume — the towering wig topped with a diminutive hat — for which they were most assiduously lampooned.<sup>60</sup> The first duke of Marlborough's spoliation of the Sun King's iconography at once represented the Duke's victory over the French king, while simultaneously exposing the pre-eminence of French culture in Britain. Marlborough may have won the war against France on the battlefields of Europe, but the arts policy

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> On the various versions of the legend of the theft of the Palladium in ancient and modern times, see Arthur Milton Young, *Troy and Her Legend* (Pittsburgh, 1948).

<sup>57</sup> On Louis Laguerre's murals at Marlborough House in London, see Hamlett, 'Rupture through Realism.'

<sup>58</sup> See in particular the Blenheim Saloon at Blenheim Palace, where Laguerre borrowed the balcony devise from Le Brun's decorations for Louis XIV's ambassador's staircase at Versailles.

<sup>59</sup> See Fumaroli, *When the World Spoke French*; and Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society*.

<sup>60</sup> Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society*, pp. 4-5.

championed by Louis XIV and his advisors ensured the enduring precedence of French cultural forms long after the King's political supremacy had come to an end.

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