

JEAN-FRANÇOIS de TROY
(1679 – 1752)

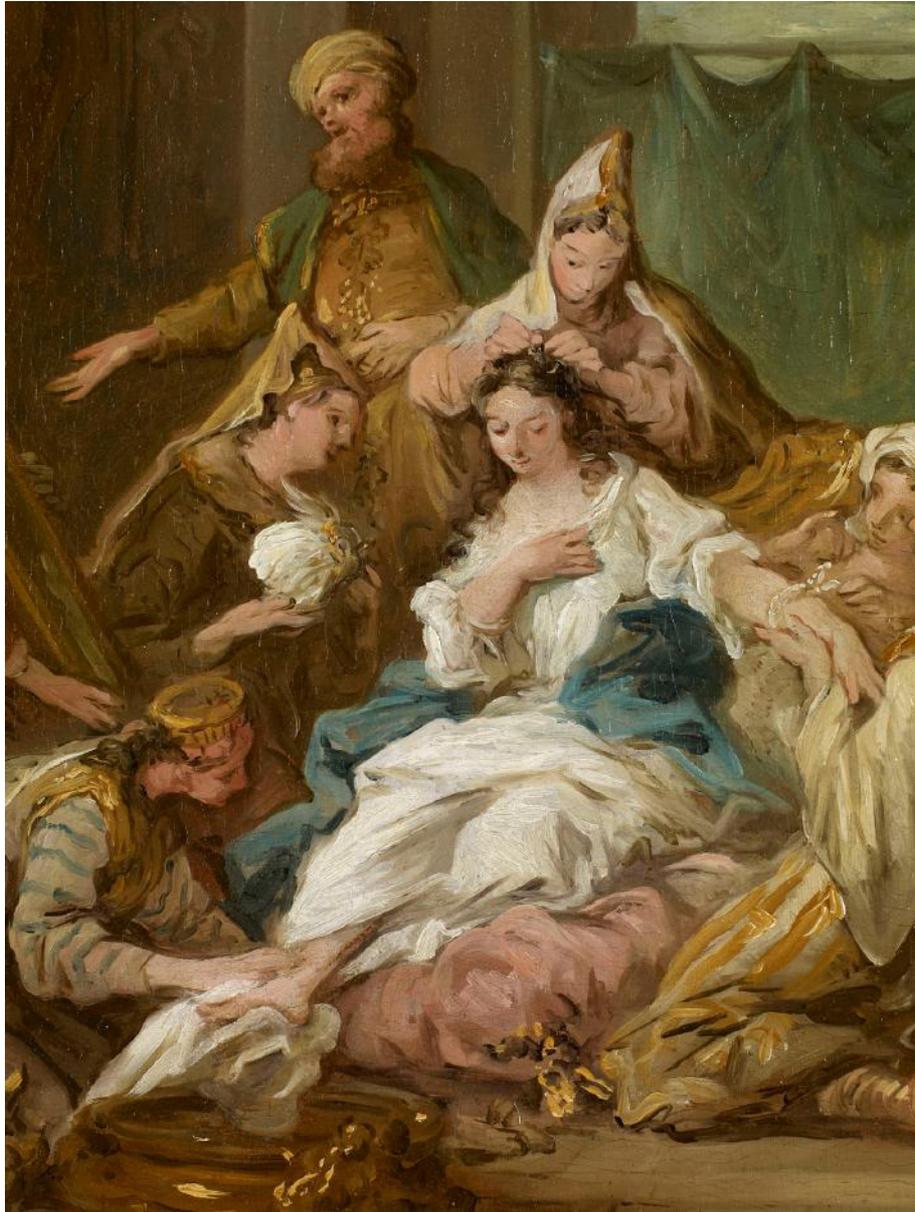


The Story of Esther

GALERIE ERIC COATALEM
PARIS

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Text from Alexis Merle du Bourg

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S. Vallée, engraved after F. de Troy, *Portrait de Jean-François de Troy*

To Charles, Louis and Pauline

Imagining finding six original studies for the same series by Jean-François de Troy, after almost three hundred years, remains exceptional and provides pleasure twice over: both intellectual when the historical importance of this series which marked French art of the 18th century is recognized and known, aesthetic by the rediscovery of the swirling technique and the almost Venetian colours of our artist.

I would like to thank most especially Alexis Merle du Bourg who agreed, with so much enthusiasm, to write the fascinating text of this catalogue, Jane MacAvock for her translation as well as Anne Mrozielski and Clara Demanie for the restoration of the works.

A special thought for Manuela de Paladines and Florence Thiéblot who assist me at the gallery, who do so with so much kindness and talent, and who always agree to conceive a catalogue...even under impossibly tight deadlines.

But also the Galerie Chevalier, Pierre Etienne, Gilles de Fayet, Jean Joyerot, Philippe Kahn, Laure Aline Demazure, Philippe Perrin, Séverin Racenet, Claire and Giovanni Sarti.

The Sketches for the Esther Cycle by Jean-François de Troy (1736)

“and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mor'decai, ..., took for his own daughter.” (*Est.* 2:7)

A supple and undulating genius, both a flattering portraitist and a prolix history painter, as well as a brilliant genre painter, in a gallant or worldly vein, Jean-François de Troy (Paris, 1679 – Rome, 1752), solicited, although he had passed the threshold of old age, a new royal commission up to his ambitions. To obtain it, he submitted – successfully - for the approval of the *Bâtiments du roi* (administration), seven *modelli* painted in 1736 with his usual alacrity. Inspired by one of the most novelistic texts of the Old Testament, the *Book of Esther*, these sketches in a rapid and virtuoso manner were transformed by the artist, between 1737 and 1740 into large cartoons intended to serve as models for the weavers of the Gobelins factory. Showing undeniable ease and skill in the composition in perfect harmony with the sensitivities of the times, the tapestry set met with great success. *The Story of Esther* perfectly corresponded to the plan of the *Bâtiments du roi* to renew the repertoire of tapestry models used for the weavers of the royal factories while it also conformed to the tastes of Louis XV's subjects for a fantastical Orient, the set for a dramatic tale in which splendour, love and death were combined. Indeed, no tapestry set was woven in France during the 18th century as often as that of *Esther*. The series of *modelli* painted by de Troy during the year 1736 looks to the history of French painting and decoration under Louis XV as much as it does the history of the Gobelins. It probably counts among the most important rococo pictorial groups to have remained in private hands.

First the Biblical source illustrated by De Troy which constitutes the base of one of the richest iconographical traditions of Western art will be considered. Then the circumstances and specific character of French civilisation during the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV which contributed to making the theme of Esther a *relevant* subject, both attractive to contemporaries and remarkably in line with the sensitivities of the time will be elucidated. An examination of the exceptional series of sketches united here, the cartoons and the tapestries that they anticipate as well as a study of their reception will close this essay.

The Book of Esther: A scriptural source at the source of rich iconography.

The Biblical text

One of the “Five Scrolls” (*megillôth*) of the section of the *Hagiographies* in the Hebrew bible, included among the *Historical Books* of the Old Testament of the Christian bible, the *Book of Esther* relates how the queen Esther and her relative Mor'decai thwarted the plans of Haman, King Ahasuerus's favourite, who had fomented the extermination of all the Jews of the Persian empire. First

of all, the various episodes of a tale rich in adventures which has continuously fed European art for over ten centuries will be recalled. It has inspired both isolated works and narrative cycles of which the most significant in the 18th century, is assuredly that of Jean-François de Troy who showed himself to be generally a very scrupulous illustrator of the *Scriptures*:¹

Chapter I

The story takes place in Shushan at the Court of King Ahasuerus who, from his capital, “reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, [over] an hundred and seven and twenty provinces”. In the third year of his reign, the king organised a sumptuous and endless (it lasted 180 days) feast at the end of which “when the heart of the king was merry with wine,” he ordered that the Queen Vashti be made to come dressed with her royal crown “to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she [was] fair to look on”. The queen refused, scorning compliance.

Chapter II

“Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him,” thus he resolved to repudiate Vashti. He soon sent throughout the empire in search of a young girl worthy of succeeding her. At Shushan there lived a Jew, Mor'decai who had been deported from Jerusalem in Babylon at the time of King Nebuchadnezzar. Mor'decai had adopted his orphaned niece,² called Esther, as his daughter, who was “fair and beautiful”. In accordance with his wishes, Esther who did not wish to reveal either her “people”, nor her “kindred”, was presented to the Eunuch Hegai whose task at the Palace was to watch over the virgins who had come from the four corners of the empire and were waiting to be brought, by rank, before the king. Hegai ordered that she benefit from all that can contribute to “her things for purification”. In the tenth month of the seventh year of the reign of Ahasuerus (it will be essential to understand that we find ourselves continuously in cosmic and not historical, time), the young woman was finally brought before the king whom she pleased more than all the other women: “she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins”. Placing the crown on Esther’s head, Ahasuerus made her his new queen. During this time, Mor'decai who had remained “in the king’s gate”, learned that two chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh had decided to assassinate the king for some obscure reason.

¹ We refer here to the text of the catholic Biblical canon, that which was familiar both to Racine and de Troy. It derives from the Greek *Septuagint* taken over by the Latin *Vulgate*. In the Greek version, the *Book of Esther* contains a certain number of additions that are specific to it. Catholics, who do not exclude them from the canon, qualify then as “deuterocanonical”, i.e. “of the second canon”. The citations in French are from the translation of LEMAITRE DE SACY because it was the most widespread at the time and it cannot be surpassed for its sublime language which is that of the Great Century. [Translator’s note: the Authorized Version of the King James Bible published in 1769 is being used for similar reasons.]

² The family connections that linked Mor'decai and Esther are unsure (later Jewish tradition even makes the two heroes of the book spouses!). For LEMAITRE DE SACY, Racine (and certainly for de Troy) they are uncle and niece. Some modern translations, more familiar with the philology, indicate a relationship of cousins (Esther being the daughter of Mor'decai’s uncle) [Translator’s note: this is the relationship given by the King James Bible edition of 1769].

Warned, Esther “certified the king [thereof] in Mor’decai's name.” The unmasked plotters were quickly hanged, the tale of the failed assassination being recorded in the annals on the king’s order.

Chapter III

The chapter narrates the elevation by Ahasuerus of Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite who “set his seat above all the princes that [were] with him”. Only Mor’decai – violating an order of the king – did not bend his knee before the favourite, refusing to adore him because he was a Jew. Haman conceived a fierce hatred for Mor’decai which extended not only to his person, but to all the Jews of the empire who he resolved to exterminate. Denouncing this nation dispersed throughout the empire, which distinguished it from the others by its ceremonies and its new laws, and disregarding the king’s commandments, Haman called for the king to give the order to have them perish, offering to pay the royal treasury ten thousand talents. Ahasuerus, at the time in the first month (*nisan*) of the twelfth year of his reign, refused this gift, but allowed Haman to dispose of the Jews as he intended, and gave him his ring. On the thirteenth day of *nisan*, letters, sealed with the royal ring, were written in all the languages to instruct the satraps and judges of the provinces that on that same day, all the Jews be killed without exception, and that their goods be pillaged. The day of the massacre, determined by lot, fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (*adar*). Letters were sent throughout the empire and the edict was posted in Susa to the great despair of the Jews, but to the great satisfaction of a celebrating Haman.

Chapter IV

In desperation, Mor’decai sent his charge a copy of the fatal edict so she could intercede with the king for her people. Now, whoever appeared before Ahasuerus without having been invited expressly was put to the death forthwith, unless the King extended his golden sceptre towards them as a mark of clemency. Esther became worried about this, not having been called by the king for thirty days. Mor’decai sent her his response, that belonging to the royal house would not save her from Haman’s planned massacre, that God would find another way to save his people and that her silence would lead her then to death, for herself and her father’s house and that finally she had perhaps been raised to the royal dignity: “iand who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for [such] a time as this?” Giving herself up to her reasons, Esther decided to go in search of Ahasuerus at her own peril. She recommended that all the Jews of Susa accompany her in prayer and fasting for three days and three nights.

Chapter V

On the third day, Esther, dressed in her royal clothing, presented herself before Ahasuerus sitting on his throne. “She was pleasing to his eyes” says the original text laconically. The sovereign then lowered his sceptre for the queen to kiss it and said to her “when you would ask me for half of my kingdom, I would give it to

you". In return Esther invited him and Haman to a banquet. During the meal, Esther invited Ahasuerus and his favourite to a second banquet during which she announced to him that she would reveal what she desired. Haman left satisfied (was he not the only one, other than the king, to have been invited), when he met Mor'decai by chance sitting in front of the palace door. The latter made no mark of respect to him (he did not even deign to stand up) which increased Haman's anger towards him. Back home, among his possessions, he opened himself to his wife, Zeresh and to his friends who responded that he should raise a gallows of fifty cubits to punish the impudent man, recommending he ask the king the following morning to have him hung. "This advice pleased him and he ordered this high gallows be prepared."

Chapter VI

Unable to sleep during the night, Ahasuerus had the annals of his reign read to him: "we fell on the place where it was written in what way Mor'decai had given warning of the conspiracy of Bigthan and of Teresh". Having asked what rewards had been given to the subject who had denounced the plot the king received the response that he had not received anything. At the same time, Haman presented himself before him to request the execution of the man he hated. The king then asked him: "what should one do to honour a man who the king wishes to cover with honours". Thinking that this man was no other than himself, Haman responded: "the man who the king wishes to honour must be dressed in royal clothing, be mounted on the same horse as the king mounts; wear the royal crown on his head" and that the first of the princes and the great men holding the horse by the reins go through the city crying: "it is thus that he whom it pleases the king to honour will be honoured". To Haman's great confusion, Ahasuerus ordered him to take a robe and a horse and to honour Mor'decai exactly as he had said. After leading Mor'decai by horse "in the City's square", Haman returned home distressed, his head covered and told the tale of what had happened to his wife and friends who foresaw his ruin. Eunuchs from the palace then arrived to invite him to the second banquet which would seal his destiny.

Chapter VII

During the festivities, Esther asked for her life to be saved and those of her people who were destined to be massacred, denouncing the intentions of Haman, their unrelenting enemy "whose cruelty fell even on the king". These statements caused Haman's confusion and the ire of the king who withdrew to the neighbouring garden. Haman, distraught, raised himself up and begged the queen to pardon him. The king then came and found the favourite "thrown onto the bed where Esther was" and resented that one could thus attack the queen in his presence and in his house. The eunuch Harbonah then informed Ahasuerus of the existence of the immense gallows that Haman had had prepared for Mor'decai "in the upper part of his house." The deposed favourite was then immediately hung on the king's order.

Chapter VIII

The king made a gift of Haman's house to Esther who revealed to him that she was related to Mor'decai. Ahasuerus gave this man – whom his former charge had named steward of her house – the ring he had previously given to his former favourite. The queen then obtained the revocation of the fatal letters that had been sent throughout the empire at Haman's instigation. Drafted "in the manner that Mor'decai wished", on the twenty-third day of the third month (*siban*) and sealed with the royal ring which made them orders, new letters were written in several languages so as to be understood in an immense empire and were sent to the governors, great lords, judges and also to the Jews. Moreover, the king ordered them to gather in all the cities of the empire and to make themselves ready to defend their life and to "exterminate their enemies with their wives, their children and all their houses and to pillage their remains". This day of revenge is set on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (*adar*). Mor'decai, dressed sumptuously, triumphed again. The Jews of Susa and the empire exulted, the other inhabitants converted to their religion and to their ceremonies "because the name of the Jewish people has filled all the minds with huge terror".

Chapter IX

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month called *adar*, the Jews gathered in all the cities of the Empire and made a carnage of their enemies and nobody dared resist them, so much the fear of Mor'decai "grand master of the palace" dominated the judges, the stewards and the governors. In Susa, five hundred men were killed and Esther obtained that the remains of Haman's sons join those of their father on the gallows. The queen asked the king, moreover, to allow the killing to continue the following day. On the fourteenth day of *adar*, three hundred men were killed. In the provinces of the empire, seventy five thousand men were "enveloped in this carnage". On the fourteenth day – the fifteenth in Susa where the vengeance thus continued for a day longer, a solemn celebration was finally organized. Mor'decai (and Esther) who had taken care to recite these memorable events in a book or a letter which they sent to the Jews who remained in all the Empire, ordered that this feast – called *Purim* – be celebrated in future centuries, in perpetuity.³

The historical facts forming the frame of the story of Esther, this "tragedy of a Harem" (L. Réau) appear to be of strongly doubtful authenticity. The book places the action after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile of the Jews in Babylon, at the court of Ahasuerus (*Achwéroch* in Hebrew, *Artaxerxés* in the Greek version) who could be Xerxes I (486-464 B.C.) or one of his successors, in particular the second Artaxerxes (404-358 B.C.). Numerous intrinsic and extrinsic elements encourage doubt of the historical truth of the facts reported by this text drafted towards the end or the middle of

³ It continues to be so in Judaism, as is well known. *Purim* means literally "celebration of destinies" *Pur* meaning the lot drawn by Aman so as to determine the auspicious day for the massacre of the Jews.

the 2nd century B.C. (after the great persecutions against the Jews of Judea ordered by the Seleucid King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes which would explain the threatening climate underlying the tale?), in all likelihood from much older Assyro-Babylonian original material.⁴ The inclusion in the Jewish and Christian canon of the *Scriptures* of this entirely profane text (in particular in the Hebrew bible, it is with the *Canticle of Canticles*, the only one where God is never mentioned)⁵ has been the subject of lively controversies down the centuries for theological reasons, as well as moral ones. In the 16th century, the Protestants inclined thus to challenge the divine inspiration of all or some of the text (the supplements known only in the Greek version were finally rejected). It is known that Luther execrated this decidedly “too Jewish” book in which he detected hints of paganism. Despite these debates, and also because of them, the Church of the Counter Reformation decreed the complete and definitive acceptance the *Book of Esther* in 1546 during the Council of Trent, which would ensure the continuation of the text’s extraordinary iconographical fortune in Catholic Europe during the early modern period, without however leading to the banishment of the theme from Protestant Europe, on the contrary.

Rich Iconography

A series of convergent religious and cultural reasons explain the unusual iconographical fortune of the text. A fabulous tale filled with rumours of assassinations and massacres, the *Book of Esther* illustrates in the first instance with its spectacular *reversal* of situation, the cardinal theological teaching of Providence “in action”. More critical for the evolution of western art was however the significance associated with Mary, attributed to it by theologians from the middle ages. The tight network of analogies which they wove, profoundly changed the nature and status of the Jewish “national” heroine that Esther had originally been.⁶ Her name, even, which refers in several ancient languages (*Ishtar*, *Astarte*) to the deified figure of the star, appears to a prefiguration of the *Stella Maris* of the Litany of the Virgin. But it is above all the narrative which supplies the arguments for these comparisons. Esther, distinguished and crowned by Ahasuerus was thus perceived as heralding the Coronation of the Virgin by Christ (or by God), from an apocryphal text made popular in the 6th century by Gregory of Tours and in the 13th century by Jacobus de Voragine. In the same way, the intervention of Mor’dcai’s charge with the formidable sovereign to wrench her nation from the mortal danger that threatened it passed for a heralding of the intercession of Mary with her son on the Day of Judgment, the Virgin, supreme intercessor obtaining from Christ the grace of humankind as Esther had obtained that of the Jews from Ahasuerus. Parallel to the close

⁴ Since the brilliant intuition of the mythologist and historian of religions, James Frazer (*The Scapegoat*, 1933) the Babylonian myth narrating the victory of Babylonian divinities *Marduk* or *Merodach* and *Ishtar* (the Greek *Astarte*) over the Elamite deities *Aman* and *Vashti* of which the story of Esther could be a historicised, fiercely Judaized transposition.

⁵ However, the name of God figures abundantly in the Greek additions of the Septuagint.

⁶ It is not possible, here to exhaust the comparisons and concordances that theologians and artists developed patiently from the *Book of Esther* (assimilation of Aman with the devil and persecutors of the Church, etc.). See for example E. LIMARDO DATURI, 2004, chapter 3.

assimilation of the biblical heroine to the Virgin, Esther became, as early as the 9th century, the symbol of the Church in the same way as the Sulamite of the *Canticle of Canticles*. For this reason, the marriage of Ahasuerus and Esther is superimposed from a theological point of view on the theme of Christ, spouse of the Church (*Sponsus Ecclesiae*), the repudiation of Vashti anticipating symmetrically that of the Synagogue. To this metaphysical and ecclesiological reading another one is added, this time, moral. It results in Esther being designated as an exemplary figure of a heroine, an “example of virtue” (*exemplum virtutis*).⁷ Initiated in an early manner in the history of Christianity, this “heroisation” of Esther was decisive in that it contributed to favouring its success with a lay public during the early modern period. More generally, it accelerated the inclusion of the story of Esther beyond sacred places, in purely profane decors, Jean-François de Troy’s *Story of Esther*, being able to appear in many ways as the arrival point of the process.

Works based on the biblical book which flourished as early as the Middle Ages can be grouped into two major types, series – like the one discussed here – which envisage Esther inside a narrative frame in which she constitutes the recurring hero (if the scene of *The Triumph of Mor’dcai* is excepted) and isolated works which crystallize an episode which had reached a level of popularity that procured its independence (and intelligibility) outside the narrative of the tale. Series, strictly speaking, are rare in the early modern period. A group of tapestries originating from the southern Netherlands at the turning point between the medieval period and the Renaissance, which are in a way, the Gothicising ancestors of the one woven at the Gobelins after de Troy’s cartoons, should be mentioned.⁸ Also, in Florentine art of the end of the Quattrocento, a set of panels attributed to Filippino Lippi (and Botticelli?) was conceived to adorn marriage trunks (*cassoni*), which is already an indication of the secularisation of the *exemplum* figure of Esther in a matrimonial context (since the tale of Esther is also that of a first marriage dissolved because of the recalcitrance of the wife

⁷ This status of heroine and “example of virtue” however was not recognized unanimously for Esther. The Lutheran and Calvinist Reform which resents the *Book of Esther*, as has already been said, denounced especially its immorality. Over the centuries, the perfume of the harem given off by the text, a scabrous place for a Biblical heroine where it is not easy to respect the Law of Moses (without mentioning simple morals) was blamed. Moreover early on the means of seduction by which Esther achieved her ends was pointed out, and more generally the duplicity and inclination towards ruse which united her with Mor’dcai. Finally, the ferocity of the Jews who escape the massacre for which they had been promised only to exterminate their enemies in turn, showing a taste for vengeance that forms a paradox when compared with the notion of charity and pardon at the heart of the message of the New Testament, was appropriate to broach, in Christian feelings, the didactic value of the text, even its sacred nature. Discussing Esther, the Jesuit Nicolas CAUSSIN (1583-1651) tried to excuse the heroine in his work published many times between 1624 and 1765, *La Cour sainte ou l’instruction chrétienne des grands...* by pointing out that she “still held much of the old testament in the search for enemies of her nation, & in the vengeance that she had carried out everywhere over those who had sworn her ruin.” (vol. II, 1653 edition, p. 192). In his *Esther* Racine largely avoids the final massacre, equally contrary to the spirit of charity as to the *decorum* which reigned over theatre according to its classical conception.

⁸ For the admirable tapestry series at the cathedral of Saragossa (c. 1490), see DELMARCEL, 1999, p. 59 *et s.*

and of a second, instrument of divine wish and of Providence).⁹ We will see that the first tapestry set woven from Jean-François de Troy's cartoons would be used at Versailles during the 1740s to decorate the apartments of the two successive wives of the Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand. Two other series of prints forming part of the mannerist aesthetic (and frequently differentiated by their rather peculiar iconography) should be mentioned: one, from the Netherlands, by Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574), was engraved in 8 plates by Phillip Galle at the beginning of the 1560s and the other, slightly later, was engraved in six plates by Denys de Mathonière after drawings by Antoine Caron (1521-1599).¹⁰ In the French set especially, the representation of the final massacre which sees the Jews exterminating their enemies can be found, a subject that obviously resonated especially with the climate of the Religious wars during Caron's time (but which de Troy refrained from treating, probably because it would have constituted a sinister conclusion for a decorative cycle).

The isolated scenes which most frequently received the favour of artists and the public, are in all rather few in number. They are found, almost without exception, in the cycle conceived by de Troy for the Gobelins. They are the *Esther at her Toilet* (probably the rarest of the "successful" scenes), the *Coronation* and *Fainting of Esther*. That is, the two scenes whose impressive frequency in art comes most directly from the association with the iconography of the Virgin crowned and intercessor, as we have seen, of the *Banquet of Esther and Ahasuerus* (generally, the second banquet is shown, the one during which Aman's fate is sealed, we will note that de Troy shows both feasts, dissociating the first, a moment of pure splendour and the second which precipitated the favourite's ruin) and the *Triumph of Mor'decai*. To consider only the French case, art in the age of the Valois dynasty (with especially Antoine Caron's set) and especially of the Bourbons, provided a number of examples whose large quantity discourages counting. The great names of Claude Vignon (*Esther Before Ahasuerus*,¹¹ 1624, Paris, Louvre), Nicolas Poussin (*The Fainting of Esther* or *Esther Before Ahasuerus*, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage, c. 1655) Charles Lebrun (who produced several versions – lost – of the *Fainting* and also, in 1689, the frontispiece to the original edition of Racine's *Esther* engraved by Sébastien Leclerc), Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet (*Esther Before Ahasuerus*, before 1675, Bourg-en-Bresse, musée de Brou and another version created in 1688, long lost), and above all Antoine Coypel, author before 1697, of a *Fainting of Esther* (Paris, Louvre), given to Louis XIV and converted around 1717-18 into a tapestry cartoon (Cambrai, Museum) to serve as a model for the Gobelins which at the beginning of the century wove a set of seven tapestries – all after compositions by Coypel – representing various scenes of the Old Testament. These works constitute many milestones leading towards Jean-François de Troy and his ambitious series which proceeds not only

⁹ The six *cassone* panels are dispersed among several major French and international museums. See for example, E. De BOISSARD, 1988, n° 43.

¹⁰ On the cycle after Heemskerck see I. VELDMAN, 1993, p. 132-137 (n°151-158) and for the one after Caron, see, most recently, J. EHRMANN, 1984 and 1986, p. 216-217.

¹¹ The Louvre painting is sometimes considered incorrectly to represent *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*.

from this rich iconographical tradition,¹² but even more from a cultural climate specific to France whose touchstone is an atypical play by Racine which encountered overwhelming success.

Racine's *Esther* (1689)

Used already in the mysteries of the middle ages, this *essentially* dramatic text, as the story of Esther can be described, was the subject of countless theatrical adaptations in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. France did not escape this general craze for a tale that was apt to entertain the public of Renaissance and Baroque Europe, which was always fond of twists and turns, terrible killings and exotic festivities. The biblical origin of the subject allowed, moreover the educational and didactic value of these works to be opposed to the most scrupulous of censors, who were always ready to denounce the exposition of the *Scriptures* on the impure theatrical stage. From D'André de Riveaudau (*Aman tragédie sainte*, 1566) to Pierre Matthieu, author of an *Esther*, of a *Vashti* and of an *Aman* (1585-1589), from the Huguenot playwright and economist, Antoine de Montchrestien (who published, amongst others, an *Aman ou la vanité* in 1601) to Pierre du Ryer and Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin who composed, a tragedy (1644) and an epic poem (1673) inspired by Esther, we see that the route that leads to the classicizing distinction of Racine is not deserted. We know that his *Esther* (the same applies to his *Athalie*) is a commissioned work ordered by M^{me} de Maintenon for her protégés at Saint-Cyr. Racine who had given up his playwright's career since *Phèdre* (1677) to devote himself to his task as Louis XIV's historiographer, was thus recalled to the theatre to compose an atypical work. Played, including the masculine roles, and for good reason, by young amateur actresses, his play, where song (Jean-Baptiste Moreau composed the music for it) mingled with declamation, was a triumph. Despite the efforts of moralists who, on the basis of principle, contested the legitimacy of a "religious theatre" (which many considered a monstrous oxymoron which in addition, exposed the young performers to many a peril...) and of the irregularity of a play that only had three acts and which respected neither time, nor unity of place, the court became infatuated with a performance which could only be attended by favour and which was presented with surprising luxury (Jean Berain designed the stage sets as well as the "à la persane" costumes which streamed with precious stones the king having lent pearls and gems which he had himself worn at ballets in the past).¹³ Where we see that Racine's *Esther* is not only one of the sources of de Troy's series but was a precursor to its exuberant oriental

¹² This tradition no more began with de Troy than it ended with him. In particular, the cycle of five large canvases (1753-1763) painted by Jean Restout for the *Feuillants* of the rue Saint-Honoré which owes much to the compositions of his predecessor, should be recalled. For more on this partly lost group, which was rather badly received by critics, see Chr. GOUZI, 2000, p. 123-125, 296, 300-301, 309-310, 315-316.

¹³ For more on the premiere of *Esther* see H. LYONNET, 1924, pl 176 *et s.* and especially, p. 185 *et s.*

splendour. For a long time the monopoly of Saint-Cyr, the play was finally included in the repertoire of the actors of the Théâtre-Français and performed in Paris. The work and its subject remained very popular during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI¹⁴ despite Voltaire's sarcasm, who claimed that the prestige of *Esther* had greatly diminished since the reprise of 1721 which had been rather coldly received by the public. Nevertheless Voltaire had to accept the literary superiority of Racine despite the weakness of the dramatic argument of the play drawn on a text whose stupidity he did not neglect to criticise. "*The impartial public saw only an adventure without interest and without verisimilitude; a foolish king who has spent six months with his wife without knowing, without informing himself even, who she is, a minister who is ridiculously barbarous enough to ask the king to exterminate an entire nation, the old, women, children, because they do not show him respect; this same minister stupid enough to give the order to kill all the Jews in eleven months, in order to give them apparently the time to escape or to defend themselves; an imbecilic king who, without any pretext, signs this ridiculous order, and who without pretext, suddenly has his favourite hanged: all of this without any intrigue, without action, without interest, displeased anyone who had sense and taste. But, despite the defective subject, thirty verses of Esther are worth more than many tragedies which have enjoyed great success*"¹⁵

Jean-François de Troy's cycle was to remain, for posterity, connected to Racine's play which had contributed so much to imposing the theme of *Esther* in the French cultural world. In 1918, for the reprise of *Esther* at the Théâtre Français, the stage setting was to use, reproduced in the form of painted canvases, several tapestries of the Gobelins set.

The origin of the Esther tapestry set by Jean-François de Troy – origin and creation of a masterpiece

According to the evidence of one of the artist's early biographers, the chevalier de Valory, author of a posthumous elegy of the master, read at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture on 6 February 1762, it was apparently due to early¹⁶ rivalry with François Lemoyne (1688-1737), his younger colleague who had precisely just been appointed First Painter to the King in 1736, that had encouraged François de Troy to seek a commission allowing him to show off his ease and his promptitude at the expense of a rival who was notoriously laborious: "*M. De Troy, retaining some resentment of the kind of disadvantage which he believed to have suffered compared with his emulator looked to regain some territory by making use of the facility his rival did not possess. M. Lemoyne was excessively long in the creation of his works,*

¹⁴ The *Œuvres mêlées* of an emulator of Racine, the Abbé Augustin NADAL thus include an *Esther. Divertissement spiritual* which is exactly contemporary with Jean François de Troy's cycle since it was performed in 1735 and published in Paris three years later.

¹⁵ *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, 1751, 1785 ed., p. 96-97 for French ed.

¹⁶ Lemoyne and de Troy had been obliged to share the First Prize in the competition organised in 1727 between the most prominent history painters of the Académie Royale.

and M. De Troy of a rare celerity: consequently, with this particular talent, the latter offered to the court to make paintings appropriate to be executed at the Gobelins Factory; and it is to this circumstance that we owe the beautiful series of the Story of Esther, which would be sufficient alone to give him a great reputation.”¹⁷ Beyond the suspicion inspired by the *topos*, which still constitutes, more or less, a tale of rivalries between artists in ancient literature, there is probably some truth in what Valory reports although A.-J. Dezalier d’Argenville (who indicates rather spitefully that de Troy did not hesitate to “cut prices” to impose himself, benefitting from the productivity assured by the unlikely rapidity of his brush)¹⁸ proves to be more evasive: “As he looked to busy himself, he had offered to make the paintings that serve as models for the King’s tapestries cheaply: which did not please his colleagues. He was given a choice of two tapestry series to be made and he took the Story of Esther and that of Jason”.¹⁹ Whether or not the choice was actually left to de Troy (which would appear rather casual on the royal administration’s part all the same), it seems likely that the artist, whose contemporaries extol his “fire”, as the faculty of invention was then called, must have ardently aspired to the possibility of using on a very large scale the “creative genius” with which Dezallier d’Argenville credits him. The decoration of the *private apartments*, the fashion for which Louis XV had promoted at Versailles and Fontainebleau, offered little opportunity to excel in this area. Other than painting for altarpieces, only tapestries could allow comparison with Lemoyne who had been granted – unfortunately for him – a major decoration: the enormous ceiling of the *Hercules Room* at Versailles. Favoured by the recent improvement in France’s financial situation, the revival of patronage offered de Troy a commission fitting for him, in a field in which, however, he had hardly any experience. Anxious to renew the repertoire of models available to the Gobelins factory, the Duc d’Antin, surintendant des Bâtiments du roi from 1708 to 1736 followed by his successor, Philibert Orry comte de Vignory, gave him the task of producing seven large cartoons inspired by the *Book of Esther* corresponding to the brilliant sketches or *modelli* which de Troy had produced in one go, or almost (very few preparatory drawings can in fact be linked to the Esther cycle and all seem to be at the execution stage of the cartoons).²⁰ Subjected to the approval of the Administration des Bâtiments according to the procedure in use for projects being planned for the Gobelins, sketches made rapidly during 1736 were approved and the project launched immediately. Thereupon came the news of François Lemoyne’s death, who, ground down by work and a victim of his private torment, committed suicide on 4 June 1737. Against all expectations, de Troy did not replace his rival in the position of First Painter (which remained vacant until the appointment of

¹⁷ *Mémoires...*, pub. L. DUSSIEUX *et al.*, 1854, II, p.265.

¹⁸ The fact that de Troy, at the risk of falling out with his colleagues, did not hesitate to make use of prices in order to convince the new directeur des Bâtiments Philibert Orry, is confirmed by Mariette who adds tersely “it caused much shouting” (pub. 1851-1860, II, p. 103).

¹⁹ *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres...*, ed. 1762, IV, p. 368-369

²⁰ Early comments on the painter are inclined to present him as a kind of “pure painter”, doing without the medium of drawing, a few intermediary studies between the Esther sketches and the large cartoons at the Louvre nevertheless show that de Troy used red chalk (see in the catalogue, the notice for the *Meal of Esther and Ahasuerus* under the entry *drawing*) to change one or other figure.

Charles Coypel in January 1747), which would perhaps have made him too obviously the beneficiary of the drama. The awarding of the position of Director of the French Academy in Rome came to console him while he had already produced (or he was in the process of finishing), in Paris, three of the seven cartoons of the cycle (*The Fainting of Esther* finished in 1737 and the *Toilet* and *Coronation of Esther*, both finished in 1738). De Troy, we can see, did not follow the order of the narrative but began with the subjects which apparently offered the least difficulty because he had already depicted them, or because they fall into a strong pictorial tradition (such is the case especially for the *Fainting of Esther*). He had hardly settled at the Palazzo Mancini in August 1738, when his first task which awaited the new director of the French Academy naturally consisted of honouring the royal commission and finishing without delay the final cartoons of the *Story of Esther* after the sketches he must have taken with him. As prompt as ever, de Troy discharged himself of the execution of the four remaining cartoons in only two years, by beginning with the largest format which allowed him to strike the imagination and to impose himself as soon as he arrived on the Roman stage: the *Triumph of Mor'decai* which was finished in 1739 (like *Esther's Banquet*). The following year, the *Mor'decai's Disdain* and *The Sentencing of Haman* were brought to an end in the same Neo-Venetian style, obviously tributary to Veronese with its choice of "open" monumental architecture which is characteristic of the entire cycle.²¹ The series, it should be noted, was almost augmented with some additional scenes in the mid 1740s. Indeed, the first tapestry set finished at the Gobelins in 1744 proved to be unsuitable for the arrangement of the Dauphine's apartments at Versailles for which it had been intended to decorate the walls the following year (cf *infra*). Informed of this, de Troy, considering that the story of Esther offered "several good subjects," immediately offered to illustrate one or new subject among those "which could appear to be the most interesting". The directeur des Bâtiments Orry, who managed the State's accounts, obviously judged it less costly to have one of the tapestries widened to fill in the end of the Dauphine's bedroom,²² which has probably deprived us of very original compositions, because de Troy had already illustrated the most famous themes, those that benefitted from a strongly established iconographical tradition and from which it was not easy to deviate.²³

²¹ De Troy seems to have been perfectly conscious of the fact that he was comparing himself with the famous Venetian painter. The Président CHARLES DE BROSSES ridiculed the artist's conceit who knew "no artist above Veronese, if not himself" (letter sent from Rome in 1739 published in *Le Président de Brosses. Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740*, pub. 1858, II, p. 231).

²² C. GASTINEL-COURAL, exh. cat. Paris, 1985, p. 10

²³ Before 1740, a writer, Louis PETIT DE BACHAUMONT (1690-1771) had rightly suggested to de Troy, using the ploy of a letter written by Racine from the Elysian Fields, of other extremely rare (and in cases never depicted) subjects drawn from the *Book of Esther* in art: *Ahasuerus consulting the soothsayers*, *The Annals Being Read to Ahasuerus*, *The Torment of Haman*. On this attempt by art criticism still in its infancy to influence artistic production see Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, p. 99-100.

A Resolutely Painterly Aesthetic

We will not be fooled too much by Valory's comments which attributed²⁴ to Jean-François de Troy's late sojourn in Rome, the autumn (or rather winter) flourishing of an artist who apparently felt "*the fire that the dissipation of life in Paris had weakened*" reignited inside. The beneficial effect of Rome and "of the masterpieces with which this city is adorned" on the young painters and more rarely, like here, hoary ones is undoubtedly one of the most powerful *topoi* of European artistic literature during the early modern period. It is possible that the four Roman cartoons possess amplexness, a frankness of colour which are rather lacking in the Parisian cartoons, but it would be wrong to want to recognize in them a "classicising" orientation on the part of a de Troy weaned in Rome from Rococo affectations. What is striking on the contrary is the homogeneity of a cycle whose character remains fundamentally French and even more characteristic of history painting under Louis XV, a sort of amiable description of the grand manner of the age of Louis XIV. It is equally remarkable that the cartoons as a group show few differences with the sketches which establish almost definitively, *ne varietur*, the representation of the various scenes. In addition, hardly any *pentimenti* have been noticed in the large paintings when they were x-rayed.²⁵ Between the *modelli* stage and that of the enlargement onto the monumental dimensions of the cartoon, de Troy seems not to have made any notable efforts to adapt his compositions to their final destination: tapestry. Against the specificities of a medium which should have led him to favour a narrow range of colour, to opt for a certain stylisation and very simplified articulation of the planes, he preferred on the contrary, the shimmer of rich colouring, multiplied the picturesque details and effects of depth, undertook to explore the *affetti* of the protagonists (less than his contemporaries would probably have liked, see the entry on the *Fainting of Esther*), working resolutely as a painter rather than as a *cartoon maker*. Although the tapestry cycle of the *Story of Esther* had been the first commission received by an "inexperienced" artist of over 55 years, this stance probably should probably be attributed less to ignorance of the requirements of the art of tapestry, a rather new domain for him, than to that of the spirit of the age. One of the fundamental propensities of the 18th century relating to the history of tapestry consisted in fact, like never before, of making the weaver's art reach towards that of the painter. One of the great craftsmen of this dynamic was certainly Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) who was asked (in the absence of the cartoons' author who had already left for Rome) to supervise the weaving of the *Story of Esther* at the Gobelins. In a famous letter to Lenormand de Tournehem (11 May 1748) who had succeeded Orry at the direction des Bâtiments in 1745, Oudry relates how the weaving after de Troy constituted "*the striking proof of [his] successes on this occasion. These successes were due especially to the pliability among the workers at the time, and the perfect appeasement with which their leaders were willing to submit themselves to the application of the true state of the art, and to give their works all the spirit and all the intelligence of the paintings, in which alone resides the*

²⁴ *Mémoires...*, pub. L. DUSSIEUX *et al.*, 1854, II, p. 267.

²⁵ BERGEON, exh. cat. PARIS, 1985, p. 15.

secret of making tapestries of the greatest beauty."²⁶ An idyllic tale. Extended to all the areas of the Gobelins' activities in 1748, Oudry's control, who supervised the weaving of the *Story of Esther* tapestries after the *editio princeps* had been completed in 1744, soon aroused increased resistance and the contestation of the workshop leaders, Audran, Cozette and Monmerqué who he pushed (the term is limp): "*to imitate the effects of oil painting*". There is no doubt, when the composition and colours of the sketches and the cartoons by Jean-François de Troy, are considered, that he had not fully agreed with the position of his colleague who did not have enough disdain for the "colours of tapestry" which seemed to him to be a something raw ("*savage*") and like an "*annoying flickering of acrid and discordant colours... substituted for the great brilliance and harmony which give these works their charm.*" Oudry, as administrator and above all as a painter, on the contrary, had at heart serving at best the new models supplied to the Gobelins and Beauvais factories by artists (in this case by de Troy and himself), who had been left, if he is to be believed: "*on the so-called reasons of manufacture... in the pain and discouragement of seeing made their works with the most humiliating non-values for them.*" The result was stunning ... but fleeting. It soon appeared that the tapestries were ageing at an accelerated rate and that Colbert almost a century earlier had not banished without reason the "*petits teins*" which allowed shades of remarkable subtlety to be multiplied in a tapestry, but gravely reduced their sustainability. Their colours paled irremediably. It is striking to note that the *Esther* cycle, which in some respects marks the culmination of the assimilation of tapestry with painting (an assimilation that is noticeable as far as the *Story of Esther's* border imitating a golden sculpted frame which Pierre-Josse Perrot had conceived in 1738, see *infra*), finally led to a deadlock which 18th century chemistry and colour production made intractable.

Reception of the Cycle by Contemporaries

Hardly any contemporary testimonials relating to the sketches, which remained inconspicuous, are known. However, we do know that the large cartoons of the *Coronation* and the *Toilet* were very favourably received by the public at the Salon of 1738 if the *Mercur de France* of October 1738 (p. 2182) is to be believed. The abbot Desfontaines (*Observations sur les écrits modernes*) confirms this "*We admired the expression of Antiquity and the true taste for History in the Esther at her Toilet, & even more in the great painting of the Coronation of this queen, excellent works by Mr. de Troy*". The abbot who had not feared comparing, in a rather paradoxical manner, the harmony and art of the composition manifested by de Troy and those of Charles Lebrun regarding two cartoons (*The Triumph of Mor'decai* and *Banquet of Esther and Ahasuerus*) exhibited at the Salon of 1740 was even more enthusiastic about the two cartoons shown at the Salon of 1742 (*Mor'decai's Disdain* and *The Sentencing of Haman*): "*What beautiful composition, what ingenious arrangement what noble architecture in the two paintings by Mr. de Troy representing the Esther*

²⁶ A. L. LACORDAIRE, 1853, P. 92-94.

series".²⁷ At the very most the critics raised at the court by Esther's stance in the painting of the *Fainting* for reasons which we still discuss in the entry on the preparatory sketch (cf. *infra*). An equally demanding connoisseur, but so much more competent, Pierre-Jean Mariette, shows some embarrassment before the paintings of a simple "practitioner" which he judges to be defective in their details because they sin against the rules of art relating to correct drawing and expression, but which do not finish any the less by carrying off adherence because an unstoppable charm emanates from them. The passage deserves to be cited: "Everything in it was made from practice, but the compositions were extremely rich and made to please. One was happier with the paintings of Esther [than with those of the Story of Jason, the second tapestry set commissioned from de Troy for the Gobelins in 1742] and one was right. He does not pare them down: they swarm with faults, and with that one is forced to admire them. That one says that Mr. de Troy is cowardly in his drawing, that he does not know what expression is, that his figures are often something ignominious, we would agree, and one would ask who is the painter who has put greater richness in his compositions who has had a more flattering brush and who has made his paintings sharper by certain effects which are his own. One would not name many who are greater than him."²⁸

One of the most troubling aspects of the judgments made by his contemporaries about Jean-François de Troy's models concerns undoubtedly the historical and "ethnographical" precision with which the artist was credited. The climate of Oriental magic which characterizes the series is of course very far from our vision of ancient Persia, fed by oriental archaeology which only truly took off in the 19th century. The evocation of Susa thus appears to us entirely consistent with his use of a backdrop formed by composite architecture which combines "classical" elements evocating palatial architecture of the Renaissance or of the 17th century and other more meaningful ones such as the spiral columns which immediately recalled in the imagination of the time those of the temple of Solomon (these columns are also called "of Salomon") and by extension the Old Testament. A disciple of Jean-François de Troy, Michel-François Dandré-Bardon in his publication, *Costumes des anciens peuples* (1772-74) believed it judicious to isolate several details drawn from the *story of Esther* (see catalogue/prints) in order to illustrate the habits, fashions, hairstyles of the ancient Persians in engravings which today amuse. It would be wrong however, to see in the series only the fruit of fantasy and caprice. To contravene willingly the rules of academism, de Troy was none the less moulded by them. As a good "painter historian" he applied himself, not only to remaining faithful to the scriptural source he was illustrating, which was already specific to a scrupulous history painter, but again, he displayed "erudite" architectural details in his compositions such as *triclinia*, a sort of bench on which the guests are placed in the two banquet scenes, furniture which Lemaître de Sacy had described in his translation of the Bible.

²⁷ T. XIV, 1738, letter 202, p. 302 and t. XXIX, 1742, letter 435, p. 354.

²⁸ Ed. 1851-1860, II, p. 103-104.

The Tapestry Set of the Story of Esther

Placed on the tapestry looms of the Gobelins at the end of the 1730s in Michel Audran's workshop, the cycle created by de Troy aroused true infatuation. The few hundred tapestries made between 1738 and 1797 – all in high-warp tapestry and woven in wool and silk except for four in low-warp made in Neilson's workshop – show the impressive success of a tapestry set that was without any doubt the most frequently woven of the 18th century in France.²⁹ Only three cartoons had been delivered by de Troy in 1738 when the first tapestry set was begun by Audran under the expert eye of Jean-Baptiste Oudry to whom the Directeur général des bâtiments, Philibert Orry had assigned the (weekly) supervision of the weaving. During the summer of 1738, the piece of the *Fainting of Esther*, which Oudry judged to be admirable, was finished. During the winter of 1742, Oudry informed Orry that about two ells of the *Triumph of Mor'decai* had been made "with no faults", that the *Coronation of Esther* was finished and that the *Esther at her Toilet* "a very gracious tapestry" was "a little over half" finished. Exhibited at Versailles in 1743, these two last pieces were admired by Louis XV and the Court. On 3 December 1744, the set of seven tapestries was finally delivered to the Garde Meuble. It was intended, the honour was not slight, to decorate the apartments of the Infanta Maria Teresa Rafaela of Spain whose marriage to the young Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand had been fixed for the following year (it took place on 23 February 1745). Apparently it was thought that the theme of Esther the biblical heroine and wife of a foreign sovereign was appropriate for the apartments of the Spanish Dauphine. As early as the month of March, the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel informed de Troy that her *grand cabinet* was decorated with the "Esther tapestry set" specifying however that "for lack of two small or one large piece, we have not been able to decorate the end of the room". This difficulty led immediately to the *Banquet* episode being woven a second time in two parts (they were delivered to the Garde-Meuble on 30 December 1746) to garnish the panels on each side of the bed of the Dauphine who would hardly enjoy them (she died on 22 July 1746 and the decoration was installed for the new Dauphine Maria Josepha of Saxony). The appearance of the set's remarkable border, which imitated a richly sculpted wooden frame, should be mentioned. Conceived in 1738 by the ornamentalist Pierre Josse-Perrot and used in the later weavings until 1768, it tended to reinforce the resolutely painterly appearance of the tapestry set which, in this regard, pushed the art of tapestry as far as its ultimate mimetic possibilities. With the exception of *Mor'decai's Disdain* which had been removed earlier, the "*editio princeps*" of the *story of Esther* (from then on in nine pieces) remained at Versailles until the Revolution. Of the eight surviving tapestries, four are at the chateau of Compiègne and four belong today to the Mobilier National. No less than seven tapestry sets reputed to be complete (one of them in fact only had six tapestries) would be produced officially at the Gobelins up to 1772.

²⁹ For more on this, the following articles should be referred to C. GASTINEL-COURAL (cat. exp. PARIS, 1985, p. 9-13) as well as the article by J. VITTET, exh. cat. LA ROCHE-GUYON, 2001, p. 51-55.

The second set was placed on the looms as early as 1742 in the workshop of Matthieu Monmerqué under the supervision of a still intractable Oudry (he did not hesitate to have a defective sleeve of one of the figures of the *Fainting of Esther* undone, the first tapestry of the second set to be woven). Finished in 1751, the wools and silks used for the weaving were however revealed to be of inferior quality, which prevented its use during the 18th century. It is today at the Mobilier National. The third set was placed on the looms in 1744 in Audran's workshop. Finished in March 1750, it was immediately sold to the Duke of Parma, Louis XV's son-in-law. It is today in Florence, at the Palazzo Pitti and the Galleria dell'Accademia.³⁰ The fourth was begun in 1746 by the workshop of Montmerqué who died the following year, leaving it to be finished by his successor Pierre-François Cozette, which was done in 1754. As early as 1753, it had been selected to decorate the bedroom of Madame Adélaïde, a daughter of Louis XV at Versailles. The six surviving tapestries belong to the Mobilier National. In December 1752 the tireless Oudry wrote to the new directeur général des Bâtiments, M. de Vandières, about the state of the large cartoons which the "seven paintings of Mr de Troy of the Story of Esther [are] as beautiful and fresh as if they had just come from the artist's hands; they are in a state to bear not only one weaving but even more than ten [because] the elements which are taken before they are mounted place the paintings under cover from their degradations (...)" adding "the paintings of the Esther tapestry set are among the most magnificent which have been made at the Gobelins and the most suitable for the uses the King wishes to make of them, either to be woven or to make gifts equally for their composition, richness and their grace". On 5 January 1753, Vandières, anxious to keep the weavers of the Gobelins busy, took "the decision to order a new set of the Story of Esther so that the vertical loom does not lack in work". Audran's workshops acquitted themselves of the task in 1756. This fifth set served in 1763 for the apartments of the Dauphine Maria Josepha of Saxony at Fontainebleau. The *Coronation* tapestry was given in 1768 to the King of Denmark (the *Coronation* episode of the eighth set replaced the missing tapestry). Three pieces of this fifth set are at the chateau of Compiègne and four at the Mobilier National. The Marquis de Marigny, directeur général des Bâtiments ordered the sixth set following a suggestion by the factory's director Jacques-Germain Soufflot, in May 1756. The workshops of Audran and Cozette completed it in 1760.³¹ The penury of new cartoons during the Seven Years War led Soufflot to suggest a seventh weaving in June 1758, again in March 1759. Marigny, having given his agreement, the same workshops finished it in 1764 (except for the *Triumph* which was not finished until 1767, after a break). These two sets served as gifts to foreign diplomats (such as the prince de Starhemberg, Austrian Ambassador) or to great figures such as the Vice-Chancellor René-Charles de Maupeou.³² Five tapestries from the eighth set placed on the looms in 1763 were given in the King's name by the Duc de Duras to the King of Denmark who visited the Gobelins on 29 October 1768. To the five tapestries which had just been woven, the *Triumph* of the seventh set and the *Coronation* of the fifth were added. This expensive present perished in the fire at Christianborg Castle in Copenhagen in 1794.

Despite the profound aesthetic renewal itowards a more and more dominant neoclassicism, the Gobelins workshops actively continued weaving the *Story of Esther* series between 1679 and 1797. It was however from then on given a new border adorned with a leafy and flowery frame and heavy cartouches at the corners, by the painter Maurice Jacques (the cartoons for the border are

³⁰ For interesting details about this set sent to Italy and the actual scenographic arrangements which were conceived to show it off, see J. VITTET, 2001, p. 52.

³¹ It is notable that Marigny resolved, during the sixth weaving, to have the paintings of the Story of Ester engraved by Laurent Cars and that he wrote to Belle, who was the guardian of the paintings, in order for him to facilitate, by all possible means, the engraver's task. The project was finally aborted.

³² The Hermitage in St. Petersburg conserves five tapestries of these two royal gifts whose provenance still awaits elucidation (as far as we are aware). In 1766, the Grand Marshal of Russia, Count Razumovski (or Razamowski), acquired the *Fainting* and the *Banquet* extracted from the sixth weaving (J. VITTET, 2001, p. 53).

conserved at the Mobilier National). More than forty weavings with this border executed in high-warp by the Audran and Cozette workshops are known. These sets served especially as gifts.

In 1774, the Grand Almoner of France, La Roche-Aymon thus received four tapestries from Audran's workshop which were bought back three years later, on the prelate's death by a tapestry weaver, who sold them on to the irritable employer of Mozart, the archbishop of Salzburg, Colloredo-Waldsee. He completed the series by acquiring two tapestries from the Gobelins. The series is now at the Palazzo Pitti, in Florence. In 1776, the directeur général des Bâtiments, the comte d'Angivillers awarded Vien a set of four tapestries (woven in the workshops of Audran and Cozette between 1771 and 1775 it was formed by the *Toilet*, the *Disdain*, the *Fainting* and the *Triumph*) intended for the throne room of the Palazzo Mancini which at the time housed the French Academy in Rome. In 1777, they aroused the admiration of the future Interior Minister Roland de la Platière who considered them to be much greater than anything which could be produced at the time by the Turin factory: "*I had just seen in Rome the Story of Ahasuerus and Esther, lately sent to the French Academy. What a difference in the gradation of shades, in the mellowness of the draperies, in the liveliness of fleshtones, in the vigorous effect of the various parts of the ensemble.*"³³ This final tapestry set never left the Academy's collections. The final gift from the monarchy, a complete set (woven between 1770 and 1786) was offered to Marie-Antoinette's sister, the Archduchess Maria-Christina, Regent of the Austrian Netherlands and to her husband Prince Albert of Saxony, Duke of Teschen who visited Paris in 1786.³⁴

It was the Revolution that ended the production of a tapestry series considered to offer "*a theme contrary to Republican morals*".³⁵ The Jury of the Arts set up by the Committee of Public Safety finally put an end to the weaving in September 1794 (except for a tapestry of the *Toilet* which was almost finished). The Jury responsible for dividing up the royal collections between the Musée Central des Arts and the Musée Spécial de l'École Française, decided nevertheless, on 17 ventôse an VI (7 March 1798) to keep the cartoons in storage (however so radically opposed, in their style, to the taste that was now dominant) for the Gobelins factory.³⁶

The Directoire sold eight tapestries made between 1775 and 1789 to repay its debts to a grain merchant and "supplier to the Republic" well known to art historians, Jacques de Chapeaurouge from Geneva. Bought by the King of England, George IV in 1825, they are currently at Windsor Castle. The other tapestries with the second border left at the Gobelins were distributed among various palaces of the Republic and for the majority belong to the Mobilier National (such is the case of four tapestries from a set woven by Cozette and Audran between 1781 and 1787 which was used under the Consulate to decorate the chateau of Saint-Cloud or the three tapestries made available in 1800 to Cambacérès -- who was Consul at the time -- to furnish the Hotel d'Elbeuf). This is also the case for the three tapestries allocated in 1804 for the use of the Minister for War and kept at the former hotel de Doudeville, currently the Italian Embassy in Paris. C. GASTINEL-COURAL noted that Napoleon himself had a set placed in the throne room at the Tuileries (the borders with the arms of France having been removed previously, then reentered) which can be seen in Goubaut's painting *The Deputation of the Roman Senate offering its homage*

³³ Lettres écrites de Suisse, d'Italie..., quoted by J. VITTET, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³⁴ The tapestry set remained in the hands of a branch of the Hapsburg-Lorraine family until 1933 (*ibid.* P. 54).

³⁵ Quoted by Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, p. 97, note 269.

³⁶ Y. CANTAREL-BESSON, 1992, p. 241.

to *Napoleon I at the Tuileries on 16 November 1811* (Versailles, chateau) where two pieces can be recognized. This decor remained in place until 1822.³⁷

The weavings for the King's service which we have just discussed should be distinguished from those made on order for individuals. A set of four pieces (comprising the *Toilet*, the *Coronation*, the *Disdain*, the *Triumph*) was thus made – unusually – in the horizontal loom workshop of Jacques Neilson for Lord Foley who intended it for the drawing room of his London residence. This commission from a foreign connoisseur was especially welcome while the Factory languished, the victim of the ruinous Seven Years War (Soufflot who had hoped to see the affair concluded did not hide his relief in a letter to Marigny in July 1761). The use of tracings, thus avoiding cutting the cartoons into bands, enabled the execution on horizontal looms, the tilting mechanism created by Vaucanson (1757) allowing better control of the weaving. Maurice Jacques had repainted his border models and it is probably for this commission which was carried out between 1761 and 1765 that the Inspector of the Gobelins, the painter Clément Belle, enlarged the *Disdain* tapestry. Foley's set then passed to the collections of Alfred de Rothschild at Halton Castle (England). The second order from a private individual, dating to 1767, came from Louise-Elisabeth de La Rochefoucauld, duchesse d'Enville who intended the set for the decoration of the salon of her Château de La Roche-Guyon. Made up of four tapestries (The *Esther at her Toilet*, the *Coronation*, *Mor'decai's Disdain* and the *Sentencing of Haman*), it was the fruit of the collaboration of the Audran and Cozette workshops and cost 16,000 livres. Now back at la Roche-Guyon (the Conseil Général of the Val d'Oise had the good idea of acquiring them at the sale of the couturier K. Lagerfeld [Christie's Monaco, April 2000, lot 50] after their sale by the heirs of the Duchesse d'Enville in December 1987), the four tapestries were ordered without any border so as to be integrated precisely in the salon's décor. In the same "made to measure" logic, Clément Belle increased the left side of the *Toilette* which is dated 1769.³⁸

Conclusion

The dispersal of Jean-François de Troy's work, the fact that a large number of his best paintings have gone to enrich, as time went by, great collections abroad have contributed to making a painter who should be included in the top rank of French painters of the 18th century along with Boucher, Greuze and Fragonard, underrated by the public. Contemporaries whose judgment was the most sure, when they happened to fault some aspects of his art (his lack of "correct" drawing, the usual ransom of "fire", and the insufficient tribute that the painter paid to ancient models), held de Troy to be one of the best artists of the time. They agreed in considering the seven compositions of the Esther tapestry set as one of the pinnacles of his work. The Comte de Caylus (a model of the

³⁷ Exh cat. PARIS, 1985, p. 13.

³⁸ S. PITIOT, 2001, p. 49.

“*anticomane*”, a supporter of a return to the ancient that would lead to a form of neoclassicism that was paradoxical to the art of Jean-François de Troy) lauded the artist thus: “happy in invention, magnificent in composition,” considering the Esther cycle as “the most beautiful and most complete of those works he has left us”.³⁹ The superficiality and frivolity of history painting during the reign of Louis XV have often been discussed. The first task of these artists was assuredly to entertain and please; the Esther series indicates that de Troy worked to seduce with an ambitious work, which he knew would have to be submitted to the most varied of publics, the most difficult, if not the best educated about art: the Court.

Despite the Biblical origin of the theme, the undeniable fidelity of the artist to scriptural sources and the link that the cycle maintains with the flamboyant masterpiece of religious theatre that is Racine’s *Story of Esther* which appears above all as a cruel Oriental tale to the detriment of the acerbity of the *Book of Esther*, whose religiosity wends a way through an iridescent rococo *Turquerie* with difficulty.

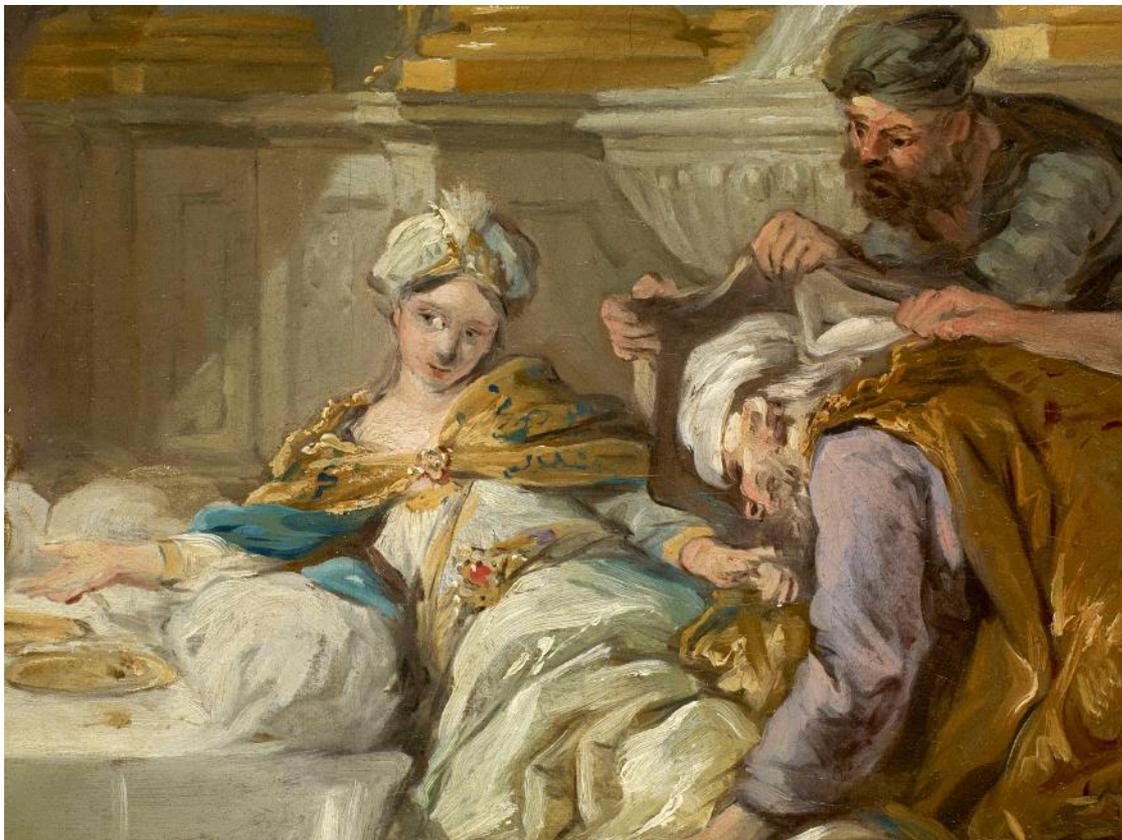
On the occasion of the restoration of the seven cartoons and when they were reunited at the Louvre in 1982, M.-C. Sahut who organised in 1985 an exhibition of the large paintings at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, although she pointed out the anecdotal superficiality of the cycle, immediately emphasized the merits of a series “*treated with an exceptional brio [which] counts among the best productions of this frivolous aesthetic which is aimed more at the senses than at the mind and which would experience the initial symptoms of the reaction a decade later (...)*”⁴⁰ Certainly the cycle appears, in many ways, to be indebted to the formidable infatuation of the 18th century for an Orient that is both “acclimatized” to French taste and sublimated. It participates in this appetite for Oriental exoticism which would prove to be infinitely fertile from a pictorial, musical and literary point of view in Louis XV’s France and throughout Europe of the age. When we consider the *Story of Esther* we sometimes have the feeling of finding ourselves more before King Schariar sought by Sheherazade rather than at the court of Ahasuerus.

It is worth recalling here the immense success in France and then Europe met by the first translation to appear in the West, by Antoine Galant between 1704 and 1717, of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and new editions constantly appeared. The cycle gives no less a political lesson which lacked neither in grandeur nor in depth (and which is perhaps the final justification for this subject for a royal tapestry set). In his *Histoire du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament...* by the sieur de Royaumont, prior of Sombrevail which was one of the pseudonyms of Lemaître de Sacy (published under Louis XIV, (editions of the work appear regularly up to the eve of the Revolution), one can read that Ahasuerus “*from then on did not in any way hold in dishonour to recognize publically that an ambitious Minister had deceived him... He turned his just anger against those who abused so cruelly his power. God showed clearly in this tale that He holds in his hand the heart of Kings & he gives them admirable instruction through this divine book, so that in remembering they are given their*

³⁹ *Vie de Jean-François de Troy peintre d'histoire* (publ. FONTAINE, 1910, p. 30)

⁴⁰ Exh. Cat. PARIS, 1985, p. 5.

right to reign by Heaven, they try themselves to bear the weight of their crown & to see all through their own eyes lest they abandon their authority to those they honour with their confidence, he would find that by abusing like Haman, in order to satisfy their passions & their interests at the expense of justice & the prince's reputation".⁴¹ Perhaps inaccessible to these serious thoughts, the courtiers of Versailles did not perceive in Jean-François de Troy's compositions the reflection (slightly) deformed of the succession of lavish banquets, rapid ascensions of a favourite or a mistress followed by shattering disgrace which constituted the derisory and tragic fabric of Court life.



(detail)

⁴¹ 1764, ed., p. 320.

Details of Provenance of the Sketches during the 18th century

Unlike the sketches for the other tapestry series created by de Troy, *the Story of Jason* (1742-1746), that of Esther did not remain in the artist's possession. Further, they do not appear in the sale that followed his death by some years (Paris, 9 April 1764 and following days, catalogue by Pierre Rémy). They were happily preserved from dispersal by (with one exception the *Triumph of Mor'decai*, which was separated from the others at quite an early date), passing from collector to collector until their sale "en bloc" in June 2011. The first among them, at least undoubtedly so, was François Marcille (1790-1856), himself father of two protagonists in the history of collecting, Eudoxe and Camille Marcille. It is possible however to suspect that the series had previously belonged to one of the eminent figures of connoisseurship and the world of the arts in the second half of the 18th century, Claude-Henri Watelet (1718 - 1786) who read in public at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture the life of Jean-François de Troy written by the chevalier de Valory in February 1762, which is proof of the particular respect he had for the deceased painter. In 1786, A.J. Paillet, called upon as an expert, inventoried on Watelet's death in the library of the Louvre apartment he had occupied : "N° thirty, *Twelve pictures painted sketches on canvas by f. De troy depicting history subjects; Valued Together in the amount of one hundred and sixty livres*" and in a neighbouring room "N° forty nine *Three pictures sketched on canvas history subjects by f. De troy and Restout; valued Together in the amount of sixty livres*".⁴² In the catalogue of the Watelet sale of 12 June 1786, we find (lot n° 33 p. 13), "*Fourteen finished Sketches, painted by de Troy, in different shapes and sizes, they depict subjects from sacred & profane History including several of Esther, & will be divided as appropriate.*"⁴³ As Ch. Leribault points out, the rarity of preparatory sketches in the artist's oeuvre which contrasts with the high number of those which were apparently found in Watelet's home, suggests that the amateur owned the series of *modelli* being discussed here, even if the existence of early copies of these sketches must naturally incite caution.

⁴² Paris, Archives nationales, T 978, 13 January and following days.

⁴³ *Catalogue de tableaux, dessins... provenant du Cabinet de feu M. Watelet.....* prepared by A.J. Paillet, shortly after the collector's death, Paris, 1786. For more about the versatile and at times talented figure that was Watelet, see Fr. ARQUIÉ-BRULEY, 1998 (1999), p. 131-158, Ch. GUICHARD, 2008 and A. MERLE DU BOURG, 2010.

Catalogue

I *The Esther at her Toilet*

Oil on canvas, 57 x 51 cm

Provenance: Painted in 1736 at the same time as the six other *modelli* of the Story of *Esther* intended to be presented, for approval, to the direction des Bâtiments du Roi; perhaps identifiable among a lot of sketches by Jean-François de Troy in the post mortem inventory of the amateur, historian and critic Claude-Henri Watelet (1718-1786) drawn up on 13 January 1786 and following days (A.N. T 978, n° 30) then in the sale of the property of the deceased, Paris, 12 June 1786, n° 33; Paris, François Marcille Collection (who owned a series of six sketches from which the *Triumph of Mor'decai* was missing, see *infra*); Paris, Marcille Sale, Hôtel Drouot, 12-13 January 1857, n° 36; Asnières, M^{me} de Chavanne de Palmassy (?) collection; Paris, Galerie Cailleux; Paris, Humbert de Wendel collection (acquired from the Galerie Cailleux in 1928); by inheritance in the same family; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 61.

In order not to add unnecessarily to the technical commentary on each work, the catalogue raisonné by Chr. Leribault which contains a substantial bibliography on the series should be referred to. The other bibliographical references only concern the publications and exhibitions to have appeared and been presented more recently.

Bibliography and Exhibitions: Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 247 (repr.); E. LIMARDO DATURI, 2004, p. 28; Exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 61 (repr.).

Related Works:

Tapestry cartoon:

The cartoon (oil on canvas, 329 x 320 cm), the third made by the artist in Paris after the sketches had been approved by the direction des Bâtiments, is in the Louvre (Inv. 8315). It previously bore the painter's signature and the date 1738 (inscriptions which are found on the tapestries). The royal administration paid 1600 livres for it on 21 June 1738 and it was exhibited at the Salon in the year of its creation.

Print:

The cartoon was in particular translated partially to a print (several heads, including that of Hegai, and figures, are found in the *Costume des anciens peuples*, second part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774, plates V and VI of the 25th book and VI of the 26th engraved under the supervision of Cochin).⁴⁴ It was above all interpreted, in reverse, by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet who engraved the entire series (431 x 598 mm., 1781, after a drawing by the engraver made in 1777 at the latest).⁴⁵ Completed in 1781, the print depicting the *Toilet* was the first to be completed by Beauvarlet. Later, the lithograph in the same direction as the painting by Turgis (213 x 298 mm.) was the subject of a registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale in 1844.

Tapestry: see above

⁴⁴ A drawing, probably by Dandré-Bardon, related to one of these prints was sold in New York at Sotheby's on 28 January 1998, n° 207 (as Jean-Baptiste Le Prince).

⁴⁵ Chr. LERIBAUT lists a series of copies, obviously after Beauvarlet's print (). See the same publication for a very complete bibliography of the cartoon.

The *Book of Esther* (2; 8-15) is eloquent on the duration of the preparation of the treatments (oils, ointments, balms) given to the young girls, were called to appear before Ahasuerus in order to become the new queen after the repudiation of Vashti. Jean-François de Troy shows respect for the Biblical text by depicting Esther surrounded by her seven maidservants which the Eunuch Hegai, guardian of the women of the harem, allocated to Mor'decai's charge when she presented herself at the Palace. It is moreover the presence of these gracious companions, in the same way as that of a man who can hardly be other than Hegai, which incites us to place this toilet before the first presentation of the young woman to the king, which would lead to her coronation rather than seeing in it the illustration of the moment when Esther dresses magnificently before presenting herself before Ahasuerus in order to save her people (*Est.* 5; 1).⁴⁶ O. Delenda has insisted on the precise symbolism to which the white worn by Esther corresponds and the pearls with which she is being adorned or even the glasses of pure crystal and the mirror which all refer, in common Early Modern European symbolism, to the purity of the young girl.⁴⁷ Compared with some more popular episodes of the *Book of Esther* the toilet scene has a rather modest iconographical tradition. In particular, for the early modern period, one of Rembrandt's last disciples Aert (or Arent) de Gelder (1645-1727) should be mentioned, who treated this theme borrowed from a Biblical book of which he was an especially prolific illustrator, almost a specialist, (one of the best versions, dated 1684 is conserved at Munich's Alte Pinakothek).⁴⁸ Other biblical toilets such as those of Bathsheba and Suzanna were much more often illustrated by artists before and after de Troy. It should be noted in this respect that, contrary to these scenes which usually serve to produce more or less openly erotic images, de Troy proposes a scene that is actually quite chaste, giving less to gallantry than to an Oriental exoticism balanced by western architecture punctuated by ionic columns and adorned with caryatids – or atlantes, at the sketch stage it is hard to be formal – evoking spontaneously in the cartoon the theological virtues (in fact if Charity hardly plays any part in the Story of Esther, the case is very different for Faith and Hope). The admirable *Esther adorning herself to be presented to King Ahasuerus* or *the Esther at her Toilet* by Théodore Chassériau (1841, Louvre), which is undoubtedly the most memorable illustration of the theme in French art, besides de Troy's composition, is both less dressed and much more languid. The composition, skilfully inscribed in a triangle with a broad base, is assuredly one of the most successful of the series and it was recognized early on as such.

⁴⁶ It is incorrectly and against the Biblical text that E. MIMARDO DATURI (2004, p. 28) considers that the *Toilet* should be placed before the *Fainting* (and after the *Coronation* and *The Disdain of Mor'decai*) and not before *The Coronation*, especially because before being crowned, Esther "could not be surrounded by maidservants". Let us agree nevertheless that it is the "second" toilet which appears to have been favoured by artists.

⁴⁷ Exh. cat. PARIS, 1985, p. 8.

⁴⁸ J. W. VON MOLTKE, 1994, n° 27, 28 and 29.



Tapestry, copyright Galerie Chevalier



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet

II *The Coronation of Esther*

Oil on canvas, 56 x 80 cm.

Provenance: See *Esther at her Toilet* for the provenance prior to 2011; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 62.

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 248 (repr.); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 62 (repr).

Related Works:

Sketch:

A second sketch on canvas, an original or a copy of the one catalogued here (?), was in the François Boucher sale with another sketch from the cycle depicting the *Esther Fainting* scene (Paris, 18 February 1771, n° 47). Measuring 55.3 x 81 cm (20 *pouces 6 lignes* high by 30 *pouces* wide), they were acquired for 51 livres by the dealer Jacques Langlier according to the annotated catalogue of the Boucher sale conserved at the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art in Paris (VP 1771/3). They should perhaps be identified with those which were sold in Paris at the beginning of the 1920s (Hôtel Drouot, 13 June 1922). A studio copy, also on canvas (60 x 83 cm.) is at the Beaune Musée des Beaux-Arts (inv. 882). From the gift of Devevey ainé, the sketch entered the museum in 1882.

Tapestry Cartoon:

The large tapestry cartoon (oil on canvas 328 x 470 cm.), the second completed by the artist in Paris after the sketches had been approved by the direction des Bâtiments, bears the painter's signature and the date 1738 lower left, on a seat rung). The royal administration paid 2,250 livres on 30 March 1738 for it and it was exhibited at the Salon in the year of its creation. After being deposited at the chateau of Compiègne, then at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris from 1912 to 1982, the painting is now at the Louvre (Inv. 8213).

Print:

The cartoon was reproduced partially in print (the head of a maidservant is shown, with a variant, in the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774, plate V of the 25th book engraved under the supervision of Cochin). Like the other cartoons of the series, it was above all interpreted in reverse by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet (431 x 597 mm, 1783; after a drawing by the engraver, made in 1775 at the latest).⁴⁹ Of a later date, the lithograph by Turgis in reverse (214 x 295 m.) was the subject of a registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale in 1844.

Tapestry: see above

After several years spent in the women's apartments, Esther is finally presented to Ahasuerus (*Est.* 2; 16-17) who immediately chooses her for his queen, placing the royal crown on her head. A majestic composition supported (like *Mor'decai's Disdain*, in particular) by a palatial architectural decor punctuated with columns, which evokes the monumental décors open to the exterior practiced in great Venetian painting of the *Cinquecento* especially by Veronese, the coronation

⁴⁹ Chr. LERIBAUT lists at least one copy of the cartoon (after Beauvarlet's engraving or Turgis's lithograph?) dating to 1847. Attributed to William Rimer, it is at the Mead Art Institute of Amherst College, Mass., inv. 1973. 91 (2002, n° P. 262). See his monograph for a complete bibliography of the cartoon.

scene, despite its character as a profane spectacle, retains in a residual manner echoes of the ancient comparison with the theme of the coronation of the Virgin. Esther's modest attitude, kneeling with hands crossed over her chest, and in some ways the colour of her garb, both white and blueish, bears this out. Ultimately, this memory of the Coronation of Mary would tend to wither away. In the cartoon, Esther is shown standing in an essentially golden and blue costume. On the balcony, the "Oriental" orchestra, charged through the costume of the musicians and their instruments which are quite atypical (the presence of a cithara should be noted), with giving an exotic touch to a scene whose Persian character, purely artificial and quite allusive, is limited to the protagonists' dress.



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet



(détail)



Tapestry, copyright Galerie Chevalier

III *Mor'decai's Disdain*

Oil on canvas, 56 x 80.5 cm.

Provenance: See *Esther at her Toilet* for the provenance prior to 2011; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 63

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 249 (repr.); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 63 (repr).

Related Works:

Tapestry Cartoon: The tapestry cartoon (oil on canvas 332 x 470cm.), the third scene of the series, was produced by the artist in Rome during winter 1739-40 (a letter of 18 March 1740 in the *Correspondance des directeurs*, IX, p. 419, 430-431) mentions "the painting of the *Pride of Haman*, occupied the direction des *Bâtiments du roi* a lot (which ended apparently by finding the crates, which had gone missing, at Le Havre) from September 1740 to the end of the following year. Exhibited at the Salon in 1742, the royal administration paid de Troy 2,125 livres for it at the end of the year (31 December 1742). Signed and dated "A ROME EN 1740", it is now at the Louvre (inv. 8214) after having been deposited at the Chateau de Compiègne and at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris from 1912 to 1982.

Print:

Two details of the cartoon (a woman's head and a soldier's head) were reproduced in print under Cochin's supervision in the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774 (plate V of the 25th book). The entire composition was especially interpreted, in reverse, by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet (433 x 596 mm., 1784, after a drawing by the engraver, made in 1775 at the latest). The lithograph in reverse by Turgis (208 x 291 mm.) was the subject of a registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale in 1844.

Tapestry: see above

Much to the fury of Haman, the favourite (*Est.* 3, 1-3), Mor'decai disdains to worship him and prostrate himself before him as all the other servants and officials of the Palace had done on the sovereign's orders (probably because Ahasuerus and, by extension, his ministers form part of the divinity of ancient Oriental civilizations which that blend inextricably the political and the religious). Mor'decai as a Jew cannot make the signs of respect and submission to the favourite which he owes only to God (Exodus, 20: 5). This is probably the most "rare" of the subjects in the series. Solidly constructed with a large diagonal which is literally broken by the vertical line formed by Mor'decai's body, the scene does not have, strictly speaking, any equivalent in the iconography of the *Book of Esther* in Western art.



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet



Tapestry, copyright galerie Chevalier

IV *The Fainting of Esther*

Oil on canvas, 55 x 80 cm.

Provenance: See *Esther at her Toilet* for the provenance prior to 2011; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 64

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 250 (repr.); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 64 (repr).

Related Works:

Sketch:

A second sketch on canvas, an original or copy of the one presented here (?), was included in the François Boucher sale with another sketch from the cycle depicting the *Coronation* scene. (Paris, 18 February 1771, n° 47). Measuring 55.3 x 81 cm. (20 *pouces* 6 *lignes* high by 30 *pouces* wide), they were acquired for 51 livres by the dealer Jacques Langlier according to the annotated catalogue of the Boucher sale conserved at the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art in Paris (VP 1771/3). They should perhaps be identified with those which were sold in Paris at the beginning of the 1920s (Hôtel Drouot, 13 June 1922). A studio copy, also on canvas (59 x 82 cm.) is at the Beaune Musée des Beaux-Arts (inv. 882-3-3). From the gift of Devevey aîné, the sketch entered the museum in 1882.

Tapestry Cartoon:

The *Fainting* (oil on canvas 322 x 474 cm.) was the first of the three cartoons made by de Troy in Paris to be finished. Exhibited at the Salon of 1737, the large painting was then presented to the King at Versailles, during September. The painter had received payment for it as early as 10 November 1737: "to Mr. de Troy, painter, 2,250 livres for payment of a painting, representing Esther fainted before Ahasuerus, which he has created to be made into tapestry at the Gobelins Factory during the present year" ["*Au Sieur de Troy, peintre, 2 250 livres pour son paiement d'un tableau, représentant Esther évanouie devant Assuaérus, qu'il a fait pour être exécuté en tapisserie à la Manufacture des Gobelins, pendant la présente année*"] Signed and dated 1737, it is now at the Louvre (inv. 8216).

Print:

A detail of the cartoon (a man's head) was reproduced in the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774 (plate VI of the 26th book). Like the other cartoons of the series, it was interpreted in reverse by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet during the 1780s (433 x 600 mm, after a drawing by the engraver, made in 1775 at the latest). The lithograph by Turgis in reverse (214 x 299 m.) was the subject of a registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale in 1844. Louis Dujardin, after a drawing by A. Paquier, reproduced the painting in wood (in the same direction as the original composition), a woodprint intended to illustrate the monumental *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles* by Charles Blanc (1865, II, p. 13).⁵⁰

Tapestry: see above

The scriptural source for the *Fainting of Esther* to which de Troy referred like all his predecessors (and in particular Antoine Coypel who, for this, was his main model) is one of these additions of the "second canon" which are found in the

⁵⁰ Chr. LERIBAUT also gives details of a female figure drawn in pencil (400 x 25mm, location unknown), which belonged in particular to the famous collector the Marquis de Chennevières. Although it was linked with the cartoon, Leribault does not believe it is by de Troy (2002, P 254). See his monograph for the cartoon which provides a complete bibliography.

Greek version of the Septuagint and which have been incorporated into the Vulgate and – finally – to the canon of the Roman Catholic Bible (Lemaître de Sacy places these additions at the end of his translation of the *Scriptures**). The content of the original book is at the very least terse: “*Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on [her] royal [apparel], and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, [that] she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that [was] in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.*” (*Est.*, V; 1-2) Chapter XV (4-19) gives not only flesh to the tale, (especially by making “extras” appear such as the two maidservants, officers, etc.) but also supplies adventures and details appropriate to feed a composition full of novelistic, if not melodramatic, details. The text deserves to be cited, if only because it shows de Troy’s fidelity to the narrative to be verified: “*And on the third day she laid away the garments she wore, and put on her glorious apparel./And glittering in royal robes, after she had called upon God the ruler and Saviour of all, she took two maids with her./And upon one of them she leaned, as if for delicateness and overmuch tenderness she were not able to bear up her own body./And the other maid followed her lady, bearing up her train flowing on the ground./But she with a rosy colour in her face, and with gracious and bright eyes, hid a mind full of anguish, and exceeding great fear./So going in she passed through all the doors in order, and stood before the king, where he sat upon his royal throne, clothed with his royal robes, and glittering with gold, and precious stones, and he was terrible to behold./And when he had lifted up his countenance, and with burning eyes had shewn the wrath of his heart, the queen sunk down, and her colour turned pale, and she rested her weary head upon her handmaid./And God changed the king's spirit into mildness, and all in haste and in fear he leaped from his throne, and holding her up in his arms, till she came to herself, caressed her with these words:/What is the matter, Esther? I am thy brother, fear not./Thou shalt not die: for this law is not made for thee, but for all others./ Come near then, and touch the sceptre./ And as she held her peace, he took the golden sceptre, and laid it upon her neck, and kissed her, and said: Why dost thou not speak to me?/ She answered: I saw thee, my lord, as an angel of God, and my heart was troubled for fear of thy majesty./ For thou, my lord, art very admirable, and thy face is full of graces./And while she was speaking, she fell down again, and was almost in a swoon./But the king was troubled, and all his servants comforted her.*” In fact, nothing is missing here (even the presence of a supernumerary maidservant is mentioned). The *Fainting* scene was the first composition de Troy enlarged up to the monumental dimensions of the cartoon after the series of sketches had been approved by the royal administration. It is impossible to fail to notice that this subject, common to numerous history painters of the early modern period seems to have attracted him especially. De Troy returned to it many times, and one of the first instances known by the artist, executed even before his first Italian journey (where he went in 1698) had already the queen’s swoon as its subject.⁵¹

*[Translator’s note: These portions, called the Apocrypha in the King James Bible and not recognized by the Protestant faiths, were placed between the Old and New Testaments in the 1611 and 1679 editions]

The theme inevitably placed him in direct competition with Antoine Coypel who had produced – before 1697 – a *Fainting of Esther* interpreted by the weavers of the Gobelins about twenty years later. The composition provoked criticism when the cartoon was exhibited at Versailles as the Duc de Luynes reports in his *Mémoires*: “(...) the Queen’s pose has been criticised, who turns her back to Ahasuerus when she faints, and Ahasuerus, who is behind her, presents his sceptre to her over her shoulder.”⁵² Beyond some inanity, this criticism (which could have been directed to Coypel, a generation earlier, whose composition presents the same “fault”) is nevertheless interesting because it emphasizes what could have been at the heart of the expectations of the *public* for which above all, the *Story of Esther* is intended: respect for propriety, primacy given to a legible and eloquent expression of the *affetti, etc.* Unusually, de Troy adds an element which without being improbable is not found in any version of the Biblical text, probably to increase the dramatic character of a scene which hardly needs it. Indeed in the background, Aman at his worktable (there is no doubt that he is working on the details of his murderous plan) is present at the scene.



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet

⁵¹ Private collection (*ibid.*, n° P. 3).

⁵² 1860-65, ed, I, p. 357.

V *The Banquet of Esther and Ahasuerus*

Oil on canvas, 55 x 80 cm.

Provenance: See *Esther at her Toilet* for the provenance prior to 2011; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 65

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 248 (repr.); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 65 (repr).

Related Works:

Sketch:

The museum of Evreux has a seductive sketch on canvas by Jean-François de Troy (50 x 65 cm., inv. 8654) representing a banquet scene in half-Oriental half Western costumes (though archaic).⁵³ It has at times been identified as a study for the *Esther's Banquet*, prior to our sketch.

Drawing:

Two red chalk studies with chalk highlights – one for a servant carrying a platter, the other for a servant with raised arms – conserved at the Hannema-De Stuers Foundation in Heino (Netherlands) and in a private collection respectively, have been linked with the composition. They illustrate the intermediary stage of preparation between sketch and cartoon.⁵⁴

Tapestry Cartoon:

The cartoon (oil on canvas, 329 x 469 cm.) was created by de Troy in Rome during the Spring and Summer of 1739 before being sent to Paris by sea (the cartoons of the *Banquet* and the *Triumph of Mor'decai*, rolled, were waiting to be shipped to France in December) and to be exhibited at the 1740 Salon. The artist was paid on 1 June 1740 (probably 2,250 livres, the amount he had received for the *Fainting of Esther* of similar dimensions). Signed and dated 1739, it was returned to the Louvre (inv. 8217) after having been deposited at the chateau of Compiègne, then at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris from 1912 to 1982.

Print:

A detail of the final composition (a female head) was engraved under the supervision of Cochin for the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774 (plate V of the 25th book).⁵⁵ Like the other cartoons of the series this composition was above all interpreted in reverse by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet during the 1780s (431 x 596 mm. after a drawing by the engraver, made in 1775 at the latest).

Tapestry: see above

The painter himself provides evidence to suggest that this is a depiction of the first feast to which Esther invited Ahasuerus and Haman (*Est.* 5; 4-8) and not the second which would send the favourite to the gallows (7; 1-10) although the tapestry series contains a citation from chapter VII of the book ("*Dona mihi*

⁵³ Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, P. 246.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2002, D 17 and D 18.

⁵⁵ There is a drawing, probably by Dandré Bardon relating to this engraved figure. This sheet was sold by Sotheby's (New York) on 28 January 1998 (n° 207 as Jean-Baptiste Le Prince).

anima...”) on the cartouche of the border. In a letter sent from Rome to the directeur des Bâtiments, Orry, written by de Troy on 21 August 1739: “*The first banquet of Esther is almost finished.*”⁵⁶ The décor which opens broadly towards a garden enlivened by fountains considerably renews the very mineral “Renaissance” architectural designs which had characterized the preceding scenes. The use of spiral columns “of Salomon” mark an attempt to make the place where the narrative takes place more clearly Oriental and to fit it more strongly into the climate of the Old Testament. Emphasized by the parallelism of the bodies and the confrontation of Haman and Esther, on opposite sides of the table, the tension, still rather overt in the sketch, becomes more anecdotal in the large cartoon not to mention in the tapestries whose decorative character empties the scene of its dramatic harshness.



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet

⁵⁶ *Correspondance des directeurs*, IX, p. 390.



(details)

Studio of Jean-François de TROY

VI *The Triumph of Mor'decai*

Oil on canvas, 41 x 88 cm.

Provenance: can be identified with the sketch in the M. T. Shiff sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 21-22 March 1905, n° 83?; hypothetically former Henri Rémon collection (the Rémon sketch was exhibited in Paris at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, - *Exposition de la turquerie au XVIIIe siècle - n° 73* – between May and October 1911); the present sketch which was not part of the six *modelli* reunited by François Marcille who had become the owner of the Galerie Cailleux in 1928 (see the provenance of *Esther at her Toilet*) finally joined this group at a date we have not been able to determine; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 66.

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 252b (related work/copy, reproduced mistakenly as the Rothan version?); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 66 (repr).

Related Works:

Sketch:

Original Sketches:

Oil on canvas, 86 x 150 cm., New York, The Metropolitan Museum (Inv. 07. 225. 285, provenance: Paris, Georges Hoentschel collection; acquired with the entire collection by J. Pierpont Morgan who gave it to the Metropolitan in 1906).

Oil on canvas, 55 x 130 cm, location unknown (provenance, Paris, Gustave Rothan collection; Paris, Rothan sale, Galerie Georges Petit, 29-31 May 1890, n° 207? The authenticity of this work (executed in Rome?) appears to be problematic.⁵⁷

Sketches (copies):

Chr. LERIBAUT has drawn up quite a long list of copies and sketches that confirm the popularity of the composition, the only one to have been engraved during the painter's lifetime. His monograph (2002, n° P 252 a and b, related works) should be referred to. Other than a sketch, the work of the studio reproducing the New York sketch exactly, at the Beaune museum (Devevey gift, 1882, inv. 882-3-1), in particular among the early copies, the one in the Musée Baron Martin in Gray should be noted (oil on canvas, 23,5 x 34 cm., inv. R.F. 1986-46, provenance: Albert Pomme de Mirimonde bequest, 1985). Deposited by the Louvre at Gray, the sketch, perhaps by a *pensionnaire* of the French Academy in Rome, has the rare particularity of including Esther as a participant in the Triumph of Mor'decai, a departure from the Bible which de Troy, more scrupulous, refrained from making.

Tapestry Cartoon:

Signed and dated DE TROY A. ROME, the huge cartoon (oil on canvas 329 x 710 cm.) was created by de Troy during the first months of the year 1739 (it was finished on 8 May) after having carved out a great success among the cardinals, Roman princesses and princes and prestigious visitors

⁵⁷ According to the Sotheby's auction catalogue of 23 June 2011, Chr. LERIBAUT (2002, n° P 252 b) apparently reproduced our painting indicating mistakenly a Rothan provenance for it and noticeably larger dimensions (55 x 130 cm.). Now, the painting reproduced by Leribault has not been cut in the upper right and left corners, unlike the sketch presented here. He considers the Rothan painting to be authentic.

such as the Prince Elector of Saxony, it was sent to Paris to be exhibited at the 1740 Salon. The sum of 5,650 livres was paid for the cartoon with *Esther's Banquet* (it is possible therefore to infer that 3,400 livres was paid for the larger painting, a rather modest amount) on 1 June 1740. After being deposited at the chateau of Compiègne, then at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris from 1912 to 1982, the painting is at the Louvre (Inv. 8219).⁵⁸

Drawings:

A large drawing for the *Triumph of Mor'decai* was included in the Nourri sale (24 February 1785, n° 1031). In red chalk and bistre wash, it is the only full compositional drawing for the Esther series to have been attributed to de Troy. Perhaps it was a model prepared for the use of the engraver Pierre-Ignace Parrocel who interpreted the large composition during the artist's lifetime (we know that for the other large tapestry series created by de Troy, *The Story of Jason*, he provided seven highly finished drawings).⁵⁹

Prints: Engraved (in reverse) in Rome by a former *pensionnaire* at the French Academy, Pierre-Ignace Parrocel (395 x 794 mm.). This is the only interpretative engraving after a composition of the series to have been made during the artist's lifetime. Numerous figures and architectural details of the final composition (including, twice, Mor'decai's head and that of Haman) were engraved in reverse under the supervision of Cochin for the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774 (plates VI of the 25th book and V, VI, VIII and XII of the 26th book).⁶⁰ As with other cartoons in the series, this one was especially interpreted in reverse, by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet at the beginning of the 1790s in a print commensurate with the cartoon (457 x 796 mm. after a drawing by the engraver made in 1777 at the latest). The cartoon has in addition been reproduced twice in lithographs (and in reverse) by Turgis (217 x 530 mm., registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale) and in a simplified version by Dutertre (383 x 525 mm.) as well as by H. Adock in a print (dimensions and technique unknown) published in Paris and London by Fisher.⁶¹

Tapestry: see above

To Haman's great confusion and for his humiliation, he has to honour Mor'decai whom he hates, in the streets of Susa and in accordance with a protocol which he has himself defined (*Est.* 6; 11). This is the only outdoor scene of the series, a great hurly-burly in an almost fantastical setting inspired by Rome (the Pyramid of Cestius is visible and the curved roof of the Pantheon) and Paris (according to one of the painter's biographers, the Chevalier de Valory, the building on the left is inspired by the facade of the Luxemburg Palace, which does not prevent Valory from praising the painter's seriousness in his "historical" restitution of these ancient times...).⁶² Closer to the cartoon than the original *modello* in New York, the present sketch reflects a more advanced stage in the progression towards the final design. This composition full of splendour and passion (contemporaries seem to have been sensitive to the contrast between the torments agitating Haman's

⁵⁸ For copies after the cartoon and the prints which have reproduced it, in particular those by Parrocel and de Beauvarlet, see Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 265.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* D. 16. For information on some copies in the same direction as the original composition and which do not therefore appear to be after a print, see Chr. LERIBAUT (*ibid.*, P. 265).

⁶⁰ A figure of Mor'decai probably drawn by Dandré-Bardon (Sotheby's, New York, 28 January 1993, n° 207, as Jean-Baptiste Le Prince), preparatory drawing for one of the prints appearing in the second part of the *Costume des anciens peuples*, published in 1774.

⁶¹ For more on a drawing reproducing the figure of Haman in the same direction as the print, conserved in a New York private collection, see Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, P. 265.

⁶² *Mémoires...*, 1854, II, p. 265-267.

heart and the almost transfigured appearance of Mor'decai) has been linked, and rightly so, with the triumphal scene of the *Sultan's Caravan going to Mecca*, an exuberant masquerade which all the *pensionnaires* at the French Academy in Rome conceived in 1748, under the supervision of their director on the occasion of the Carnival, for the rapture of the Romans. Counting about twenty costumed horsemen, a chariot carrying students in disguise...as sultanahs with their guardians, preceded by trumpets and timpani, the cortege reaped “universal applause” according to de Troy’s report (letter to Lenormand de Tournehem dated 20 November 1749). The seductive Oriental figures making up the masquerade were engraved in 1748 by Joseph-Marie Vien in an album which was dedicated to de Troy as director of the Academy. They show an aesthetic relationship and perfect community of expression not only with the scene of the triumph but again with the entire Esther series.⁶³



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet

⁶³ T. GAEHTGENS and J. LUGAND, 1988, p. 17-18 and in particular drawings n° 18-50 and prints, n° 2-33.

VII *The Sentencing of Haman*

Oil on canvas, 55 x 75 cm.

Provenance: See *Esther at her Toilet* for the provenance prior to 2011; Paris, Sotheby's, 23 June 2011, n° 67

Bibliography and Exhibitions: see the entry on *Esther at her Toilet*; Chr. LERIBAUT, 2002, n° P. 253 (repr.); exh. cat. NANTES, 2011, p. 138, n° 34, referred to in note 1; Sotheby's catalogue, *Tableaux anciens et du XIXe siècle*, 23 June 2011, n° 67 (repr).

Related Works:

Sketch:

A studio copy, also on canvas (57 x 78 cm.) is at the Beaune Musée des Beaux-Arts (inv. 882-3-2) which consequently conserves in all four sketches related to the series. From the gift of Devevey aîné, the sketch entered the museum in 1882.

Tapestry Cartoon:

The cartoon for the seventh scene of the series (signed and dated "*FAIT A ROME PAR. L. DETROY. EN 1740*", oil on canvas, 332 x 429 cm.) was created in Rome during the second quarter of 1740. After its arrival in France, it was exhibited at the Salon of 1742. The artist was paid on 31 December 1742, receiving 2,125 livres (4,250 livres with *Mor'decai's Disdain*). After having been deposited at the Chateau de Compiègne and at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris from 1912 to 1982 the painting returned to the Louvre (inv. 8218).⁶⁴

Prints:

Two details from the cartoon (the head of Ahasuerus and a soldier's head) were engraved under Cochin's supervision in the *Costume des anciens peuples*, 2nd part, by Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, published in 1774 (plate Vand VI of the 26th book).⁶⁵ Like the other compositions of the series, it was especially interpreted, in reverse, by Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet during the 1780s (431 x 600 mm. after drawing by the engraver, made in 1777 at the latest). The cartoon was in addition reproduced twice as a lithograph by Turgis (219 x 312 mm. the subject of a registration of copyright at the Bibliothèque Royale in 1844) and by Dutertre (388 x 520 mm., registration of copyright in 1844 at the Bibliothèque Royale).

Copy (after the print):

Oil on canvas (44.5 x 73.6 cm.) reproducing the composition entirely in reverse, conserved in the USA at the Allentown Art Museum (inv. 72.88, gift of M. and Mrs. Gurdus, 1972); copy attributed to Paul Cézanne (56. x 73.5 cm., signed "*d'après F. de Troy / P. Cézanne 1865*", London, Knight Frank & Rutley sale, 18 November 1959, n° 10.

Tapestry: see above

⁶⁴ In his entry on the cartoon (2002, n° P 271) Chr. LERIBAUT notes the presence in early and modern auction catalogues of five head studies of old men attributed to the artist. One has the particularity of being attributed to de Troy who apparently retouched it and to the connoisseur and director of a royal factory at the Gobelins Jean de Jullienne (Jullienne sale, 30 March 1767, n° 232). Since we are dealing chiefly with the sketches here, see Leribault's publication for more about this.

⁶⁵ Chr. LERIBAUT (*ibid.*) mentions a drawing related to this engraved head of Ahasuerus. Undoubtedly by Dandré-Bardon, the sheet was sold by Sotheby's (28 January 1998, n° 207 (as J.-B. Le Prince).

In March 1740, the artist announced from Rome to the Directeur des Bâtiments Orry: "I will begin without delay the *Sentencing of Haman*, which is the seventh and the last of the Esther series." On 16 June of the same year, he was able to announce the completion of the large painting which concluded the great cycle with the ruin and death of the persecutor of the People of God and the bad servant.⁶⁶ Faithful to his reputation for promptness, the painter had consequently spent in all four years from the creation of the sketches to the completion of the final cartoon (at a rate of three months per cartoon!) to produce this ambitious cycle which would have constituted for someone else an almost insuperable effort. It has been mentioned that de Troy had shown himself to be generally very true to the compositions laid out in the sketches from which he had hardly varied except for details in the ordering of the costumes or the arrangement of the architectural backgrounds. The *Sentencing of Haman* constitutes the most notable exception. In fact the sketch depicts for us a Haman bent before the queen begging, in vain, for her pardon. The cartoon, on the contrary emphasizes the dramatic content of the scene which takes on a paroxysmal character. Instead of being in *profil perdu*, Haman turns, distraught, towards the king at the precise moment when he orders the former's death. His face and body, which illustrate the incomprehension and a profound distress, form a contrast with Esther's impassiveness (we should note that in the sketch, the queen's face with its arched eyebrow in which a nuance of malice passes appears much more interesting than the slightly bovine placidity expressed by the young queen in the final design). This enhanced exploration of the *passions* of the soul – whose expression is according to the theoreticians and amateurs of the time, especially in France, the ultimate goal of great art and the highest aim which an artist can pursue – was actually done no doubt to seduce the public. It is permissible to consider that the criticisms raised at the Court by the heroine's attitude in the *Fainting of Esther* a few years earlier (cf. *supra*) prompted de Troy to emphasize and make more legible the psychological aspect of the composition, an orientation evidenced also by the *Triumph of Mor'decai* completed the previous year. To his disadvantage no doubt, despite the very successful character of the sketch and to a lesser extent the cartoon. Such a project shows evidence of an obvious lack of adaptation to tapestry, the perfect medium for large rhythmic arrangements of coloured areas, but which constituted a poor support for the expression of the psychology of the protagonists. Again Jean-François de Troy's fidelity to the details of the biblical text should be noted. At the moment the favourite's ruin is consummated and the king sends him to the gallows, a soldier covers his head (Est. 7; 8).

⁶⁶ *Correspondance*, IX, p. 419 and 428.



Engraved by J.F Beauvarlet



Tapestry, copyright Galerie Chevalier

Restoration of the Works

Jean-François de Troy

(1679-1752)

We worked on the entire series of seven works, six painted by Jean-François de Troy and one by his workshop; this last one includes some variants compared to the original sketch conserved at the Metropolitan Museum of New York.

The restoration protocol we used was the same for each of the paintings, the aim being to re-establish the structural cohesion and balance of the works, while restoring the aesthetic integrity.

The seven paintings had been relined when restored some time ago. For two of the paintings, "*Esther at her Toilet*" and the "*Fainting of Esther*", the old treatment of the support had caused deformations leading to weaknesses at the adhesion-cohesion level between the original support and the relining canvas. Mr. Joyerot, a restorer specialising in supports, therefore removed the relining canvas from these two paintings in order to stabilise them and recuperate coherent legibility.

The works were cleaned, then the old varnish, oxidised and yellowed, was partly removed. Excessive old retouching, which was rare, but the tones of which were no longer accurate, was also removed.

We then worked again on a healthy and authentic surface, sensitively, reintegrating the painting imitatively.

We varnished the seven paintings in a consistent manner with the aim of protecting the whole while showing its nature.

All the treatments were chosen in the interests of reversibility and stability.

Clara Demanie & Anne Mrozielski Studio, Paris

Summary Biography

1679 (27 January): Baptism in Paris (Parish of St. Nicolas du Chardonnet) of Jean-François de Troy, son of the painter François de Troy and Jeanne Cotelle, sister of the painter Jean II Cotelle.

1696-1698: Studies (apparently rather turbulent) at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture.

1698-1708: First trip to Italy. Is obliged to leave Rome in January 1711 after a tempestuous affair (a duel?), de Troy extends the traditional Roman experience as a *pensionnaire* at the Académie de France by also visiting Tuscany where he stays for a long time, Venice (his art in fact has a strongly Venetian character) and Genoa.

1708: De Troy (whose father had been elected Director of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture on 7 July) is *agrée* and immediately received at the Académie with *Apollo and Diana Piercing with their Arrows the Children of Niobe* (Montpellier, Musée Fabre) on 28 July.

1710: First royal commission, paid for on 10 May (a sketch representing “the Promotion of the Order of the Holy Spirit” for the tapestry series of the *History of the King*).

1716: Jean-François de Troy is elected Assistant Professor at the Academy.

1720: He is appointed Professor.

1723: The artist creates the double portrait of Louis XV and Marie-Anne-Victoire, Infante of Spain.

1724 (June): First exhibition of Jean-François at the Place Dauphine. He begins, in particular, to make himself known through irresistible worldly and gallant genre paintings, widely distributed through engravings which would count a lot for his fame.

Execution of two overdoors for the Hotel du Grand Maitre at Versailles.

1725 (25 August and following days): De Troy exhibits no less than eight paintings at the Salon. He would then become quite a regular exhibitor.

1727 (30 June): With the *Diana Resting* (Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts), the artist wins, *ex aequo* with his younger colleague François Lemoyne, the competition organised at the Académie by the Duc d'Antin, *surintendant des Bâtiments du roi*, to stimulate history painting which was judged to be languishing by having the twelve best painters of the institution measured against each other.

De Troy, who from 1725 receives major commissions from the churches of Paris and the Hotel de Ville, supplies a clientele of the grand bourgeoisie and financiers including Samuel Bernard who ordered the decoration (1728-1729) of his Parisian townhouse in rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires.

1734: Completion of an overdoor for the Queen's bedroom at Versailles.

1735: Completion, among others, of the famous *Oyster Breakfast* (Chantilly, musée Condé) for the galerie des cabinets intérieurs of Louis XV at Versailles.

1736-1740: Completion in 1736 of seven sketches inspired by the *Book of Esther*. Validation of these *modelli* by the administration of the *Bâtiments du roi* directed by Philibert Orry who immediately asks de Troy to reproduce the sketches in the form of cartoons for the weavers of the Gobelins factory. De Troy works on them from 1737 to 1740. The first tapestry set was put on the loom as early as 1738. *The Story of Esther* appears quickly as one of the pinnacles of his work.

1737: The artist creates a series of paintings (hunting scene, *Hunting Lunch*, portraits) for the royal apartments at the chateau of Fontainebleau.

18 May. Admission of Jean-François de Troy to the Compagnie des Secrétaires du Roi (position of conseiller secrétaire du roi, maison couronne de France).

From 18 August to 5 September: he exhibits six paintings at the Salon including the cartoon for the *Fainting of Esther*.

1738: Jean-François, who had missed out on the position of First Painter to the King (again) after the suicide of François Lemoyne (June 1737), is appointed Director of the French Academy in Rome at the beginning of the year (certificate dated 22 January). He was made Knight of the Order of Saint-Michel (25 May). During the summer, the new Director and his wife travel from Paris to Rome. From 18 August to 10 September, two cartoons of the *Story of Esther* (*The Coronation* and *Esther at her Toilet*) were exhibited at the Salon.

1739 (5 April): Election of Jean-François de Troy to the Accademia di San Luca of Rome (the reception takes place on 3 May).

From 22 August to September, two new cartoons of the *Story of Esther* were exhibited at the Salon (*The Triumph of Mor'decai* and *the Banquet of Esther*).

1741: Execution of a self-portrait commissioned by the Electress of Palatine, Anna Maria Luisa de Medici for the gallery of artists' portraits at the Uffizi in Florence (*in situ*).

1742 (25 August – 21 September): the two final cartoons of the Esther series (*Mor'decai's Disdain* and the *Sentencing of Haman*) are exhibited at the Salon

1743 (22 December): the artist is elected *Principe* of the Accademia di San Luca (he would remain at the head of the institution until the election of Giambattisti Maini in Deember 1745).

1747 (23 June): In Paris, the Académie royale grants de Troy the rank of "Former Rector) by acclamation.

1748 (September): Exhibit at the Salon of the seven cartoons of the *Story of Jason*, the second major tapestry set created by the artist.

1751: De Troy executes for Besancon cathedral the three altarpieces (*in situ*) which would be his three final large creations.

1752 (25 January): Death of Jean-François de Troy at the Palazzo Mancini which housed the French Academy in Rome. His successor Natoire had replaced him in May 1751.

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