

Plate I Friedrich Brentel. Engraving of the *Salle d'Honneur* at the *Pompe Funèbre* of Duke Charles III of Lorraine, detail, right half. Strasburg, about 1610. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whittelsey Fund, 1959.

A NOTE ON THE TAPESTRIES AT THE
POMPE FUNEBRE OF CHARLES III OF LORRAINE

By

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In 16th-century Lorraine it was said that the three most magnificent ceremonies to be seen in Europe were the crowning of an Emperor at Frankfort, the anointing of a King of France at Rheims, and the burial of a Duke of Lorraine at Nancy. And it is true that in Lorraine, from René II down through the century, the established ceremonial of each successive ducal "Pompe Funèbre" had increased in splendor, until the sumptuous obsequies for Charles the Great surpassed all that had gone before.

Charles III, Duke of Lorraine, died in his palace at Nancy on the 14th of May, 1608, deeply mourned, for he had been a benevolent ruler, ever solicitous for his people, devoted to the wise administration of his duchy and the preservation of its integrity in a hostile and aggressive world.

His was a distinguished lineage, allying him with every court in Europe. A direct descendant of René I, Duke of Anjou, he was the son of Francis I, Duke of Lorraine, and Christine of Denmark, daughter of King Christian of Denmark and Queen Isabella, sister of the Emperor Charles V.

By the sudden death of his father in 1545 he became heir to the dukedom at the tender age of two. His mother, Christine, assumed the regency and undertook his education with the help of his uncle the Bishop of Metz, but King Henry II of France, concerned to thwart the influence his great uncle, Charles V, might bring to bear on a bewildered and leaderless duchy, moved swiftly to invade Lorraine in 1552. He banished Christine to Flanders and, on leaving Lorraine, carried off the child duke to the French court where he was brought up, and in 1599 married to the Princess Claude of France, second daughter of the King and Catherine de Médicis. A year later, on the death of King Henry and the accession of Francis II, the young duke, with his wife the Princess Claude, returned to Lorraine as Duc Charles III and began his long reign of enlightened and compassionate government that earned him the title of "the Great."

Fortunately, the magnificence of the burial of a Duke of Lorraine is preserved in a set of ten large engravings in the Musée Historique Lorrain at Nancy and the Metropolitan Museum that graphically portray the sequence of funeral rites of Charles III's "Pompe Funèbre," from his death on May 14th, 1608, until his final interment on the 19th of the following July. The engravings of each event in the obsequies are all entitled "Pourtraicts," as in Plate II, "Pourtraict de la Sale-d'honneur, préparée à Nancy en l'Hostel Ducal, pour le Corps de feue son Altesse de Lorraine, Monseigneur le Duc Charles 3me. de ce Nom..." (Pl. I), and so on down to Plate X, the "Pourtraict" of the heir Henry II's return to the ducal Palace following his proclamation as duke.

Each plate carries the inscription: "Claudius de La Ruelle, inventor, Fridericus Brentel fecit, Perspectiva per Ioann la Hiere, Herman de Loye excudit," a fortunate combination of designer, engraver, draughtsman, and publisher collaborating to produce an extremely detailed pictorial record of the court of Lorraine's greatest spectacle.

Claude de La Ruelle, the designer, "secretaire des Commandements" to his late Highness as well as to Duc Henry II, had served the court of Lorraine in many posts with a distinction that Duc Charles rewarded by ennoblement in 1570, naming him "gentilhomme de sa maison." Little is known of Friedrich Brentel, the engraver, save that he was born in 1580 in Germany and was established as engraver and miniaturist in Strasburg in 1601, where he died in 1651. His principal work, and that of Jean la Hière, his assistant in the technique of perspective, seems to have been this famous set of illustrations of Charles III's "Pompe Funèbre." Herman de Loye, also of Strasburg, issued the prints about 1610.

Immediately following Duc Charles' death, Henri, his son, appointed Claude de La Ruelle Master of Ceremonies for the funeral arrangements, requiring that they be worthy of his father's wide prestige. In La Ruelle's own words: "Commandant que toutes choses fussent faites en la plus grande splendeur, dignité, honneur, somptuosité, magnificence, & pompe que faire se pourroit & devoit."

The brilliance and grandeur that La Ruelle achieved so impressed the large assemblage of noble mourners that he was importuned to write down a full account of the ceremonies, that all who desired might have

the record. "Son Altesse me commanda alors de rediger le tout par escrit; ce que me fut une grande charge..." However arduous the "grande charge," Jean Savine, in 1609, at Nancy, published La Ruelle's detailed description in a small octavo volume entitled: "Discours Des Ceremonies Honneurs et Pompe funebre faits a l'enterrement du Tres-Hault, Tres-Puissant & Serenissime Prince Charles 3. du Nom..." (Pl. II).

The "Discours" and the engravings correspond very closely. The account of each phase of the "Pompe Funèbre" is faithfully illustrated. Thereby, as designer and author, Claude de La Ruelle contributed invaluable documents of a famous event in the social history of Lorraine.

It took from May 15th to the 9th of June to complete the preparations of the *salle d'honneur* for the reception of the effigy that would lie in state there for the divine services, to be held day and night until the 14th of July. It was needful time for the construction of the effigy and its regal vestments, and for the merchants of Nancy to amass sufficient quantity of fabrics, "sarges de Fleurence, sarges de Gennes & autres draperies qu'il falloit pour un si grand deuil," to clothe, at Duc Henri's expense, the more than six hundred mourners of the blood.

A stage with steps mounting to the "Lict d'honneur" was built at the end of the great hall, the whole carpeted "de riches tapiz de Turquie," and the sacred area partitioned from the concourse of mourners by a balustrade painted crimson and sown with allerions in silver. Large decorative panels covered the coffered ceiling enclosing designs of the double C. crowned, for Charles and Claude, the Cross of Lorraine painted in gold on a field of azure, and others with allerions in gold on a field of gules. Above the "Lict d'honneur" a great canopy was raised of cloth of gold bordered with crimson velvet richly embroidered in gold and silver threads.

La Ruelle, in his "Discours" tells us that around the walls two sets of tapestries were hung, "tres-riches & tres-excellentes tappisseries rehaussées d'or d'argent & de soye, l'une figurée de l'histoire de Moyse & l'autre de celle de S. Paul." In three of the Brentel engravings of the *salle d'honneur* the set of the life of Moses can be clearly recognized, beginning with the scene of his rescue from the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter, which was hung on the wall of an improvised sacristy.

Following around the *salle d'honneur* from the sacristy to the opposite wall, in at least twelve of the tapestries, events in Moses' life are identifiable, their scenes enclosed in borders filled with decorative allegorical figures, and rectangular cartouches with descriptive legends in Latin are above each subject. Coats of arms in oval cartouches fill the upper corners of the borders of each tapestry, not all recognizable in detail, for the artist was limited by his medium and the very small scale to a sketchy representation. Where they can be distinguished, the arms of Lorraine are in the upper left hand corner and those of Claude of France in the right.

It would seem that tapestries so faithfully depicted in scenes of historical importance, or at least remnants of them, might still be in existence, though a hopeful search through the illustrated records of Flemish and French 16th-century tapestries has not been fruitful.

In the Austrian National Collection at Vienna, however, there are 16th-century tapestries depicting events in the lives of Moses, of Abraham, and of St. Paul, that formerly did belong to the Dukes of Lorraine. They became part of the Austrian *garde-meuble* in 1745 on the accession of Francis, Duke of Lorraine, as Emperor Francis I, husband of Maria Theresa. And there are inventories preserved in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Department of Manuscripts, dated May 17, 1575, and January 22, 1606, that list these same tapestries as part of the household furnishings of the ducal palace at Nancy and other residences of the Dukes of Lorraine.

We are concerned here only with the Moses series, and fortunately, for the purpose of comparison with the hangings in the engravings, lists and illustrations of the nine Moses tapestries preserved at Vienna were published by Ernst Ritter von Birk in the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, t. I & II, Vienna 1883-1885, and again by Ludwig von Baldass in *Die Wiener Gobelins-Sammlungen*, Vol. II, Vienna, 1920.

In comparing the scene of Moses with his rod turned into a serpent in the Vienna tapestry (Pl. III) with the same scene in the Brentel engraving (Pl. IV) one sees at a glance that the figures in both are different in character and gesture. Nevertheless the two tapestries do have significant points in common. The narrow borders that edge the wide borders with allegorical figures, described in one of the old inventories

as a "torty de feuillage et de fleurette," are definitely identical in both. The same stiff lines of twining foliage and flowerets, with masks at each crossing, serve to define and enclose the same compartments for scenes and decorative figures. The rectangular cartouches with descriptive legends in Latin above the scenes occupy the same positions in the Brentel engravings as in the Vienna versions, although the designs of the cartouches are somewhat dissimilar and the legends not identical. The arms in both are placed in the upper corners of the borders. Those in the Vienna tapestries are on shields and include those of Duke Francis of Lorraine and his wife Christine of Denmark, as well as those of their son Duc Charles and Claude of France.

There can be little doubt that the nine Moses tapestries at Vienna, authenticated by inventory and provenience, are survivals of the original set that belonged to the Dukes of Lorraine and decorated the walls of the *salle d'honneur* at Charles the Great's "Pompe Funèbre." At the same time one is reluctant to dismiss Brentel's tapestry designs as pure fantasy when other details of the obsequies correspond so faithfully with the "Discours" and the engravings.

A convincing explanation of the unexpected disparity is to be found in a work entitled *Recherches sur les Pompes Funèbres des Ducs de Lorraine* by Pierre Marot, Conservateur au Musée Historique Lorrain, published at Nancy in 1935. Monsieur Marot came to the conclusion that the plates of the "Pompe Funèbre" were engraved by Brentel, not from nature, but in his own studio, away from the ducal palace where the confusion of preparations, the gathering of mourners, and the hourly services for the deceased, made access for a prolonged copying of the tapestries virtually impossible. He is persuaded that Claude de La Ruelle, whose name on the plates as "Inventor" acknowledges such direction, supplied Brentel with the general scheme, modeled on the Vienna tapestries, for the framework of the designs and that Brentel then had recourse to one of the innumerable collections of 16th-century engravings of Old Testament subjects for his portrayal of events in Moses' life. Monsieur Marot, however, did not pursue the subject of pattern source further.

It is probable that La Ruelle supplied Brentel, also, with a copy of the *Quadrins Historiques de la Bible*, a small octavo volume, first published by Jean de Tournes at Lyons in 1553, and illustrated with

charming little woodcuts by Bernard Salomon in which we can identify the pattern source of Brentel's tapestries (Pl. V).

Bernard Salomon, a native of Lyons, called "le petit Bernard" (ca. 1508-1561), was the foremost artist in the de Tournes publishing house. He illustrated their lovely books, both secular and scriptural, with great distinction, from 1546 until his death. His style was of the Fontainebleau school, his scenes and figures filled with elongated grace and refined animation. So popular were the *Quadrins de la Bible* that they went into many editions and were translated into Spanish, English, German, Italian, Flemish, and Latin by 1558. Brentel must have availed himself of one of these, or possibly the *Biblia Sacra*, in Latin, published by de Tournes in 1556 with the same illustrations.

The woodcut by "le petit Bernard" of Moses with his rod turned into a serpent is from the Latin version of the *Quadrins de la Bible* published in 1558. The scene is in reverse, not uncommon when a design has been traced and then printed. All twelve of the Moses tapestries in Brentel's engravings, that can be deciphered, derive from these woodcuts by Salomon.

There is mounting evidence of the popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries of Bernard Salomon's designs as sources of pattern in many branches of the decorative arts. They have been recognized in needlework, Limoges enamels, wood carvings, Elizabethan silver, and other metalwork. It has been claimed that he also drew cartoons for tapestries, though no examples of these are known. If so, it was a very apt choice for La Ruelle or Brentel to choose his woodcut series of Moses' life for the tapestries in the engravings of the "Pompe Funèbre."

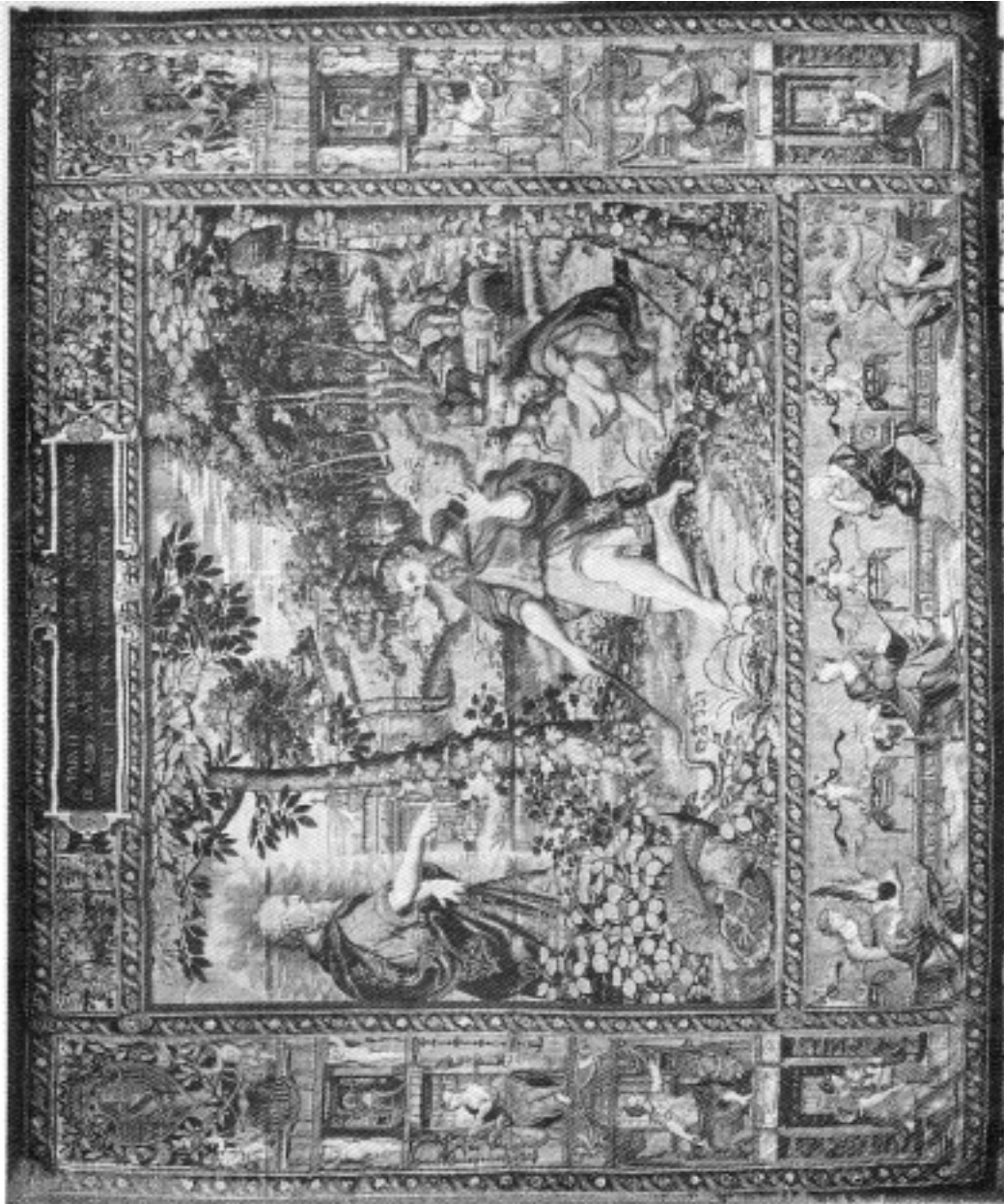


Plate III *Moses' rod changed to a serpent.* Tapestry. Nancy, about 1565.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Tapisseriensammlung.



Plate II Title page of Claude de La Ruelle, *Discours des Ceremonies...*, Nancy, 1609. Courtesy of the Boston Atheneum.

Plate V *Moses' rod changed to a serpent.* Page from the Latin translation of the *Quadrins Historiques de la Bible*, with woodcut by Bernard Salomon, Lyon, 1558. Hofer Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

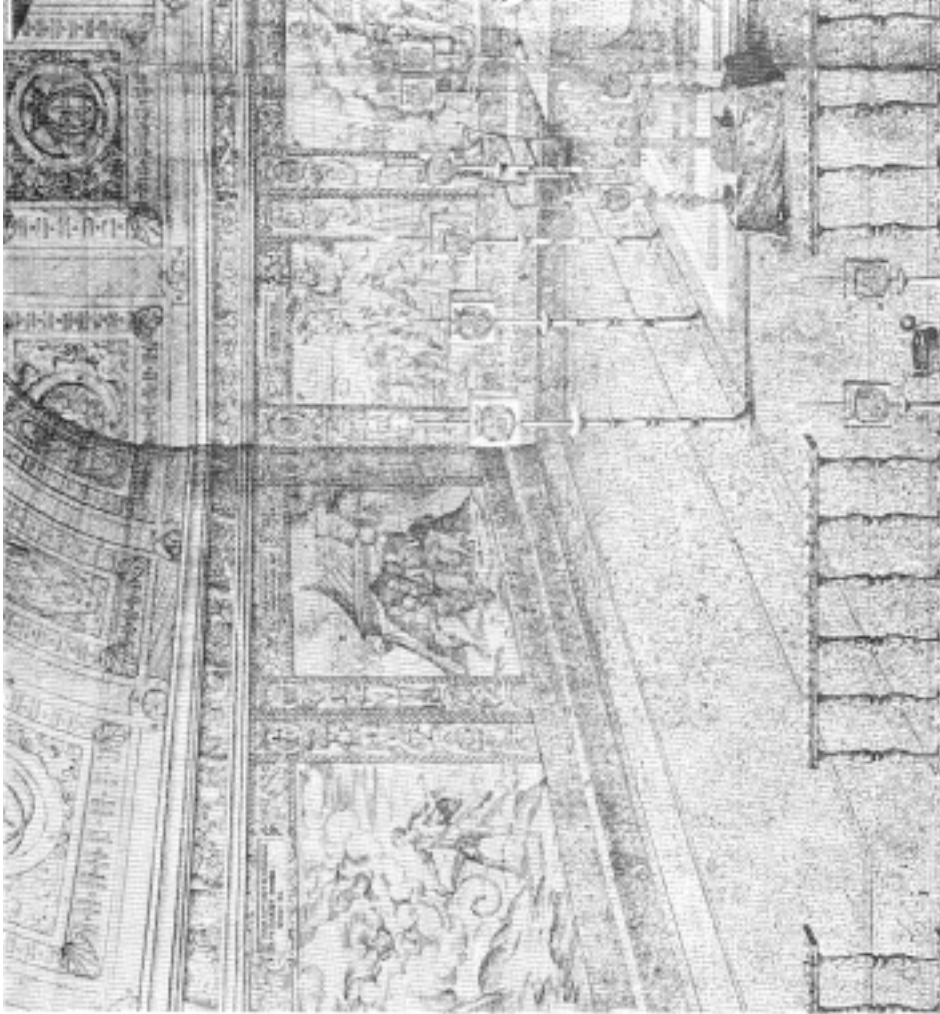


Plate IV Same as Pl. I, left half.