



SOCIÉTÉ DES AMIS & MÉCÈNES  
DU CHÂTEAU DE FONTAINEBLEAU

# The Chapel of the Trinity

By HÉLÈNE VERLET



Cover cliché. Chapel of the Trinity.  
Concert given on 16th September 2012 by the Ottawa choir.

*During the annual Heritage Days in September 2012, when over 12,000 visitors came to the château of Fontainebleau, a presentation was made to a very attentive audience about the long history of the Chapel of the Trinity and of the successive improvements made to it. A monastery chapel before becoming a palace chapel, this place was at the heart of the history of these "very Christian kings", each of whom left his mark on the château. To this day the Chapel of the Trinity retains the signs, be they grandiose or discreet, of their presence. The idea was then developed of extending these presentations into a new dossier for the Friends of the Château.*



View of the interior east wall of the nave.

*One of the aims of these publications is to make better known "The Treasure of the wonders of the Royal House of Fontainebleau", as Père Dan put it. The Chapel of the Trinity is one of the most precious examples of this "Treasure". So, like Abbé Guilbert, another distinguished historian of Fontainebleau, "let us enter the Sanctuary of the Lord and consider with respect the magnificence of his holy Temple"*

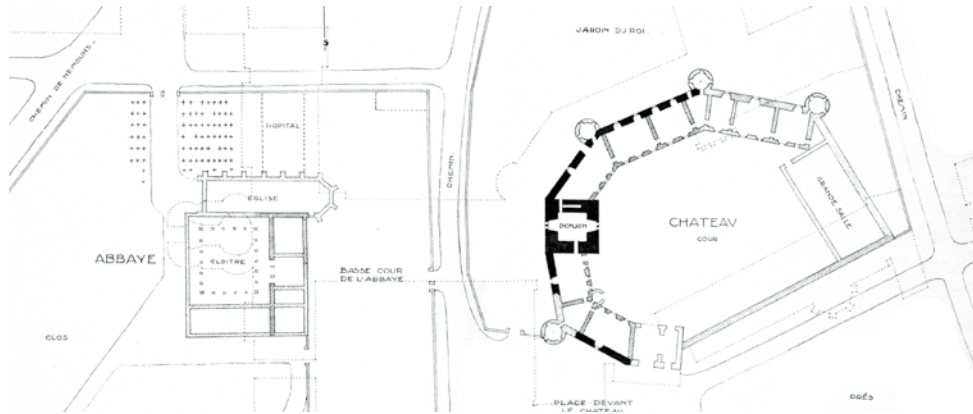
## I IN THE TIME OF SAINT LOUIS

To begin any study of the history of the Chapel of the Trinity, we must go back to St Louis and to that decisive period of his reign, the 7<sup>th</sup> Crusade; to 1248 and the defeat at Mansourah in Egypt and the weeks of captivity in Damiette which followed. During those difficult and humiliating days, a strong relationship grew between the King and Père Nicolas, Minister of the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Ransom of Captives, (also known as the Mathurins) which had



Maître François. The Speculum Historiale by Vincent of Beauvais, Volume III. The Crusader Fleet before Damiette in 1249. Illumination on parchment. 15th Century. Condé Museum, Chantilly.





Albert Bray. Conjectural plan of the château at the end of the 15th Century. Bulletin monumental, 1935.

been founded in 1198 by Saint John of Matha. Like Louis, Father Nicolas was a prisoner of the Moslems of Egypt and his radiant personality made a great impression on the King.

So, shortly after returning from his four years spent in the Holy Land, the King expressed the wish to become a lay member of the order. Then similarly, and with the same desire to see a "royal religion" which had led him and his mother to establish the Cistercian Abbey of Royaumont in 1231, he obtained the agreement of Pope Alexander IV to install a royal monastery beside his château in Fontainebleau.

The act was signed in 1259 in this château which had already been in existence for over a century, as we can see from its first mention in a charter of Louis VII in 1137. For almost a century the château had been a centre of piety: in 1169, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury then exiled in France, had consecrated the chapel of the château both to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Saturnin.

The King gifted a plot of undeveloped land for the construction of the monastery, together with out-buildings, a hospital and, of course a church, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, so revered by the Trinitarian order. He made sure that this donation was accompanied by several financial and material privileges based on income from various properties, including the renewal of the gift made by his grandfather, Philippe Auguste, of the great press at Recloses and all fees and dues relating to it.

There is no trace left of this first monastery which would have been built along identical lines to all the abbeys, with a cloister running along the south wall of the church and surrounded by the buildings of the monastery. There would have been a church, with its altar at the east, towards the keep, in other words perpendicular to the axe of the current church. Excavation work beneath the horse-shoe staircase carried out by Albert Bray in April 1927 revealed the initial plan for a building with a single nave. There was also a pool, a fish pond and a kitchen garden. The King had a great affection for his château in Fontainebleau and right up to his death he ensured protection for the monastery. His successors, Philippe III and Philippe IV le Bel, who was born and who died at Fontainebleau, followed by the last Capetians and the first of the Valois monarchs continued to honour the foundation set up by Saint Louis and the very valuable charitable work of the order.

## II IN 1528, THE KING DECIDES THAT ALL IS TO CHANGE



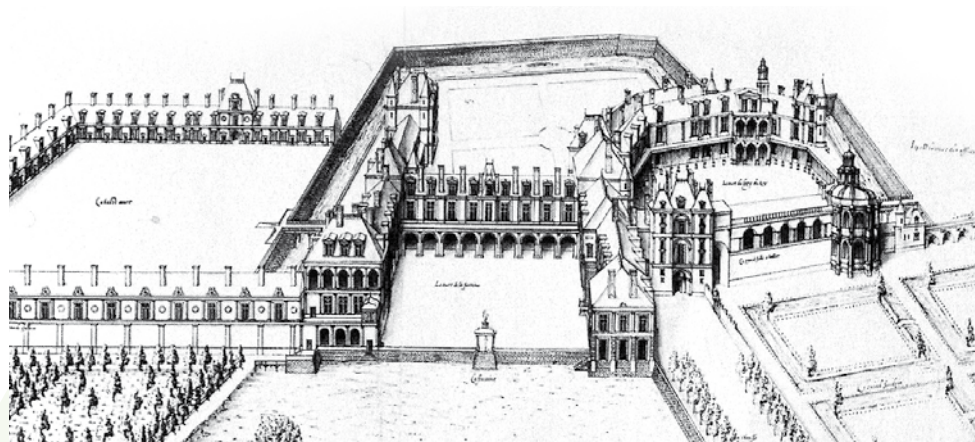
Joss van Cleve. Portrait of François I. Around 1535. Oil on wood. Château de Fontainebleau.

It is also a homecoming which will mark the new stage of the history of the chapel. In 1526, François I returned from captivity in Spain following defeat at Pavia. He regained his freedom leaving his two sons as hostage with Charles V. He had been ill, humiliated and badly supported by his kingdom's capital. He distanced himself from his royal buildings in the Loire valley and decided that the Court would return to Paris; as a result, the architect Pierre Lescot will later be given responsibility for the major extension work at the Louvre. But above all he ordered the construction of what will become his most prestigious residence, the Château of Fontainebleau. François I loved this spot, in particular being close to the forest "for the pleasure of hunting the red and the black beasts", the deer and the wild boar. The first work began in 1528.

But he felt cramped by the way in which the buildings and the outside areas of the monastery had been extended over three centuries, all the more so since he could not enlarge his construction towards the south because of the pond. So, with royal abandon, he decided on the purchase, almost the expropriation, of the monastery, which he pushed back to the north, (this would become the Ministers' wing), as well as the land around the pond which he made into his first gardens.

*"so as to increase, enlarge and ease the building which presently we have constructed and erected in our Châtel and House of Fontainebleau... it is agreeable to us to take and recover from our dear and much loved Ministers and Monks of the Order of the Holy Trinity... the half of the area where is presently situated the Great Gallery made in order to go from said château into their church and lodgings of the Abbey, their gardens and their great Clos des Prés, the which is at present our stable with Ponds and nursery..."* December 1529, document published by Abbé Guilbert.

Then the King had the old château demolished; it was no doubt quite worm-ridden ("which was almost in ruin") despite the campaigns of work ordered by Queen Isabeau of Bavaria at the beginning of the XV century. He then had new *corps de logis* (the principal blocks) built on the old foundations, under the responsibility of the "entrepreneur-architect" Gilles le Breton, taking up the oval plan of the previous buildings and conserving only the Keep, sole survivor of the demolition. He annexed the space gained from the monastery in order to establish a courtyard, a "farm-yard", with various outbuildings.



Androuet du Cerceau. The château of Fontainebleau. Bird's eye view from the south. Detail, the oval court, the gallery, the chapel. The most excellent buildings of France. 1579. Pen and ink. The British Museum. London.

And, very importantly, from 1528 appears the project of the gallery which is to connect the royal apartments in the Keep to the abbey. This latter is repaired at the King's expense: "contract of 28 April 1528 with a roofer who is obliged to undertake all the masonry work for the refectory, kitchen and other things which may be expedient for the lodgings of the monks". Even more explicit in the texts, the abbey is used as temporary lodgings for the King and his Court during the reconstruction work at the Château.

The construction of the Armoury is dated from 1535-1538, no doubt leaning against an older building on the south side belonging to the Abbey. It was towards 1540 that the old church was destroyed and the rubble "piled up in the courtyard for the king's benefit." Only a Gothic arcade remained "which it seemed had been left deliberately to designate the spot where this former church had been built and to show the marks of its antiquity in memory of its founder Saint Louis" (Père Pierre Dan). The construction of the new church began in the last years of François I's reign. It was placed between the far end of the Gallery and the Armoury and, unlike the previous church, had its altar to the north. There is a record of the contract made in November 1551 between Henri II's architect, Philibert Delorme, and the carpenter Jacques Belèze "for the roof of the new building". At this time a choir screen was installed, supported by highly worked columns with beautiful capitals. A sort of rood screen, separating the church in two, it was sculpted by the carpenter Scibec de Carpi and the central arch acted as a door. There was also a tribune, narrower than the one placed today against the south wall, supported by marble columns on which, according to a contract of 13 February 1557, was placed a little oratory which served for the devotions of King Henri II whose royal monogram adorned the walls.

But as it appeared in this first phase, the construction was covered by a flat roof, a "plat-fond" (from which "plafond", ceiling), the walls were bare. The project of an outside portal had not materialised, the entrance was through a wooden door situated in the vestibule, whilst the Saint Trinity monks had no doubt a direct access to the chapel from the monastery which then backed on to the Armoury.

From outside, there was no sign of a religious building, simply the clock tower, lower than today's, with a clock and a bell, and the organ pavilion, built by Philibert Delorme in 1551 and thus named because of its designation, providing a harmony to the west wall.



The chapel facade, the clock tower and the organ pavilion.

### III HENRI IV, A MOST RESPECTFUL SON OF THE CHURCH



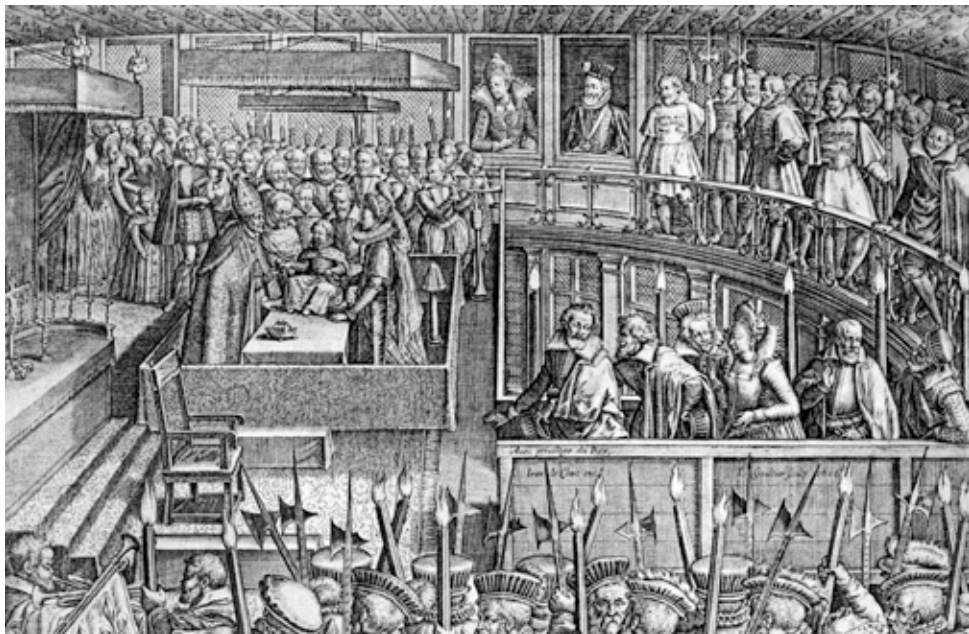
Pierre-François Cozette. Henri IV. Gobelins Tapestry, 18th Century. Château of Fontainebleau

This was how the church of the Trinity lived through the wars of religion, which ended with the accession of Henri of Navarre to the throne of France. With his return to the Catholic faith in 1593, Henri IV wanted to prove himself a respectful son of the Church and to demonstrate his devotion to its major dogmas.

Queen Marie de Médicis had presented him with an heir apparent (the Dauphin, future Louis XIII). At the King's request, Pope Paul V was to be his godfather. The Queen later gave birth to two princesses. The King's visits to Fontainebleau became more and more frequent. In 1604 he had confirmed his royal donations to the monastery of the Mathurins, (Trinitarians) whose living space was frankly limited because of the extension of the château, and now he felt the need to improve the church. As Saint Louis had done before him, he showed in this way his desire to bear witness to his filial – and royal – respect for the Church.

His first decision was to replace the flat roof ("plat-fond") by a vault and gable wall behind the sanctuary (contract with Rémy Collin on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1605), including the construction of buttresses to the east. Considerable work was carried out in the chapel. This explains why, although Fontainebleau had been chosen for the baptism of the Dauphin and his two small sisters instead of Notre Dame de Paris, (the plague epidemic then ravaging the capital), the baptismal celebration on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1606 actually took place in the Cour Ovale and not in





Léonard Gauthier. The baptism of Louis XIII. Engraving.

the Chapel. In this Oval Courtyard a wide platform had been set up, surmounted by an awning of blue cloth, decorated with stars and dolphins. The precious inlaid baptismal font known as "le baptistère de Saint Louis" was brought from Paris, (cliché 9 RMN) and the celebrations were held in the open air, followed by a magnificent banquet in the Belle Cheminée room which had been decorated with the twenty-two sumptuous hangings of the Scipion tapestry.

Henri IV then decided to entrust the interior decoration, vault, walls and altar to Martin Fréminet. *"The King, having heard much praise of Fréminet, sent for him, appointed him as his chief painter and instructed him to begin by painting the chapel of Fontainebleau"* (Père Dan) And so, after fourteen years spent in Italy, in Rome then in Venice, admiring the work of Michelangelo, Titian and Tintoretto, Fréminet took over this responsibility from Etienne Dumonstier and set himself up in a house in the canal garden.



Inlaid font said to be the «Baptistry of Saint Louis». Egypt, 14th Century. The Louvre.

## IV MARTIN FRÉMINET, "AS SKILLFUL AS HE WAS JUDICIOUS"

Fréminet then proposed a composition with iconography in accord with the spirituality of the Mathurins, reflecting the Mysteries of the Middle-Ages, to the King, and it shows with what care the painter prepared his project: *"Sire, all our faith is in the Church and your Majesty is its protector and its eldest son..."* But, during those years, Père Coton, a Jesuit preacher renowned at the Court, as well as confessor to the King, introduced him to the writings of another Jesuit, Père Richeomme. While present at the Court in 1605, the priest entreated the King to meditate upon the Life of the Virgin, the Last Judgement and the Redemption by Divine Grace of Man the Sinner through some of Père Richeomme's sermons and writings, in particular "Le Pelerin de Lorette" (the Pilgrim of Lorette). At the request of Henri IV, this religious re-orientation led Fréminet to modify his original project ( of which there remains a precise description) as the work progressed, and to choose the Redemption as the central theme of the decoration.



Martin Fréminet. View of the central painting of the vault, framed by stucco mouldings. Christ, triumphant on the Day of Judgement, surrounded by the seven Virtues and Justice.

Work on the vault began in 1608. The future Louis XIII, for whom Fréminet was the Drawing Master, amused himself by coming to see the work in progress and climbing the scaffolding, as the story told by his doctor Héroard goes: *"It is true, see how well it is done"* he said on seeing the painting of the Annunciation "... then you can get down through a hole between the boards".



The scaffolding and pots of paint in the chapel may also explain the somewhat ironic remarks of the Ambassador of Philippe III of Spain during his visit on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1608: when Henri IV asked his opinion about what he had just been shown, he replied *"it wants only to house God there so well as Your Majesty"*. In fact, since March 1608, due to the works, masses were temporarily said in la Salle de la Belle Cheminée, and the monastery itself, moved by order of François Ier, would no longer be seen to such advantage.

Meanwhile however, Fréminet and his assistants were making progress in the church. In a design perhaps inspired by the compartmentalized vault of the Petite Galerie at the Louvre, the Chapel's vault was divided into six sections by thick stucco mouldings. One can see six large scenes (painted in oil directly onto the plaster) representing the doctrine of Redemption: God showing Noah the first sign of His mercy, a rainbow; the Fall of the Angels; Christ Triumphant on the Day of Judgement: the Angel Gabriel "bowing before God to receive his orders as ambassador for the redemption of the human race" (Père Dan); the Holy Fathers assembled in Limbo, delighted by the news of the Mystery of the Incarnation. And above the altar (but hidden since the installation of the high altarpiece in 1628), the Annunciation to the Virgin.



Martin Fréminet. The Archangel Gabriel, sent by God to announce the Incarnation. (Detail).

The strength of the scenes, the contortions of the bodies, the foreshortened architectural perspectives and the chiaroscuro use of light and shadow bring to mind the Italian Master-Painters whose influences are clearly evident. It is well-known that Rubens admired this great cycle of paintings, so very Italianate and totally new to France. Nevertheless, they were sometimes criticized "... of a coarse darkness in the coloration..." and, by Abbé Guilbert "... proud and terrible, and giving his figures movements too violent."

On the wall, heavily framed in stucco, fourteen rectangular or oval paintings depict the Four Elements, the Old Testament Kings, the Patriarchs, the Prophets and Sibyls, as well as the theological Virtues, showing proof, as in the paintings on the vault, of a thorough knowledge of theology and the Bible.



Martin Fréminet, A King of Judah and Israel. According to Dominique Cordelier, this could be Solomon, holding the sword of his proverbial justice. Oil on plaster. Around 1620.

Above the pillars, between the windows sixteen paintings framed with gilt mouldings alternate with panels illustrating scenes from the life of Jesus. The originals are now unfortunately lost to us, so we can no longer see more of Fréminet's hand than six sketchy designs of these paintings, some "modelli (studies)" in grisaille or cameo pink and some drawings kept now at the Louvre. The beauty of the bodies and their poses is extremely impressive. Because they were in a very degraded condition, those works were replaced at the beginning of Louis XVI's reign by paintings on the same subject matter done by different artists. These oils on canvas were later taken down and then re-installed in 1983.

The death of Henri IV, in May 1610, did not stop the works. Fréminet continued his project under Louis XIII "who had no less an estimation of him than his father the King. He honoured him (Fréminet) with the Order of St Michael but while he was working to finish the Chapel, he fell ill and died on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1619" (Abbé Guilbert).



Martin Fréminet. A study of « Religion. » Pink cameo. Oil on canvas-covered board. The Louvre.



Louis-Jean-Jacques Durameau. Jesus healing the paralysed man. 2nd canvas to the right of the altar. Oil on canvas.





Barthélémy Tremblay. Angels holding a cartouche with the coat of arms of France and those of Marie de Medici surrounded by the collar of the order of Saint Michel. Around 1629.

After his death, it was Barthélemy Tremblay, and later his son-in-law Germain Gissey who, after a space of several years "as had been indicated and planned by the Master Fréminet and following his drawings" (Père Dan) created the fifteen plaster Corinthian pilasters in the Chapel, as well as the garlands, festoons, heads of angels and cockle shells. Also attributed to them are the large, rather mannered angels supporting the Arms of France and of Navarre over the altar, and of the King and Marie de Médicis above the door opening onto the gallery. After some temporary installations, (even though there were two sketches of designs for a high altarpiece made by Fréminet in 1611 and again in 1615), it was the Florentine sculptor Francesco Bordonì who completed a retable in 1633. Made of a sumptuous marble enhanced with golden bronze, it



Francesco Bordonì. Inlaid marble flooring. In the centre, the footed (or eight-pointed) Cross of the Trinitarian Order

is surmounted by four bronze angels. The two large statues in the niches "in the most beautiful marble to be found, worked and carved to the best of the sculpture" represent Henri IV in the guise of Charlemagne and Louis XIII in the guise of Saint Louis. The gleaming marble marquetry floor "of which several chapters would not suffice to describe the beauty and richness" (Père Dan) was also the work of Bordonì, following the original desires of Henri IV, who indicated that the chapel and its gallery should "be dressed in marble on all its elements". Here we should point out the novelty of "this type of work, of which the pavement of the Invalides was considered the masterpiece, in the reign of Louis XIV" (Louis Dimier).



Francesco Bordonì. The High Altar. At the centre, a canvas by Jean Dubois. The Holy Trinity at the moment of the descent from the Cross.





Francesco Bordonì. Henri IV in the guise of Charlemagne



Francesco Bordonì. Louis XIII. in the guise of Saint Louis



The screens of the side chapels, restored at the beginning of the second Empire.

The lateral chapels, seven on each side and closed nowadays by identical partition walls, alternate with gilded wooden pilasters. The fourth chapel on the left which is panelled and has a gold altar, had been that of Diane of Poitiers, the mistress of Henri IV. His (chapel) across from hers, with the rich wood carvings, was even more elaborately decorated. "Since 1608, all that has disappeared; all the chapels are the same, closed by gilded wooden screens that harmonize with the beautiful panels prevailing around the church" (Felix Herbet)

The Chapel was consecrated in 1633 after many years of interrupted work. A black marble plaque reminds us:

**In honorem sanctissimae et individuae Trinitatis,  
Ludovicus justus XIII  
Francorum et Navarrae rex Christianissimus  
Dedicavit in domini anno MDCXXXIII**



Gobert. Detail of the door opening onto the chapel, from the first floor vestibule, centred on the horseshoe-shaped staircase which, from the middle of the 16th Century, became the main entrance instead of the Porte Dorée



Tabernacle, ordered by Napoleon I in 1812, in a neo-classical style much appreciated during the 1st Empire and made by the cabinet-maker Morizot and the bronze sculptors Delafontaine.

A little later, in 1639, Gobert sculpted the oak vestibule doors on the first floor, the noble entrance, as well as the door on the ground floor which had been assigned to a more modest workman. In 1642, the altar was completed with the addition of a painting by Jean Dubois representing the Holy Trinity at the moment of the Descent from the Cross.

During the reign of Louis XIV, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1656, the bells were baptized. "The fifteenth day of the month of May 1656, the three bells of the beautiful Chapel of the Château of Fontainebleau, were blessed by Père Lebel, minister and Father Superior of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, based at said château, curé of said place and chaplain to the King. The biggest bell was named Louise, for the very Christian King Louis the Fourteenth, the middle one was called Anne, after Anne of Austria, Queen of France and mother of the King. The smallest bell was named Julie, in the name of His Eminence Cardinal Jules Mazarin, Prime Minister of State, done on the aforementioned days and hours after vespers in the Chapel of the aforementioned Château of Fontainebleau." Destroyed in 1702 by a fire that ravaged the clock tower, those bells were replaced by others ordered from the founder Gilles le Moine.

A new tabernacle, replacing the first ( of which no trace remains) was created by the sculptor Girardon in 1680. The relief on the door pays homage to the founders of the Trinitarian Order, Saint Jean de Matha and Saint Félix de Valois. Taken away during the Revolution, at the same time as the large statues left at the Louvre, it has for many years adorned the altar of the parish church of Saint Louis of Fontainebleau. The tabernacle now in place, ordered in 1812 by Napoleon I, was made by the bronze-founder & sculptor Delafontaine.





French school. The Marriage of Louis XV at Fontainebleau. 5th September, 1725. Oil on canvas. Château of Fontainebleau.

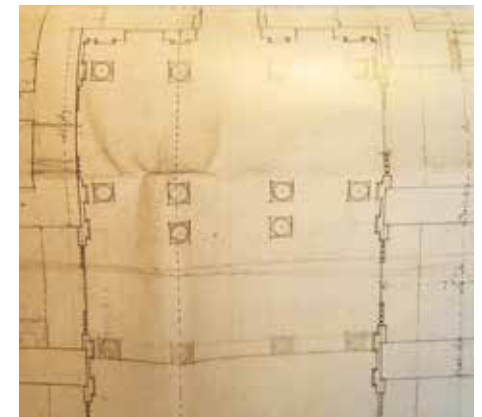
## V LOUIS XV AND THE PRIVACY OF PRAYER.

The following century, on the 5th of September 1725, a young King Louis XV, 15 years of age, married Princess Marie Leczinska in the Chapel of the Trinity which was equipped with viewing stands rising almost to the height of the balconies. The ceremony lasted 3 hours and was preceded, at least for the Princess, by an exhausting session of dressing and personal preparation. It was conducted by Cardinal de Rohan and the Father Superior of the Trinitarians. According to the description of *"...the magnificent festival which took place in Fontainebleau attending the wedding of the King, the Queen was taken ill during the service, it was necessary to break the windows of the chapel to give some air"*.



Page from the Gazette.

An avid hunter, the King came regularly to Fontainebleau. With advancing age and authority, he decided to modify certain areas in the château, some for his own comfort and privacy, others in the new wing of the Cour du Cheval Blanc to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of courtiers. At the same time, he wanted to better adapt the areas of devotion to the religious practices of the royal family. And so, in 1747, a small private oratory was created for Marie Leczinska on the mezzanine level of her apartment, which, thirty years later, became the Turkish-style boudoir of Queen Marie Antoinette. But before that, in 1741, a quite ambitious plan had been envisaged for the chapel. A transept was to be created in place of the last row of the choir, which would change the (original) basilica plan. The high altar would be moved, replaced by a double-face altar of which the rear side would face towards the choir and be surrounded by stalls reserved for the Trinitarian monks. However, because of the Austrian war of succession, other budgetary imperatives meant that this project would be abandoned. Nevertheless, the raised tribune of the chapel where the royal family attended daily mass was elegantly transformed: four superb Corinthian columns were erected, in order to support an enlarged floor with a girder. In place of the



Detail of the plan of the ground floor with the addition of graphite pencil lines showing the planned new columns to support the tribune. Archives nationales O1 1421-80.





The panelling, a «remarkable example of the art of sculpting in wood, carried out for the Crown» (Xavier Salmon). Although these oratories were designed for the private prayer of the Queen and her daughters, nevertheless the King's monogram, the 2 interlaced letters L, is very evident in the Royal Chapel.



Jean-Marc Nattier. Queen Marie Leczinska reading the Gospels. Oil on canvas. 1748. Château de Versailles.

existing oratories, (also known as "niches" or if more enclosed, "lanternes"), and to make them nearly identical to those in the Chapel Royal at Versailles, two new small oratories facing the altar were constructed.

We attribute the decoration of the sculpted panels to Verbrecht, who embroidered around the King's monogram and the bread of the Last Supper with the same delicacy he showed in the profane subjects adorning the Dauphin's apartment, the Council Chamber, and the King's bedroom. *"The ornamentation is of a great delicacy, vigorous and elegant. It places this ensemble at the level of the best French creations of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century"* (Côme Fabre) Comfort was assured by benches strewn with cushions, some prie-Dieu (prayer stools) covered in velvet, a carpet, *"On the subject of the carpet: on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1768. Delivered by Mr Gilbert, Esquire, Inspector of the Royal manufacturer of the Savonnerie. To serve the Ladies of France in the Chapel of the Château de Fontainebleau. A carpet of wool, background black, having at the centre a Moorish rose surrounded by cockleshells and a garland of flowers and fruit, and at the corners, a fleur de lys on a blue base, the border formed by a moulding entwined with foliage."* (Pierre Verlet. The James A. de Rothschild collection at Waddington Manor) an occasional table, and white taffeta curtains to protect from the cold and preserve the intimacy of devotions. And because they were careful to do the work between the visits of the Royal Family *"there will be nothing to fear (of the odour) of the primer (made of rabbit glue) which will not smell after a fortnight with the precautions that we have taken"* (letter from Louis de Cotte to Philibert Orry, the Director General of the King's Buildings, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1741).

These new arrangements of the gallery and the oratories allowed the Queen to be at ease



The tribune and the carpet. Between 1815 and 1825, around twenty different pieces were set up on the looms of the Savonnerie. Jean-Demosthène Dogourd designed three, one being for the Throne room at the Tuileries, which represents a major piece of work for the manufactory. The central part can be seen at the Senate and the two side pieces at the Château de Fontainebleau.

during her hours of devotion, attended by her chaplain, her Guard of Honour and her Ladies-in-Waiting. Near to her, in the "niche" on the left, her eldest daughters took their places, then the younger sisters, after their return from the Abbey of Fontevault where they had been raised. The King and his son sat in the centre of the gallery. *"no day passes that he doesn't hear mass, and he attends it with respect, always on his knees, reciting the prayers from his book"* (letter from the Ambassador Kaunitz to the Empress Marie-Thérèse). Behind, the ladies of the court were to be found, *"for whom, madame de la Tournelle having complained that the benches which were behind were only boards with no coverings, they were covered in crimson plush"* (Duc de Luynes). But after the deaths of the Queen and the Dauphin (Heir Apparent), and due as well to the changes within the Royal Family, the utility of the oratories was brought into question and that led to their meticulous dismantling in 1771. *"The King ordered to have the galleries demolished with care and to reunite all the pieces in storage, in such a way that, if it was judged appropriate to re-use them, as might happen some day, they would be in a state to be re-employed"* (letter from the Marquis de Marigny to Monsieur de Moranzel, controller of buildings in charge of Fontainebleau). A gilded sculpted balustrade (now disappeared) replaced the dismantled oratories. In turn they were replaced by some very beautiful Empire chairs leaving the Savonnerie carpet open to admiration. The carpet was a portion of one taken from the Throne Room of the Tuileries (although, in 1737, a Gobelins carpet had been woven for the choir). Installed under Napoleon I, but cut up in the centre, this new carpet was rewoven and received the royal lily under the Restoration.



## VI AN ORGAN STILL IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE.

During the reign of Louis XV, the ornate wrought-iron balconies were placed in front of the bays of the first floor of the nave. The King's Music was placed behind these balconies opposite the narrow tribune on which was installed the organ. Every year when the Court was in residence in the Autumn, François Couperin came to play the Trinity organ, a "transportable positive organ" probably brought from Versailles and built by Louis Alexandre Clicquot. In 1774 his son, the famous organ-maker François-Henri Clicquot, built this very beautiful instrument on a specially raised tribune. It was a small eight foot model which remains there to this day. Tiers of wooden seats made a somewhat precarious installation for approximately fifty instrumentalists whose music gave the response to the singers opposite. This was how the famous « grand chœur » motets of Delalande and Rameau were performed.

But at the time of the Revolution, when all the treasures were taken from the sacristy, when the candle sticks and sacred vessels were sent to be melted down, when certain paintings were burned and the chapel turned into a store, the organ, stripped of its pipes and suffering from the passage of the years, was more or less abandoned. Almost two centuries later, in 1967, the organ was extensively restored, thanks to the remarkable work of the organ-builder



The organ was built in 1772 by François-Henri Clicquot for the musicians' tribune in the Kings chapel. Having been stripped of its pipes during the Revolution, it was rebuilt by Alfred Kern in 1967, using available mechanical parts.

Alfred Kern, using existing parts. Today, the association les Amis de l'Orgue works to enable the chapel to remain a place of worship and of culture, where, in the best possible conditions, people can hear the great music which has been played here throughout the centuries.

In 1804, life returned to the château and to the chapel. Pope Pius VII had accepted Napoleon's request to be present at his coronation in Notre Dame de Paris on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1804. Fontainebleau was chosen as the place where the Pope and Napoleon would meet and in nineteen days, "as if by



J-R Auguste. The coronation ewer. Vermeil, 1804. Château de Fontainebleau.

magic" according to the journal of the architect Fontaine, the château was refurnished, but using unmatched and heterogeneous furniture. The large statues of Charlemagne and of Saint Louis were returned to the chapel which once more became a place of worship, in accordance with the decision of the Concordat of 1801.

1810 saw the baptism of the future Napoleon III, aged two. Napoleon I, then at the height of his glory and only a few months after his marriage to Marie-Louise, who was expecting a child, wished his nephew's baptism in the chapel of the château to be a particularly glittering occasion, in this place which he respectfully described as "the true abode of kings, the house of the ages."

## VII THREE WEDDINGS ON 30<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1837

The chapel, which had fallen into disrepair, was extensively restored during the reigns of Louis XVIII and Charles X : renovation of the side chapels, construction of a walking gallery to replace the former terrace, raising of the organ-loft facing the court yard. Here in the chapel on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1837, the wedding was celebrated of the Duke of Orléans, eldest son of King Louis-Philippe, to Princess Hélène of Mecklembourg-Schwerin. The religious ceremony was preceded by the civil wedding, which took place in the Salle de Bal. As the young bride was of Protestant confession and wished to retain her own religion, a third wedding took place in the Salle des Colonnes, where an altar had been set up, bedecked with green velvet. Notre-Dame de Paris would, no doubt, have been a more prestigious venue, but, despite the dispensation granted by Pope Gregory XVI, the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr de Quelen, a fervent legitimist close to Charles X, had refused to officiate. The Chapel of the Trinity in the château of Fontainebleau, seemed, by its long and eminent history, to offer an elegant alternative solution. So it was the Archbishop of Meaux, Mgr Gallard, who received the wedding vows of the couple. This is portrayed on the porcelain plaques of the wonderful "wedding cabinet" recounting the three ceremonies which was presented by the City of Paris as a wedding gift to the young duchess.

Faithful to the chapel of his baptism, the Emperor Napoleon III continued the work of renovation and embellishment undertaken by his predecessors. Freminet's paintings were fully restored,





Bronze cabinet, designed by Jules Bouchet and decorated with porcelain plaques, which illustrate the three ceremonies. Drawings by painter Charles Develly and porcelain figurines by the sculptor Jaley. Château de Fontainebleau.



the altar bronzes and large angels regilded. In 1866 a white marble statue was installed as a holy-water font. With the return of the carved wood screens, the chapel became close to what it had been earlier. In 1930, this in turn led to the replacement in their stucco frames of most of the oval paintings from the time of Louis XVI and to the gradual reconstitution of the walls and windows. The decorative ensemble as seen today is very close to that at the end of the reign of Louis XVI.

In 1978, the architect B Collette repainted the figures in cameo on the woodwork on the ground floor.



Trinity Sunday, 19th June 2011.  
Blessing of the statue of Saint Jean of Matha.

## VIII “NOW AND FOR EVER AND EVER”

Today, far from being just a museum, the chapel remains a place of worship, supported in this aim by the Association of the Friends of the Order of the Trinity in accordance with their mission to further the renewal of the Order. Prayers which have been recited here for eight hundred years are still heard today, particularly during the two annual masses celebrated in January and at the Feast of the Holy Trinity, ending with that great doxology “Glory be to God the Father Almighty, to his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to the Holy Spirit within our hearts, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end”

## IX SO BEAUTIFUL THAT NOTHING MORE IS NEEDED.

Let us end this short account with a few lines from the *Mercure Galant* recounting the wedding on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1679 uniting Marie Louise d’Orléans, eldest daughter of Monsieur, the King’s Brother, with the King of Spain:

*“The ceremony was to take place in the chapel of the château, known as the beautiful chapel, being indeed one of the most beautiful in the kingdom. The gilding, the sculptures, the figures and the paintings were all so beautiful that it was quite unnecessary to add any other ornaments, apart from a large cross and six ornate candlesticks on the altar”*

So beautiful, then, that all we have to do is to look around it, without, of course, forgetting the Holy Chapel or the Royal Chapel at Versailles, which may be equally deserving of such praise. •



Door of the tribune of The Chapel of the Trinity by Gobert. 1639



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