

## Charles Perrault Mémoires de ma vie

### *Plan for the Louvre proposed by the cavaliere Bernini:*

While he was working on the bust (of Louis XIV), all was put in order to facilitate the execution of Bernini's design for the Louvre. He put together an account of all the materials, work and tasks required for the project, the most detailed that had ever been produced, and the most filled with useless precautions – such that it must at least be seen as the product of a man of consummate prudence. He ordered the despatch of stone-workers from Rome, men we would simply call masons here in France, but claiming that the French knew nothing about building.

### *Manner in which the Italians built:*

Bernini wanted us to have regard to two things, both of which should be done in Italy where pozzolana [a type of volcanic ash] is used instead of sand, but which is inappropriate here in France. The first of these is to use the small, rough stones employed in the foundations without hammering them together and then layering them systematically and carefully, but simply tipping them into the foundation trench without any attempt at arrangement – because he argued, simply thrown in haphazardly they would combine better with the mortar and form a structure that was solidier. The second was to dampen the moilon when it was being employed. Our own builders argued the contrary with equal conviction, such that it was considered necessary to carry out a comparison of these two methods of construction in a part of the Palais Mazarin.

### *Two bids to construct a wall and a vault, one by the Italians one by the French:*

The “stone-workers” built two walls using their technique, five or six feet high, over which they constructed a stone vault using the same techniques as they had used for the walls – that's to say the moilons put in haphazardly; our own masons built two walls up to the same height and also constructed a vault in the same style and shape as the Italians, with the same materials, but using the techniques practised in France.

### *That of the Italians collapsed at the first signs of spring thawing of the ice, whereas the French construction remained entirely firm.*

It is quite true that at the end of the winter the Italian vault collapsed, whereas the French design was as strong and solid as it was when first constructed. The “stone-workers” were astonished, and excused themselves by saying that the ice had ruined their work, as if it was entirely extraordinary that there should be icy weather during the winter.

### *Memorandum of some of the faults in the design of the cavaliere Bernini:*

As Bernini's plan was not very well conceived and as it could not have been constructed without exciting the scorn of everyone in France, I wrote a memorandum concerning just some of the incongruities in the plan – I didn't think it was appropriate to list all of the faults in this first account. I sent the memorandum to Monsieur Colbert who was at Saint-Germain at that time. As soon as he came back to Paris having read the memorandum he asked me to join him in his garden – abandoning the audience that he was giving at that time in order to speak to me. “I was surprised, he told me, at the

memorandum that you sent me; are all these matters that you have commented upon true, and have you gone into them in detail?"

I replied that "I did not think, Monsieur, that I have said anything which is not exactly as I have written about it; but I ask your pardon for the liberty that I have taken in penning these criticisms.

"You did well, he told me, and should continue; one cannot shed too much light on a matter of such importance. I cannot understand how this man should have drawn up a design for us where so many things are poorly considered or incorrect."

From this moment Monsieur Colbert recognized that he had been duped by Bernini, but he believed that it was still necessary to try to revise and to make the project work. He seems to have believed that by making use of good advice it would be possible to put Bernini back onto the right tracks, and that the result would be an excellent building. But in thinking this he did not know Bernini.

#### *Opposition between Bernini and Colbert:*

It would be hard to imagine two spirited figures who were more different. Bernini was not remotely interested in practical detail, and thought only of creating great salons in which plays could be performed or in which elaborate festivities and ceremonials could be held. He simply couldn't be bothered with practical details in his plans, the various constraints on his plans for the use of space, the allocation of appropriate and adequate rooms to each of the functions within the palace – innumerable matters which demanded an attention to detail which Bernini simply did not possess, and was incompatible with his spontaneous and flighty personality.

#### *Bernini's talents:*

Essentially I am convinced that in architectural matters Bernini was much inferior to his skills in decoration and in building theatrical machines. In addition he could at times be extremely impertinent, as was the case when he claimed that various of his machines had been destroyed by a fire which everyone else assumed had been extinguished before it did any damage, and which could indeed have been controlled if he hadn't been so anxious to get away as fast as possible from the threat of the fire. Monsieur Colbert, in contrast, wanted precision; he wanted to know precisely where the king would be lodged, how he could be served smoothly and easily, and was persuaded that it was not just a question of providing lodgings for the king and other members of the royal family, but providing accommodation for all the officers of the court, even down to the most minor staff, who were no less necessary for the efficient service of the king than the grandest. He worked all hours to have memoranda drawn up about everything that needed to be taken into account in the planning and construction of all of this accommodation. Bernini was exasperated by all of these memoranda which he either misunderstood or did not wish to understand, considering that it was demeaning for a great architect such as himself to have to descend to such utilitarian concerns. He complained of this treatment to Monsieur Chantelou, and did so in a manner which showed scant respect. "Monsieur Colbert, he said, treats me like a little boy (these are the terms cited in the account written by M. Chantelou, which was passed on to me after Chantelou's death); he bombards me with useless discussion-papers about the location of privies and water-pipes, he wastes the time of entire offices of staff; he wants to play the skilled, knowledgeable patron but

he knows nothing: he's a real c\*\*\* ” He added that Colbert wanted to portray Bernini as an obstacle to getting the project completed, and that he had almost been pushed as far as he would go, but that reason had just held him back so far.

*Rising hostility between Bernini and Colbert:*

If Bernini was frustrated by Colbert, M. Colbert for his part was no less dissatisfied with Bernini, though Colbert concealed this increasing hostility and was careful to speak of Bernini in public in terms of the greatest respect. However one day an event occurred which opened my eyes to the true state of affairs and allowed me to get a glimpse of what the Court was really like.

*The occasion on which Colbert allowed me to see what he really thought of the Cavaliere Bernini.*

One day Colbert said to Bernini: “We are about to start constructing a building that will cost millions of *livres*, but this is unimportant: the king will never regret the expenditure of money provided that the building in every way matches up to his highest expectations. That said I will take the opportunity to say that, if we do not watch out, then this building, in which there will be all manner of great halls for ceremonies and for theatrical performances, salons of the most prodigious grandeur, wonderful galleries and everything else appropriate to the majesty of a truly great palace, that in all of this the king will be forced to sleep in a room so small that half the officials and others who have the right to attend on the king will not be able to squeeze themselves in. That will without doubt be a source of major reproach, and which will be laid at your door. It is essential to remember before anything else that the Louvre is a palace for the winter, for during the others seasons the king will be lodged in the other royal palaces out in the countryside, that it is also essential that the king's apartment should face southwards, which also provides the best view out towards the river. It also needs to be taken into account and is not negotiable that the king must have his bedroom in the pavilion which represents the end-point of the wing which runs along the bank of the river [the South Façade]. Placing the king's apartment in the opposite [North] wing as you propose would involved having to place sentries in the street outside to ensure that first thing in the morning the noise of carriages and carts would not intrude on the royal apartments. Moreover the chosen pavilion consists of a run of only three bays [windows], of which two will need to be allocated to the presence chamber, such that there will be only one window available for the king's bedchamber which, as a result, will be so small that, as I've already said, there will not be space for half the officials and courtiers to squeeze in to take part in the royal ceremonial.”

Bernini promised that he would think about trying to remedy these problems. Three days later he brought a drawing to the building committee which met at the Louvre. This committee consisted of Monsieur Colbert and M de Chambray [Roland Fréart, sieur de Chambray, the brother of M. de Chantelou], and myself. Bernini originally concealed the drawing, and first of all announced to Colbert that the angel who presided over the good fortune of France had inspired him to rework his plans. He himself could not have hoped, unaided, to have conceived a structure so beautiful, so grandiose and as entirely suitable as that which had come to him in this inspired moment of reflection. “I entered into the most profound thought”, he told us with the fullest of emphasis, just as if he was

telling us that he had been down into hell to collect the ideas. Finally, and after a long preparation which would have wearied the most polite and respectful of men, he showed us his design with the same kind of pomp and ceremony as if he had been showing us the one true picture of the crucifixion of Our Lord. This “profound thought” was no more than a little scrap of paper stuck on yet another design for the pavilion of the Louvre against the river, on which he had marked, with a yellow pen, four bays in place of the three that he had given in the previous design for the building. He told us that of these four bays, two would be allocated to the presence chamber, and that the other two could be provided for the bedchamber. Moreover by pushing back the internal wall that separated the two chambers, it would be possible to reduce the size of the presence chamber a little, but that this would contribute to enlarging the bedchamber proportionately. M. Colbert appeared to give strong approval to these new thoughts, and heaped massive praise on them. I, who was standing next to Colbert and was enraged to see such an exercise in unjustified self-promotion, could not prevent myself from saying to him in a low voice that Bernini’s revised project could not be executed without demolishing the existing pavilion on the South façade and also the three others which were arranged symmetrically on the other corners with this one – something which was quite out of the question. Bernini, who was apparently offended at my impertinence in opening my mouth, but who had heard nothing, demanded to know what I had just said. Colbert simply said that it was nothing, and not worth repeating. However Bernini insisted on hearing, to the point where he said that he would leave immediately if he was not told. At which Colbert gave him a full account of my objection. Bernini, without responding to my criticism, simply dismissed my views saying that it was clear that I was not an architect by profession and that it ill-befitted me to give my opinion on a matter about which I knew nothing. Colbert replied that he was quite right, and that there was no reason to take note of what I had said. I was treated by both men as if I was the stupidest and most ignorant of men. The plan was admired by everyone else and after having gone on to speak of a number of other things the company split up. Bernini went home, and Colbert returned to the apartment that he had in the Louvre. I followed him and, when passing him in a corridor, asked his pardon for having taken the liberty of speaking out about the drawing of the cavalieri. “Do you think, he replied to me with the greatest anger and indignation, that I couldn’t see the problem just as clearly as you? Devil take the b\*\*\*\*, who thinks that he can run rings round us like this.” I was astonished by this outburst, and at the same time gave thanks to God that he had opened my eyes to the dissimulation that one is obliged to practice when at Court.

After the new plans of Bernini appeared to have been sufficiently examined, the day came for the placing of the first stone of the foundations of the main façade of the Louvre. The King wished to place this himself and the ceremony took the following form.

*How the King placed the first stone to begin Bernini’s project for the Louvre.*

The stone set in place by the King was about a foot and a half square, and cleanly cut by the masons. To be embedded within the stone in a special cavity were a medal and an inscribed plaque. The medal was gold and had the King’s head on one face and on the other Bernini’s design for the building with the words: *Majesti et aeternitati Imperii*

*Gallici sacrum.* It was worth one hundred louis. It had been sculpted by M Varin, and the motto had been devised by M. Chapelain. The expense of making dies and casts from steel had been too great and would have taken too much time. A pestle of ebony and pear-wood had been made to hold the mortar, and a silver trowel and steel hammer provided for the ceremony.

M. Colbert, followed by the various officers of the King's Buildings, had placed themselves in the site of the foundations with the various workers and the master of works, M. Villedo (master of the king's stonemasons since 1654). Colbert held the measuring rod which he passed to me, the workers held the trowel, the pestle and the calipers, and the master of works held the hammer. Chantelou's *Journal* says that Bernini held the trowel. The King arrived, followed by numerous courtiers. After he had established himself on of the workers handed the trowel to Colbert (M. the Superintendant of Buildings), who passed it to the King, who used it to apply some mortar to the place where the first stone was to be set, which was in turn lowered into position by the workers. Then the hammer was passed to the King by Villedo, and His Majesty struck the stone two or three times.

*The medal set into the foundations.*

The medal and the inscription were also presented to the King, who, having first looked at both of them, then placed them in the cavity within the stone expressly created for them, and the second stone was set on top to seal the cavity. After this the King left the site, instructing that one hundred *pistoles* were to be given to the workers. Trumpeters who had been brought to the edge of the building-site played fanfares as they had done when the king arrived. The Superintendant of Buildings (Colbert) and his officials accompanied the King to the exit of the building-site and workshops, except for the Comptroller and the senior clerk, who remained at the site and who did not leave until the first stones had been sufficiently covered by others that there seemed no danger that anyone would venture in at night and seek to steal the medal.

*Inscription placed in the foundations.*

The French inscription, placed in the foundations of the Louvre and written on a large gilded plaque, said the following.

LOUIS XIV, KING OF FRANCE AND NAVARRE

Having defeated and disciplined his enemies, given peace to Europe and having relieved the burdens and suffering of his peoples, resolved to complete the royal palace of the Louvre, begun by François I and continued by subsequent kings. He initially considered working within the same plan; but subsequently, having conceived a new, grander and more magnificent design, such that what had been built hitherto would represent only a small part of the total building, established here the foundations of this superb construction in the year of grace 1665, the 17<sup>th</sup> day of October. M. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, minister of State and Treasurer of the Orders of His Majesty, then Superintendant of the King's Buildings.

On another copper plaque of the same size and thickness was inscribed:

*Ludovicus XIV, Francorum et Navarrae rex christianissimus, florente aetate, consummata virtute, devictis hostibus, sociis defensis, finibus productis, pace sancita, asserta religione, navigatione instaurata,*

*Regias Aedes*

*Superiorum principum aevo inchoatas, et ab ipso juxta prioris exemplaris formam magna ex parte constructas, tandem pro majori tam sua quam imperii dignitate longe ampliores atque editores exitari jussit; earumque fundamenta posuit anno R.S. MDCLXV. Octob. operi promovendo solerter ac sedulo invigilante Joan-Batista Colbert, Regi Aedif. Praefecto.*

*Dispute which I had with the Cavaliere Bernini.*

One day [6<sup>th</sup> October 1665] when I was in Bernini's workshop while he was working on the sculpted bust of the King, I amused myself by looking over the design for the river [South] façade of the Louvre, which the sieur Mathias [Mattia de Rossi], Bernini's pupil, was redrawing in a final version. Having noticed that one side of the building was not identical with the other, I asked M. Mathias what the reason for this was. Bernini, who heard me ask this question, entered the room immediately, furious, and called me all imaginable names, suggesting among other things that I was not even worthy to clean the muck off his boots. After having allowed his anger to dissipate, I told him as respectfully and straightforwardly as I could that I had not intended by my question to say anything against his plan, but that having the honour to be the chief clerk of the royal buildings, I had hoped to discover some information from the master's pupil so that I would be in a better position to answer at least some of the thousands of questions that courtiers and others asked me about the design of the buildings. I had asked the question which had so insulted him so that I would be in a position to answer the same question that I was regularly asked. The way that I responded was so reasonable that his anger died down a little; but he continued to repeat words like: "to a man of my rank! That I should be treated thus - me, whom the Pope treats with respect and courtesy. I will go and complain to the King; I'll leave tomorrow; he thinks he can treat me in this way, and it would serve him right if I took a hammer to my bust of the King after such an insult. I'll go and see the nuncio..." I had no idea whether he went to any of these lengths or not, but he certainly did not mention the episode to either the King or to M. Colbert, and matters were allowed to rest. M. de Chantelou recorded in his *Journal* that it was he [Chantelou] who dissuaded Bernini from lodging a complaint, having pleaded with Bernini that it would ruin the career of a young man. Certainly the episode did me no harm, for when later the same day I recounted to M. Colbert the events as they had happened, Colbert simply told me that I must be more careful to say nothing whatsoever about Bernini's design, but that I had no reason to be concerned for Bernini was far too skilful an operator to make an issue of this episode given the present state of play with regard to the building project. However I certainly think that if at that moment he had received from my hands the king's gift of 3,000 *louis d'or* – the episode I will mention later – then he might well have been tempted to make some petty comment or complaint.

*Two proposals made by Bernini for the foundations of the Louvre, both of which were found to be worthless.*

The Cavaliere proposed two things concerned with the foundations of the Louvre: the first was to cut back two feet on the third layer of the foundations, which was pointless because it would have involved building up the walls on only one part of the foundation stones. This proposed cutting back was rejected; the other proposal was that the earth beneath the foundations should be excavated, which was felt to be pointless and was not followed.

*Aphorisms of Cavaliere Bernini.*

M. de Chantelou, in his *Journal*, reported numerous aphorisms and worthy sayings of Bernini, which I set down here in sequence so as to save the time and effort of mentioning the occasions and circumstances when he made these comments, circumstances which are of little significance.

Speaking of the bust of the King that he was about to sculpt, he said that a marble bust was like a face in which everything was blank to begin with, etc., etc...

He said that it was not at all shameful that the French should have brought an architect from Rome, any more than it would be shameful for Rome to send for a French army general if she had need of one.

He said that having once asked Pope Urban VIII for a dowry for a girl whom he assured the Pope was exceptionally virtuous, Urban replied that "she would have the dowry if she had the virtue."

He said that the Spanish had absolutely no taste in matters artistic, and he took any opportunity to mock them for this.

He considered that the Pasquino in Rome was the most beautiful of all antique sculptures, and after it, the torso that was said to be a statue of Hercules.

He said that Urban VIII had written the following epigram about his sculpture of Apollo and Daphne:

"Whosoever pursues beauty with fiery desire  
Will only discover, on capturing the prize, a bitter fruit."

He said that the medals that were cast with the lightest relief were the best masters.

That he has in Rome a shield that was 4 or 5 feet high, which weighed only two pounds, and yet could withstand the force of a musket shot. It was made of the skins of three fish layered one upon another.

He said that there were stables in Italy which had sets of stairs in order to train the horses to ascend and descend these flights.

He told the nuncio that it was God who inspired him when he drew up the design for the Louvre.

That Michaelangelo only sculpted nine or ten figures in his life, although he lived for 92 years.

That Annibale Carracci, pressed to give his opinion about Michaelangelo's sculptures, said that it was necessary to see the bodies of men from the time of Michaelangelo before passing any judgement.

That he had a great enemy in Paris, which was the great opinion that the Parisians had of his abilities.

That water should be measured using a clock.

He said to M. Colbert, who praised his design for the Louvre, that he was not the author, but that God was.

That Pope Paul III said one day “When I refuse a pardon to a criminal, my judgement is made here (pointing to his head); when I accord pardon to his sisters, the judgement is made here (placing his hand on his heart)”.

He said that you cannot fill up a large fountain by emptying a small bottle of water into it, and that a mediocre talent will not gain anything by proximity to a great and creative genius. (The great creative mind was certainly intended to represent Bernini himself, and I believe that the mediocre talent was M. le Brun – and that Bernini had come up with this comment about the silence that he had maintained about the works of le Brun.)

That pupils should learn to draw draperies from looking at sculptures in relief. (In my opinion there is nothing weaker in classical reliefs than their depiction of drapery.)

That there should be no flowers depicted on the borders or tapestries, nor should there be any use of burnished gold paint in paintings, because it is too bright for the other colours, nor should there be any ornamentation in niches that were intended to hold statues, for the sculptures themselves were the ornamentation.

That Raphael was beginning to paint like Titian in his last years, that’s to say that he was including reflections in his paintings, as can be seen from the painting that he did of Pope Leo X.

“That buildings are the images of the souls of princes.”

“I doubt, Bernini said, that the King has any real experience of truly beautiful things; to gain this it’s necessary that he should see some great piece of architecture to refine his judgement. Once he has seen a great piece of sculpture (by which he meant his own bust of the King), then he will be better able to judge quality in architecture.”

He said to M. Le Brun that it was better always to depict legs in paintings as too long rather than too short (he was correct in this, and it was certainly a fault of Le Brun’s depictions).

That the Spanish like only highly polished marble sculpture, which they call *lindo*.

A king said: “I rob my subjects”. The minister said: “I rob the king”. The tailor said: “I rob the minister”. The soldier said: “I rob all of them.” The confessor said: “I absolve all four of them”. And the devil said “I’ll take all five of them down to hell”. This little story was actually told by the abbé Butti.

He said that Trajan’s column was the school that had taught both Raphael and Giulio Romano their skills. Michaelangelo said that if the painters of Lombardy had been able to draw well, then noone would have looked at paintings produced anywhere else, but that it was only in Rome that there was Trajan’s column. (All of this is nonsense. There are some relief sculptures at the base of the column which are especially beautiful, and there are plaster casts of almost all of these sculptures from the lower column which are just as good as the original marbles for developing a feel for antique sculpture and its imitation. The rest of the column is almost worthless, and since plaster casts of these have been brought back to France not a single painter or sculptor has seen fit to copy them, though they were brought back to France with precisely this intention.)

M. de Chantelou argued that the lowest sections of Trajan’s column were sculpted with the intention that those higher up should appear to be exactly the same scale as the lower ones, and that the lower figures are therefore smaller than those higher up, and that both sets are contrived to suit the angle at which they would be seen by a spectator on the ground. The effect is therefore completely uniform, although in reality the figures are of deliberately different sizes. (The good man has no idea what he’s talking about. I had

the figures measured by M. Girardon, who sent me all the measurements which I have included in my papers: the bas-reliefs at the base of the column are the same size as those higher up; there isn't the slightest difference in scale.)

Bernini said that there were stones in the façade of Nero's palace which were six foot cubes; this is frankly ridiculous, even if what he really meant was six feet square instead of cubed. M de Chantelou added after this comment of Bernini's that it would be difficult to design machines capable of lifting a block of stone of this size, though suggested that this could have been accomplished because of the infinite number of slaves available in Rome. What an excellent solution!

In respect of the fact that in Italy buildings which show the line of their roofs are regarded as crude and disliked, M. the marshal du Plessis produced a good explanation, and one which was quite different from the usual explanation that in warm climates there is no need to have pointed roofs as in a cold climate where the roofs need to be proof against strong winds and the weight of snow and ice in the winter. Du Plessis suggested instead that the reason was that tiles in Italy tend to be very ugly, and that they don't have slates as for roofing as we have in France.

Bernini said nothing about the paintings of M. Le Brun that he saw in the church of the Carmelites.

The abbé Butti said that M. Le Brun was the reason why the banker and collector Eberhard Jabach refused to put any of his drawings on display – fearing that Le Brun would steal the ideas from them.

Bernini said that Charles Vigarani [Superintendent of theatrical machines and the entertainments of the King] was devoid of intelligence and had no sense of perspective or of drawing; that his father [Gaspard Vigarani, Superintendent of buildings of the Duke of Modena] had known something about how to construct theatrical machines, but that his son knew nothing and that all of the designs were done by one of his valets who knew more about design than he did.

*Gift of 3,000 louis d'or made to Bernini, and the King's brevet of 12,000 livres, etc.*

It's necessary to finish off here about Bernini before moving on to other matters. Once the foundations of the Louvre had been advanced according to the designs of Bernini, he requested permission to return to Rome, claiming that he could not spend a winter in a climate as cold as that of northern France. The day before his departure I carried to him personally, to do him greater honour, 3,000 *louis d'or* in three separate sacks, together with a royal brevet for a pension worth 12,000 *livres* per year, and another brevet to provide a pension of 1,200 *livres* for Bernini's son.

*His response:*

Bernini's only reply when he received me was that this was a good day and that it would be good if they came round more often. As for the brevet, he said that he thought he would receive the pension for a year or two, but not beyond that. I replied to him that the King's promises were absolute, and that he had no reason to doubt his good faith. I was somewhat surprised at this bizarre reception for myself and for the king's generosity. He had been promised 3,000 *louis d'or* per year if he would remain in France, and 6,000 *livres* for his son and for his pupil, M. Mathias, 900 *livres* for the sieur Jules (Giulio Cartari), 600 *livres* for sieur Cosme (Cosimo Scarlati), Bernini's majordomo, and 500

*livres* for each of Bernini's three valets. In the event that the sieur Mathias would remain in Paris on his own, he would receive 12,000 *livres* per year.

*Sarcasm of marshal Grammont:*

The marshal said that the Cavaliere had shown great generosity when he left France, having given a 30 *sol* coin to the old woman who had served him throughout the time he had been in Paris. Grammont added that the woman had refused to accept this miserable sum, and that Bernini had quickly put it back in his purse. I refused to believe that this story could be true, but Grammont assured me of it, saying that he would not tolerate the presumptuous nor praise their works. Bernini's servants committed a much worse crime – I think without Bernini's own knowledge. The Cavaliere had asked the officials of the King's wardrobe to allow him to borrow one of the King's most beautiful lace collars in order to copy it for the bust. When the officials asked for its return, Bernini's men refused to return it. The King heard about this and told his officials not to go on trying to get it back. As a result the Cavaliere's servants made off with this item.

*Bernini said to be dissatisfied with the present that he had received:*

The Comte de Sault reported that Bernini was dissatisfied with the present that he had received. M. Colbert agreed that Bernini appeared to be unmoved by the King's generosity. Monsieur (the King's brother) having said the same as the Comte de Sault, M de Chantelou sought to paint a different picture, but Monsieur replied that "the King believes the same". And M. the abbé Montagu, who had been present when the King had spoken of the matter, confirmed what Monsieur had said. M. de Chantelou pleaded with Bernini that he should write to M. de Lionne and to ask Lionne to do all possible to disabuse the King of this widespread perception of Bernini's ingratitude. Lionne did this, but the King replied that he had heard of Bernini's response from a source which was unimpeachable.

*The King went to the Louvre to resolve whether to continue the building work in accordance with the design of Bernini.*

When the crucial moment arose of whether to build to Bernini's design on the foundations that had now been completed, M. Colbert began to have his own reservations about the design, to which my own observations certainly contributed. Colbert wanted the King to come from Saint-Germain to Paris to see the model of Bernini's design for the Louvre, which had been constructed with great care and expense, and to expressly order that the project should go forward in the presence of the entire Court. In this way Colbert would be able to avoid incrimination and blame should the project meet general disapproval. Early in the morning of the day when this resolution was to be taken, I set before Colbert a memoir which contained all of my reasons why I considered that the project should not be carried forward. Colbert, having read this, summoned me in order to expand and elaborate some of the points that I made in this document. He seemed fully convinced by all of the points I made about the problems and impracticalities of Bernini's design, so much so that he was afraid that the King might arrive at the Louvre before him and would immediately take the decision to move forward with the design in the presence of the entire Court. To avoid this he had his coach prepared forthwith and ordered the coachman to drive to the Louvre as quickly as possible. The coachman

believed that Colbert meant the Palace of the Tuileries, which was also occasionally called the “Louvre” when the King lodged there. When Colbert realized that the coach was going to the wrong part of the palace he almost fell out of his coach as he leant out of the door to shout at the coachman that he wanted to go to the “Old Louvre” – terrified that the King would arrive before him. He was delighted when they finally got there to discover that the King had not yet arrived.

*M. Colbert, to whom I had given my memoir about all the problems with Bernini’s design, spoke in a low voice to the King about the project but this did not resolve anything.*

Once the King had arrived, Colbert immediately went over to him and spoke secretly to him for a long time. It would seem that Colbert was presenting the King with the main problems of Bernini’s design, for once the king had rejoined the mass of Courtiers who had been standing slightly apart while he conversed with Colbert, he immediately asked them what they thought of Bernini’s design – the model of which, both a large and a small-scale version, was in front of their eyes. The King gave absolutely no indication of what he thought about the model, which left the Courtiers very uncertain and awkward – for it’s well known that the majority of Courtiers only hang around the King in order to agree with him and to praise his wisdom and judgement, and that they are always deeply suspicious of each other and have no wish to be seen to disagree with the King. As they were all afraid to express a view which might not be that of the King, it was amusing to see the way in which they discussed the model while carefully refusing to take any sides for or against it. Yet for all this careful politicking, because Bernini had not been liked by the Courtiers when he had been in France, they tended gradually towards a position that was more critical than favourable.

The King held his own council throughout this charade and after a vague and ambiguous conversation with the various *grande*s who had been looking at the models, he left without having decided anything. All the Courtiers followed him without saying anything. This complete silence seemed as astonishing to me as anything I had yet seen.

*Memoir sent to M. Colbert which showed that Bernini’s design would involve knocking down all of the existing parts of the Louvre.*

This memorandum [also by Perrault] left Colbert in an extremely awkward position, even though it had been specified earlier that it was certainly not agreed to go forward with Bernini’s plans if this would involve destroying those parts of the palace that had been built by the King’s predecessors. Respect for the integrity of the older parts of the palace was a fundamental condition of all the projects for the new section; Bernini’s plan disregarded this stipulation in two respects: in the first place it would involve demolishing the four domed pavilions in the old building which could not be preserved if Bernini’s design was to be carried out. In the second place, the plan required that the façades on all four sides of the Louvre should be refaced and all the architectural detail with which they were at present decorated would have to be destroyed: that’s to say the columns would be removed, as would the cornices and all of the architectural ornamentation. This was no less a destruction of the existing building as would be completely painting over an existing picture on a canvas. This memoir was critical in shaping the final decision. Colbert summoned me and asked if I was absolutely certain of

everything which I had included in this memoir. “Monsieur, I replied, matters are exactly as I represent them in this memoir, and in fact M. Mathias totally agrees with my diagnosis.” “That cannot be so, Colbert replied, ask him to come here, give him a copy of your memoir and tell him to put his comments in the margins.”

*The Sr. Mathias, pupil of Bernini, agrees with my memoir.*

I summoned Mathias to my office, and with a pencil he approved all of the articles of my memoir. I took both Mathias and the memoir straight across to Colbert’s office, so that he could present his annotated version. Colbert having reread the memoir and the annotations, spent some time walking around his office without speaking, and I began to worry that he was not going to say anything at all. Finally he spoke: “Bernini considers himself to be a very great man, and takes us to be a bunch of fools; but in both respects he has made an error of judgement. Monsieur, he said, speaking to Mathias, you must think about your journey back to Rome. I am entirely satisfied with your services, and I will give orders that you will be properly rewarded for them. Nonetheless, as you yourself realize, these plans amount to knocking down the existing parts of the Louvre, against all of the conditions that were initially established for the new project, understood when your master came to France. Why did you not remonstrate with Bernini that his plans would defy this stipulation? Mathias answered that he had raised this issue with Bernini on numerous occasions, but that he had always replied that it was not for me to consider these matters, and that I was simply in Paris to make formal drawings and to help to execute Bernini’s own projects.

*The Sr Mathias returns to Rome.*

Mathias was well-paid and left promptly [end of May 1667; he received 9,000 *livres* of wages and 7,000 *livres* for his travelling costs to return to Rome], and we never heard again either from him or from Bernini himself about the Louvre project.

*Equestrian Statue that Bernini sculpted for the King and sent to Versailles.*

It is true that the Cavaliere undertook to sculpt and equestrian statue of the King which, according to Bernini’s own promises, would be the most beautiful statue in the world. The statue was hugely expensive and, when it had been brought to Versailles with the most extraordinary difficulty and the use of large numbers of machines, it was considered to be so hideous that the King had it moved from the position where it had originally been intended, and had the head removed, which had been sculpted with the intention of resembling the King, and M. Girardon replaced the head with another, modelled on an antique sculpture. Noone knows why Bernini made such a mess of this work; some said that he was getting old and losing his touch; others said that he was so offended by the rejection of his project for the Louvre that he took his revenge by producing this botched sculpture.

*M. Colbert presents the King with two designs for the Façade of the Louvre, one by M. Le Vau and the other by M. Perrault, the doctor [Claude Perrault, brother of Charles].*

Although Colbert very much liked the design produced by my brother, he still went ahead and commissioned a plan from M. Le Vau. After which he presented both of them to the King to discover which of the two projects he would prefer. I was present when the two

designs were offered for the King's scrutiny. It was in the *petit cabinet* of the King at Saint-Germain; present were only His Majesty, the captain of his guards, M. Colbert and myself. The king looked at both plans with the greatest attention, after which he asked Colbert which of the two he considered to be the most beautiful and the better to be carried out in practice. Colbert said that, were he the King, he would choose the one that did not include the gallery (at this time the gallery with its row of columns set along the terrace to create a covered walkway which linked all of the apartments on this first floor, had not become known as the peristyle). This design [without the peristyle] was Le Vau's, and I was astonished at this apparent choice of Colbert's. But Colbert had hardly had time to declare his preference when the King riposted that: "for my part I would choose the other, which seems to me far more majestic and beautiful". I realized then that M. Colbert had operated as a skilful courtier, who wished to ensure that all the honour of making the right decision went to his master. Perhaps this was some sort of larger game played between the King and himself, but whatever was going on the decision had now been taken.

*The King chooses the design submitted by M. Perrault, the doctor.*

However well M. Colbert understood the abilities of my brother as an architect, I noticed nonetheless a certain hesitation about proceeding with his design; it obviously seemed to him a strange thing that one should prefer the creative ideas of a doctor in matters of architecture to the design of the most celebrated architect then at work in France. The envy of those working in this discipline in Paris did not fail to be stirred up against this decision, and all sorts of bitter jokes were made – such as saying that French architecture must be in a truly bad state for it to be necessary to put it in the hands of doctors.

*Establishment of a committee for the Building Project.*

I sent another memoir to Colbert in which I proposed that he should create a committee for the building, composed of M. Le Vau, the First Architect of the King with more than thirty years of experience, of M. Le Brun, who understood all of the arts including the essentials of architectural theory, and my brother, who had submitted the design for the project, and who assuredly possessed remarkable genius and capacity. However as it was clearly inconceivable that he [Claude Perrault] should be the chairman of the committee, some of the subsequent developments were not what he had hoped or expected. I had the honour to be made the secretary of the committee, and I kept a register in which I recorded all of the resolutions that were taken. The committee assembled twice a week. The register which I kept, together with all the other papers and documents related to the buildings, is full of curious and significant information, and will be of considerable value for those connoisseurs of architecture who want to know about the history of this project. From the register it emerges that my brother was almost always contradicted in everything he asserted or wanted by M. Le Vau and M. Le Brun, and that in order to assert his point it was necessary that he resort to innumerable long disquisitions, almost architectural lessons, which he needed to make to defend his decisions to the assembled committee. I have all the originals of these accounts by my brother, which I am happy to keep in my possession. It is certainly true that Le Vau and Le Brun never approved the design made by my brother, always saying that it only appeared beautiful in painted depictions and plans, and that it would be a disaster when carried out in stone – above all

because the peristyle was far too deep, being twelve feet from front to back, and because the because the architraves were too heavy and would destroy their supports, bringing down the whole front of the building; however as time has shown, nothing in the world is more solid than this design. There is nothing so beautiful or so daring in all of the works of antiquity.

The existence of the committee for the building, despite the specific privilege that I and my brother had to publish the design and to attribute it exclusively as Claude's creation, encouraged the sieur Dorbay, pupil of Le Vau, to make the insolent claim that it was his own master who was the author of the plan. This was an appalling calumny, especially since it had been Dorbay's task to produce the finished version of Le Vau's real plan, which he had presented to the King and which had been turned down in favour of my brother's.

Dorbay simply would not accept that Le Vau had not been the designer of the building as it was executed. I had proposed a dozen times to Dorbay that the building would be enhanced by a peristyle on the principal façade, and had even drawn him various plans and elevations for this; but he always refused to listen to this, still less to talk to his master about it. For in fact, and I say this in all sincerity, my brother and I are so attached to peace and tranquility that there is nothing that we would not be prepared to do to maintain harmony, and if this meant that it should be the First Architect of the King to whom are attributed the designs for a royal palace this would have been acceptable to us, and preferable to these disputes and arguments.

*A small-scale model is made of the façade of the Louvre using the same number of stones that the building itself would have.*

In order to lay to rest all of the concerns of Colbert about the construction of the building, I proposed to him that we should make a small model of the façade with its peristyle using small stones that would be exactly equivalent to the full-size stone blocks used for the actual building. When this had been constructed and held in place by miniature iron bars, using exactly the same technique that would be carried out on the real building, Colbert was convinced of the solidity and structural soundness of the building. Above all he could see that the iron bars did not carry any weight, and simply held the architraves in place whose own weight held the façade in place, but did so with such an even spread of the weight that there was no risk that the façade would be overloaded at any point. The technique was used in practice in the gap between the vault of the peristyle and the roof above, a space in which numbers of men could have easy access and work without difficulty, and could thus oversee any problems which might occur from stresses and strains on the fabric if they were to occur at a later date. The whole edifice was so well constructed that it gave every appearance that it would last for ever. The detailed notes on the construction of the building is in the first volume of the architectural drawings compiled by my brother, which is in my own collection of books.

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