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# The Grand Escalier at the Château de Versailles

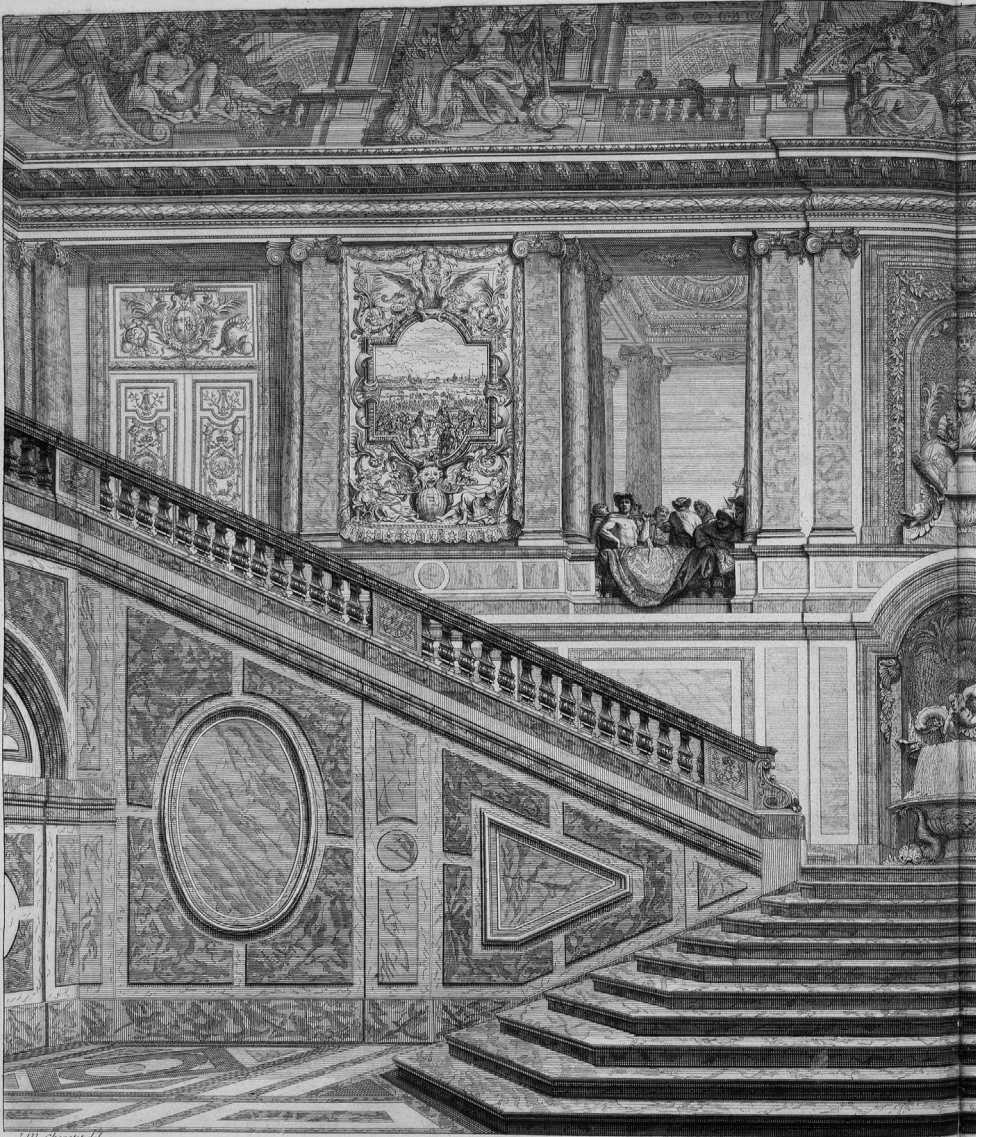
## THE MONUMENTAL STAIRCASE AND ITS EDGES

CAROLYN YERKES

THE Grand Escalier, also called the Grand Degré or the Escalier des Ambassadeurs (fig. 1), is one of the most significant architectural elements to have disappeared from the château of Versailles. Completed in 1679, this element had a hybrid function: not only was it the principal staircase of the palace, the primary means of access to the state rooms on the second floor, but it also was the official reception point for foreign dignitaries and thus a ceremonial space in its own right.<sup>1</sup> The Grand Escalier was meant to be a tour de force, a display of architectural bravado that combined a relatively new form of staircase design with a lavish decorative treatment. Yet despite its spatial and functional importance, the staircase was short-lived, destroyed in 1752 under Louis XV.<sup>2</sup> Its particulars are known mainly from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prints that detail every aspect of its original appearance. These prints of the Grand Escalier mark the intersection of two trajectories in French architectural theory: the representation of the staircase as a demonstration of technical achievement and the

1. For the history and use of the Grand Escalier, see Henry Jouin, *Charles Le Brun et les arts sous Louis XIV* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889), 279–80; Olivier Merson, “A propos de quelques grandes œuvres disparues de Charles Le Brun,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 22 (1899): 360–68; Pierre de Nolhac, “L’Escalier des Ambassadeurs,” *Revue de l’Art Ancien et Moderne* 7 (January–June 1900): 54–68; Fiske Kimball, “The Genesis of the Château Neuf at Versailles, 1668–1671, II, The Grand Escalier,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 40 (1952): 115–22; Jean-François Revel, “L’Escalier des Ambassadeurs,” *Connaissance des Arts* 74 (April 1958): 70–77; Robert W. Berger, *A Royal Passion: Louis XIV as Patron of Architecture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66, 68, and 70; Lydia Beauvais et al., *Charles Le Brun 1619–1690, Célébration du tricentenaire de la mort de l’artiste: Le Décor de l’escalier des Ambassadeurs à Versailles* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000), 21–42; and Alexandre Gady, *Versailles: La Fabrique d’un chef-d’œuvre* (Paris: Passage; Versailles: Château de Versailles, 2011), 56–61. Here “second floor” refers to the story above the ground floor.

2. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Grand Escalier was imitated in private homes across Europe. For these copies, see Oscar Tusquets Blanca et al., *Staircases: The Architecture of Ascent* (New York: Vendome Press, 2013), 166.



J.M. Choiseul del.

*Vue intérieure du Grand Escalier de Versailles*  
*Côté opposé à l'entrée*



*Prospectus interioris majorum Scallarum Versalianarum*  
*Pars fores spectans*

1. Jean-Michel Chevotet (1698–1772), “Vue interieure du Grand Escalier de Versailles Costé Oposé a l’entrée,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles dit Escalier des Ambassadeurs* (Paris: Louis Surugue, [1725]), pl. 6. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.

representation of the interior as an essential component of planning and design. The prints demonstrate how the Grand Escalier departed from the Renaissance tradition of the showpiece staircase, a tradition in which a staircase's independence from the wall as a means of support became a sign of structural daring. Instead, the Grand Escalier's virtuosity is the way it merges with the wall, effectively incorporating the inhabitants of the room as the final elements of a complex decorative program.

#### THE IMAGE OF THE STAIRCASE IN FRANCE

Before the Grand Escalier, French designs for monumental staircases tended to emphasize sculptural or structural aspects of the staircases themselves. These staircases were meant to be perceived as independent elements rather than as elements embedded within a decorated interior space. This was true for various types of staircases, but especially so for the great spiral staircases of Loire Valley châteaux. The most famous of these staircases, such as the single-spiral at Blois and the double-spiral at Chambord, both built during the second decade of the sixteenth century, can be appreciated from various vantage points, but the staircases are always understood as distinct forms within the context of the buildings.<sup>3</sup> The staircases rise through the floors like columns in interior rooms, and in exterior courts they protrude from the building walls as separate volumes. Straight-flight staircases in tunnel vaults, on the other hand, tend to read as independent elements for the opposite reason: encased within their own cages or wells, they are understood best from within them. Built in 1518, the staircase at Azay-le-Rideau exemplifies all these traits. Its location is marked on the exterior walls with a vertical arrangement of columns, pilasters, and sculpture, but the elaborate sculptural decoration of the structural vaults over the individual flights can be seen only when on the steps.<sup>4</sup> As for exterior staircases, the grand, multi-flight staircases built before the entrances to many châteaux throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Fontainebleau remains a canonical example—provide some

3. On these and other types of sixteenth-century French staircases, see Jean Guillaume, "L'Escalier dans l'architecture française de la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *L'Escalier dans l'architecture de la Renaissance: Actes du colloque tenu à Tours du 22 au 26 mai 1979* (Paris: Picard, 1985), 227–43.

4. *Ibid.*, 232–33, figs. 44–47.

of the closest antecedents to the Grand Escalier because they are set against façades and therefore are part of the choreography of arrival.<sup>5</sup> Yet these entrance staircases differ from the Grand Escalier in that the staircases remain visually and structurally separate from the façades. All three types of monumental staircases have this independence in common, which means that despite their differences from each other, they present a similar set of representational problems within the context of the architectural book.

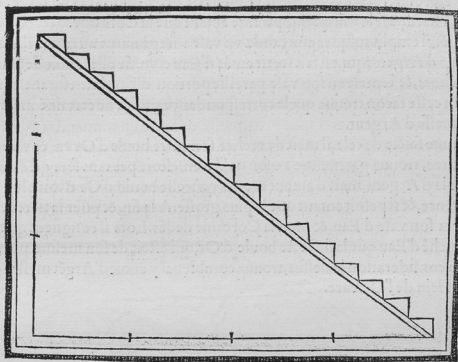
Most of the earliest architectural books published in France were translations of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Latin and Italian treatises, and in this genre the staircase was usually addressed as a practical problem to be solved. Antiquity provided no other literary models. In *De architectura*, the lone surviving Classical text devoted solely to architecture, Vitruvius explains how to calculate the proportions of risers and treads using the hypotenuse of a triangle.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, he couches this analysis within a discussion of geometrical theorems and not within a chapter devoted to buildings. The first full French edition of Vitruvius's original Latin text, translated by Jean Martin and published in Paris in 1547, includes an illustration of the calculation. Although some of the woodcut plates in this edition were created especially for it by Jean Goujon, Martin borrowed this one from Fra Giocondo's 1511 Latin edition of Vitruvius (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> The illustration's diagrammatic quality encapsulates how in early architectural treatises staircases were primarily an issue of pragmatics and not aesthetics. In *De re aedificatoria*, the first architectural book to appear in print, in 1485, Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) advised that only those with experience should attempt to build staircases, because they are difficult and awkward to incorporate into plans. Alberti gave some basic tips on lighting, position, and riser-tread dimensions, but the first edition

5. See Claude Mignot, "L'Escalier dans l'architecture française: 1550–1640," in *L'Escalier dans l'architecture de la Renaissance*, 244–55, for the monumental entrance and other types of staircase design in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French architecture.

6. Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, book 9, preface.

7. Vitruvius, *M. Vitruvius per Iocundum solito castigatior factus cum figuris et tabula ut iam legi et intelligi possit* ... (Venice: Impressum Venetiis ... diligentia Ioannis de Tridino alias Tacuino, 1511), fol. 85r. On the Fra Giocondo illustration, see Cherubino Gambardella, *L'Architettura della scale: Disegno, teoria, e tecnica* (Genoa: Sagep Editrice, 1993), 25 (fig. 30) and 27.

a raison qu'autant que sont grandes Trois d'icelles parties en hauteur depuis le dict comble iusques a rez de chaussee, il en fault pour la pente de l'Escailier adiouster vne d'auantage, afin d'exceder la ligne perpendiculaire ou a plomb: & luyuant cela se doyuent enchasser egalement les boutz des marches dedans leurs rampas. Ce faisant, les ayances des montees & de leurs marches seront ainsi qu'il appartient, comme la forme cy deffoubz en pourra faire foy.



COMMENT VNE PORTION D'ARGENT MESLEE

*avec de l'Or, peut estre congneue en une piece d'auure  
entiere. Chap. III.*



Ncores que les inuentions d'Archimedes soyent en grand nombre, & toutes admirables & diuerses, si est ce que celle que ie pren a deduire, semble estre vne excessiue expression de sa grande industrie: car quand Hiero fut peruenu a la dignité royale de Syracuse, maintenant Sicile, vn iour entre les autres apres auoir bien fait les besongnes, son plaisir fut ordonner que lon porteroit en quelque Temple, vne Corône d'Or, qu'il auoit vouee aux Dieux. & pour ce faire conuint de pris avec l'Orfeure, & luy bailla de l'Or au poix. Cest ouurier au bout de certain temps apporta & pleuint au Roy son ouurage pour bon, & curieusement fait: puis rendit (ce sembla) mesme poix d'Or comme il auoit receu. Mais apres qu'on en eut fait l'essay, & trouué qu'il auoit desrobé vne certaine partie d'Or, meslat autant d'argent parmy, Hiero courroucé du peu d'estime que cest Artisan auoit fait de son autorité, & toutesfois ne sachant moyen pour aperceuoir son larrecin, pria le susdict Archimedes qu'il voulust prendre ceste charge sur luy. Ce qu'il feit, & en

X iij

2. Vitruvius, *Architecture, ou Art de bien bastir, mis de latin en francoys, par Ian Martin* (Paris: Veue & heritiers de Ian Barbé, on les vend chez I. Gazeau, 1547), fol. 123r. Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

of his book included no illustrations, and the 1553 French translation by Jean Martin contained only a simple diagram of the suggested height-depth ratio.<sup>8</sup>

Although his discussion of staircases sticks mainly to practical considerations in the planning of basic flights, Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554) did posit that a staircase could have an aesthetic impact on a building in addition to its usefulness. Staircases seen in profile, he explained, not only allow people to ascend, they also bring pleasure to viewers.<sup>9</sup> Serlio introduced this idea in his book on perspective, the second of his multipart treatise on architecture, which was published in Paris in 1545 jointly with his first book, on geometry.<sup>10</sup> Given this context, it makes sense that his analysis concentrates on how to draw staircases rather than on how to build them. His woodcut illustration of a symmetrical double-flight staircase, for example, organizes the steps into a three-dimensional grid as a means of ordering the composition using a vanishing point (fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Serlio's accompanying text explains that each square of the grid represents one common foot, so that the reader can gauge all the necessary dimensions from the illustration alone. Whereas when translators and editors incorporated illustrations into various early editions of Vitruvius and Alberti, the focus remained on the text (this would not be true in the later sixteenth-century editions), Serlio's architectural books privileged the images. His illustrations have primacy even over the architecture they ostensibly represent. When Serlio says that treads should be one foot deep and five feet wide, with risers one-half foot high, he is designing a staircase that is easy to draw in perspective, not necessarily one that is comfortable to use or logical to build.

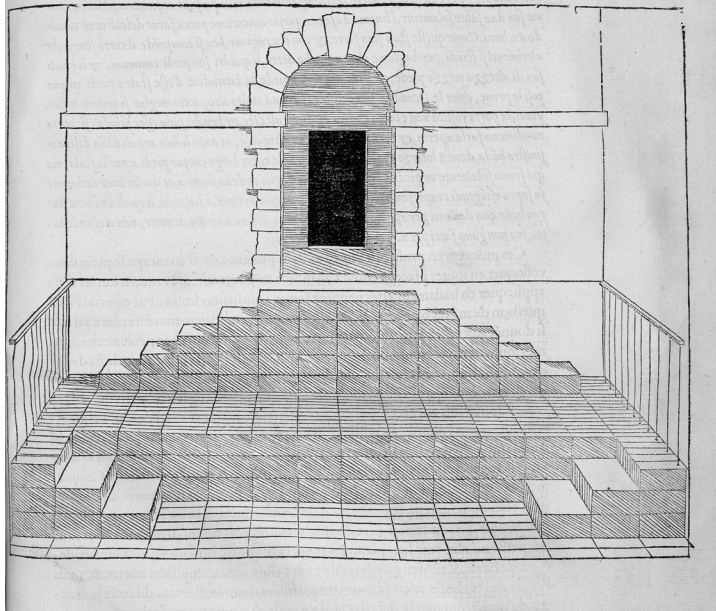
After Serlio, the staircase became a common subject in books on perspective. It provided an ideal test case for demonstrating methods of projection through endless permutations with varying degrees of

8. Leon Battista Alberti, *L'Architecture et art de bien bastir, diuisée en dix liures, tr. de latin en françois, par deffunct Ian Martin* (Paris: Imprimé par R. Massellin, pour I. Keruer, 1553). In this edition the passage on staircases begins on folio 19r of book 1, chapter 14; the diagram is on folio 19v.

9. Sebastiano Serlio, *Il primo libro d'architettura ... Le premier liure d'architecture ... mis en langue françoise, par Iehan Martin ...* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de I. Barbé, 1545), fol. 52v.

10. Serlio published French and Italian editions of both books simultaneously.

11. See Gambardella, *L'Architettura della scale*, 48–51, for these and other staircases discussed and illustrated by Serlio.



3. Sebastiano Serlio, *Il primo libro d'architettura ... Le premier liure d'architecture ... mis en langue françoise, par Iehan Martin ...* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de I. Barbé, 1545), fol. 53r. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology.

intricacy. For the authors of these perspective books, interest in the staircase was primarily representational and not architectural. In his *Livre de perspective*, published in 1560, Jean Cousin (ca. 1490–ca. 1560) demonstrated in two lessons how to draw a spiral staircase in double-point perspective.<sup>12</sup> Cousin was a painter and an engraver, and like Serlio, he included these lessons among others that explain how to draw architectural settings and details, not build them. Another engraver, Jacques Androuet du Cerceau (1511–1585/6), illustrated the design of spiral staircases using a method similar to Cousin's. In his *Leçons de perspective positive* of 1576, du Cerceau produced a set of three

12. Jean Cousin, *Livre de perspectiue de Iehan Cousin* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Iehan le Royer Imprimeur du Roy és Mathematiques, 1560), pls. Lijj and M.

exercises focusing on spiral staircases.<sup>13</sup> These begin with a basic lesson on how to block out each step and render it correctly. Then they proceed with increasing complexity to the third and final exercise: a spiral staircase with slender pillars and arches in lieu of side walls, and with an open newel, or central supporting section (fig. 4). The awkwardness of du Cerceau's demonstration figure shows that even he had not mastered all the techniques that are necessary to render such a complicated element.

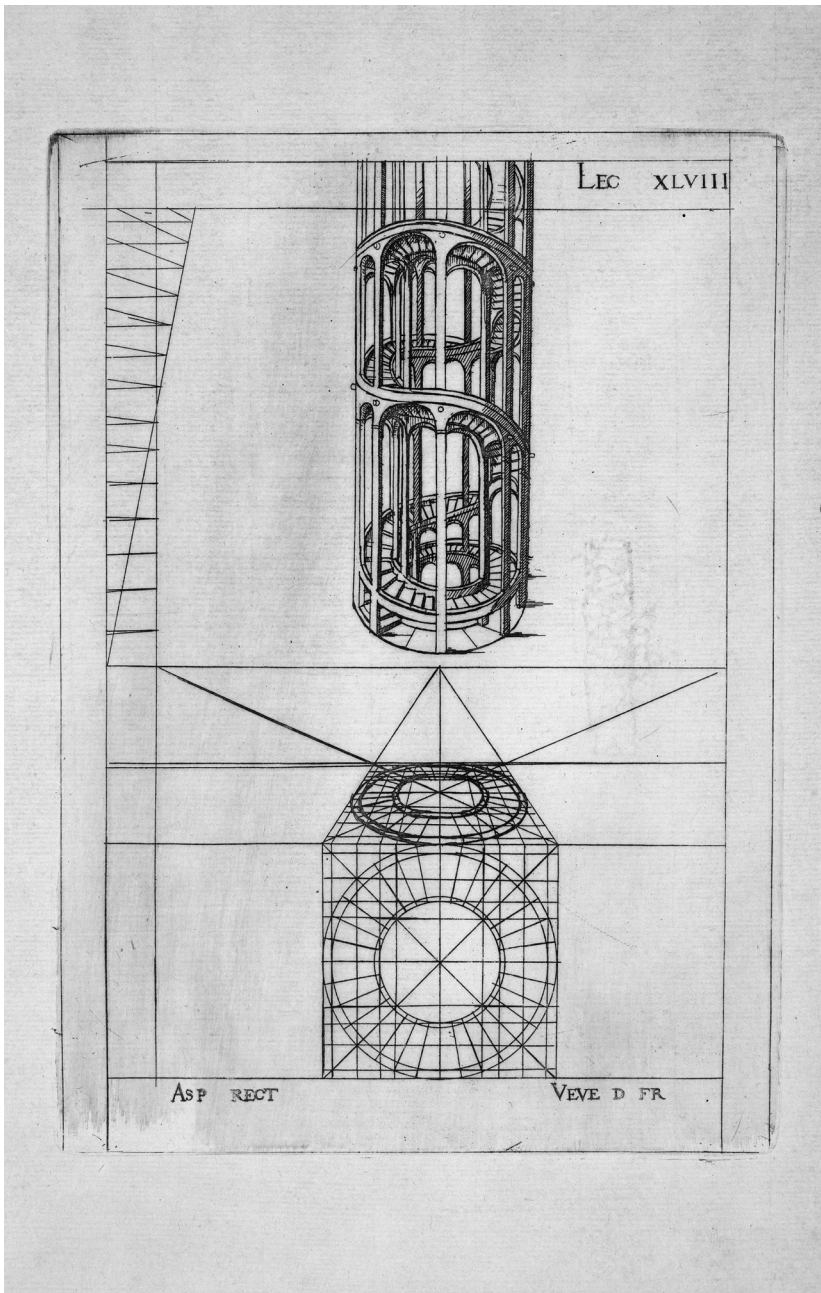
Staircase designs continued to feature in perspective manuals throughout the seventeenth century, when advances in engraving techniques allowed for ever more intricate examples to be included. When Jean Du Breuil (1602–1670) published *La perspective pratique* in 1642, which was essentially a compendium of previous sources on perspective, he began the section on staircases with simple exercises similar to Serlio's straight-flight staircases based on units of one foot.<sup>14</sup> His lessons progressed through multi-flight staircases viewed from between flights, through the geometry of spiral staircases, to an illustration of one such staircase, shown fully shaded with adjacent walls and balustrade (fig. 5). Yet despite the complexity of these images, which over time came to include other architectural elements as part of perspectival constructions, they give little sense of the relation between the staircases and their surrounding buildings, or little instruction on how to design staircases with respect to practical considerations. These matters were confined instead to treatises on construction, and some authors and engravers worked in both genres.

Mathurin Jousse (ca. 1575–1645), for example, engraved the plates for a 1626 French translation of *De artificiali perspectiva* by Jean Pélerin, called Viator, that included staircases among its illustrations.<sup>15</sup> The following year Jousse, a Jesuit locksmith, published his own carpentry manual, *L'Art de charpenterie*, which focused almost entirely on how to

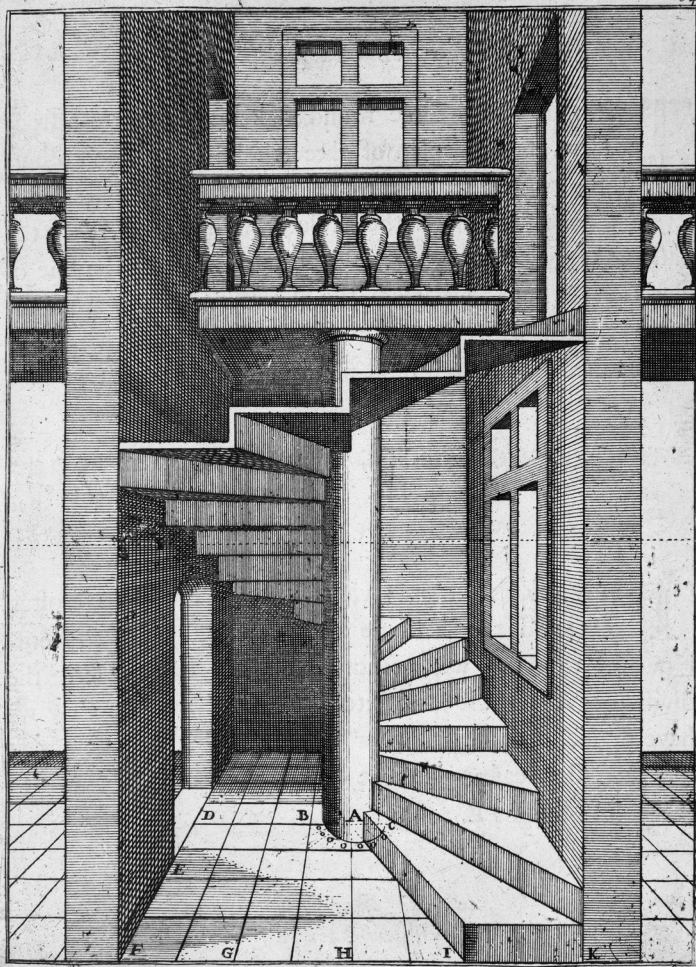
13. Du Cerceau's lessons in drawing perspective staircases are discussed in Gambardella, *L'Architettura della scale*, 44–48. For the representation of staircases in other books by du Cerceau, see Mignot, "L'Escalier dans l'architecture française: 1550–1640," 50–51.

14. Jean Du Breuil, *La perspective pratique necessaire a tous peintres, graveurs, sculpteurs, architectes, orfeures, brodeurs, tapissiers, & autres se seruans du dessein* (Paris: M. Tavernier/F. Langlois, 1642); see pp. 78–84 for the section on staircases.

15. Étienne Martellange, *La perspective positive de Viator Traduite de latin en François Augmentée, & illustrée, par Maistre Estienne Martellange ...* (La Flèche: Georges Griveau, 1626). Viator's *De artificiali perspectiva* was published in Toul by P. Jacques in 1505.



4. Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, *Leçons de perspective positive* (Paris: M. Patisson, imprimeur, 1576), pl. 48. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology.



5. Jean Du Breuil, *The Practice of Perspective: or, An Easy Method of Representing Natural Objects According to the Rules of Art*, 4th ed., trans. E. Chambers (London: Printed for T. Bowles, 1765), fig. 84. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology.

build the framing for tall wooden roofs.<sup>16</sup> Located near the end of the manual, a shorter section on staircases offered a natural complement to the material on roofs, because these structures presented similar problems: how to use timber framing to scale heights while supporting weight. Although Jousse presented his information in a format comparable to most perspective manuals—a series of lessons paired with illustrative figures—he made a dramatic shift in the means of representation, including only orthogonal plans and elevations. This projection method allowed Jousse to render all lines to scale and thus made *L'Art de charpenterie* a more useful manual for builders than for painters.

More controversial than his *L'Art de charpenterie* was Jousse's book on stereotomy, the technique of cutting stones for complex vaults, referred to in its title, *Le Secret d'architecture*.<sup>17</sup> The first book devoted entirely to the topic, *Le Secret* was published in 1642, one year before François Derand (ca. 1588–1644), the Jesuit mathematician who was undoubtedly the authority on the subject, was able to get his own stereotomy treatise, *L'Architecture des voûtes*, into print.<sup>18</sup> Although stereotomy had been practiced by French masons for centuries, its relatively late appearance in architectural books indicates that these publications were not so much practical instruction manuals—the workmen responsible for cutting stones in building yards did not need books to tell them how to do it—as they were vehicles to elevate an insular profession. The printed treatise offered a means of canonization for a mysterious art, and within the treatise the staircase offered a perfect example of how that art could be incorporated into all types of architecture, even

16. Princeton owns a later edition of this work, entitled *L'Art de charpenterie de Mathurin Jousse; Corrigé & augmenté de ce qu'il y a de plus curieux dans cet art & des machines les plus nécessaires à un charpentier, par Mr. D. L. H. [Philippe de La Hire]* (Paris: T. Moette, 1702).

17. Mathurin Jousse, *Le Secret d'architecture decouvrant fidelement les traits geometriques, couppez, et derobemens necessaires dans les bastiments enrichi d'un grand nombre de figures ...* (La Flèche: George Griveau, 1642).

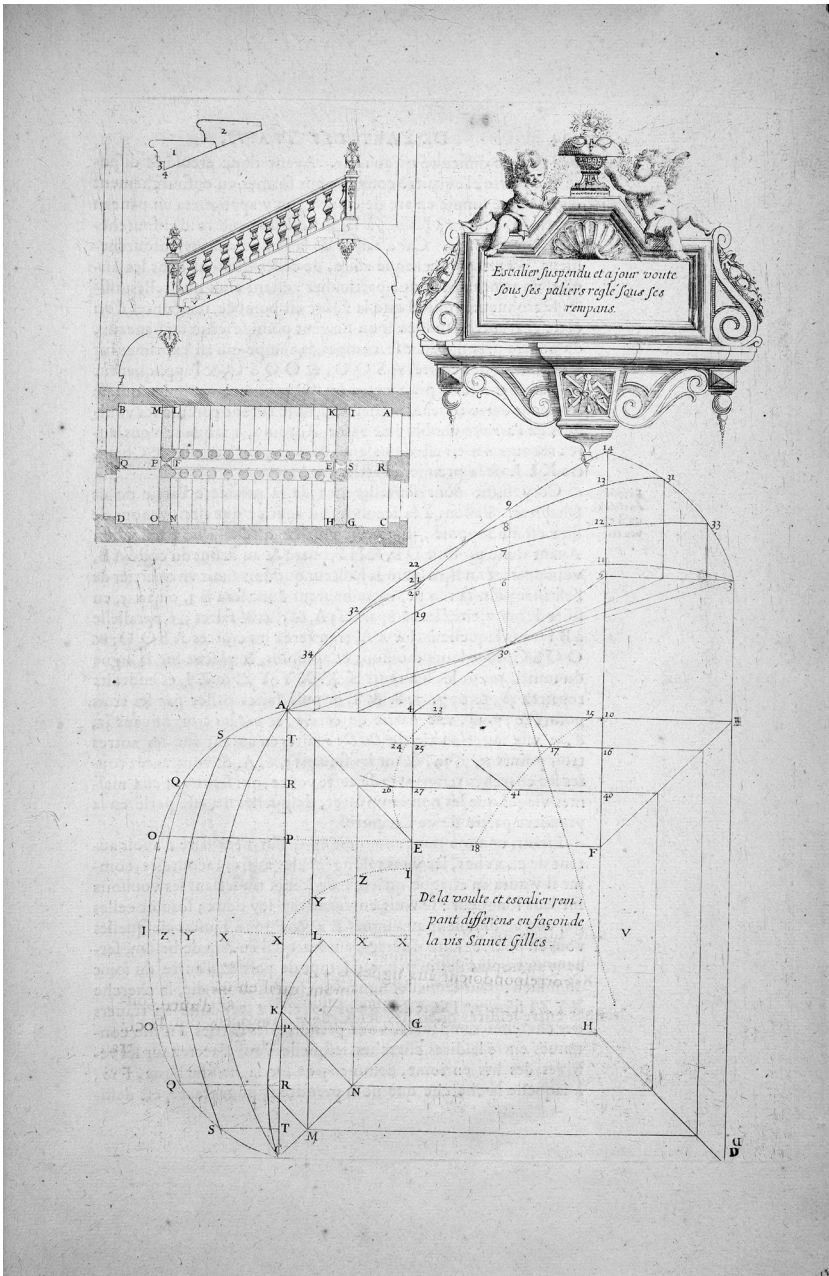
18. François Derand, *L'Architecture des voûtes; ou, L'Art des traits, et coupe des voûtes; traicté tres util, voire necessaire a tous architectes ...* (Paris: Chez Sebastien Cramoisy, 1643). On the publications of Martellange, Jousse, and Derand, see the series of articles about them on the *Architectura* database ([architectura.cesr.univ-tours.fr](http://architectura.cesr.univ-tours.fr)), directed by Frédérique Lemerle and Yves Pauwels, particularly the articles by Lemerle (2007) on Martellange, by Jean-Pierre Babelon (2006) and François Le Boeuf (2006) on Jousse, and by Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos (2009) on Derand. These articles include relevant bibliographies.

domestic. Most of Derand's illustrations were designed to dazzle: they demonstrate the projection methods used to generate three-dimensional multi-planar geometries in engravings where the resulting forms—that is, the shape of the stones themselves—are often not easy to discern. Unlike the illustrations of vaults, trompes, and pendentives, however, Derand's staircase illustrations occasionally include key images that explain where and how these vaults work in real buildings. Instead of providing only the projection diagram used to create the supporting vault, for example, an illustration of a suspended staircase includes a plan and section of the entire element in situ (fig. 6). The illustration demonstrates how to generate the vaults to support the staircase and also how the vaulted staircase then connects adjacent floors: it is a rare stereotomic illustration that combines an abstract diagram with a figural representation.

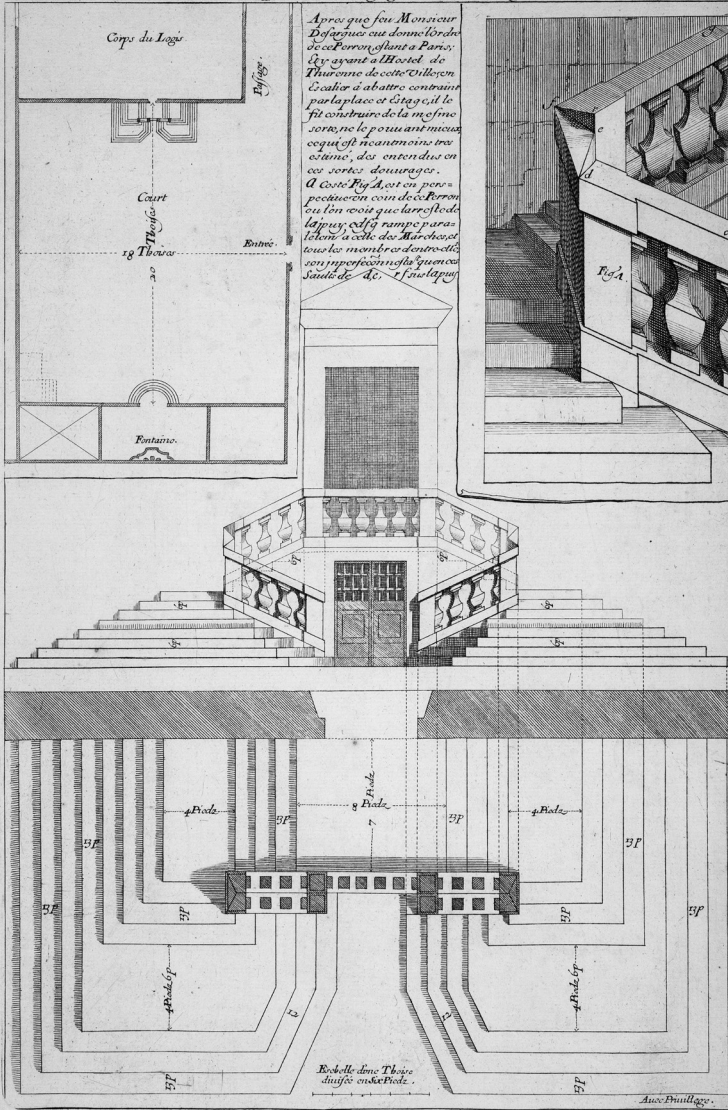
Although perspective books, construction manuals, and treatises on stereotomy rarely address the question of the staircase within the building, architectural treatises that deal with building types do take up this issue. As Claude Mignot has discussed, seventeenth-century books on domestic architectural planning typically consider the staircase in terms of its placement within the house.<sup>19</sup> Beginning with the *Manière de bastir* (1623) by Pierre Le Muet (1591–1669) and Louis Savot's *L'Architecture française* (1624), books of house plans encompass staircase design mainly as a series of generic types to be inserted for convenience.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, later seventeenth-century treatises that deal more specifically with the design of the staircase as an individual element tend to separate the element from its function within the plan. One exception is the *Traité des manières de dessiner les ordres ...* by Abraham Bosse (ca. 1604–1676), first published in 1664, which after a series of illustrations on general principles of staircase design and layout, includes the specific example of a monumental staircase at the Château de Vizille (fig. 7). The single plate combines a plan, elevation, detail, and site plan to provide a full survey of the staircase, including its use as the main entrance to the château.

19. Mignot, "L'Escalier dans l'architecture française: 1550–1640," 53–58.

20. Pierre Le Muet, *Manière de bastir pour toutes sortes de personnes* (Paris: Melchior Tauernier, 1623), and Louis Savot, *L'Architecture française des bastimens particuliers* (Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1624). Princeton has the second edition of *L'Architecture française*, augmented with notes by François Blondel (1618–1686) (Paris: Chez La Veuve & C. Clouzier etc., 1685).



6. François Derand, "Escalier suspendu et a jour voute sous ses paliers réglé sous ses rempans," in *L'Architecture des voutes; ou, L'Art des traits, et coupe des voutes; traité tres util, voire necessaire a tous architectes ...* (Paris: Chez Sebastien Cramoisy, 1643), part 5, chap. 9, p. 443. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology.



7. Abraham Bosse, "Perron fait en l'année 1653, dans la Grande Court du Ch'au de Vizile en d'Auphiné pres de Grenoble, appartenant à Monseigneur le Duc de l'Ediguieres," in *Traité des manieres de dessiner les ordres de l'architecture antique en toutes leurs parties* ... (Paris: Chez Claude Jombert, 168?), pl. XL. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology.

Yet Bosse's record of the Vizille staircase notwithstanding, in other architectural treatises extant staircases frequently appear only as real-world iterations of particular typologies.<sup>21</sup> Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) provided the ur-example of this practice in his *Quattro libri dell'architettura* (1570), where he illustrated the double-spiral staircase at Chambord at the end of a sequence of designs for basic spiral staircases.<sup>22</sup> Although he describes it as an exception, Palladio's presentation of the Chambord staircase within this sequence identifies it as a variation on a theme. As with his descriptions of his own buildings, Palladio includes the specific examples in part to illuminate how they relate to general themes.

In their exhaustive focus on a single element, Etienne Baudet's *Le Grand escalier de Versailles* and Louis Surugue's *Grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles* present the Grand Escalier not as an instructional example of how to draw, design, plan, or build, but rather as an interior. The differences between the two sets of prints, published over forty years apart, are significant in this regard. Baudet (ca. 1638–1711) depicted only Charles Le Brun's ceiling—which he may have wanted to show separately from the walls, because those were mainly Adam Frans van der Meulen's responsibility—while Surugue provided a view of the entire room, including the staircase. The earliest representation of a Versailles interior, Baudet's set falls within the genre of the reproductive print: like Gérard Audran's prints of cupola and gallery ceilings by Le Brun (1619–1690) and by Pierre Mignard (1612–1695), Baudet's prints do not extend past the limits of the painting. Surugue (ca. 1686–1762), on the other hand, depicted the entire Grand Escalier as a fully conceived architectural entity. This emphasis on the room and its contents—a room in which the staircase cannot be distinguished from its surroundings—is an indication of what Meredith Martin has described as the “growing ascendancy of the interior” in seventeenth-

21. See Werner Oechslin, “Von der Treppe zum Treppenhaus: Der Aufstieg eines architektonischen Typus/From Stairs to Stairwell: The Rise of an Architectonic Type,” *Daidalos: Berlin Architectural Journal* 9 (September 1983): 42–52, for the representation of staircase types in architectural books; see p. 47 for a brief discussion of the Grand Escalier.

22. Andrea Palladio, *Quattro libri dell'architettura* (Venice: D. de' Franceschi, 1570), book 1, chap. 28, p. 65. On Palladio and spiral staircases, see André Chastel, “Palladio et l'escalier à double mouvement inversé,” *Bollettino del Centro Internazionale di Studi d'Architettura Andrea Palladio* 2 (1960): 26–29, and 7, no. 2 (1965): 7–22.

and eighteenth-century French and British architectural books.<sup>23</sup> Furnishings, sculptural ornament, ceiling paintings, and other aspects of decoration were becoming a focus not only of elite architectural design, but also of the representation of design. The Grand Escalier and its images play into this feedback loop: with their overall format and specific details, the prints exacerbate the illusionistic effects of the original room. The prints emphasize the degree to which the staircase itself was designed as an element within an image.

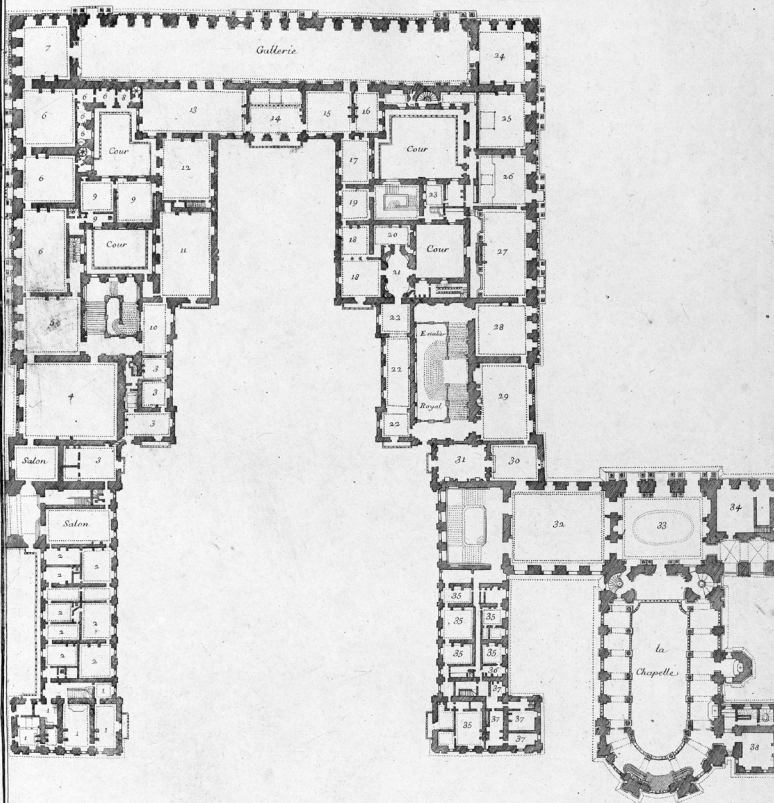
#### THE GRAND ESCALIER AT VERSAILLES AND ITS IMAGES

Visible in the plan of the second floor of Versailles published by Gilles de Mortain in 1716, the Grand Escalier was located in the palace's right wing (fig. 8). It could be reached from the section of the central courtyard that narrows before the Cour de Marbre (Marble Court). Mortain's plan illustrates how the staircase provided visitors a direct route from their arrival point in the Cour Royale up to the king's apartment on the second floor. Thus the staircase was the first link in the chain of rooms, each with its own ceremonial purpose, that led visitors to and through the *enveloppe*, the perimeter circuit constructed around the Petit Château at the heart of the palace. The chain included the ballroom, throne room, bedroom, and various reception rooms that made up the procession of spaces for the rituals of attending court. As one of those spaces, the Grand Escalier presented an imposing face to arriving dignitaries. In an engraved elevation of the château's exterior, a plate designed by Jean-Michel Chevotet (1698–1772) and published by Louis Surugue in 1725 in a portfolio of prints devoted to the Grand Escalier, smooth stone facing identifies the staircase's interior location and differentiates it from the surrounding masonry (fig. 9).<sup>24</sup> After passing through the entryway of three arched portals, an arrangement that echoed the façade of the Grotto of Tethys, visitors then reached a vestibule, one bay deep and three bays wide,

23. Meredith Martin, "The Ascendancy of the Interior in Eighteenth-Century French Architectural Theory," in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Farnham, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010), 17.

24. *Grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles dit Escalier des Ambassadeurs ordonné et peint par Charles le Brun Ecuyer premier Peintre du Roy, consacré a la memoire de Louis le Grand*, published with a text by L. C. Le Fèvre (Paris: Chez Louis Surugue, [1725]).

PLAN DU PREMIER ETAGE ET DES APARTEMANS  
DU CHATEAU ROYAL DE VERSAILLES.

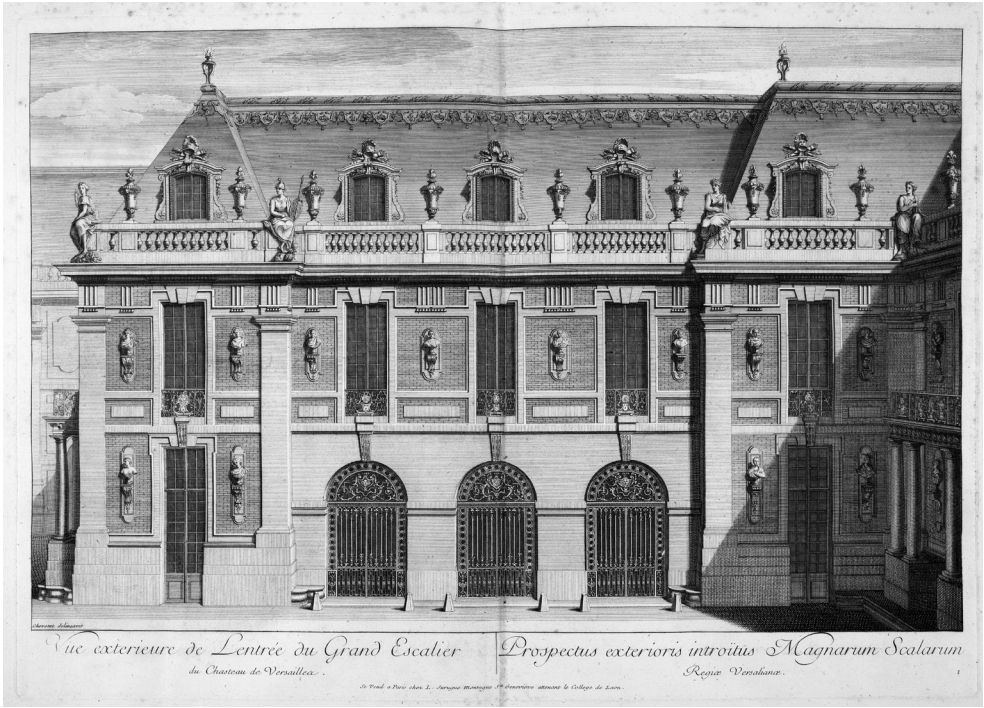


Explication des Chifres des Apartemens du premier Etage.

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>1. Le Duc D'Orléans.<br/>2. Apartement de Monsieur le Duc de Bourgogne.<br/>3. Apartement de Monsieur le Duc de Bretagne.<br/>4. Grande Salle des Gardes.<br/>5. Salle des Gardes de la Reine.<br/>6. Apartement de la Reine.<br/>7. Salon de la Reine.<br/>8. Apartement du premier Valet de chambre.<br/>9. Apartement de Monsieur le Dauphin Bourgeois.<br/>10. Salon de l'Escalier de la Reine.</p> | <p>11. Salle des Gardes pour le Roi.<br/>12. Chambre de Monsieur le Duc de Bourgogne.<br/>13. Antichambre du Roi.<br/>14. Chambre du Roi.<br/>15. Chambre de Monsieur.<br/>16. Cabinet des Peruques.<br/>17. Chambre des Châtons du Roi.<br/>18. Cabinets des Armes et Bijoux.<br/>19. Salon du petit Escalier du Roi.<br/>20. Cabinets des Livres du Roi.<br/>21. Salon de l'Oratoire.<br/>22. Petite Gallerie du Roi.</p> | <p>23. Garçons du Chateau.<br/>24. Salon de la Couronne.<br/>25. Chambre du Trône.<br/>26. Chambre du Lit.<br/>27. Salle du Bal.<br/>28. Chambre du Billard.<br/>29. Grande Salle de l'Escalier du Roi.<br/>30. Petit Salon du Cabinet.<br/>31. Cabinet des Medailles et Bijoux.<br/>32. Grand Salon.<br/>33. Salon de la Chapelle.</p> | <p>34. Apartement de Monsieur le Duc de Chartres.<br/>35. Logement du Gouverneur.<br/>36. Logement du Coartier.<br/>37. Logement du Confesseur du Roi.<br/>38. Salle de la Musique du Roi.</p> |
|--|---|---|--|

At Paris chez Mr. de la Harpe sur le Pont Neuf, par le P. de la Harpe, 1715.

8. Gilles de Mortain, "Plan du premier Étage et des Apartemens du Chateau Royal de Versailles," in *Les Plans, profils, et elevations, des ville, et château de Versailles... dessinés et gravés en 1714 et 1715* (Paris: Demortain, [1716]), pl. 2. Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

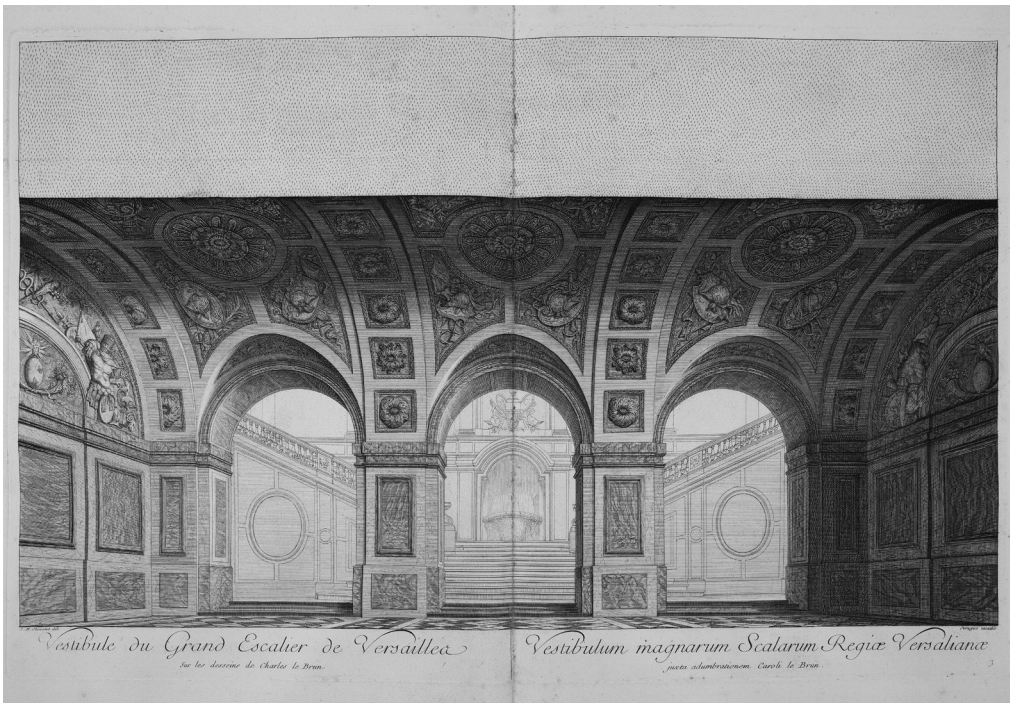


9. Jean-Michel Chevotet, “Vue extérieure de L’entrée du Grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles*, pl. 1.

ornamented with colored stone veneers on the walls and with gilded reliefs of floral decorations, military arms, and the heliocentric iconography of Louis XIV on the ceiling vaults (fig. 10). This semi-darkened space provided an entr’acte before the climax of the Grand Escalier, which lay ahead through another triple arcade.

Chevotet’s elevation of the Grand Escalier presents the view that confronted visitors as they emerged from the low and dim space of the vestibule: a pyramid of steps spreading out to meet them as they entered the room (fig. 1). Although they filled almost a third of the floor at their base, these staircases reduced in size as they led upward, funneling toward a fountain that was recessed into a niche in the wall behind the landing.<sup>25</sup> Cascading from the center of the ensemble near

25. Surugue’s portfolio also includes an engraving of this fountain based on a design by Chevotet (“Fontaine dans le grand Escalier de Versailles,” pl. 7). In the fountain shown in the engraving, an ancient marble statue of Silenus and a marine centaur is set above a basin supported by two dolphins. According to Le Fèvre’s text,



10. Jean-Michel Chevotet, “Vestibule du Grand Escalier de Versailles sur les desseins de Charles le Brun,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles*, pl. 3.

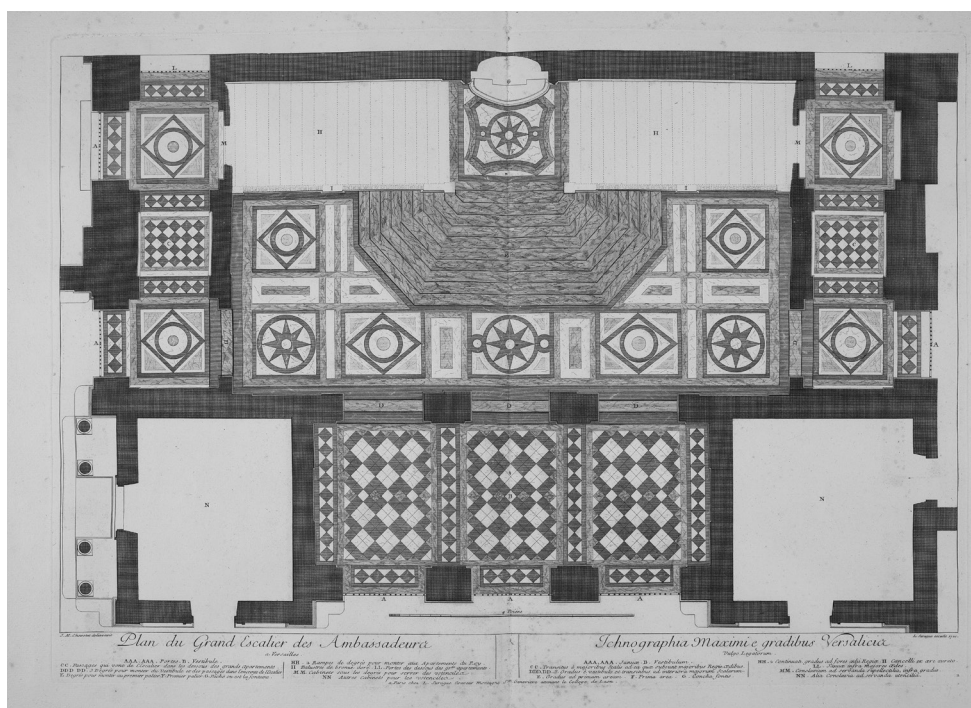
eye level, the fountain’s water formed the focal point of the room. In this way the fountain connected the château’s interior to its gardens, a manmade landscape dependent on a complex system of waterworks, and to the Grotto, which had a reservoir on its roof.<sup>26</sup> The fountain also launched the decorative program of the Grand Escalier with an architectural device that obscured the wall physically. A spatial recession covered by a sheet of water, the device was the first of several tricks designed to dissolve the perimeter visually.

Other variations of surface and depth in the Grand Escalier included the stone inlays set into the floor in a pattern of circles, diamonds, and

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this statue replaced another figural group that originally stood in its place, a pair of Tritons holding a shell (*ibid.*, 3; see also *Mercure Galant*, 1680, 279).

26. On the waterworks of Versailles, see Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 181–93 (“Water systems and land management”).



11. Jean-Michel Chevotet, “Plan du Grand Escalier des Ambassadeurs a Versailles,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles*, pl. 2.

sons (fig. 11). Visitors crossed this floor on their approach to the first flight of steps. This pattern extended up onto the walls of the first level of the room, where a topography of slightly raised panels and moldings echoed the château’s garden parterres. As with the Roman Pantheon, whose stone columns and veneers were imported from across the empire to demonstrate the vast extent of Rome’s domain, the marbles of the Grand Escalier were chosen to show off France’s natural resources.<sup>27</sup> Quarried from its provinces, the marbles were meant to rival the finest Italian stones.<sup>28</sup> Because it still survives with its original interior

27. Albert Laprade, *François d’Orbay, architecte de Louis XIV* (Paris: Editions Vincent, Féral & Cie., 1960), 176.

28. On the diversity of the Pantheon marbles as representative of the Roman Empire, see Mark Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 184. Like much of the stone decoration of the Pantheon, the marbles of the Grand Escalier were spoliated after its destruction, reused in the private homes of French nobles (Beauvais et al., *Charles Le Brun*, 30).

decoration, the Escalier de la Reine—the slightly smaller pendant staircase in the palace’s left wing, constructed immediately after the Grand Escalier was completed across the courtyard—gives a sense of how these stone veneers must have appeared in the seventeenth century.

The first flight of steps led to the landing with the fountain. After this landing, the staircase split into two flights, each one heading to opposite sides of the room in a T-formation. At the top of these flights, on the second level of the room, the stone ornamentation of the first level continued with an ionic order of pilasters and columns. These orders framed a sculptural program that included a white marble bust of Louis XIV, installed above the central fountain, and bronze reliefs of the arms of Hercules and of France and Navarre, set into the central panels of the walls to the left and right of the staircase. Sculpted by Antoine Coyzevox (1640–1720), the bust and the arms were commemorated by individual prints in Surugue’s series.<sup>29</sup> Like the fountain and the stone inlays, the bust and the arms added elements of high and low relief to the Grand Escalier. The major dissolution of its surface, however, derived from the sequence of frescoes that Charles Le Brun designed to cover the other walls of the second level and the vaults of the ceiling.

Le Brun’s historical and allegorical program celebrated the achievements of Louis XIV through direct reference and through allusion.<sup>30</sup> On the front and rear walls of the second level, four trompe l’œil tapestry panels by Adam Frans van der Meulen illustrated military conquests.<sup>31</sup> These employed a double illusionistic device, with the battle

29. The bust by Coyzevox replaced an earlier one by Jean Warin, completed in 1665/6. For the Surugue prints, see “Le Buste de Louis le Grand dans le grand Escalier de Versailles exécuté en marbre par Ant. Coyzevox,” pl. 10; “Trophée des Armes d’Hercule dans le Grand Escalier de Versailles exécuté en bronze par Antoine Coyzevox sur les desseins de Charles le Brun,” pl. 15; and “Les Armes de France et de Navarre dans le grand Escalier de Versailles exécutées en Bronze par Ant. Coyzevox sur les desseins de Ch. le Brun,” pl. 19.

30. On this program, see Roseline Bacou, “Cartons et dessins de Le Brun pour l’escalier des Ambassadeurs, au Musée du Louvre,” in *Liber Amicorum Karel G. Boon*, ed. Dieuwke de Hoop Scheffer, Carlos van Hasselt, and Christopher White (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1974), 13–27, and Gérard Sabatier, “Le Parti figuratif dans les appartements, l’escalier et la galerie de Versailles,” *XVIIe Siècle* 161 (October–December 1988): 409–16.

31. On these paintings, see Pascal Torrès Guardiola, “Charles Le Brun et Adam Frans van der Meulen: Peinture de bataille et peinture d’histoire dans le décor peint de l’Escalier des Ambassadeurs Versailles,” in *À la gloire du roi: Van der Meulen, peintre*

scenes at their centers surrounded by painted frames, which were in turn set against backgrounds of painted tapestry fabric.<sup>32</sup> Next to each of these tapestry sections, four fresco panels depicting the peoples of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia used another series of trompe l'œil effects.<sup>33</sup> These frescoes repeated the stone orders of the second level as elements in a fictive space beyond it, where figures were shown leaning over a balustrade as if they inhabited the real space of the room. Finally, at the top of the room, the ceiling vault was covered with entirely fictive architecture—that is, the ceiling vault had no pilasters or columns at all, as on the second level—and was populated by an assembly of allegorical and mythological figures. Surugue's volume includes a view of the vault, engraved by Charles-Louis Simonneau the Elder (1645–1728) (fig. 12).<sup>34</sup>

Each of the ceiling's allegorical figures played a specific role in the iconography of Louis XIV, and the text by Le Fèvre included with Surugue's plates explains these roles, a complicated interplay of gods and muses, personifications of the arts, symbols of virtues, and terms representing the months. Although many eighteenth-century guidebooks skipped its details, at one time the figural program had been newsworthy.<sup>35</sup> A long description of the Grand Escalier that appeared in the *Mercure Galant* in 1680, almost immediately after construction

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*des conquêtes de Louis XIV* (Dijon: Musée des beaux-arts de Dijon; Luxemburg: Musée d'histoire de la ville de Luxembourg, 1998), 203–9; Marguerite Allain-Launay, “*La Reddition de la Citadelle de Cambrai*, de Le Brun et Van der Meulen: Une Œuvre sauvée par la transposition de Picault en 1750,” in *ibid.*, 210–13; and entries 90–93 (pp. 213–18) in the catalog that contains these essays.

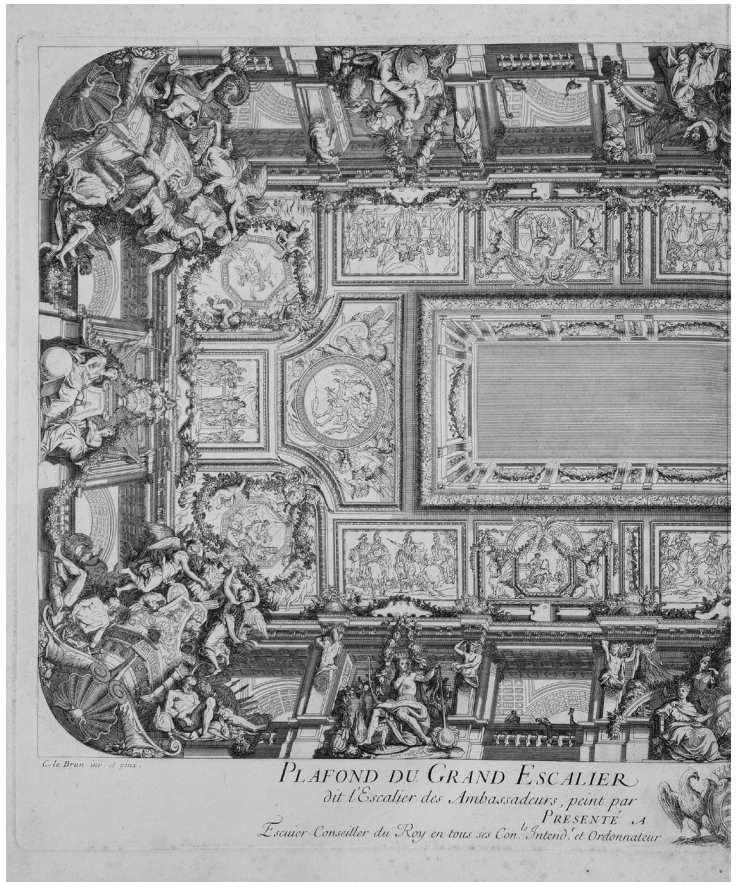
32. In the Surugue portfolio the four panels are entitled “Valenciennes emporté d’assaut, dans le grand Escallier de Versailles, peint par F. Vandermeulen, et les ornements par C. le Brun,” pl. 8; “Reddition de Cambray ...,” pl. 12; “Prise de Saint Omer ...,” pl. 17; and “Bataille de Cassel ...,” pl. 21.

33. In the Surugue portfolio these are “Les différentes Nations de l’Europe, peintes dans le grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles par Charles le Brun premier peintre du Roy, et gravé par Louis Surugue en 1720,” pl. 9; “Les différentes Nations de l’Amérique ...,” pl. 11; “Les différentes Nations de l’Asie ...,” pl. 19; and “Les différentes Nations de l’Afrique ...,” pl. 20.

34. In addition to the library's copy, the Princeton University Art Museum also owns a copy of this print (ui.2012.2258).

35. For example, a guidebook by George Louis LeRouge that went through multiple editions, entitled *Les Curiositez de Paris, de Versailles, de Marly, de Vincennes, de S. Cloud, et des environs*, mentions the allegorical ceiling painting but does not include an explanation of its figures (rev. ed., Paris: Saugrain, 1733), vol. 2, p. 170.

12. Charles-Louis Simonneau the Elder, after Charles Le Brun, “Plafond du Grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles, dit l’Escalier des Ambassadeurs, peint par Mr. le Brun premier Peintre du Roy,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles*, pl. 24.



on the staircase had ended, included several pages devoted to the significance of its ceiling decoration.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Etienne Baudet engraved a suite of seven prints of the ceiling as part of the *Cabinet du Roi*.<sup>37</sup> Princeton University’s Marquand Library of Art and Archae-

36. *Mercure Galant*, 1680, 276–320.

37. Etienne Baudet, *Le Grand escalier de Versailles* (Paris, 1679–1683). On Baudet, see Roger-Armand Weigert, *Inventaire du fonds français: Graveurs du XVIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1939), 287–306; Maxime Préaud, “Baudet, Étienne,” in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, vol. 7 (Munich, Leipzig: Saur, 1993), 518; and Annelaure Aumaître and Céline Morisseau, “Graver l’antique: Mellan, Baudet et la collection de Louis XIV (1668–1681),” *Revue de l’Art* 52 (June 2003): 16–17. For these prints specifically, see Weigert, *Inventaire du fonds français*, 294–96, nos. 41–47. According to Weigert, the dating of the plates is based on the first and last payments that were issued for them.



ology recently acquired a copy of this suite in a volume that bears the arms and cipher of Louis XIV.<sup>38</sup> This volume also includes Simonneau's view of the Grand Escalier ceiling (fig. 12); three plates of the ceiling of the galerie of the petit appartement du roi at Versailles, engraved by Gérard Audran (1640–1703) after Pierre Mignard; five plates of the cupola of the chapel of the Château de Sceaux, painted by Le Brun and engraved by Audran; and six plates, also engraved by Audran, of Mignard's ceiling for the cupola of the Val-de-Grâce in Paris. These other plates in the Princeton volume provide a context for how Baudet's prints of the Grand Escalier were meant to be

38. The binding also features the ex libris of the Earl of Rosebery. Princeton acquired this copy in the sale "Bibliothèque d'architecture d'un amateur: De Vitruve à Ledoux" held on March 6, 2014, at Alde in Paris, organized by Librairie Lardanchet.

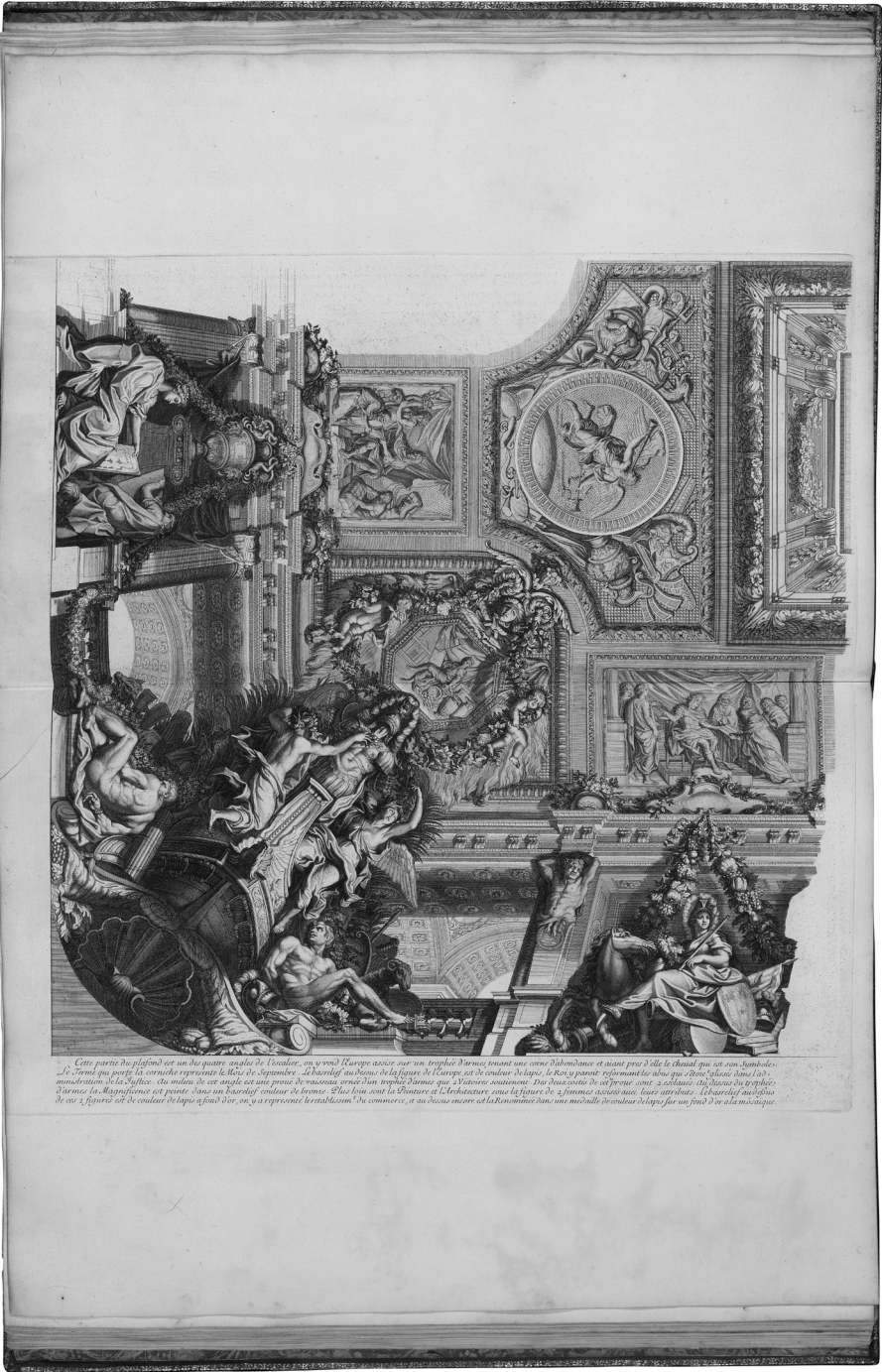
used.<sup>39</sup> Audran's plates of the Petite Galerie, for example, could be lined up in a row to create a complete image of the ceiling, and his plates of the cupolas at Sceaux and at the Val-de-Grâce could be cut out and assembled to form complete views of those vaults.<sup>40</sup> Baudet's prints also could be assembled this way, which is why the engraved areas often end unevenly before the edge of the plate mark (fig. 13). These uneven breaks guide the alignment of adjacent prints, as does the Simonneau print, which shows the entire ceiling in one view, although in the reverse orientation.

When arranged in sequence, the four corner and two long-side prints of Baudet's set form a continuous image of the Grand Escalier ceiling perimeter (fig. 14). Each of these six prints includes an explanation of the iconography, written by Claude-Auguste Berey as a caption at the bottom of the plate. The first print in the series provides the center of the assembled image: it shows the large rectangular oculus that lit the entire room (fig. 15). This skylight was a major technical achievement, the first of its kind to be constructed in France, and provided a climax to the climb of the staircase and the final dissolution of the wall.<sup>41</sup> Baudet's print illustrates the skylight with a series of trompe l'œil effects similar to those used in the decoration of the room. In between two bars ornamented with brackets and garlands, the name of the Grand Escalier and a description of it appear against a gray background. Although the bars and the background represent the frame and opening of the oculus as it once appeared in the room, in this print they also serve as the traditional apparatus of a frontispiece. The void at the ceiling's center doubles as a solid surface for writing, and the image of the oculus is thus transformed into a title page, as this print is often described.

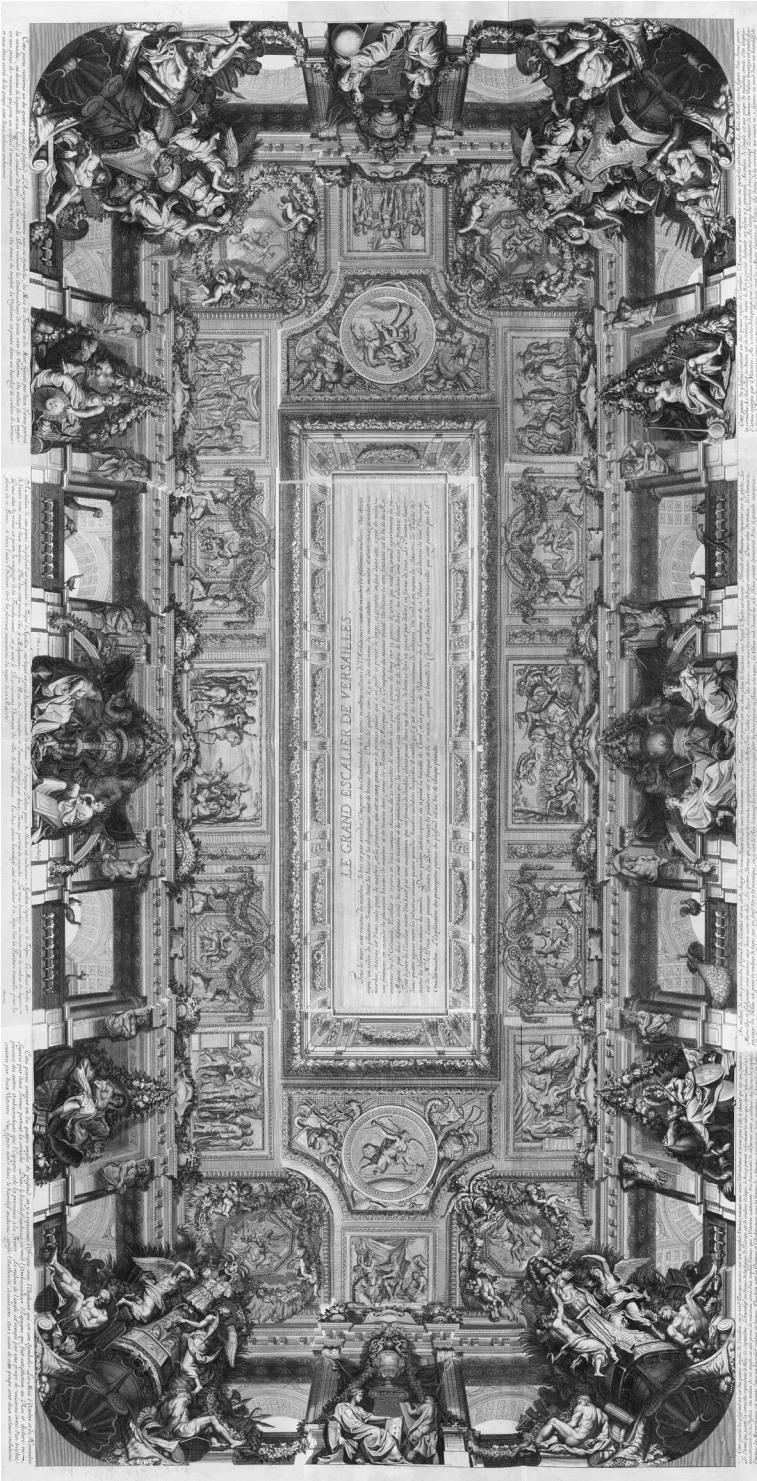
39. See Louis Marchesano, "Charles Le Brun and Monumental Prints in the Grand Manner," in *Printing the Grand Manner: Charles Le Brun and Monumental Prints in the Age of Louis XIV*, ed. Louis Marchesano and Christian Michel (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 1–37.

40. On Audran's prints of Le Brun's ceiling at Sceaux, see Merson, "Quelques grandes œuvres disparues de Charles Le Brun," 355–60. Princeton University's Graphic Arts Collection has another set of Audran's prints of Sceaux, known as the *Triumph of the New Testament over the Old Testament* (1681). This set has been cut for assembly; photographs of the set fully assembled can be seen at [blogs.princeton.edu/graphicarts/2013/03/cupula.html](https://blogs.princeton.edu/graphicarts/2013/03/cupula.html).

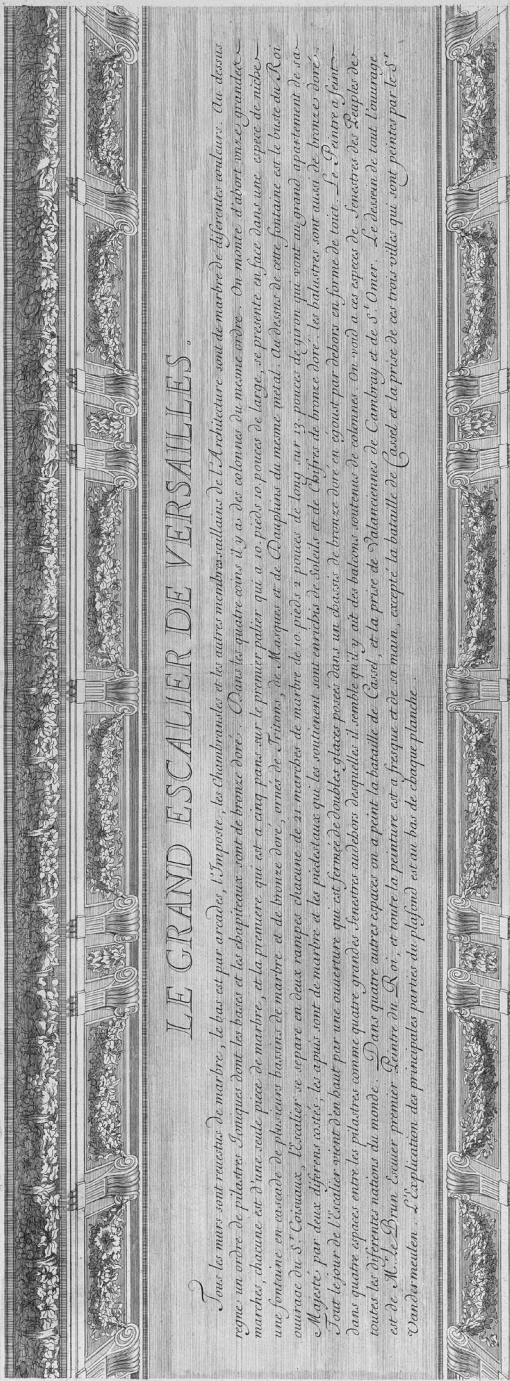
41. Kimball, "Genesis of the Château Neuf," 120; Sabatier, "Le Parti figuratif," 409.



13. Etienne Baudet, “Cette partie du plafond est un des quatre angles de l’escalier, on y voit l’Europe . . .,” in *Le Grand escalier de Versailles* (Paris, 1679–1683). Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology. Purchased in part with funds provided by the David A. Gardner '69 Magic Project. This plate is in the lower left corner of figure 14.



14. Etienne Baudet, *Le Grand escalier de Versailles*. The seven prints in the suite have been aligned digitally to create a continuous image.



## LE GRAND ESCALIER DE VERSAILLES.

Tous les murs sont revêtus de marbre, le bas est par arcade, l'imposte, les Chambranles et les autres membrures de l'Architecture sont de marbre de différentes couleurs. Au dessus regne un ordre de pilastres. Quelques dont les bases et les chapiteaux sont de bronze doré. Dans les quatre coins il y a des colonnes du même ordre. On monte d'haut vers, grandes marches, chacune est d'un seul piéce de marbre, et la première qui est à cinq piés sur le premier pilier qui a six piés 10 piéces de large, se présente en face dans une espèce de niche avec fontaine en cascade de plusieurs bassins de marbre et de bronze doré, orné de Tritons, de Muses et de Chansons du même métal. Au dessus de cette fontaine est le buste du Roi ournaux du S<sup>r</sup> Louis. L'escalier se sépare en deux rampes chacune de 21 marches de marbre de 10 piés 2 piéces de long sur 13 piéces de large, et un grand appartement de sa Majesté, par deux différens vestes, les apais sont de marbre et les piédestaux qui les soutiennent sont enrichis de balda et de Chiffres de bronze doré.

Tout le bas de l'escalier vient en bout par une sautoire qui est formé de doubles glaces posés dans un chassis de bronze doré en sautoire par dessus en forme de toit. Les Piliers y sont dans quatre espaces entre les pilastres comme quatre grands Génies adossés dequelles il semble qu'il y ait des balcons soutenus de colonnes. On voit à sa espèce de balcons des 2 angles de toutes les différentes nations du monde. Dans quatre autres espaces on a peint la bataille de Cassel, et la prise de Valenciennes de Combray et de S<sup>r</sup> Omer. Le dessin de tout l'ouvrage est de M. le Baron Eouer premier Gentre du Roi, et toute la peinture est à fresque et de sa main, excepté la bataille de Cassel et la prise de ces trois villes qui sont peintes par le S<sup>r</sup> Vandermeulen. L'explication des principales parties du plafond est au bas de chaque planche.

15. Etienne Baudet, "Le Grand escalier de Versailles," in *Le Grand escalier de Versailles*.

Like the Grand Escalier itself, Baudet's prints themselves soon became notable.<sup>42</sup> The ceiling was, after all, the apotheosis of the room, the area where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, obscured with architectural and painted devices in the lower levels, also were obscured with iconographical devices. The staircase served as a vehicle to approach, observe, and eventually interpret those devices. It brought visitors up to and then into the decorative program of the walls, positioning dignitaries and other guests against it as additional figures in the display. At the Grand Escalier, the staircase and the walls operated in tandem, an inextricability not found in earlier French staircases. Previously, the grandest of these were designed to have a spatial complexity that challenged easy comprehension—and thus also challenged the limits of two-dimensional representation. The Grand Escalier stood outside that tradition in part because it was not spatially complex: its virtuosity derived instead from its relation to a layered decorative scheme.

#### THE EDGE OF THE GRAND ESCALIER

There was nothing revolutionary about the structure of the Grand Escalier itself. Essentially a variant of the imperial type that developed in Italy and Spain during the Renaissance, it was a symmetrical, open-well staircase comprising a single, straight flight that branched into two.<sup>43</sup> These two flights rose against the wall opposite the main entrance, so that as visitors ascended the steps, they remained visible to all who entered after them. Their movement up the staircase became part of the pageant of the room, a pageant set against and in conjunction with the decorative program of the interior walls. The Grand Escalier was designed to emphasize not the structure of the staircase itself, but those walls. As in a wall-tomb or a façade-fountain, the figural program of this set piece was entwined with its architectural support.

The interlacing of the figural and the architectural differentiates

42. They are mentioned in a 1717 guidebook to Versailles: Jean-Aymar Piganiol de la Force, *Les Delices de Versailles, de Trianon, et de Marly* ... (Amsterdam: David Mortier, 1717), 17.

43. Catherine Wilkinson, "The Escorial and the Invention of the Imperial Staircase," *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (1975): 65. For an overview of the history of staircase forms, see John A. Templer, *The Staircase: History and Theories* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

the Grand Escalier not only from the staircases depicted in French architectural books, but also from some of the great European staircases of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as those at the Würzburg palace, designed by Balthasar Neumann (1687–1753), or at the palace of Caserta, designed by Luigi Vanvitelli (1700–1773). These staircases, though enormous and complex, were not visually integrated with the decorative programs around them. This integration was the key to the entire program of the Grand Escalier: the wall-staircase positioned visitors against a series of trompe l'œil effects, incorporating them into the scheme of the dissolving boundary. The staircase was not merely a stage for activity—at least not in the same sense that it later became at the Palais Garnier, the Paris opera house designed by Charles Garnier (1825–1898). At the Palais Garnier, the great staircase ushers visitors to the center of the hall and makes them the focal point of an ensemble: as ticketholders arrive and ascend to various tiers throughout the theater, the staircase brings them together in a human spectacle that can be observed from the perimeter mezzanines. At Versailles the perimeter was the spectacle, and the program was predetermined.

The development of the Grand Escalier as a new type of wall-staircase, embedded in a decorative program, can be seen most clearly when contrasted with its immediate precedent, the staircase that Claude Perrault (1613–1688) designed for the renovation of the Louvre in 1668.<sup>44</sup> Both iterations of Perrault's project, which was never built, include symmetrical branching flights that begin in the center of an open room and ascend along its sides.<sup>45</sup> One iteration of this project is so close in form to the Grand Escalier—begun in its final form at Versailles only a few years later under François d'Orbay (1634–1697)—that it probably provided the basis for the shape of the staircase itself. Yet although Perrault's project and the Grand Escalier share the same

44. Michael Petzet, *Claude Perrault und die Architektur des Sonnenkönigs: Der Louvre König Ludwigs XIV und das Werk Claude Perraults* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2000), 249–59. Perrault's drawings for the Louvre staircase, shown in figs. 162 and 163, are in the Stockholm Nationalmuseum.

45. On Perrault's designs for the Louvre staircase, see also Ragnar Josephson, "Quelques dessins de Claude Perrault pour le Louvre," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 69 (July–August 1927): 175, 178–82; Kimball, "Genesis of the Château Neuf," 118–19; Antoine Picon, *Claude Perrault, 1613–1688, ou, La Curiosité d'un classique* (Paris: Picard, 1988), 189, 194 (figs. 157, 158), and 196; and Gambardella, *L'Architettura della scale*, 63.

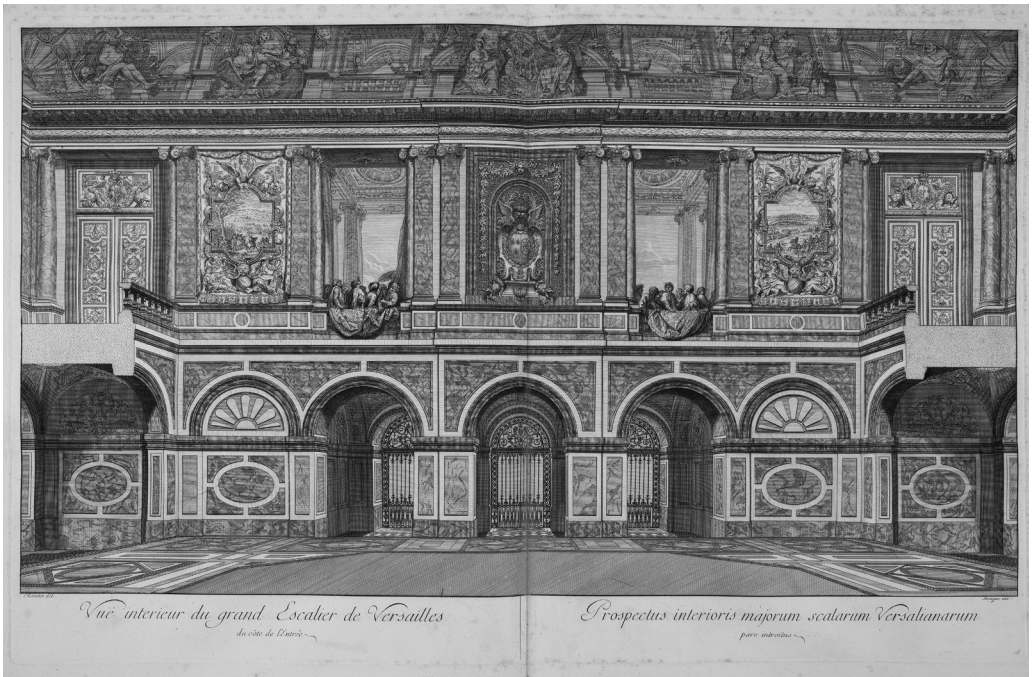
basic form, Perrault's design did not encompass a decorative program like the one incorporated into the Grand Escalier: the emphasis of the composition remained on the staircase. In Perrault's designs, each staircase ascended to a second-level balcony surrounded by a balustrade and rows of coupled columns and pilasters. These boundaries were not merely visually but actually porous.

Claustrophobic and hyper-saturated in execution, the Grand Escalier at Versailles was conceptually a porous edge. Although it had an almost entirely closed perimeter, the imagery of that perimeter created the illusion of architectural space beyond. The perimeter also referenced the exterior landscape of Versailles and of France itself through visible connections—the water in the fountain, the stones of the walls—and visual echoes, such as the parterre-like patterns. This incorporation of the outside world into the interior expanded the decorative program's overarching narrative about the relation of the earthly to the otherworldly. When visitors to Versailles arrived from the courtyard, passed through the dark vestibule, and emerged inside the room of the Grand Escalier, they became figures in the narrative of the interior.

Chevotet's view from the staircase toward the entrance shows where these visitors once entered (fig. 16). Standing at the foot of the staircase, they looked up and saw tiers of representations rising above their heads. As they started up the steps, the visitors ascended past scenes of historical triumph and dominion toward a mythical apogee.<sup>46</sup> At the top, before they began the ceremonial circuit of the Versailles court, they stood under the skylight: the oculus that was the centerpiece of Baudet's prints, the great blank in the middle of Simonneau's ceiling, and the main source of illumination in the room. Le Fèvre, at the end of his text that prefaced Surugue's 1725 portfolio, described how the light pouring through the oculus not only heightened the effect of the paintings and reliefs by making them visible, but also became part of the allegory of the Sun King.<sup>47</sup> In the same way, the Grand

46. On the symbolic dimensions of this program, see Sabatier, "Le Parti figuratif," 409–16.

47. "Il en paroist plus d'harmonie dans les Peintures, la lumiere en devient Majestueuse, et si l'on fait attention à l'allégorie de tout l'ouvrage, on peut prendre la disposition de ce jour, pour un symbole de cette lumiere Céleste qui guide les véritables Héros dans toutes leurs Actions, et qui doit les Couronner dans l'Eternité." Le Fèvre, in *Grand Escalier du Chateau de Versailles*.



16. Jean-Michel Chevotet, “Vue interieur du grand Escalier de Versailles du côté de l’Entrée,” in *Grand Escalier du Château de Versailles*, pl. 16.

Escalier took human figures and transported them, subsumed them into a system of representations. It, too, functioned not only as a structural, practical, or even aesthetic device, but also as an allegorical one. For this, the Grand Escalier can be detached from the history of the monumental staircase in France and reinserted into the history of the interior: it created not so much a representational challenge as a representational opportunity.