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**Rubens' Medici Cycle:
Justification for a Heroine Queen**

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Master of Arts

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Table of Contents

Abstract	III.
Résumé	IV.
Acknowledgements	V.
Dedication	VI.
List of Illustrations	VII.
Pertinent Illustrations are inserted after each chapter.	
Introduction	1.
Chapter One	13.
Maria de Medici and Henry de Bourbon	
Maria de Medici	
Henri de Bourbon	
Chapter Two	28.
The Luxembourg Palace	
The Decoration of the Luxembourg Palace	
The Galleries	
Chapter Three	35.
Rubens and the Commission for the Maria de Medici and Henri IV Cycle	
The Contract	
The Placement of the Paintings for the Palais du Luxembourg	
The Maria de Medici Gallery	
The Henri IV Gallery	
Chapter Four	49.
Rubens Related Galleries	
Destiny	
Marriage and Legitimacy	
Duty Fulfilled	
The Consignment of the Regency and the Survival of the Monarchy	
The Coronation and Sovereignty	
The Regency Period - Completion of the Mandate	
The Warrior Queen and the Military Hero	
The Queen Triumphant and The Triumph of Henri IV	
Conclusion	93.
Bibliography	96.

Abstract

In 1622 Maria de Medici commissioned two series of twenty four paintings for the galleries in her new home in the Palais du Luxembourg from the renowned artist Peter Paul Rubens. The Henri cycle was to illustrate the "triumphs" of her late husband the King, and the Maria cycle was to illustrate the Queen's "illustrious life and heroic deeds". This thesis proposes that the Maria de Medici cycle cannot be disassociated from the Henri IV cycle because the Queen's intention was to present her reign as a continuation of his and to prove that she was equally capable to rule the French nation. Chosen by Henri as his successor, Maria overcame obstacles that originated in his reign and that jeopardised the throne for her son and the Bourbon line.

Although the Henri IV cycle was never completed, the paintings and sketches that exist make it possible to link the two galleries by the pivotal event of marriage. The Maria cycle addresses and resolves issues stemming from this union. The repetition of specific images and themes in the two cycles represents Maria's unique qualifications and reinforces the equality of the two sovereigns. Maria completed the mandate that Henri authorised her to carry out, ensuring peace at home and in Europe, thus justifying her designation as a heroine Queen.

Résumé

En 1622, Marie de Médici a passé une commande à Pierre Paul Rubens pour deux séries de vingt-quatre peintures pour le Palais du Luxembourg. Une série devait illustrer "les triomphes" de son mari, Henri IV, et l'autre devait représenter "la vie illustre et les succès héroïques" de la Reine. Cette thèse propose que le cycle de Marie de Médici ne peut pas être séparé de celui d'Henri, puisque les intentions de la Reine avec ces peintures étaient de présenter son règne comme la continuation du sien et de montrer qu'elle était aussi capable qu'Henri en tant que gouverner la nation française. Choisi par Henri pour lui succéder à la couronne, Marie a dû surmonter des obstacles ayant leurs origines pendant le règne de son mari et qui mettaient en question la succession de son fils Louis et le futur de la dynastie des Bourbon.

Même si la série d'Henri IV n'a jamais été complétée, on peut relier les deux galeries avec l'événement central du mariage: c'est de cet événement que proviennent tous les questions adressées et résolues dans la série de Marie. La répétition d'images spécifiques par Rubens démontre les qualités uniques de Marie et renforce l'égalité des deux souverains. Marie a achevé le mandat qu'Henri lui a laissé, ce qui a établi la paix en France et en Europe et qui justifie son titre de "Reine-héroïne."

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Dedication

To Frank and Michel

List of Illustrations

1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*, 1628, sketch, oil on panel, Wallace Collection, London. Source: Christopher White, *Peter Paul Rubens, Man and Artist*, New Haven, 1987, Fig. 240.

Chapter One

2. Alessandro Allori, *Marie de Medici When Young*, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Source: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Royal French State 1460-1610*, Oxford, 1987, p. 263.

3. Artist Unknown, *Bianca Cappello*, (1560s), Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Source: Santina Levey, *A History of Lace*, London, 1983, Fig. 58.

4. Maria de Medici, *Bust of a Woman*, woodcut, 1587, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medicis*, New York, 1969, Fig. 2.

5. Clouet, *Henry of Navarre as a Young Man*, Source: Henry Dwight Sedgwick, *Henry of Navarre*, Indianapolis, 1930, p. 164.

6. Benjamin Foulon, *Gabrielle d' Estrées, Duchesse de Beaufort*. Source: Henry Dwight Sedgwick, *Henry of Navarre*, Indianapolis, 1930, p. 212.

7. *Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil* (1579-1635), Musée de Versailles, inv. MV 3333. Cl. Source: Marie Noelle Beaudoin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1991. Fig. 84.

Chapter Two

8. Palais du Luxembourg, Gravure de Perelle. Senat. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig 5.

9. L. Vorsterman, *Claude Maugis, Abbé de Saint Ambroise de Bourges*, d'après un original inconnu peint par Ph. de Champaigne (1628-30). H. 0, 23, 1. 0, 156. Arsenal, Est. 118. Cl. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medicis*, New York, 1969, Fig. 34.

10. Philippe de Champaigne, *Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu*, Inv. 1136. Cl. Louvre, Paris. Source: Marie Noelle Beaudoin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1991. Fig. 221.

11. Plan of the main floor of the Palais du Luxembourg and the Medici Gallery in the time of Marie de 'Medici. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 6.

Chapter Three

12. Claude Mellan, *Peiresc*, Gravure, Bibliotheque Principale, Anvers. Source: Marie Noelle Beaudoin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1991. Fig. 48.

13. Last page of the contract of February 26, 1622 between P.P. Rubens and Maria de Medici, Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York.

14. Hypothetical Reconstruction of the plan of the Luxembourg Gallery after Thuillier-Foucart. Drawn by Francesco Quinterio. Source: R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, p. 20-21.

Chapter Four

15. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Expulsion From Paris*, sketch, oil on panel, 62.3 x 48.9 cm., Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Source: Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. II, Princeton, 1980, Fig. 10.

16. Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany*. oil on canvas, 2.47 x 1.16 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, New York, 1969, Fig. 17.

17. Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Johanna of Austria, Grand Duchess of Tuscany*. oil on canvas, 2.47 x 1.16 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, New York, 1969, Fig. 16.

18. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of Maria de' Medici*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m. Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 2.

19. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of Henri IV*, oil on panel, Wallace Collection, London. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, New York, 1969, Fig. 45.

20. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of the Dauphin at Fontainebleau*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 8.

21. Cesare Ripa, *Monarchy*, Source: *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611. Reprint of the 1611 ed. Padua, 1976. Fig. 208.

22. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of the Princess*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m. Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 3.

23. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Felicity of the Regency*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m. Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 15.

24. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*, 1628, sketch, oil on panel, Wallace Collection, London. Source: Christopher White, *Peter Paul Rubens, Man and Artist*, New Haven, 1987, Fig. 240.

25. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of Her Portrait to Henry IV*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 4.

26. Anonymous, *Mirror of the Prince*, title page for P. Belluga's *Speculum Principum*, engraving, 1655, Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge. Source: Geraldine Johnson, "Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de' Medici Cycle," *Art History*, Vol. 16 No. 3, September 1993, p. 460, Fig. 37.

27. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Wedding by Proxy*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 5.

28. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Disembarkation at Marseilles*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 6.

29. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage Consummated in Lyons*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 7.

30. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Exchange of the Princesses at the Spanish Border*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 14.

31. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Council of the Gods*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.02 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 12.

32. Francesco Bianchi, *Marriage of Caterina de Medici and Henri II*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 19.

33. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Marriage of Joanna of Austria and Francesco de Medici*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife. Source: Marie Noelle Beaudoin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1991, Fig. 59.

34. Jacopo da Empoli, *Proxy Marriage of Maria de Medici*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife. Source: Marie Noelle Beaudoin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1991, Fig. 61.
35. Valerio Marucelli, *Exchange of the French and Spanish Princesses, (Marriage of Louis XIII)*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 22.
36. Domenico Passignano, *Embarkation of Maria de Medici at Livorno*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 22.
37. *Maria de Medici and her Children*, from J. P. de la Serre, 1632. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 39.
38. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Reconciliation of Henri III and Henri de Navarre*, 1628, oil on panel, Rochester Memorial Art Gallery. Source: Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. II, Princeton, 1980, Fig. 84.
39. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consignment of the Regency*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 9.
40. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Death of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*. Oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.27 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 11.
41. *Propagio Imperi*, Emblem of Henri IV and Maria de Medici, 1604, Trésor de numismatique. Source: R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, Fig. 23.
42. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consignment of the Regency*. 1622, Sketch, oil on panel, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Source: Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. II, Princeton, 1980, Fig. 67.
43. Peter Paul Rubens, *Louis XIII Becomes of Age*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 16.
44. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Coronation of Henri IV*, sketch, oil on panel, present location unknown. Source: Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. II, Princeton, 1980, Fig. 90.
45. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Coronation in St. Denis*. Oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.27 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgwood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 10.

46. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Regent Militant: The Victory at Julich.*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: C.V. Wedgewood, *The World of Rubens 1677-1640*, Alexandria, 1967, Fig. 13.
47. Peter Paul Rubens, *Battle of Ivry*, 1630, Uffizi, Florence. Source: Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, Fig. 26.
48. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant*, oil on canvas, 2.76 X 1.49 m., Louvre, Paris. Source: Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, New York, 1969, Fig. 18.
49. Wingless Victory, emblem of Henry IV, 1599 from De Bie. Source: R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, Fig. 47.
50. Cesare Ripa, *Nobilita*, Source: *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611. Reprint of the 1611 ed. Padua, 1976, Fig. 383.
51. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Triumph of Henry IV*, 1630, oil on canvas, Uffizi, Florence. Source: Christopher White, *Peter Paul Rubens, Man and Artist*, New Haven, 1987, Fig. 236.
52. André Valladier, *Triumphal Arch for Maria de Medici*, Labyrinthe royal de l'Hercule Gaulois Triomphant, Avignon, 1601, p. 186.
53. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant.*, sketch, oil on panel, Stiftung, Kunsthof, Worms, Source: R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, Fig. 76.



The King pushed by a holy friendship
 Communicated to his chaste half
 His diadem as well as his bed.....
 You are with his sweet kisses
 To give birth to Kings, Such a Princess
 Must bring to blossom an immortal race....
 Now therefore, Queen, in your order succeed
 To the crown and the scepter possess,
 Of the great Henry who comes to receive you,
 To share the sovereign power
 That Nature and his own valor
 Have acquired for him over the people of France
 And as he gave you the care of commanding there
 Take, too, the honor.¹

Fig. 1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*.

¹ Jean Prévost, *Apothéose du très chrestien Roy de France et de Navarre Henri IIII*, Poitiers: Julien Thoreau, 1613, Bk. 1.

Rubens' Medici Cycle: Justification For A Heroine Queen Introduction

In 1622, Maria de Medici, Queen Mother of France, widow of Henri IV, and mother of the reigning King Louis XIII, commissioned two series of paintings for her new home in the Palais du Luxembourg. According to the contract signed with the renowned painter Peter Paul Rubens, the Maria de Medici cycle was to chronicle her illustrious deeds and heroic life, while the other, the Henry IV cycle, was to illustrate the heroic military exploits and the peaceful accomplishments of her late husband.²

At the time of the commission Maria was just a dowager Queen with a limited say in the King's Council. From 1617 until 1620 she had suffered great personal trials and tribulations at the hands of her son and his advisors. Her power as Queen had been usurped, she feared for her own life and for that of her children, her closest friends had been murdered, and she had been forced into a humiliating two year exile. She had been rescued by her late husband's closest advisors, who had pledged their loyalty and support when Henri had consigned the regency upon her. Louis had disregarded all of Maria's efforts and achievements as Queen and Regent to complete the mandate that Henri had authorised her to carry out.

It is this author's opinion that Louis' hostile actions were the catalyst for the commissioning of the cycle. Indeed, his behaviour could be considered especially malevolent since Maria alone had preserved the throne for her son. Even the King had been cognizant of the true nature of their son, for he had warned Maria of Louis' subterfuge :

The end of my life will be the commencement of your woes. My mistresses have displeased you, but you will find it very difficult

² Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici*, New York, 1970, p. 97.

to avoid being mistreated some day by those who will take over his [Louis'] mind.³

The twenty four paintings of Maria's life now hang in the Salon des Etats of the Louvre in Paris as a testament to the tenacity of a Queen whose intentions, this author feels, have been misunderstood for more than three hundred and fifty years. This paper proposes that the essential meaning of the Medici cycle can only be realised when viewed in conjunction with that of Henri IV. The Medici cycle and the Henri IV cycle were commissioned by Maria to present the two sovereigns as equal partners and her reign as a continuation to that of her husband's. Maria was chosen by Henri to complete his mandate because he knew that she was the only person capable of accomplishing his objectives and of preserving the monarchy for their son and the Bourbon line. It was Maria's intention to reinforce her position by illustrating her own unique qualifications for the role she had been destined to play as Queen of France, which were comparable to those of the King, and displaying the characteristics that fulfilled the necessary requirements for her depiction as a heroine Queen.

The major studies on the Medici Cycle have been concerned with various political aspects of the commission. Von Simson believed that the gallery, although the quintessential example of the Baroque apotheosis of a sovereign, was in fact a collaboration between Rubens and the politics of Richelieu as much as it represented the ideas of the Queen.⁴ Coolidge proposed that the cycles were commissioned by Maria as counter propaganda to the critical political commentary of the Constantine tapestries ordered by her son Louis XIII.⁵ Saward's study attempts to approach the imagery of the

³ Maximilien de Béthune Sully, *Mémoires*, cited in Françoise Kermina, *Marie de Médicis, reine, régente, et rebelle*, (Présence de l'Histoire, coll. ed. A. Castelot), Paris, 1979, p. 217.

⁴ Otto Von Simson, *Zur Genealogie der weltlichen Apotheose im Barock, besonders der Medicigalerie des P. P. Rubens*, Strasbourg, 1936, pp. 15-16.

⁵ J. Coolidge, "Louis XIII and Rubens, The Story of the Constantine Tapestries," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, LXVII, 1966, p. 285.

public life of the Queen through the artistic, literary and political traditions that define an ideal monarchy as a return to a golden age.⁶ Marrow's thesis represents an effort to reassess the art patronage of Maria de Medici because her position as Queen afforded her the ability to commission work that not only expressed her point of view but also raised passive female imagery into an image of power.⁷ Millen and Wolf propose that the cycle was commissioned by Maria as a vindictive retaliation against her son for the usurpment of her power.⁸ These studies make no thematic connection between the Henri IV cycle and the Maria de Medici cycle. No conclusions are drawn to the importance of the fact that Maria commissioned the two cycles at the same time other than the stipulation that both be completed within the four years.

Thuillier-Foucart's monumental study recognises that "the story set forth in the cycle of Maria de Medici was conceived right from the start, in close relationship to the other story, that of the exploits of her husband Henri IV".⁹ Yet it makes no further suggestions as to how the cycles were associated other than by physical proximity. It does, however, state that the Henri IV cycle was to act as a preamble to the Medici cycle.¹⁰ Smith theorises that Rubens based the conceptual structure of the commission on the ancient *Consecratio* uniting both galleries in an effort to legitimise Maria's reign and to call for peaceful alliances in global terms.¹¹

Although each of the galleries can be appreciated individually, it is the opinion of this author that Maria de Medici did not intend her gallery to be viewed separately, but rather as a continuation of the story of the life of Henri

⁶ Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, p. 7.

⁷ Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de 'Medici*, Ann Arbor, 1982, pp. 1, 76.

⁸ R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, p. 13.

⁹ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

¹¹ Shaw Smith, "Rubens and the Grand Camée de France: The *Consecratio* in the Medici Galleries of the Luxembourg Palace," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, Ser. 6, vol. 20, October 1992, pp. 127, 128, 135.

IV as depicted in the Henri IV cycle. Furthermore, it is the opinion of this author that the Queen intended, as Thuillier-Foucart suggest, that the Henri IV gallery be seen before viewing her own. This was specifically because the images of Henri's cycle prepare the viewer for the paintings of the events of Maria's life illustrated in the Medici cycle. These were representations of situations that resulted from Maria's union with Henri which directly affected the future of the monarchy. The visitor's perception of the Queen is influenced by these images as well as those which are common to both cycles. The Henri cycle was not "just" a preamble to the Medici cycle, as Thuillier-Foucart theorise, because Maria and Henri appear in each others' cycles, indicating the equality of their relationship and the importance of each other in the intertwining of their lives.¹² Unfortunately the Henri IV cycle was never completed and only three of the bozzetti prepared for paintings on the east side of Henri's gallery, illustrating his peaceful accomplishments and his relationship with Maria are presently known. This fact suggests the possibility that other sketches may be found that confirm Maria's appearance in his cycle more frequently than just in the final painting.

Significantly, the final painting of the Henri IV cycle, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*, did not end the cycle according to Thuillier-Foucart as "the crowning point to an epic with nothing more to add,"¹³ but rather linked this pivotal event with the events portrayed in the Maria cycle. It is Held's view that the composition and placement of this painting were devised by Rubens specifically to propel the visitor out of the Henri gallery and into the Maria gallery.¹⁴ Thus the story of the monarchy should be seen to continue from the perspective of Maria de Medici.

Henri's accomplishments were well known. He had by his own heroic

¹² Thuillier-Foucart, p. 71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ J. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, vol. 1, Princeton, 1980, p. 135.

effort, managed to unify the nation under his leadership. He established religious tolerance after thirty five years of religious wars; and he brought peace and prosperity to a bankrupt nation that was still lumbering under a mediaeval social framework. His relationship with Maria was indispensable to fulfilling his goals. Her participation was integral with the success of his reign and her own achievements were significant. The Medici wealth from her dowry infused the royal coffers with much needed cash. She produced an heir who would guarantee the continuation of the Bourbon line and assure the preservation of the monarchy. By earning the trust and confidence of her husband, the match that originated as a financial merger evolved into a loving marriage. Henri encouraged her participation in the Royal Council and because he had full confidence in her ability to govern, he decreed letters of consignment in 1603 and again in 1610. Henri intended that she should rule as monarch with the full support of the government declaring her Regent until the Dauphin became of age. Henri's choice of Maria as Regent was significant since the appointment of the mother of the Dauphin to act in that capacity was not automatic. The coronation ceremony held two months after the consignment of the regency affirmed Henri's faith in Maria providing evidence of his desire for continuity. This was not a necessary act but a public confirmation to France and Europe of Henri's intention that she should rule. After Henri's death, Maria, in her role as Queen and Regent, completed the King's mandate in order to maintain the peace at home and abroad.

The Queen chose to present the image of her husband Henri as a hero, whose active male qualities of courage, magnanimity, wisdom, prudence and justice distinguish him from other men according to the definition found in the *Dictionnaire de l'Academie françoise*.¹⁵ Thus the Henri IV cycle

¹⁵ *Le grand dictionnaire de l'Academie françoise*, 2d ed.; Vol. 1, Paris, 1695 (reprinted 1968), p. 340.

represented the King's greatest military victories and his triumphal entry into Paris as well as the wisdom he exhibited in choosing Maria as his mate. Thuillier-Foucart believe that Maria commissioned the Medici cycle with the sole intention of bequeathing to posterity an image of herself as a heroine.¹⁶ This was because the image of the heroic female particularly responded to the literary taste during the period of 1610 to 1660. As a heroine, Maria is naturally endowed with the passive heroic qualities usually associated with the female sex, such as chastity, piety, dutifulness and domesticity that fulfilled the requirements of a wife and mother. She also exhibits the active masculine traits of the hero warrior whose qualities of courage, wisdom and prudence, according to the definition found in the *Dictionnaire*, make her equal to the male.¹⁷ Rubens portrayed Maria in his paintings illustrating the different roles that she was required to assume as a heroine Queen exhibiting characteristics, both masculine and feminine, that she shared with earlier French heroines such as Joan of Arc and Blanche of Castille. Maria herself chose the term "heroic" to be used in the contract referring to her own deeds and it is implicitly understood that the actions of the King satisfy the necessary criteria for description as a hero since fully one half of the Henri cycle concerns his military career. It can, therefore, be said that the heroic actions of the two main characters define the thematic approach of the cycles. Elaine Rubin writes that:

[The] heroic tradition was innately linked with determination of kingship and the justification of the French state, [and] the use of heroic language must be viewed as a means to strike at the roots of historic allegiances and sexual beliefs established in the French psyche. The heroic image engendered a myriad of visions and responded to various levels of the psyche. For this reason it was a powerful political tool.¹⁸

¹⁶ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Le grand dictionnaire*, vol. I, p. 340.

¹⁸ Elaine Rubin, *The Heroic Image: Women and Power in Early Seventeenth Century France, 1610-1661*, Phd. dissertation, George Washington University, 1977, p. 3.

Marrow states that the imagery used in Maria's paintings is complex and multifaceted in order to respond to the broad political concerns of her rule.¹⁹ Except for the canvases that deal with the particular issues that arose between Maria and her son after 1617, the problems Maria had to address were those that originated with the reign of her husband. The legitimacy of their marriage was an issue because of Henri's foolhardy willingness to sign a promissary note of marriage with his mistress. This irresponsible act placed the validity of his marriage to Maria in question, which, in turn, directly affected the legality of the heir, the son who would become Louis XIII. The religious divisions in France also concerned Maria's government. Conflict between the Huguenots and the Catholics plagued the French nation. Henri's reign had ended thirty-five years of religious strife and his abjuration of the Protestant faith had been a necessary act in order to ascend the throne and to unify the country. Marriage to a Catholic Princess alleviated the concerns of the Catholic Majority, but he had also instituted the Edict of Nantes in 1598 in order to provide the Huguenots with religious freedom and security. Maria was politically astute enough during her Regency to realise that the country could ill afford to be swept into another religious war. Thus she quickly reaffirmed Henri's policies after his assassination, and then concluded the negotiations for the marriages of her son Louis, and her daughters, one to a Catholic King and one to a Protestant to assure peace in Europe.

Although Rubens began the commission with the series dedicated to Maria's life, it was the Queen's intention right from the beginning that the image she wished to project was one of equality between the two sovereigns. The two wings of the Palais du Luxembourg were to be identical in size and construction, according to the architectural plans of de Brosse. The two galleries in the Luxembourg were to be given equal prominence and the

¹⁹ Marrow, p. 56.

Henri IV cycle was intended to decorate the gallery in the east wing of the palace exactly opposite and parallel to the Maria de Medici gallery. The contract also called for an equal number of paintings for each gallery.

Maria was in full control of the commission and made the final decision on the topics that Rubens would paint. She established a program that reiterated key images that related to both sovereigns. The repetition of specific depictions painted by Rubens encourages the audience to draw conclusions about the equality of the sovereigns and their worthiness to rule. In particular these representations validate Henri's decision to designate Maria as Regent of France. For Rubens, there was no secular precedent for the symbolic, allegorical and political biography that he was commissioned to paint. He used the ancient literary panegyric as the basic organisation of the two cycles reinforcing the idea that the lives illustrated in the two galleries were deserving of depiction because their rule exemplified the classical ideals of good government, statecraft and kingship. The images portrayed in the cycles outlined the momentous events of the lives of both Henri and Maria that made them worthy of their destinies to rule.

According to Thuillier and Foucart, no gallery of paintings had ever been devoted to a sovereign within his/her own lifetime, in the manner that Maria requested from Rubens. In Italy, however, it was a common practice to portray a prince realistically and directly in a large composition, and Maria had seen the finest examples in her youth, at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, where the glorious history of the dynasties of Medici princes was recounted on the walls. This type of realism became popular in French painting and engraving during the reign of Henri and Maria, and illustrations of the Joyous Entries and public solemnities became common.²⁰ The poems Malherbe wrote for the court ballets that were created to celebrate the most

²⁰ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 33, 34, 62 n. 98.

recent events in the life of the Royal family are also considered by Thuillier-Foucart as the literary equivalent of Rubens' painted panegyric. Most likely influenced by this style, Maria instructed Rubens to be "guided by the truth of history."²¹ For this reason Rubens' suggestion of the "Flaminéo" as a subject for the Medici cycle was brushed aside and the events after 1617 were included. These paintings imply Louis' ineffectiveness by contrasting the majestic events leading up to the final transfer of power, which Louis took from Maria by force, with those that concern the problematic relationship of Louis and his mother after her exile to and escape from Blois. The canvases that illustrate the affection and cohesiveness of the personal relationship of the King and Queen and the success of their reigns also reinforce the viewer's perception of Maria's difficulties with Louis and his inability to govern. Most importantly, the paintings reinforce Henri's decision to designate Maria as his immediate successor.

The qualities and characteristics that made Henri a successful King and heroic leader are never questioned, yet the fact that Maria continued to rule successfully for seven years after his death did not afford her the same description. Stereotypical attitudes regarding Maria's character and ability originated in seventeenth-century works that undermined the female ruler in accordance with the Salic Law and were perpetuated until as recently as 1969. These attitudes are reinforced by writers such as Félibien who describes Rubens and the Medici cycle as "flattering a graceless monarch".²² Saint Simon portrays Maria as a person who has; "a mind extremely limited, always governed by the worst elements at Court, without knowledge and without judgment, hard, haughty, imperious."²³ Friedrich, writes that Maria

²¹ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 38, 38, 62 n.118

²² André Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus excellentes peintres anciens et modernes*, Vol. III, Trévoux, 1725, p. 423.

²³ Louis de Rouvray, duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, Vol. XXVII, Paris, 1879-1930, p. 4.

was "forever jealous of her son's advisors and favourites, bigoted and slow-witted, yet domineering and intriguing".²⁴ Cabanne states that Maria was "a fallen monarch of forty-nine, fat and expressionless, an intriguer, sensual and cynical" that the artist Rubens transformed her with his talent from "the Florentine virago who did not love her husband but did her best to destroy his life's work, into the woman, mother and Queen, shining with all the graces and virtues".²⁵

Unfortunately the opinions of these writers have negatively influenced the way generations of people have viewed the cycle and perceived Maria. The voice of the Duc de Sully, the King's minister who was closely involved with the King and Queen on a daily basis, is seldom heard. He writes in the *Economies Royales* that "there was nothing more worthy of admiration than her beautiful carriage and countenance, her good looks, fine figure, grace, majestic presence, admirable gravity..."²⁶

Only recently have the success of the Regency period and Maria's contribution to the completion of Henri's mandate been acknowledged. The historian Michael Hayden describes in his article of 1973, that Maria was neither a weak nor an incompetent ruler: she was fully prepared by the King to act as Regent until the Dauphin should reach the age of maturity.²⁷

This essay intends to illustrate that the Queen commissioned the Maria cycle as a continuation to the Henri cycle, to represent herself and her husband as equal partners in their ability to rule the French nation, and specifically to portray the heroic qualities which she possessed that enabled her to preserve the monarchy for her son and the Bourbon line. The biographical studies describe the preparation which proved to be

²⁴ Carl J. Friedrich, *The Age of the Baroque, 1610-1660*, New York, 1952, p. 213.

²⁵ P. Cabanne, *Rubens*, New York, 1967, pp. 151, 155.

²⁶ Louis Batiffol, *Maria de Medici and Her Court*, trans. by Mary King, London, 1908. As quoted on p. 23.

²⁷ Michael J. Hayden, "Continuity in the France of Henri IV and Louis XIII: French Foreign Policy, 1598 - 1615," *Journal of Modern History*, XLV, 1973, p. 23.

indispensable for the positions both Maria and Henri assumed and emphasise the role of "Destiny" in bringing them together. This thesis discusses Maria's plans for the construction of the Luxembourg Palace and the two identical galleries, focusing on the terms of the contract, the subjects chosen for the pictures, and the organisation of the paintings commissioned from Rubens that represent the ideas that Maria wished to project. The main emphasis is on the pictures that illustrate the themes, common to both cycles, of destiny, marriage and legitimacy; the transfer of power and the coronation; heroism and the completion of Henri's mandate; and triumph; that reinforce the success of Maria's reign, and thus justifying her designation as a heroine Queen.

Chapter One

Maria de Medici and Henri de Bourbon

Maria de Medici

Maria de Medici was born in 1573, the youngest daughter of Francesco de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Joanna of Austria. (Fig. 2.) She was the product of an unhappy marriage. The Duke had a violent temperament, neglected his wife and treated her so harshly that her brother, the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria issued threats of punitive expeditions against him.²⁸

Johanna on the other hand was described by the Venetian ambassador Gussoni, as being a princess “of singular goodness and exemplary religion, as beautiful in spirit as nature has been stingy in endowment with physical beauties, pallid in face and of not very pleasing aspect, of a mind rather placid and quiet rather than lively and spirited”.²⁹

The Medici were not a noble old line. However, by the time of Maria’s marriage they had achieved a prestige and power unrivalled in Italy, with a court whose culture set a model for all of Europe and for France, especially. The dynasty had also managed to produce two popes. Maria’s mother was of a royal blood, and was always addressed by full title: “Her Serene Highness, the high born Princess, Madame Johanna, Grand Duchess in Tuscany, Duchess of Florence, born Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, Archduchess of Austria”. Johanna died in childbirth in 1578 leaving four children, Anna and Filippo, who lived only into childhood. Filippo died in 1582 and Anna in 1583. Eleonora and Maria lived into adulthood. Francesco waited only a few months before marrying his mistress Bianca Cappello, (Fig. 3.) and then, it has

²⁸ Luciano Berti, *Il Principe dello Studiolo e la fine del Rinascimento fiorentino*, Florence, 1967, p. 298.

²⁹ R. F. Millen and R. E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures*, Princeton, 1989, p. 24. and Berti, p. 298.

been written, exiled his children to the Palazzo Pitti.³⁰

Most of Maria's early education was in accordance with the principles that governed the behaviour of wealthy women of her time. Classical education of females differed from that of males. Home, social life, the rearing of children, the practice of charity, and religious obligation were their first duties. The study of history was permitted, but not rhetoric, science or mathematics, and letters in general were subordinate to manners and character.

Maria was a good student and besides painting, sculpture, engraving, music, and the connoisseurship of precious stones the Princess seems also to have had the advantage of studying subjects not usually explored by females. Her education included the disciplines of rhetoric, science, and math, that were usually reserved for princes. Her father wished her to receive all the instruction that was considered desirable for the time. Unfortunately she did not study French until her betrothal to Henri, and her unease with the language, written and spoken was obvious.³¹ The Medici court was known to be wealthy and cultured and played host to distinguished scholars of letters and science as well as to musicians who would have taught the children to play instruments and to sing. Maria must also have learned the importance of art at an early age having experienced it as an integral part of Medici court life.³² Maria was even taught how to engrave, and years later she gave the artist Philippe de Champaigne an etching she had done when just twelve years old. (Fig. 4.)

Batiffol wrote that Maria's early years were miserably lonely and bleak having been exiled to the Palazzo Pitti by her father after his marriage to Bianca Cappello, only two months after the death of her mother. According

³⁰ Millen-Wolf, p. 24 .

³¹ The grammatical and spelling inconsistencies and errors occurring in Maria's French correspondence that follow in the text are copied exactly and are not the errors of the author.

³² Batiffol, p. 2.

to Batiffol, the step-mother was described as a cause of shame and sorrow to the children and Maria said that "she found the burden of shame from this disgraceful alliance almost intolerable".³³ It was not until the death of her Father and Bianca from a violent fever in 1587 that her life changed.

Millen-Wolf write that Maria's life was not as lonely and bleak as portrayed by Batiffol. She was only three years old at the time of her mother's death. True, her little brother Filippo and her sister Anna died and though Eleonora left in 1584 to become Duchess of Mantua, they shared a lifelong friendship. She also enjoyed the company of her cousins Virginio and Léonora Orsini, who were brought up with her and were her school and playfellows, as well as that of her half-aunt Camilla Martelli, and Antonio, her father's illegitimate son by Bianca Cappello, born in 1576. Antonio was much loved by his half sisters even though Batiffol wrote that Maria hated him.³⁴ If this had been true, she would not have appointed him head of her escort from Marseilles to Lyons at the time of her marriage.³⁵

All were housed at the Palazzo Pitti and shared the activities of the family, joining in the regular trips to the country villas, and the two girls accompanied their father and step-mother on at least one grand tour. According to Millen-Wolf there is no documented proof that they were kept isolated from the usual pleasures and diversions of the court in a gloomy wing of the palace.³⁶ Nor, it seems, would Maria have requested the plans of the Palazzo Pitti on which to base the construction of her own Palais du Luxembourg if her memories had been of loneliness and misery.

Because of a lack of male Medici heirs, her uncle Ferdinand, the Cardinal Deacon of the Catholic Church, left the religious life and assumed

³³ Batiffol, as quoted on p. 2.

³⁴ Millen & Wolf, p. 39, and Batiffol, p. 10.

³⁵ R. F. Millen, "Rubens and the Voyage of Maria de Medici from Livorno to Marseilles: *Etichetta*, Protocol, Diplomacy and Baroque Convention. Essay Towards a Study of History in Art" in *Rubens e Firenze*, ed. Mina Gregori, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1983, p. 141.

³⁶ Millen-Wolf, pp. 38, 39.

the title of grand Duke of Tuscany at the death of Francesco. He was a complete opposite to his brother and treated Maria with affection and kindness. In fact, he was often addressed by Maria as "my Father, more than my Uncle".³⁷ Ferdinand married Cristina, Princess of Lorraine in 1589, a niece of Caterina de Medici, who was about the same age as Maria, and the two young women shared a warm and close relationship.³⁸

Maria's marriage was not one that was easily arranged. The Grand Duke began the process of negotiations for marriage when Maria was only fourteen years of age, but she had rejected many suitors and openly said that she would rather join a convent than marry an unsuitable mate. Her uncle Ferdinand had no intention of giving away his niece unless he was assured of receiving political gain and that she should at least be placed in a position higher than the one into which she was born. The destiny of the future Queen was entangled in the prophecies of the Capuchin Nun of Sienna, Passitea, who foretold Maria's marriage to the King of France. The young Maria was appalled at the thought of marrying the gray-bearded, lecherous, convert from Protestantism, but Passitea cautioned her not to attempt to evade her destiny.³⁹

Only when Maria was twenty seven years old did Ferdinand, finally manage to orchestrate the match between the financially depleted Henri IV and his niece. This celebrated marriage had been preceded by three inauspicious years of negotiations and had finally been brought to fruition by the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, Alessandro de Medici, who realized that he could further the interests of his family and the Church, the Ambassador Cardinal Gondi and the Canon Bonciani.⁴⁰ Thus, as Thuillier writes, the private interests of Maria became synonymous with that of France and the

³⁷ Millen-Wolf, p. 41.

³⁸ Batiffol, pp. 2, 5.

³⁹ Millen-Wolf, p. 28

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

Church.⁴¹ Ferdinand gave Maria a large dowry of six hundred thousand crowns and required her to renounce any claim to the right of succession of her parents in order to protect his own interests and those of his heirs.⁴² The negotiations for the marriage contract were concluded in December 1599, and the contract signed on April 25, 1600, in Florence.

On October 5, 1600, Maria de Medici was married by proxy to Henri IV, King of France in the Cathedral of Florence. The marriage was performed by a prelate of unimpeachable authority, the Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, nephew of Pope Clement VIII. The bride's uncle, the Grand Duke Ferdinand stood in Henri's place because he was detained at war and with his usual feminine diversions.

The event was heralded by ten days of festivities and celebrations beginning with a banquet held in the Salone dei Cinquecento of the Palazzo Vecchio. The banquet lasted all night with a different scenic framework for every course of the meal. The table decorations included life size statues of the bride and groom as well as an equestrian statue of the heroic warrior Henri IV.⁴³ Visible were images that were particularly significant to the union of France and Tuscany. The use of the symbol of France, the mystical *Fleur de lys*, had been granted to the house of Medici by Charlemagne, and was very much in evidence among the decorations in the Salone, denoting the long and close relationship that the kingdom of France had enjoyed with the House of de Medici.

Marriage scenes were common in Florentine art, and at the Banquet were two paintings by Jacopo da Empoli, one depicting the union of Caterina de Medici to Henri II, and one of Maria de Medici to Henri IV. Thus was

⁴¹ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 14, 22.

⁴² Ibid., p. 12.

⁴³ Roy Strong, *Splendour at Court, Renaissance Spectacle and the Theatre of Power*, Boston, 1973, p. 198, and Marrow, p. 7.

linked the illustrious past and the present of the two royal houses “

The musical entertainment for that evening, *La contesa fra Giunone e Minerva* composed by Giovanni Batista Guarini and Emilio de' Cavalieri placed the goddesses Juno and Minerva on a cloud with a rainbow extending across the Salone praising Maria as an incarnation of virginal, matronly and marital attributes, and the wedding feast as a “superhuman banquet of the demigods”.⁴⁵

Marrow writes that the imagery used in these festivities represents a culmination of the impact of Florentine art on Maria and is important for an understanding of her future taste and iconography.⁴⁶ Although it is not possible to ascertain the amount of input Maria might have had on the imagery employed at the marriage celebrations, it is obvious that the Queen was influenced by what she saw, and she utilised a similar type of representation several years later when she decorated the Luxembourg .

The feast was so lavish and the theatrical effects so spectacular that two guests, then unknown to each other, the artist Peter Paul Rubens, who had attended the wedding as a member of the retinue of the Duke of Mantua, and the scholar Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc marvelled at the magnificence of the celebrations. Twenty-two years later, as they collaborated as artist and advisor on the Medici Cycle for the Palais du Luxembourg, their correspondence made reference to images that they had seen at the wedding and banquet, which Rubens then incorporated into his Medici cycle paintings.⁴⁷

On October 13 Maria left Florence for Livorno where she sailed for Marseilles in the company of her sister Eleonora, the Duchess of Mantua and her Aunt, Cristina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, in a fleet of Tuscan

⁴⁴ Marrow, p. 64.

⁴⁵ Strong, p. 198, and Marrow, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Marrow, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 110-111.

ships. The galley sent by the Grand Duke to transport the Florentine Princess and her dowry was magnificent, befitting her new title as Queen of France, inlaid richly with lapis lazuli, semi-precious stones, and sparkling with gold and silver. Maria passed the eighteen tedious days at sea with such remarkable aplomb and stamina that at her arrival in Marseilles on November 5, she was complimented for conducting herself in a manner that her new subjects considered so heroic that she was called a beautiful “hero-heroine” and was described as having a “male heart, warrior and generous”.⁴⁸

There was no bridegroom to welcome the arrival of the new Queen of France at Marseilles. Henri was preoccupied with a military campaign against Savoy and with his mistresses. The Grand Duchess of Tuscany, and the Duchess of Mantua, delivered the bride and her dowry into the hands of the French then took their leave to return to Italy.⁴⁹

The Florentines and their French hosts made their way from Marseilles to Lyons arriving on December 3, 1600. Henri showed up unannounced, six days later, disguised himself at the Queen’s hotel and remained there incognito to watch his bride at supper. He did not disclose his presence until Maria had retired to her chamber. And since there had been no room or bed prepared for him, he took advantage of the situation and consummated the marriage there. Henri later confided to the Venetian Ambassador that he found his Queen to be beautiful, not only for a wife but for a mistress, that she was high spirited, a characteristic which he valued more than beauty; and that above all the others Maria was the one woman whom he could have desired for his consort.⁵⁰

Maria and Henri were officially married at the Lyons Cathedral eight days later on December 17, again officiated by the Cardinal Aldobrandini. For

⁴⁸ André Valladier, *Labyrinthe royal de l’Hercule gaulois triomphant*, Avignon, 1600, pp. 8, 56.

⁴⁹ Batiffol, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 16,17.

Henri it was politically expedient for him to have a second marriage in person, not by proxy, as the ultimate legitimisation of the marriage. Not only because he was being harassed by his mistress Henriette d'Enragues, with whom he had signed a promissary note of marriage, but to appease his Medici in-laws who were also his financial backers. The most important reason was to ensure that no one could challenge the validity of the Dauphin that the forty-seven year old gallant hoped to sire without delay.

The King spent five weeks with his bride and when the Queen showed signs of having conceived, Henri returned to Paris and to his mistress Henriette d'Enragues whom he promptly also made pregnant. Henri had made no preparations for his wife and her entourage to travel to the capital. Courageous Maria, carrying the future heir, was left to make her own way to Paris travelling by litter through France during the coldest winter in thirty years. On February 8, 1601, three months after her arrival in Marseilles, the Queen of France met her Parisian subjects totally without ceremony.⁵¹

The Dauphin, Louis XIII, was born on September 27, 1601 in the Oval Room at Fontainebleau, nine months and fourteen days after the Queen's marriage at Lyons. Maria wrote to the Cardinal Archbishop in a letter of October 15, 1601 "My cousin, it is with you, that from the start desired and secured the accomplishment of my marriage that I must rejoice over its fruits and events"⁵² and Henri wrote " I should never have fulfilled the joy that I feel for the son that God has given me if I did not communicate it to you, for I know that you are among my friends who will most share in it."⁵³

For the next ten years the Queen was busy producing five more children and slowly earning the respect and love of the King. She was admitted to the Royal Council at her husband's request in order for her to

⁵¹ Millen-Wolf pp. 73-75.

⁵² Thuillier-Foucart, p. 58 n. 20.

⁵³ Ibid.

become familiar with the workings of the government. She studied the histories of previous regencies and their queens, at her own initiative, preparing herself for the consignment of the regency should the situation arise. The King was twenty years her senior and for every year of his reign there had been at least one assassination plot. Everything pointed to her having to assume the throne as regent sooner or later.

Henri de Bourbon

Henri de Navarre was born December 13, 1553, the son of Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre and Antoine de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme. (Fig. 5.) Through his father, Henri was the sole legitimate line of descent from the Capetian kings of France. Apart from the Kingdom of Navarre, he was sovereign of Béarn and the Comté de Foix, the Duchy d'Albret and hundreds of fiefs in the Comté d'Armagnac. His titles included Duc de Vermandois, and Beaumont, Comte de Marly, Vicomte de Chateaufort-en-Thimerais; and he acted as the king's representative in Guyenne.

He was descended by blood from Francis I, whom he was said to resemble, and was the grandson of Margaret d'Angoulême, the King's sister. He was also descended from Louis IX (Saint Louis), and the princes of Lorraine and Savoy. He was a second cousin to the Valois dynasty whom he succeeded, but of the Bourbon family that had lived in the shadow of this royal power for three hundred years.

The marriage of Caterina de Medici and Henri II had produced four sons; therefore it was scarcely suspected that Henri de Navarre would one day ascend the throne of France as the first Bourbon king. Declared the heir presumptive to the throne of France after the death of François Duc d'Anjou, he succeeded the throne of Henri III in 1594.

Part of his childhood and adolescence was spent at the Valois court (1561-1567) with his cousins, including Marguerite de Valois, with whom he

was betrothed. Caterina de Medici and Jeanne, Queen of Navarre had begun these negotiations in the couple's childhood. It was Caterina's plan to unify the country by encouraging Henri's conversion to Catholicism, thus becoming the Catholic leader of the Huguenots. He was married to Marguerite de Valois, on August 18, 1572.

The marriage was unsuccessful due to incompatibility and after several attempts at cohabitation the couple spent most of their married years apart. Much of Henri's time was spent in amorous liaisons and his reputation as a philanderer was known to all of Europe including his future wife Maria de Medici. Marguerite de Valois, had not only been an incompatible mate, she had proved incapable of producing an heir and this placed the throne of the aging Henri in a precarious position.

Discussions of a marriage between Henri and Maria de Medici had begun as early as April of 1597, while the Cardinal Archbishop had been the papal legate *a latere* from 1596 to 1598 in France. The King's mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrées succeeded in stalling the negotiations by having Alessandro de Medici recalled to Rome.⁵⁴ (Fig. 6.)

Though La Reine Margot detested her husband, she had vociferously refused to grant a divorce to allow the King to marry his mistress, writing to Sully, the King's minister, that:

she was resolved to contribute anything in her power to facilitate and hasten the dissolution of her marriage; but.....if it was to install in her place a woman of such low extraction, and who led such a filthy and nasty life as that which was rumoured of her, she would do quite the contrary....⁵⁵

The Queen recanted, however, and decided to grant her husband a

⁵⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 58 n. 20.

⁵⁵ Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully, *Mémoires de Sully*, ed. Louis Raymond Lefèvre, Paris, 1942, pp. 195-196.

divorce in 1599, for the sake of the country.⁵⁶ Henri, ever a slave to his passions, made plans to marry his beautiful Gabrielle but she died suddenly in childbirth before the ceremony could take place.⁵⁷

Just as the future of Maria and Henri looked promising, Henri, ever *le Vert -Gallant* found a new mistress, Henriette d'Entragues who was shrewd enough to extort a promissary note of marriage, before she gave herself to him. Henri foolishly wrote and signed the note, thereby putting the legality of a second marriage and any future legitimate heirs in jeopardy. This infatuation further delayed the culmination of negotiations by another two years, and the Pope refused to grant a divorce without assurances that the King would not marry his new mistress.⁵⁸ (Fig. 7.)

By taking a Medici princess as his Queen, Henri, the recent convert, could further reassure the Catholics of his faithfulness.⁵⁹ Just as the marriage of Caterina de Medici to Henri Duc d'Orleans, who became Henri II, sealed the fragile alliance between the Papacy and the French court in 1533.⁶⁰ There were few princesses other than Maria to choose from, and those available were either too old or too ugly to contemplate marrying. Henri knew nothing about his future wife except that she was considered passably handsome, young enough to produce an heir, and that her uncle was one of the wealthiest men in Christendom and France owed him a lot of money.

The King had hoped that the dowry might be more lavish than the six

⁵⁶ Victor L. Tapié, *France in the Age of Louis XIII and Richelieu*, trans. & edited by D. McN. Lockie, London, 1974. The divorce was obtained on the grounds that no Papal dispensation had been received for the union despite the blood relationship they shared and that Marguerite had been forced, against her will to marry Henri, by her mother Caterina de Medici and her brother Charles IX. p. 65.

⁵⁷ Desmond Seward, *The First Bourbon, Henri IV, King of France and Navarre*, London, 1971, pp. 123-125.

⁵⁸ Thuillier-Foucart pp. 14, 15.

⁵⁹ Tapié, The government of France was Catholic and the King could not have assumed the throne without abjuring the Protestant faith. The alliance between the monarchy and the Catholic Church is attributed to the Concordat of Bologna 1516 which gave unprecedented power to the King over the Church. This allowed the King to recruit his own clergy and explains the meteoric rise of Richelieu, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *The Royal French State*, trans. by Juliet Vale, Oxford, 1987, p. 290.

hundred thousand crowns that Ferdinand gave Maria and he had no qualms about writing to the French Ambassador to England, Marquis de Chatte, that "I am one of those who think that a good marriage should help to pay off part of a man's debts".⁶¹

Henri de Bourbon, the prince who was to become King of Navarre had been known as a man of the people from his early years living among the peasants in Béarn. It was said that no one ever saw a prince more human or who loved his people more.⁶² A man of quick intelligence with natural gifts for speaking and writing he could just as readily address the parliament with ease and clarity as motivate his cavalry to fight. He loved the excitement of battle, taking part in his first skirmish at the age of fifteen. In all, he participated in one hundred and twenty-five campaigns and two hundred sieges.⁶³ He was a remarkable leader whose bravery and willingness to share the danger endeared him to his men and earned him the title *le Roy des braves*.⁶⁴

As a young man Henri attended classes at the Collège de Navarre, founded by Philippe le Bel, with his cousins the Duc de Guise and the future Henri III. He was classically educated; learning to speak, read and write Latin and Greek, and his command of the French language was exceptional. He was also taught the necessary skills of horsemanship, swordsmanship and endurance to prepare him for battle, as well as the practical studies of heraldry and genealogy which were indispensable for a man whose life would eventually deal with the intricacies of provincial politics.⁶⁵ His firsthand knowledge of Catholic and Protestant theory and dogma contributed to the ecumenical approach that exemplified his quest for a common ground

⁶¹ *Lettre inédites du roi Henri IV à M. de Sillery, ambassadeur à Rome du 1^{er} avril au 27 juin 1600*, ed. Eugène Halphen, Paris, 1866, p. 34, and Thuillier-Foucart, p. 14.

⁶² H. D. Sedgewick, *Henry of Navarre*, Indianapolis, 1930, p. 277.

⁶³ Seward, p. 178.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

between the Protestant and Catholic Churches. He shared the Calvinist ideas adopted by his Mother heading the list of signatories to the confession of La Rochelle in 1571, which has remained the credo of the Protestant Church in France to the present day. Henri did change his religious affiliation several times in his life. He had been baptised a Catholic in 1554; was under the influence of the Protestants from 1559 to 1562; became a Catholic again between June and December of 1562; then again became Protestant from 1563 until 1572. He was forcibly converted to Catholicism after the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572; returned to Protestantism for a third time after his escape from the Royal Court in 1576; and he made his final conversion to Catholicism in 1593.⁶⁶

This was done in order to secure his ascension to the throne, to unify the country and to win Paris. It would have been impossible for him to lead the French and become King if he had not abjured the Protestant faith. Once he became Catholic, the people of France were ready to accept Henri de Navarre as the rightful heir to the throne and to rally around him.

The coronation was held at Chartres on February 25, 1594. Henri knew the effect that the ceremony, as a sacramental confirmation and a seal of legality, would have on the French people thus making him King of France and responsible to God alone.⁶⁷

The state of the nation before the ascension of Henri was deplorable, bankrupted by the religious wars (1562-1598) which had divided the country, and the excesses of his predecessor Henri III. Henri aimed for religious tolerance and dialogue between the opposing churches. He introduced religious and educational reforms, allowing the Jesuits to return and set up schools instituting new teaching methods. The great spiritual giants, St. Vincent de Paul, Jean Pierre de Camus and the Oratorian Pierre de Bérulle

⁶⁶ Ladurie, pp. 229-230.

⁶⁷ Seward, p. 100.

began their ministries during his reign.⁶⁸

Henri's major contribution was the Edict of Nantes instituted in 1598 which gave the Huguenots some guarantee of religious tolerance. According to Tapié, this was an inevitability because the religious conflicts of the sixteenth-century did not lead to the triumph of one doctrine over another, and this necessary compromise finally ensured long term religious peace for the co-existence of the Huguenots and the Catholics in France. The Protestants were granted freedom of conscience and limited places of worship. They were also allowed to retain the fortified towns where garrisons under Protestant command were maintained at the King's expense for protection from possible Catholic aggression, and the political organisations resembling the general assembly that had been established during the Wars of Religion.⁶⁹

Henri began a program of public building, but not just for the beautification of Paris. He completed the Palace of the Tuileries, constructed the great gallery of the Louvre, the Hôtel de Ville, the Place Royale and erected the Pont Neuf. He also repaired roads, bridges and canals to improve communications. He reduced taxes and reformed the local governments of towns. He fostered agriculture, and encouraged the development of the country's natural resources. He promoted the manufacture of cloth, the silk industry and glass making. The King's interest in colonial expansion led him to support Champlain's establishment of a colony in Québec.⁷⁰

France flourished under Henri's reign because of his remarkable political insight that enabled him to govern efficiently. Peace brought prosperity, and under his direction, the Duc de Sully, Henri's Protestant minister, reorganised the nation's finances and stabilised the economy. He made a bankrupt nation the most powerful in Europe leaving a government

⁶⁸ Seward, p. 182.

⁶⁹ Tapié, p. 26, and Ladurie, p. 97.

⁷⁰ Seward, p. 200, and Sedgwick, pp. 277, 305.

that would endure for two hundred years.

Because he was the main force behind the establishment of order and religious toleration, of territorial unity and centralised authority he was also a target of political and religious discontent. More than twenty attempts were made on his life, most by fanatical Catholics.⁷¹

One such deranged fanatic, François Ravallac, succeeded in assassinating the King in his coach on the afternoon May 14, 1610. The King and seven gentlemen had been driving through Paris in a carriage to a meeting at the Arsenal with M. de Sully. The intent of the excursion was to verify that the preparations for the Joyous Entry into Paris of the newly crowned Queen the following Sunday were on schedule. The murderer jumped onto the coach and thrust the knife into the side of the King as he read a letter to the Duc d'Epemon.⁷² The knife entered the left lobe of the lung severing the aorta and the arterial vein that carries blood from the heart to the lungs. The King almost immediately fell dead.⁷³ Thus the Regency period began only one day after the coronation of Maria de Medici.

⁷¹Sedgwick, p. 277.

⁷² Ibid., p. 122.

⁷³ Batiffol, p. 132.



Fig. 2. Alessandro Allori, *Marie de Medici When Young*, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 3. Artist Unknown, *Bianca Cappello*, (1560s), Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Fig. 4. Maria de Medici, *Bust of a Woman*, woodcut, 1587, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 5. Clouet, *Henry of Navarre as a Young Man*.

Fig. 6. Benjamin Foulon, *Gabrielle d' Estrées, Duchesse de Beaufort*.

Fig. 7. *Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil (1579-1635), Musée de Versailles*.

Chapter Two

The Luxembourg Palace

The Queen laid the cornerstone to begin construction of the Luxembourg Palace on April 2, 1615; but she had been making plans for this new establishment since 1611.⁷⁴ It was to be her private residence, her new home, since her old domicile was no longer suitable because of the marriage of her son Louis XIII to Anne of Austria which had also occurred in 1615. Maria felt that the Louvre was too small for the courts of two queens.

Besides having had to cede her royal apartments to Anne of Austria, and move into apartments that were traditionally reserved for queen mothers, she had never found the Louvre particularly habitable. Moreover, Maria felt that the Louvre stank in summer and was an unhealthy place to bring up her children. She chose to build her new palace on the south side of the Seine where the air was healthier and where the homes of her childhood friend Léonora Galigai and the Florentine Ambassador Gondi were situated.⁷⁵

Maria bought the old Hôtel du Luxembourg and its garden from François de Pinay du Luxembourg in 1612 and for the next several years she occupied herself with acquiring land around the site. She awarded the commission in 1612-13, to Salomon de Brosse (1571-1626), her principal architect and the most important master of the first quarter of the seventeenth century.⁷⁶ It was Maria's intention to build the Palais to resemble the Palazzo Pitti and she wrote to her Aunt Cristina of Lorraine, on October 6, 1611, from Fontainebleau, to send her the plans of her childhood home:

....Ma Tante. Estant en volonté de faire bastir et accomoder
une maison à Paris pour me loger et voulant quelque chose

⁷⁴ Batiffol, p. 234, and Thuillier-Foucart, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Marrow, pp. 11,12.

⁷⁶ Batiffol, p. 233, and Marrow, pp. 11,12.

me regler sur la forme at modelle du Palais de Piti (lequel j'ai tousjours estimé pour l'ordre de son architecture et grandes commoditez qui y sont), je vous fais celle cy pour vous dire que j'auray a singulier plaisir que vous m'en faciez faire le plan en son entier avec les eslevations et perspectives des bastimens tant du costé de devant ledict Palais qu'au derriere d'icelluy du costé des terrasses, salles, chambres et autres stances de ladicte maison pour m'en ayder et servir en la structure et decoration de la mienne,....Ma tante vous me feres bien plesir de m'envoyer la plan et les desseings du palais de Pitty dont je me veux servir pour l'ordre et ornement ma maison.⁷⁷

She wrote again on October 14 to tell her :

il est besoing d'envoyer sur les lieux une personne qui soit bien entendu et experimenté en telles affaires, je vous ay dépesché ce porteur nomme Métezeau Architecte deu Roy monsieur mon filz avecq celle cy que je vous faiz de rechef, pour vous prier d'avoir agréable qu'il voye et considere particulièrement ledict Palais de Pitien tous les endroictz de son ediffice tant par le dedans que par le dehors d'icelluy, en sorte qu'il me puisse fidellement rapporter tout ce qui est de l'art et architecture de ladicte maison avec les mesures et proportions de ce qui en deppend pour l'effet que dessus.⁷⁸

But de Brosse refused to construct an Italian Palazzo. Ultimately the design of the Palais du Luxembourg (Fig. 8.) depended on that of a traditional French château. The *corps de logis*, two wings, and a screen surround a large courtyard. Double pavilions were built at each end of the *corps de logis*, single pavilions flank the screen, and the entrance pavilion is domed. According to Batiffol, the Luxembourg closely resembles the Château Verneuil constructed by de Brosse's uncle Androuet Cerceau. His own father had laboured on the building project and he was familiar with it from his youth.⁷⁹ Despite de Brosse's refusal to consent to Maria's request, Marrow finds some of the

⁷⁷ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo, 5933, 6, fol. 27r, October 6, 1611, Maria de Medici to Cristina of Lorraine, in Marrow, p. 97. Previously published by J. Pannier, *Salomon de Brosse*, Paris 1911, p.258 and, R. Coope, *Salomon de Brosse and the Development of the Classical Style in French Architecture from 1565-1630*, London, 1972, p. 261.

⁷⁸ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo, 5933, 6 fol. 28 October 14, 1611, Maria de Medici to Cristina of Lorraine, in Marrow, p. 97-98. Previously published by Pannier, 1911, p. 259 and Coope, 1972, p. 262.

⁷⁹ Batiffol, p. 235.

surface effects, especially the rustication, reminiscent of the Pitti courtyard.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, the continuing acquisition of property was interrupted by Maria's two year exile to Blois from 1617 to 1619. Upon her return to Paris, she resumed the construction of the palace and Salomon de Brosse continued as the chief architect and contractor. The building operations were accelerated, the acquisition of property resumed and the decorations were begun. Little of de Brosse's role in the decoration of the palace is known, although it is generally assumed that he established the general outline of all the rooms, and that he had reserved the design of the two galleries for himself. A letter from Claude Maugis to Richelieu dated August 14, 1621, included drawings of the wainscoting for the hall and gallery executed by de Brosse.⁸¹ The correspondence between Peiresc and Rubens of June 9, 1622 also indicates that de Brosse was involved in the decoration of the Medici Gallery and that he was the cause of disruptions in Rubens' work as a result of the delay in the sending of precise measurements.⁸² The Queen ultimately found it necessary to take legal action against de Brosse for the unnecessary interruptions in building which also impeded the work on the Henri IV gallery.

The Queen took great interest in the operations of the on going construction and visited the site frequently. She was aided by a chain of command that was put into place to oversee the administration of the project; Claude Bouthillier acted as Secretary; and Florent d'Argouges as Treasurer-General. For the decorations, her Counsellor Claude Maugis, Abbé de St. Ambroise, who was also Superintendent of Finances, was in charge, (Fig. 9.) along with the Cardinal Richelieu, who was Superintendent-General of her household. (Fig. 10.)

⁸⁰ Marrow, pp. 19, 21.

⁸¹ J. Roman, "Lettre de Maugis, Abbé de Saint Ambroise, sur les decorations interieures du Palais du Luxembourg," *Nouvelles Archives de l'art français*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 1885, pp. 113-115.

⁸² Thuillier-Foucart, p. 104.

The Decoration of the Palais du Luxembourg

The Palais du Luxembourg and its ensuing decoration was Maria's largest and most important artistic project and most of the artists who worked for her during the period of the 1620's were employed here. Guillaume Berthelot was hired by Maria in 1618 and began the sculptures in 1620. In April 1621 a contract was signed with Renault Lartigues, Nicolas Duchesne, and Pierre de Hansy for the decoration of the great hall and gallery. Maria also commissioned canvases from the painters Guido Reni, Orazio Gentilleschi and Phillipe de Champaigne. The Paillet inventory 1686-1693, although not entirely accurate, contains the most complete information about the art and artists at the Luxembourg and provides valuable descriptions of those decorations that have not survived.⁸³ In his letter of September 15, 1622 Peiresc wrote to Rubens:

The S.r Abbot told me that the Queen has a chest in which she has placed together all the drawings and plans for the entire building of her palace, and for all the statues to be located there, down to the smallest detail of the ornaments, wainscotting, and gardens and that she wished to have to add to them all the drawings for your paintings, which she would have put altogether in a book in proper order and carefully bound.⁸⁴

Maria was able to work on the decoration of her palace for only a decade before her permanent departure from France; but during this time she was constantly sending representatives abroad to find art and furnishings suitable to complete her new home. The project was never concluded, but the the first floor of the west side of the palace, where Maria's apartments and the Medici gallery were located, had been finished and was ready for the series that Rubens was preparing on her life. (Fig. 11.)

⁸³ Paillet, Archives Nationales, O' 1966, dossier 5 (published in full by A. Hustin, *Le Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1904, pp. 54-56), the inventory is undated but Hustin gives the date as 1686-93.

⁸⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 109, letter from Peiresc to Rubens, September 15, 1622.

The Galleries

The Medici gallery was a long narrow room extending from north to south and was fifty eight metres long, but only eight metres wide (7.6 m to be exact). The walls were punctuated on either side by nine windows, leaving eight intervals between them. Near the entrance, before the first windows were narrower fields, and after the last windows, at the end were two wider spaces. All of these fields were to receive paintings, numbering twenty in all. At the south end a chimney was planned, leaving three wall spaces, one on either side and one above the mantel. At the north end the wall remained uninterrupted bringing the total number of paintings to twenty-four. Most of the paintings to be placed along the side walls were to be 3.94 X 2.95 m (12'11" X 9'8") wide except the first and the last nearest the fireplace, which were 48.3 X 64.2 cm (19" X 25 1/4"). At the north end of the gallery were places for three larger canvasses of 3.94 X 7.27 m (12'11" X 23' 10 1/4") on the rear and rear side walls; and at the opposite end over the doors, were spaces for two paintings of 2.47 X 1.16 m (8'1 1/4" X 3'9 5/8") and for one over the mantel piece of 2.76 X 1.49 m (9' X 4' 10 5/8").⁴⁵

This room was to serve as a waiting area leading to the Queen's apartments and it was here that Maria would receive dignitaries of state. It was described as a traditional French gallery with a flat ceiling, a high wainscotting and a monumental fireplace. In 1643 Matthieu de Morgues wrote that "the finest minds in Europe invented the devices and inscriptions that are scattered across the wainscot" and that the gold ceilings had paintings by the "finest masters in the world" in the recesses. ⁴⁶ The Rubens contract of 1622 referred to the gallery as finished and described the crossbeams and

⁴⁵ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 32, 67-70, and Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, Vol. 1, Princeton, 1980, p. 89.

⁴⁶ M. de Morgues, *Les deux faces de la vie et de la mort de Marie de Médicis Royne de France,....Discours funebre*, Antwerp, 1643, pp. 38, 39.

pilasters as gilded and painted.⁸⁷

Other sections of the Palace were fairly complete as early as March 1623, because Peiresc reported that Lartigues was living in apartments above those of Maria's and that Rubens was welcome to use them if he wished to live there during his stay. He also wrote in April 1623, that Maria's funds were again severely restricted and that the work on the palace had to be temporarily interrupted. The Queen petitioned the Florentine court to gain control of the large amount of money that had been sent back to Florence after the death of Léonora Galigai, her dearest friend and confidante. Through the Florentine Ambassador Gondi the Queen pleaded with her relatives to repay the debt in order for her to continue her projects. The amount of two hundred thousand Florentine scudi was paid to her on November 12, 1623, in response to a written agreement from Maria that she would make no further claims on Medici money.⁸⁸

Rubens' Life of Maria de Medici was installed in 1625. From this period onward the Queen stayed in the Palace from time to time. The east wing was finished by 1634 although the interior decorations were never completed. It appears that none of the paintings prepared for the Henri IV gallery were hung although Rubens' letter to Dupuy of October 1630 states that the Triumph was ready for placement at the rear of the gallery.⁸⁹ However Thuillier-Foucart interpret this letter to mean that the painting was indeed installed.⁹⁰

At the time of her exile in 1631, the palace was still not finished and it remained uninhabited for more than ten years. Maria left the Luxembourg to her younger son Gaston d'Orleans in her will, but he did not take ownership

⁸⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 95.

⁸⁸ Archivio de Stato, Florence. Correspondence regarding the settlement can be found in Carteggio Mediceo, 4747, fol. 184r. Correspondence concerning the Concini money can be found in Carteggio Mediceo, 4746, in Marrow, p. 82. n 16.

⁸⁹ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 130-131.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

of the property until 1646.

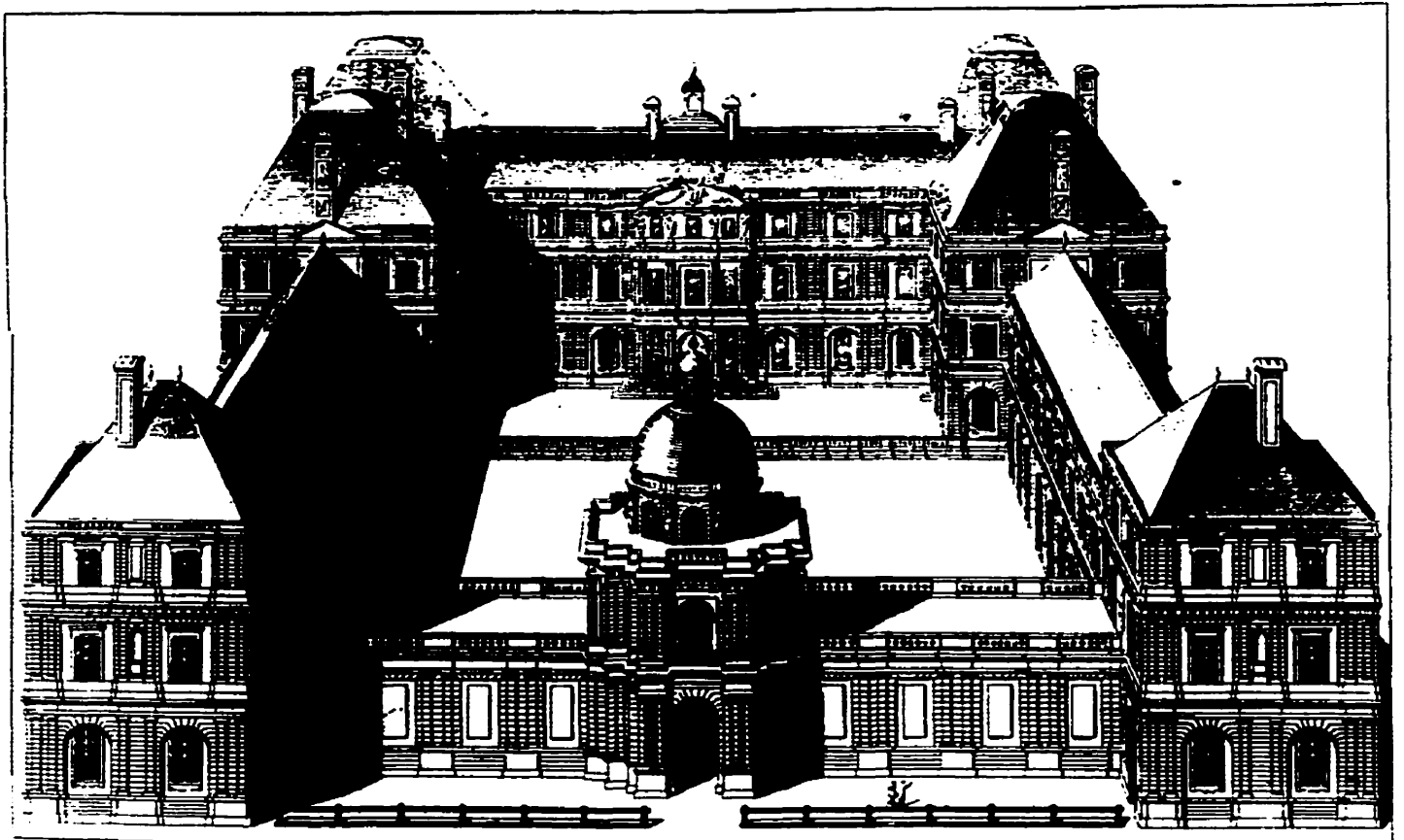


Fig. 8. Palais du Luxembourg, Gravure de Perelle. Senat.



Fig. 9. L. Vorsterman, *Claude Maugis, Abbé de Saint Ambroise de Bourges*,
 Fig. 10. Philippe de Champagne, *Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu*,
 Inv. 1136. Cl. Louvre, Paris.

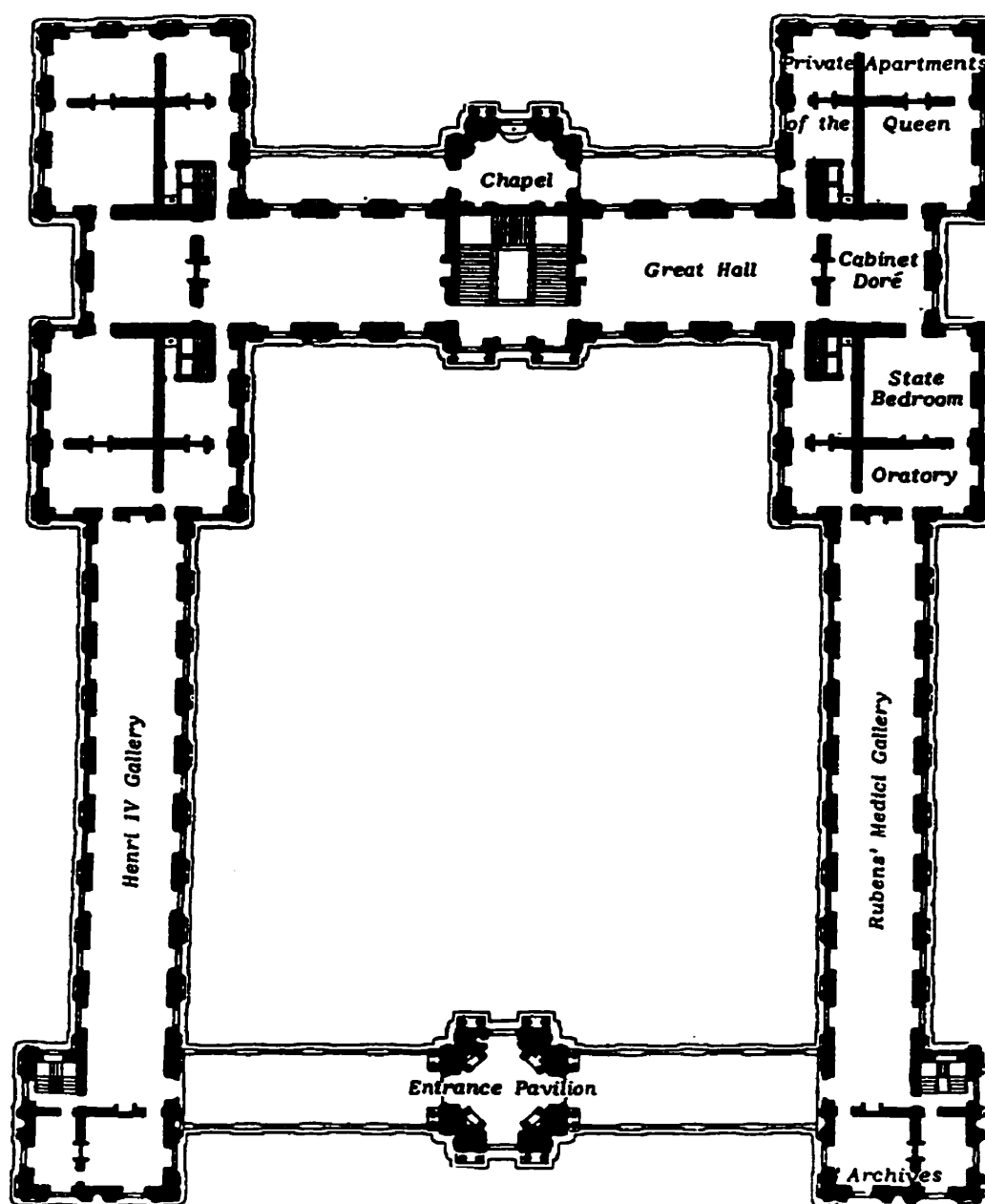


Fig. 11. Plan of the main floor of the Palais du Luxembourg and the Medici Gallery in the time of Marie de 'Medici.

Chapter Three

Rubens and the Commission for the Maria de Medici and Henri IV Cycles

The first known mention of the Queen Mother's intention to have Rubens' paintings decorate the galleries of the new Palace is in a letter dated December 23, 1621, from Rubens to his intimate friend Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc, (Fig.12.) one of the most brilliant scholars and antiquaries of the early seventeenth century. Rubens and Peiresc had enjoyed a constant correspondence since the fall of 1619 when Peiresc had succeeded in obtaining copyright privileges for the publication of engravings of Rubens' paintings.⁹¹ They then continued their communications dealing mostly with their shared interest in antiquities.⁹²

The correspondence that exists between the two friends and scholars regarding the Luxembourg commission illustrates Peiresc's role as advisor to Rubens on how to deal with the intricacies of the court intrigues; and describes his actions as intermediary between the court functionaries and Rubens. It was also Peiresc who assured that all classical references used in the paintings were correct and that contemporary details would not offend the sensibilities of the Queen or her courtiers.⁹³ He also made suggestions to Rubens regarding topics for the canvases.⁹⁴ Much of the imperfectly documented history of the cycle has been gleaned from these letters.

What initially prompted Maria de Medici to commission this major project from Rubens is subject to speculation. Rubens' fame as a painter and his outstanding qualifications, especially the monumental work he had

⁹¹ R. S. Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, Cambridge, 1955, p. 83.

⁹² Millen-Wolf, p. 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, Letter of April 22, 1622, Peiresc to Rubens suggesting a topic relating to events that became *The Consignment of the Regency*, p. 102.

completed for the ceiling of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp, would have been enough of a reason for his selection for the Luxembourg Cycle.

Maria's elder sister, the Duchess of Mantua, was married to an early patron of Rubens, Vincenzo I Gonzaga. Rubens had attended the marriage by proxy, of Maria to Henry IV, on October 5, 1600, in the Cathedral of Florence as part of the Duke of Mantua's retinue. It would have been logical for her to have sought the advice of her sister and brother-in-law with whom she kept a continual correspondence. They would surely have recommended Rubens. She also had the painter François Pourbus in her service, who had been a friend of Rubens' at the court of Mantua and would surely have supported her choice of the esteemed artist.

Rooses assumes that Rubens had been nominated by the Flemish ambassador Henry de Vicq, based on the close relations between the French court and the Spanish regents of the Netherlands, the Archduke Albert and his wife Isabella. ⁹⁵ Dubon states that there is no documentary evidence to support this claim, although Rubens had been named their court painter on his return from Italy. ⁹⁶

Rubens was already known to the court of France since 1619 because of the aforementioned copyright application. ⁹⁷ Coolidge suggests that Maria decided to decorate the Luxembourg Galleries to rival the designs that had already been commissioned from Rubens for the Constantine Tapestries by her son Louis XIII.⁹⁸

Though it might seem unusual to have chosen a Flemish painter for the Palace of the French Queen in Paris, there was an absence of French painters of note at this time. Nicolas Poussin and Claude Gellée (Lorrain),

⁹⁵ M. Rooses and C. Ruelens, *Correspondence de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres*, Antwerp, 1887-1909, Vol. II, p. 342.

⁹⁶ David Dubon, *Tapestries from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, London, 1964, p. 4 n.6.

⁹⁷ Magurn, p. 83.

⁹⁸ Coolidge, p. 285.

were in Italy, and the young Fleming, Philippe de Champaigne had hardly begun his career. Simon Vouet would have been ignored because he was considered too much influenced by Caravaggio's naturalism to treat his subject with the required amount of decorum. In short there was no equivalent to the brilliant generation of Caravaggio and Carracci in France.⁹⁹

The Contract

In a letter of November 26, 1621, Rubens wrote to Peiresc informing him of his intention to visit Paris. Though he did not provide reasons, we may assume that Maria had approached him about the paintings several weeks earlier. Rubens arrived in Paris, January of 1622.¹⁰⁰

Claude Maugis, Abbé de St. Ambroise became the principal agent in the negotiations between the Queen and the artist. It was his opinion that Rubens was the only painter in Europe capable of handling so vast a work: "The painters of Italy would not carry out in ten years what Rubens would do in four, and would not even think of undertaking pictures of the necessary size".¹⁰¹

After six weeks of discussion, the formal contract for the decoration of the two Luxembourg Galleries was drawn up and signed on February 26, 1622. The contract called for the painting of twenty four works dedicated to the life of Maria de Medici and a second group of twenty four on the life and military career of her late husband Henri IV. The contract specified that Rubens was to:

do and accomplish with his own hand each and all of the canvases for the two galleries.....and to represent in the said pictures all the events that are written out in detail at length according to the wishes of Her Majesty,.....And in the first place, in that one of the galleries which is already completed... the said Rubens will be required, and has engaged himself, to draw and paint with his own hand twenty-four pictures in

⁹⁹Thuillier-Foucart, p. 45-46.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰¹Anthony Bertram, *The Life of Peter Paul Rubens*, London, 1928. As quoted on p. 109.

which shall be represented the histories of the very illustrious life and heroic deeds of the said Queen according to the specifications [in subjects up to the number of nineteen] which, as has been said, have been given to the Sieur de Rubens by the said Majesty [who will transmit to him the other five subjects while he is working on the first ones].

As for the gallery on the other side, which is not yet made, the said de Rubens engages himself to make and paint with his own hand all the pictures required to place and install in the positions designated for each of them. And in the said pictures to represent and paint all of the battles of the late King Henri the Great, the encounters he engaged in, his combats, conquests and sieges of cities, with the triumphs of the said victories in the fashion of the triumphs of the Romans, according to the specifications which will be given him by Her Majesty.....

And the said lady the Queen has reserved for herself the authority to increase or decrease the subjects of the said pictures before they have been begun, and to have those figures which do not please her retouched and changed once the pictures have been received here... Also Her Majesty does not wish to receive any not entirely painted by de Rubens' own hand as regards the figures.

De Rubens promises and binds himself to make and complete all the said pictures and canvases required for the two galleries of the aforesaid palace of Her Majesty within the time of four years, and in addition to draw and paint them, as has been said, with his own hand, and all of this for and on condition of the price and sum of sixty thousand francs tournois payable as specified hereinafter.

And De Rubens to supply the paintings for the gallery which is at present ready, and this within the next two years. And to deliver twelve fully finished within the coming year and to have them installed in their place and location, and the other twelve during the following year. And the said de Rubens also promises that when he brings the first twelve pictures he will give over to the Queen the drawings he will have done for the battles of the late King Henri the Great for Her Majesty's other gallery, as well as those which remain for the aforesaid gallery.

The above mentioned sum of sixty thousand francs tournois will be paid by the said lady the Queen to the said de Rubens in four equal instalments each of fifteen thousand francs, of

which the first payment shall be made when the said de Rubens will have finished completely and installed in their place and location the first twelve pictures, which constitute half of the twenty four required for the said first gallery. The second payment when he will have completed the twelve others constituting the remainder of the said gallery. And the two other payments will be made and completed at such time as he shall deliver half of the other pictures destined for the second gallery and shall have completed them perfectly and installed them in their place and locations as above noted.¹⁰²

The contract (Fig. 13.) was signed at the Louvre by Maria, her secretary Claude Bouthillier, two notaries named Parque and Guerreau, and by Rubens. An additional secret clause was signed by the two notaries and Rubens later on, stating that the actual price for the commission was fifty four thousand francs tournois with the remaining six thousand francs to be awarded as an honorarium at the Queen's discretion. Rubens returned to Antwerp at the end of February with a settlement of twenty thousand crowns and his copy of the terms of the contract.

The themes for the first seven historical pictures of the Medici cycle had been worked out by the time the contract had been signed and were never subsequently changed, the remainder of the works underwent many alterations and modifications. By August 26, 1622 the subjects of seven more paintings had been formulated with five more to be worked out. The first and the last pictures, those of the smaller format *The Fates Spin the Destiny of the Future Queen* and *The Triumph of Truth* were originally conceived on a single panel are not included in the first seven.¹⁰³

Once the contract had been signed the Queen delegated the details to her chain of command but retained for herself the right of final approval. It was she, however, who ultimately determined the subjects. She entrusted

¹⁰² Thuillier-Foucart, p. 97.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 92 and Held, 1980, pp. 98-99.

the management of the assignment to the Abbé de St. Ambroise.¹⁰⁴ She consulted with Richelieu and the Abbé who, in turn, consulted with Peiresc and indirectly with Rubens about specific scholarly matters.

It appears that the choice of Rubens for the Luxembourg Gallery was not a popular one in France. Peiresc wrote to Rubens on March 17, 1622: "The painters here are furious to see their reputations in ruins since you arrived and started work, and are stirring up the very devil in an attempt to start some quarrel".¹⁰⁵

Rumours of Rubens' death circulated throughout Europe during the summer of 1622, which caused great concern to the Queen. Although the source of these rumours was never discovered,¹⁰⁶ it was generally thought that the disgruntled Archpriest Nardi, who had originally opened the negotiations for the commission and had been removed from this position before they had been finalised, was stirring up animosities and plotting against Rubens. The Queen became so tired of his complaints that she silenced him with the threat of one hundred strokes.¹⁰⁷

In a letter of January 26, 1623, Peiresc wrote to Rubens:

The Sig. r Abbot has not failed to do you the offices of a wholly devoted friend, informing the Queen Mother that a number of painters have laid a plot against you to seek to censure your works, although in this they err grievously. The Queen replied to him that she cared not a fig for their prattle and that she desired, under pain of her displeasure, that no one should make so bold as to speak to her with sinister intent of the works of Y.W., of which she remains fully satisfied, and it is certain that she wishes this to be perfectly clear to everyone.¹⁰⁸

The Queen gave Rubens the largest and most important commission

¹⁰⁴ Bertram, pp. 109, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Rooses-Ruelens, II, pp. 351, 352.

¹⁰⁶ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Marie-Ann Lescourret, *Rubens: A Double Life*, Chicago 1930, p. 121.

¹⁰⁸ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 115.

of his career, and he, in turn, gave her his undying loyalty and devotion, becoming her life-long friend and supporter. Stechow writes that Maria's relationship with Rubens was one of the most extraordinary examples of friendship between a great artist and his patron.¹⁰⁹ Maria not only chose Rubens to paint the two Luxembourg Galleries, she also helped him to obtain other important commissions in Paris, as well as in foreign courts.

The Placement of the Paintings for the Galleries du Luxembourg The Medici Gallery

The three portraits, the Queen's parents, Joanna of Austria and Francesco I de Medici, and Maria de Medici as the Queen Triumphant were placed on the southern entrance wall of the gallery above the two doors and the fireplace.¹¹⁰ According to Peiresc's letter of April 22, 1622,¹¹¹ which contains the earliest surviving plan for the gallery, the west wall of the gallery would have represented Maria's life before she came to power. Beginning with and following the logical historical sequence of events; *The Birth of Maria de Medici*, April 26, 1573; *The Education of Maria de Medici*; *The Presentation of the Portrait*; *The Marriage by Proxy in Florence*, October 5, 1600; *Debarcation at Marseilles*, November 3, 1600; *The Consummation of the Marriage*, November 9, 1600, *The Birth of the Dauphin*, September 27, 1601, *The Consignment of the Regency*, March 20, 1601, which was Peiresc's suggestion in a letter to Rubens; and *The Coronation of Maria de Medici*, May 13, 1610.

The east wall of the gallery was to have focused on the regency, including the panels on the Spanish marriages. Originally, four places were allotted to the marriages, but were later reduced to three; *The Council of the Gods*,¹¹² *Marriage of Louis*, and *Marriage of Elisabeth*. The three large paintings that were to be placed at the north end were *Death of Henri and the*

¹⁰⁹ Wolfgang Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, 1968, p. 78.

¹¹⁰ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 70.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 21, 102-103.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 60, 61, the council of the gods achieves peace by means of the double marriages.

Proclamation of the Regency, Juliers, and Peace of the Regency. Rubens apparently balked at having to paint double compositions out of *Juliers* and *Peace*, and the places were assigned to *The Coronation* and *The Council of the Gods*. These adjustments caused other changes in the arrangement of the paintings, particularly the loss of symmetry between *Juliers* and the *Queen Triumphant*.¹¹³ *The Triumph at Juliers* was to be placed at the north end of the gallery in pendant, opposite *The Queen Triumphant*. Another letter from Peiresc dated August 22, 1622 states that the marriage paintings were reduced again to only two paintings, *The Council* and one other canvas, while the program was extended to include events that took place after the regency period.¹¹⁴

The final arrangement for the regency period became, *The Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*, May 14, 1610; *The Council of the Gods*, *The Triumph at Juliers*, September 1, 1610; *The Exchange of the Princesses at the Spanish Border*, November 9, 1615; *The Felicity of the Regency*, and *The Coming of Age of Louis XIII*, October 20, 1614, which was originally to conclude the cycle.

The final five paintings belonged to the post regency period. The subjects for these pictures were outlined in a letter from Peiresc to Rubens dated August 26, 1622 and were the last to be worked out; *The Expulsion from Paris*, May 3, 1617 which presently exists only as a bozzetto, *The Escape From Blois*, February 21-22, 1619; *The Treaty of Angoulême*, April 30, 1619; *The Conclusion of Peace*, August 10, 1620; *The Full Reconciliation*, December 15, 1621. Peiresc advised Rubens, in his correspondence that these pictures were to be executed with "mystical figures and with all respect shown to the son".¹¹⁵ According to Held, the sketch for *The Fates Spin the Destiny of the*

¹¹³ Marrow, p. 44.

¹¹⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 108.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Future Queen and *The Triumph of Truth*, the first and last paintings was done on a single panel in 1622, both of these being of the smaller format.¹¹⁶ However according to Thuillier-Foucart and Millen-Wolf, these two paintings were conceived last and were not completed and installed before 1625.¹¹⁷

This program was elaborated by The Beluze Memorandum found in the Bibliotheque Nationale by Jacques Thuillier, which not only preceded the preparatory sketches but also describes the first nineteen subjects.¹¹⁸ The sketches, the majority of which are now at the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad and the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, the letter, and the manuscript, together form the basic outline of the series as it was finally executed except for the very last minute exchange of *The Felicity of the Regency* for *The Expulsion from Paris*.¹¹⁹

Once *The Expulsion From Paris* was removed, however, the order of the paintings had to change to preserve the historical accuracy of the arrangement except for *The Exchange of the Princesses at the Spanish Border* which actually occurred one year later on November 2, 1615. Louis was declared of age in an official ceremony on October 2, 1614. *The Expulsion* took place on May 4, 1617. Maria escaped from Blois and took refuge in Angoulême on February 21, 1619. With *The Felicity of the Regency* in place before *The Coming of Age of Louis* the time line is correct. Without *The Felicity of the Regency*, *The Expulsion from Paris* and *The Flight from Blois* had to have been originally placed side by side. *The Felicity of the Regency* was painted in 1625 in Paris and there was no need for a precise date for an allegorical presentation of an era that lasted seven years. Therefore, there had

¹¹⁶ Held, 1980, p. 98.

¹¹⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 21, 59 n. 49, and Millen-Wolf, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Marrow, p. 44, foot notes that Thuillier published this document found in Bib. Nat. Ms. Baluze 323, fol. 54-57, in a separate article.

¹¹⁹ Marrow, p. 44.

to have been an exchange of the positions between *The Felicity of the Regency* and *The Coming of Age of Louis*. (Fig. 14.)

On May 24, 1623 the first nine paintings for the Medici gallery were delivered to Paris. According to correspondence from the Ambassador Gondi, the Queen made a special trip to Paris from Fontainebleau from June 10 to 16 to see the paintings.¹²⁰ Peiresc wrote that the Queen had "so much satisfaction that words simply failed her", and that Rubens "was the first man in the world in his profession".¹²¹ By December 1624, the remaining canvases were sufficiently advanced that Rubens could plan their delivery.

Rubens' third trip to Paris occurred on February 24, 1625 when he arrived with the balance of the paintings to prepare the Gallery for the celebrations that Richelieu was holding for the marriage by proxy of Henrietta Maria to Charles I of England. This event was to take place on May 11, 1625. It was at this time that Richelieu took offence to *The Expulsion From Paris*. The picture was rejected and Rubens was required to paint *The Felicity of the Regency*, as a last minute replacement.

Rubens had been able to complete only half of the monumental task in three years because of circumstances beyond his control; delays and difficulties in the construction of the galleries, in receiving exact measurements for some of the works for the Medici cycle and in establishing the subjects for the Henri IV cycle. Had the commission for the two Luxembourg Galleries been completed according to the contract signed in 1622, it would have been the most ambitious undertaking of Rubens' career. But at this point, his only wish was to receive final payment and leave. He wrote to Peiresc on May 13, 1625:

I am tired of this court, and unless they give me prompt

satisfaction, comparable to the punctuality I have shown in the

¹²⁰ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo, 4637, not paginated, June 20, 1623.

Correspondence from Gondi to Florence, in Marrow p. 98.

¹²¹ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 109,110,119,122.

service of the Queen Mother, it may be (this in confidence *entre nous*) that I will not readily return. However, to tell the truth, up to now I cannot complain about Her Majesty's attitude for the delays have been legitimate and excusable.¹²²

Rubens left Paris in June tired of the court intrigues and deceptions and anxious to be free of the association with Richelieu that had become estranged.

The Henri IV Gallery

..... the story set forth in the cycle of the Life of Marie de' Medici was conceived, right from the start, in close relationship to the other story, that of the exploits of Marie's late husband Henri IV, a cycle which likewise was entrusted to Rubens and was intended to decorate the gallery of the west [east] wing of the palace, exactly opposite and parallel to the Queen's gallery.¹²³

The layout of the Henri IV gallery was intended to be symmetrical with that of Maria's, but the same difficulties that arose between Salomon de Brosse and the Queen that delayed the completion of the Medici gallery also delayed the construction of the Henri IV gallery.¹²⁴ This fact, as well as the animosities that were brewing between Rubens and Richelieu, who was becoming increasingly aware of the artist's diplomatic activities on behalf of Spain, put the completion of the gallery in question.

As early as 1623, however, Richelieu had considered giving the commission to Guido Reni. His correspondence indicates that he had instructed his agent in Italy, M. des Roches to inquire if Guido Reni would be willing to work for the Queen Mother on a gallery dedicated to the battles of Henri IV.¹²⁵ In May of 1625 Rubens wrote to Peiresc of his anticipation of problems with Richelieu and Maugis over the choice of subjects which still had not been determined, although he personally felt that the theme was so

¹²² Magurn, p. 110.

¹²³ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 70

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

¹²⁵ Armand Jean du Plessis, *Lettres, instructions diplomatiques et papiers d'état du Cardinal du Richelieu*, Vol. 1, Paris, 1888, p. 777, and Thuillier Foucart, p. 59 n. 45.

copious and magnificent that it would suffice for ten galleries.¹²⁶

A persistent rumour that the decoration of the gallery would be assigned to an Italian painter even though the contract had been signed with Rubens, became a source of consternation for the artist, and he wrote to Valavez on February 12, 1626 concerning this gossip.¹²⁷ According to another letter from Rubens of February 20, 1626 to Valavez,¹²⁸ the Queen had still not chosen the subjects for the paintings for the second gallery, but there must have finally been some agreement made before the end of 1627 because on January 27, 1628, Rubens wrote to Pierre Dupuy that he had begun the designs and that the Henri IV series would prove more splendid than the first. He wrote to Dupuy again in October 1630 to say that he had begun the largest and most important paintings, including *The Triumph of Henri IV*.¹²⁹

Although the project was never completed, Thuillier writes that the existing paintings by Rubens and Snayers, and the bozzetti, allow for a partial reconstruction of the gallery plan and that, in his opinion, the Henri IV gallery was to act as a preamble to the Medici Gallery.¹³⁰

As Jost points out, there were to be ten paintings along the side walls. Proceeding in chronological order on the east side of the gallery, the following seven are known representing the early life of the King. The cycle begins with *The Birth of Henri IV*, December 13, 1553, which corresponds in size to the first painting of Maria's cycle *The Fates Spin the Destiny of the Future Queen*, and follows with: *The Battle of Coutras*, October 20, 1587; *Reconciliation Between Henri III and Henri of Navarre*, April 30, 1589, *Siege of Caen*, 1589; *Battle of Arques*, September 16-21, 1589; *The Combat in the Outskirts of Paris*, probably October 1589; and *The Battle of Ivry*, March

¹²⁶ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 122.

¹²⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 123.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 72, 71.

14,1590, a large canvas, corresponding to *The Coronation of Maria*, completed the east side of the gallery. *The Triumph of Henri IV*, was intended for the large field at the back of the gallery that corresponds with *The Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*.¹³¹ Continuing along the west side, only two of the paintings at the time of Thuillier-Foucart's study were known: *The Surrender of Paris*, March 22, 1594, and another large picture, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*, which corresponds to *The Triumph of Truth*, and was to be the last painting of the series. Another sketch by Rubens, *The Coronation of Henri IV*, February 27, 1594, was unknown until its appearance at a London auction house in 1973, offers an additional subject to the cycle. Held believes this work, inscribed with the number sixteen, was also originally intended for the west side of the gallery to be placed immediately after the three large canvases. This, he writes, would have been in an incorrect chronological order because the Coronation actually took place three weeks before the capture of Paris. But just as subjects for the Medici cycle had been shifted about early in 1622, and again in the final hanging of the cycle in 1625, this numbered sketch, Held suggests, could have belonged to an earlier phase of preparation.¹³²

Confirmation that Rubens had, indeed, worked on the paintings for the Henri IV gallery is found in the *Spécification des peintures trouvées à la maison de feu Messire Pierre Paul Rubens*, which is the inventory of Rubens' house after his death in 1640. It lists "six large unfinished pieces, containing, sieges of cities, battles, and triumphs of Henri IV, King of France, which were begun some years ago for the gallery in the Hôtel du Luxembourg of the Queen Mother of France".¹³³ Further proof of the completion of the two most notable paintings, *The Battle of Ivry* and *The Triumph of Henri IV*, came

¹³¹ Ingrid Jost, "Bemerkungen zur Heinrichsgalerie des P.P. Rubens," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisches Jaarboek*, XV, 1964. 175ff.

¹³² Held, 1980, pp. 133, 134.

¹³³ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 72.

from the history of the acquisition of the pictures. These canvases were purchased by the Grand Duke Cosimo III de Medici in 1687, and are presently at the Uffizi in Florence.¹³⁴ According to Held, the theme of the east wall was the military battles and victories of Henri IV, while the west wall was to represent his peaceful achievements with the *Triumph* as a link between the two.¹³⁵

As Held points out, Richelieu may well have been politically motivated to remove Rubens from the commission. It was not in his best interest to employ a painter who had access to the highest levels of government, in the person of the Queen, and whose political activity ran counter to his own plans and convictions. Richelieu, by this time had been reinstated as *principal ministre*, with a large network of spies. He was well aware of Rubens' political position as ambassador to Spain.¹³⁶

On February 23, 1631 the Queen was banished to Compiègne and all hopes of Rubens completing the commission ended. The following July she escaped and fled to Flanders remaining there until 1638. From 1638 to 1641 she stayed in England with her daughter Henrietta Maria and her son-in-law Charles I until it was feared that her presence would exacerbate his own political problems. Forced again to leave, she ended her days poverty stricken in Cologne, living out her last year in a home provided to her by her loyal and devoted friend Peter Paul Rubens.

¹³⁴ Jost, p. 94, and Thuillier-Foucart. p. 72.

¹³⁵ J. Held, "On the Date and Function of Some Allegorical Sketches by Rubens," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVIII, 1975, p. 227.

¹³⁶ Held, 1980, p. 123.



NIC. CLAUDE FABRI. DE PEIRESC.

Fig. 12. Claude Mellan, *Peiresc*, Gravure, Bibliotheque Principale, Anvers.

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XX.

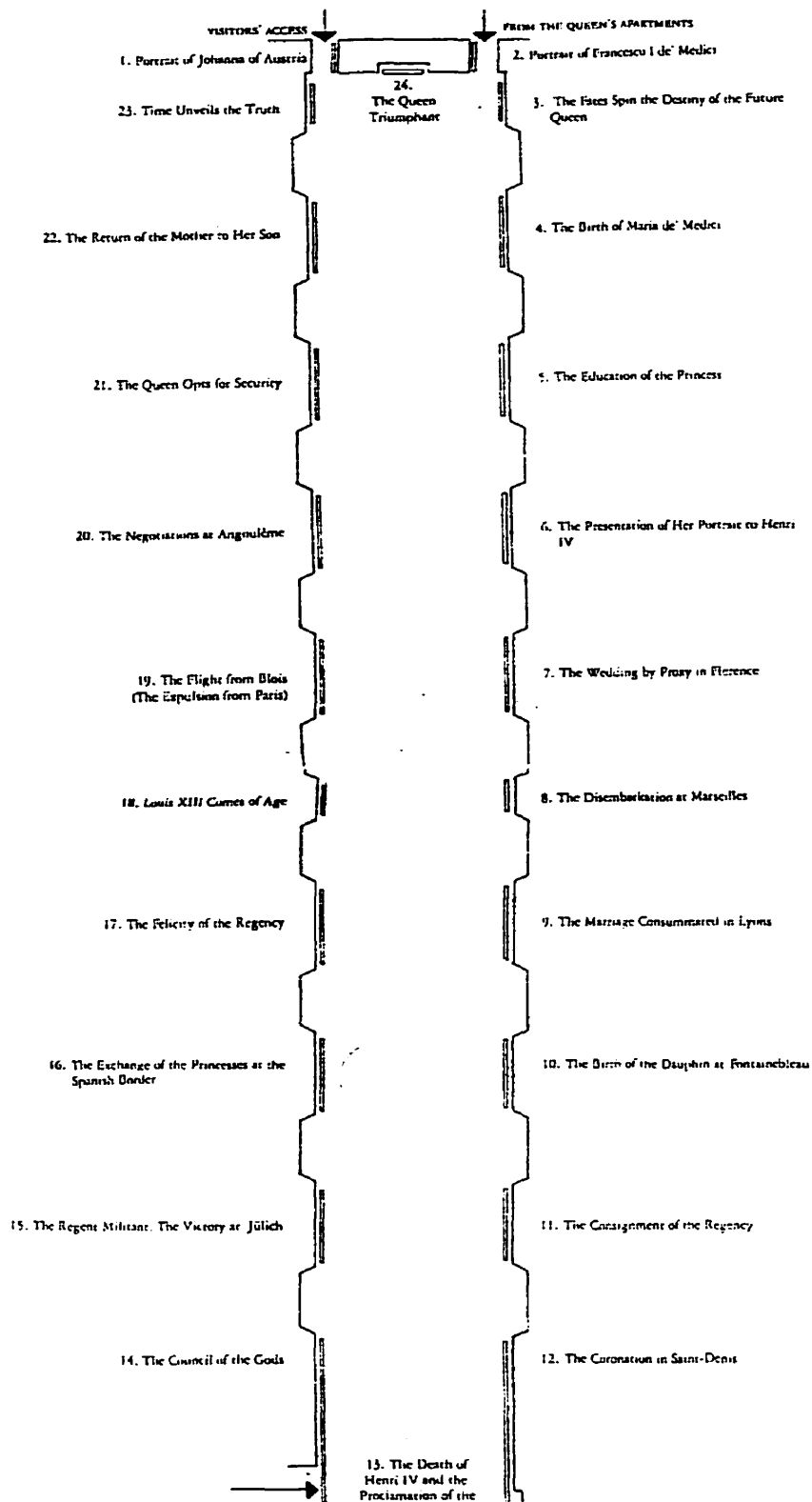


Fig. 14. Hypothetical Reconstruction of the plan of the Luxembourg Gallery after Thuillier- Foucart. Drawn by Francesco Quinterio.

Chapter Four

Rubens' Related Galleries

The panegyric was the perfect device for Rubens to portray and display Maria's grand plan for the gallery dedicated to her life and that of her husband. This was because there was no secular precedent for the symbolic, allegorical and political biography that he was commissioned to paint for the Queen Mother of France who was still alive and aspiring to power. The artist relied on the format of the panegyric to illustrate the "heroic deeds and illustrious life" of the Queen and the "triumphs" of the King outlining the momentous events of their lives that made them worthy of depiction. Rubens used this structure as the overall framework for the Medici and the Henri IV cycles precisely because it is patterned after Roman ideals of kingship, good government and statecraft and reinforces the idea that Maria's reign was a continuation of Henri's denoting peace and stability. The Maria cycle validates Henri's wisdom in choosing Maria as his mate and designating her his successor.

Roger de Piles description of the artist's unique talents support Maria's selection of Rubens, the quintessential Baroque artist, as the most appropriate choice for the commission at the Luxembourg.

No man ever treated allegorical Subjects so learnedly and clearly as Rubens; and as *Allegories* are a sort of Language which consequently ought to be authorised by Use, and generally Understood, he always introduced those *Symbols* in his *Pieces* which Medals, and other Monuments of Antiquity, have rendered familiar, at least to the learned.¹³⁷

Rubens' canvases are filled with references to the goddesses, omens and

¹³⁷ Roger de Piles, *Dialogue des Coloris*, in *The Art of Painting and the Lives of Painters*, London, 1706, p. 293.

prophecies that foretell of Maria's future greatness.¹³⁸ The use of rhetorical devices such as allegory and metaphor define the character that allows her to persevere during the extraordinary events of her life; the Fates spin her destiny, Lucina, presides over her fortuitous birth and Minerva educates the young Princess at her knee, preparing Maria for her future role in government.

Thuillier-Foucart's commentary on Rubens' function in the creation of the Medici cycle diminishes the painter's brilliant creative talents and the keen intelligence which permeates the paintings with multiple levels of meaning and subtle shades of truth. They write:

In all this his own voice was rarely heard and nothing was left to his decision. Certainly he discussed the ensemble and the details on his first visit to Paris, but in general the formulas were imposed upon him. His only task was to execute what others planned - and to transmute that program into a masterpiece.¹³⁹

This is an unfair evaluation of Rubens' ability to translate and transmit the message that Maria was trying to deliver to the visitors to the Luxembourg galleries. His inspiration was fueled by many sources besides the study of classical antiquities. Maria made the final decision for the subjects of the canvases but Peiresc also had an influence on what Rubens eventually painted, suggesting subjects that would please the Queen and advising him of the dangers associated with those that concerned Louis. Several of the paintings were based on compositions Rubens had completed for previous commissions; *The Triumph of Henry IV* is closely related to *The Triumph of the Church Over Ignorance and Blindness* (1626); *The Triumph at Juliers*, to the equestrian portrait *The Duke of Lerma*. (1603); the sketch of *The Reconciliation of King Henry III and Henry of Navarre* to *The Reconciliation*

¹³⁸ L. Born, "The Perfect Prince according to the Latin Panegyrists", *American Journal of Philology*, LV, 1934, 20f, and Quintillian, *Institutio oratoria*, III, vii, pp. 4-28, and Seward, p. 9.

¹³⁹ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 43.

of *Esau and Jacob*.(1624-1626). *The Marriage by Proxy* , closely follows the format of the Medici marriage paintings of Vasari and Jacopo da Empoli seen at Maria's wedding in Florence. *The Consignment of the Regency* is taken from a coin minted by Dupré and *The Queen Triumphant* could have originated from a medal minted for Henri in 1599 and the similar illustration of the characterisation of "Nobilita" from Ripa's *Iconologia*. Significantly, this was not the first time that the panegyric was used in connection with Maria. According to Millen-Wolf, a panegyric was also published at the time of her marriage and it is possible that Rubens was also familiar with and perhaps influenced by images from this publication.¹⁴⁰

This series of paintings was important to Maria who had something to say to the French nation and the King, her son Louis XIII, regarding her own worth and the value of her accomplishments. This was in part because the strength of the female regent was undermined by the Salic law and particularly because of the mistreatment she had endured at the hands of her sickly, immature son for whom she had acted with courage and heroism to preserve the monarchy. His actions had been the catalyst for the commissioning of the cycles and once she had been rescued from Blois and was in the refuge and the safety of her supporters at Angoulême she wrote to him clearly expressing her grievances and describing her achievements safeguarding the security of the nation:

The Queen complains greatly that, being born Princess of one of the most Illustrious Houses of Europe, and having had the honor of being wife to one the most great Kings who ever reigned in France, and Mother of the King now reigning, and after having preserved that Kingdom with so many perils and anxieties during the minor age of the King her son, as recompense for such maternal efforts and affections she was shamefully driven out of the court and of the presence of the King her son and of her children, to be confined as prisoner in Blois with every sort of indignity against the respect due to her birth and to so many great Princes with

¹⁴⁰ Millen-Wolf, p. 28, noted at the bottom of the page.

whom she has the honour of being related, and against the honor which is due to the memory of the deceased King and to that of the King her son, all this through the advice and counsel of Luynes, his brothers, and adherents which, during the youth of the King her son, was designed to usurp more easily the royal authority and the government of the state.¹⁴¹

The fact that Richelieu found the painting which illustrated the catalytic event *The Expulsion from Paris* (Fig. 15.) too sensitive a subject to be seen by the King and that Rubens was required to replace it with another at the last minute supports this theory. Most importantly, Louis' inability to govern wisely could undo everything that both Henri and Maria had accomplished for the good of the French nation. Louis was already participating in campaigns against the military strongholds of the Huguenots in 1621 in direct contradiction to the Edict of Nantes instituted by his father and reaffirmed by his mother after the assassination; jeopardising the peace and welfare of the nation. The only positive aspect of Louis' campaign was that he had given up playing with toy soldiers to occupy himself with the real thing.

Maria's intention was to present her reign within the same framework as that of her husband's who satisfied all the criteria of a return to a golden age of peace and prosperity. It was heralded as such in the monumental work, *Astrée*, written by Honoré d'Urfé and dedicated to Henri IV's sovereignty because it surmised that Henri's reign brought the Astrean rule of justice back to Europe. Elaine Rubin's thesis contends that a golden age continued under Maria's rule as well because the Astrean myth countered all precepts of the Salic Law. Thus Maria could be the warrior Queen in *The Triumph at Juliers* even though, according to the Salic law women were not allowed to bear arms. Rubin explains that the problem with the regency periods was not only the difficulty Frenchmen had with the acceptance of the

¹⁴¹ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo, To Louis 6023, C. 62; general declaration, 4633, November 3, 1618, along with letters to her daughters, in Millen-Wolf, p. 241 n. 20.

female rulers but the reconciliation of the national Salic heroic myth which opposed women yet supported the monarchy and with the imperial heroic myth which exalted women and supported the monarchy.¹⁴² Maria's position was also reinforced by the poems of Malherbe written for the court ballets that Thuillier-Foucart considered the literary equivalent of Rubens' painted panegyric.¹⁴³ The *Ballet de Madame, soeur aînée du Roi* of 1615 is noted in particular because it celebrated the positive aspects of the Regent's rule and illustrated Maria's success as the female deliverer of France.¹⁴⁴

Great masterpiece of the Heavens, marvel of Etruria
Sweet star of the French, o divine Marie

.....
You join so well the Louvre with the Escorial
That after so many great deeds, in peace and war
Which have brought to your feet all the kings of the earth.
It is a little thing to raise for you an imperial throne.¹⁴⁵

The repetition of particular ideas and images in the paintings of the two Luxembourg galleries reiterate themes that reinforce the ideas associated with the positive aspects of Henri's reign that are perpetuated in Maria's regency. The problematic issues that originated in Henri's sovereignty are addressed and resolved in the pictures of Maria's cycle. These associations support Maria's claim that her actions were heroic and that she was justifiably called a heroine. The thematic links established between the two cycles under the following specific headings reinforce the thesis statement that Maria was as capable to rule as Queen and Regent as her husband the King. She alone possessed the unique qualities to preserve the monarchy for Louis and the Bourbon line and to complete the mandate that Henri authorised her to carry out.

¹⁴² Rubin, pp. 45-46.

¹⁴³ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 33, 34 .

¹⁴⁴ Rubin, p. 87.

¹⁴⁵ Description du ballet de Madame, soeur aînée du roi, Lyon, 1615, p. 14. as cited in Rubin p. 86.

Destiny

Twice together we have dipped the thread that goes to make the cloth in purple dye and interwoven therewith the same gold of which Lachesis has woven the golden centuries that are mine beneath thy rule. See here I have prefigured thy destined progeny, those children for whom the world prays; soon shalt thou confess me a true prophet and coming fate prove that my embroidery is true. ¹⁴⁶

Neither Maria or Henri was destined by birth to rule France. Thus the events that transpired to lead each of them to the momentous event of the coronation are important to the viewers' appreciation of the worthiness of the King and Queen and the recognition of their accomplishments. The portraits of the Queen's parents, the first and second of the series are, significantly, the only ones that were executed without the use of myth and allegory. (Figs. 16, 17.) No doubt Maria felt that her parents' portraits spoke for themselves, reminding the viewer in the gallery of the nobility of her ancestry and the wealthy cultural legacy she inherited. This was an important message for Maria to put forth, since even Sully in his *Mémoires* recounts, when suggesting Maria as a possible mate for Henri, that the Medici were one of the most modest families in Christendom to bear a princely title, and that there were no more than sixty or eighty years since Maria's ancestors were, at best, among the most prominent burghers of their city. ¹⁴⁷ There was also need to combat the lingering hatred toward her distant relative Caterina de Medici, who also acted as regent and instigated the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, as well as the underlying fear of foreign influence and domination.

Henri was at least a second cousin to the royal family of France and was, albeit remotely, in line to inherit the throne. He was destined to become King of Navarre and his upbringing with the peasant children *à la Béarnoise*, at the court of Paris with his cousins, and his classical education served him

¹⁴⁶ Claudian, *De Consulatu Stilichonis*, II, p. 333-361.

¹⁴⁷ Sully, p. 118.

well. The chance of his ascending the throne because of the death of the four sons of Caterina de Medici and Henri II was almost negligible. The "Fates" that spun the destiny of the future Queen were equally occupied with that of Henri IV.

Rubens planned the compositions for the painting *The Birth of Maria de Medici* (Fig. 18.) and the sketch of *The Birth of Henri IV* (Fig. 19.) as almost mirror images of each other. This was because of the clockwise and counter clockwise order of the paintings in the galleries and also because the similarities in compositional formulae reinforce the idea of equality between the two monarchs. Rubens chose to place all the nativity scenes of the two cycles outdoors, Maria's in a garden near a portico reminiscent of his own house, and Henri's on a plain perhaps to allude to a battle field. Significantly the third picture portraying a birth; *The Birth of the Dauphin* (Fig. 20.) does not follow this same format even though the birth occurs out of doors in the garden at Fontainbleau. Louis' birth was well documented by Louise Bourgeois midwife to the Queen and was witnessed by members of the court to assure the validity of the heir to the throne.

In Rubens' letter to Pierre Dupuy of October 29 1626, his criticism and commentary on Morisot's poem *Porticus Medicea* about the Medici cycle, makes it clear that in *The Birth of Maria de Medici*, the personage wearing the wall crown and holding the baby Maria is the city of Florence.¹⁴⁸ The old river god is the Arno. Repeating the format for *The Birth of Henri IV*, the figure holding the baby Henri represents the city of Pau where Henri de Bourbon, Prince of Navarre was born, and the river god is the Gave de Pau. However, Mars, accompanied by three putti carrying lance and shield, hands the flaming sword of war to the baby boy. The little Henri puts out his hand to receive his destiny. The contract signed with Rubens stated that the cycle was

¹⁴⁸ J. Held, 1980, p. 99.

to illustrate the battles, sieges and victories of the King and this prepares the viewer for the paintings in the cycle to follow.¹⁴⁹ Fully one half of the Henri cycle concerns his military career, and the emphasis on war changes to peace in the second half of the cycle when he begins the relationship with Maria.

Lucina the Goddess of childbirth, characterised by her nudity and the torch she carries, attends the fortunate birth of Maria. The happy hours shower the princess with flowers and the good genius of the Queen, represented by a youth carrying a cornucopia containing crowns, a sceptre, *main de justice*, a necklace of pearls and a laurel wreath, alludes to her future role as monarch. The lion refers back to the old Medici coat of arms, appropriately since the *Fleur de Lys* on the shield, the symbol of France had also been granted to Tuscany by St. Louis and reinforces the notion of their long relationship.¹⁵⁰

At the time of Maria's birth, the Grand Duke Francesco wrote to his brother Ferdinand, a Cardinal in Rome: "Your Excellency acquired a pretty little niece, brought forth by Her Most Serene Highness, the Grand Duchess; and because often times female creatures conduce to great things in states, to me this was very pleasing indeed".¹⁵¹ Most likely this was because Caterina, the first Medici Queen of France, was at the height of her Dowager influence.

There has been much discussion on the part of art historians regarding Rubens painting of the halo surrounding the head of Maria de Medici at the time of the birth. Simson found the painting to be reminiscent of the Holy Night.¹⁵² Held writes that all the modern commentaries on the birth of Maria make the iconographic analogy between the figure of Florence holding Maria and the Virgin holding the Christ child.¹⁵³ Millen and Wolf interpret the

¹⁴⁹ Held 1980, p. 126.

¹⁵⁰ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 75.

¹⁵¹ Archivio de Stato, Mediceo 5088, C. 166, Florence. Letter from Francesco I to Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici, April 26, 1575, in Millen-Wolf, p. 234, II, n. 8.

¹⁵² Held, 1980, as quoted on p. 100.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 100.

canvas as an emblematic image of the advent of a royal infant who is to become a sovereign.¹⁵⁴ However, Rubens also painted the baby Henri with a halo and there is no such analogy drawn between the baby boy and the Virgin which would make a more logical association to the Christ Child. At the time of the commission, Henri IV had been dead for fifteen years and the rays of light would have been justified for he was, and still is, considered one of France's greatest Kings.

According to the Baluze Memorandum, the reference to the halo around Maria's head was a "sign that she would become the greatest princess of the world".¹⁵⁵ Rubens' known familiarity with Ripa would lead us to assume that he referred to the 1611 edition of *Iconologia*, which describes the female figure of "Monarchy" as having a ray of light surrounding her head to denote the lustre and the respect due her greatness.¹⁵⁶ (Fig. 21.)

Maria could justifiably claim her descent from two of the great houses of Europe. The histories and legends of her ancestors attested to this fact. Her mother was Queen of Hungary and Bohemia and Archduchess of Austria. The Medici side of her family dated back to the time of Charlemagne who had granted the founder of the Medici dynasty, Everard de Medici the seigneurie of Florence because he had aided the French in opposing the Lombards. A sign of celestial and supernatural esteem was transferred to the house of the Medici when Louis IX gave the Medici permission to wear the *Fleur de Lys*, linking the two powers in perpetuity.¹⁵⁷

The court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany afforded Maria an education that was far superior to that of most women of her time thus preparing her for her future position as a monarch. Millen-Wolf write that Rubens'

¹⁵⁴ Millen & Wolf, p. 34.

¹⁵⁵ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 75

¹⁵⁶ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611. Reprint of the 1611 ed., Vol II, Padua, 1976, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes du seigneur de Brantôme*, Vol. 5, Paris, 1822-1823, p. 25.

painting *The Education of Maria de Medici* (Fig. 22.) provides an image of the Princess as an active individual with a personality of her own. The education she receives arms her with the ability to act through her own will. Minerva in this painting represents Wisdom who must teach the young Maria the art of good government for which her life is predestined. Minerva is also the Queen's emblematic tutelary goddess, who helmeted and armoured accompanies Maria through the cycle providing guidance, advice and protection.¹⁵⁸ The attributes of her education, the musical instruments, the engraving tools, palette and brushes, sculptor's chisel scattered across the canvas also characterise her reign and her patronage of the arts. These elements are repeated in *The Felicity of the Regency* (Fig. 23.) and reinforce the positive aspects of the Regency period reinforcing the ideas proclaimed in Malherbe's poems; peace brought prosperity and allowed the arts to flourish under Maria's tutelage.

Marriage and Legitimacy

Marriage to Henri IV had been Maria's first step to power and the significance of the marriage scenes in the gallery were complex in that they not only represent the beginning of the relationship of the two main characters of the cycles but they also address issues that have far reaching repercussions on the monarchy. Indeed, much of the Medici cycle concerns Maria's marriage and the marriages of her children and all of the paintings address issues that relate to Maria's accomplishments and achievements for the good of the state. For these reasons marriage must be considered the most important event in the two cycles.

The final achievement of the cycle dedicated to Henri's life concludes with the sketch of *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici* (Fig. 24.) Thuillier-Foucart's comment that this final picture is the crowning point in

¹⁵⁸ Millen-Wolf, p. 38, 47.

an epic in which there was nothing more to add, presents a rather limited viewpoint of what this marriage meant to the Kingdom of France.¹⁵⁹ It is the author's opinion that marriage is the link between the two galleries and is the pivotal event from which the questions regarding the legitimacy of the ceremony and the heir to the throne originate and are resolved.

From what is known of the west side of the Henri IV cycle it is assumed that *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici* represents the first appearance of Maria in his gallery. Rooses incorrectly states that this is a painting of Henri leading his bride to the altar.¹⁶⁰ This is not a representation of the sacrament of marriage, but a scene of the marriage in its essence as a period of peace. We may note the olive branch in Henri's right hand, which symbolises what Held theorises is the theme of the last half of the Henri cycle.¹⁶¹ It was the marriage to Maria that provided fulfilment to the life of the King in the accomplishment of his greatest desire, to produce a son and heir and secure the throne for the Bourbon line. The image portrays the loving couple enjoying a leisurely stroll through the garden in perfect harmony, the arm of Henri around the waist of his wife. The attention of all of the figures in this painting, the King and the infant Loves are focused on Maria, who appears to be pregnant. The style of her dress accentuates this notion. The theory that the marriage is the pivotal event that links the two cycles is reinforced by Held's opinion that this final painting of the cycle is composed and positioned in the gallery to propel the visitor out of the Henri gallery and into the Maria gallery to continue the story from Maria's point of view.¹⁶²

During the negotiations for a marriage, portraits were often sent between royal houses as a method of introduction for the intended couple. Many portraits were exchanged between the courts of France and Tuscany

¹⁵⁹ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ Rooses, M., *Rubens*, Vol. III, Philadelphia, 1904, p. 275.

¹⁶¹ Held, 1975, p. 227.

¹⁶² Held, 1980, p. 135.

during the three long years of negotiations for this merger and as usual Rubens based the picture *The Presentation of the Portrait* (Fig. 25.) on fact. The portrait was a fashion of the day and many were painted for, and of, the Queen and the royal family during Maria's reign. These were continually being sent abroad to the English court and the royal houses of Europe.¹⁶³

In the Maria gallery, *The Presentation of the Portrait* represents the first appearance of Henri. This painting is replete with references to all of the positive aspects that the marriage will provide to France and Henri. It is Thuillier-Foucart's opinion that by the allusion to the "king as a warrior", this painting establishes the link between the two galleries. The King's presence alludes to the fulfilment of peace because the Baluze Manuscript makes reference to the same infant Loves who appear in *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici* as removing the instruments of war from the King in order that the kingdom might enjoy a long peace. Note the smoke of battle in the background while he admires Maria's image. The change in Henri's attitude occurs because Maria is about to come into his life.¹⁶⁴ A more appropriate interpretation would relate this first image concerning marriage to the idea that a perfect marriage will be the outcome of this portrait presentation of the ideal woman for this man. The gods Jupiter and Juno, examples of the perfect marriage, who made their first appearance at the very beginning of the Maria cycle, once again overlook the scene. The god of marriage Hymen with his burning torch holds the portrait while Cupid points out Maria's many attributes. Henri was very much in debt to the Medici and he was placed in the position of having to choose a wife that was as good for him as it was for the nation. Maria was a member of one of the wealthiest families in Europe and her dowry would infuse the coffers of France with much needed money. Even "France" is represented encouraging

¹⁶³ Batiffol, pp. 237-240.

¹⁶⁴ Thuillier-Foucart p. 76.

the union.

Johnson suggests that the black framed portrait of Maria alludes to the literary genre known as the *Mirror of the Prince*, a book which describes appropriate princely behaviour. Ordinarily the prince looks into the black framed mirror and sees himself accompanied by virtues. (Fig. 26.) She draws the analogy that Henri who stares at the portrait/mirror sees himself in her, a point which reinforces Maria's legitimacy to ascend the throne.¹⁶⁵ However, the theory that the King looks into the painting/mirror and sees his future wife as himself supports the thesis statement that Maria is equally capable of assuming his position as the head of state.

The marriage ceremony, as previously stated, is the official act from which all issues concerning Maria and legitimacy originate. Much of the Queen's imagery had to do with marriage and the attributes of power achieved by matrimony. Marriage had, after all, been Maria's path to power and it was a common theme in Florentine art and pictorial biography. Anthony Blunt has discussed the style of marriage portrait favoured by the Medici, drawing attention to the format of the paintings celebrating the marriages of Caterina de Medici and Henri II, Francesco de Medici and Joanna of Austria, as well as that of Maria and Henri IV.¹⁶⁶ Maria continued the Medici pictorial tradition of marriage as well as developing an imagery of her own. It is possible that Rubens had seen Vasari's painting of Caterina's wedding, on the ceiling of the Sala de Clemente VII in the Palazzo Vecchio, as well as those by Jacopo da Empoli which decorated the Salone de Cinquecento while he was in attendance at Maria's wedding. Rubens' use of the same composition could have been motivated by Maria's desire for continuity. It recalls the picture of the marriage of the first Medici Queen of

¹⁶⁵ Geraldine A. Johnson, "Pictures Fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de' Medici Cycle", *Art History*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 1993, p.458.

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Blunt, "A Series of Paintings Illustrating the History of the Medici Family Executed for Marie de' Médicis," *Burlington Magazine*, CIX, 1967, (2), p. 562.

France and her success as Regent and therefore provides historical veracity to emphasise the legitimacy of her own claims of succession.

Millen-Wolf consider *The Wedding by Proxy in Florence* (Fig. 27.) to be one of the most political paintings of the series because the legality of the marriage and, of course, the ensuing off-spring were subject to questions of legitimacy since Henri had foolishly signed a promissary note of marriage with his mistress.¹⁶⁷ This promissary note continued to plague Maria and she knew that Henriette d'Entragues had intentions of using it to oust her and Louis when the timing was right. They theorise that Rubens chose the moment directly after the placing of the ring upon the finger of the bride and its blessing by the papal legate Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, nephew of Pope Clement VIII, to ensure that the viewer would appreciate the prestige of this marriage and its unchallengeable legitimacy. The Cardinal's red hat is hung up so that the audience can comprehend that the service had been performed by a prelate of unimpeachable authority.¹⁶⁸ Peiresc made this suggestion to Rubens in a letter dated October 27, 1622; "I should like to think of some small place (in the picture) for that minor altar so that the red hat could be laid on it as a sign of the dignity of the prelate....".¹⁶⁹ Seward writes that the marriage scene is the first graphic documentation of Maria's significant claim to the throne of France.¹⁷⁰ The moment immediately following the placing of the ring upon the finger, and its blessing by the papal legate, was chosen precisely for the fact that any challenger to the validity of the wedding would realise that two acts of legitimisation have already occurred: the brief of the legation affirming the papal authority of the cardinal officiant, and the King's empowerment of proxy to the person of the Grand Duke.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 53, and Batiffol, p. 116.

¹⁶⁸ Millen-Wolf, p. 54.

¹⁶⁹ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 111.

¹⁷⁰ Seward, p. 58.

¹⁷¹ Millen-Wolf, p. 54.

Four paintings of the Luxembourg Cycle refer to Maria's own marriage and one refers to that of her children. *The Presentation of the Portrait*, *The Marriage by Proxy*, *The Disembarkation at Marseilles* (Fig. 28.) and *The Consummation of the Marriage at Lyons* (Fig. 29.) concern her own. *The Exchange of the Princesses at the Border* (Fig. 30.) concern the marriage of her son Louis and her daughter Elisabeth. *The Council of the Gods*, (Fig. 31.) which Thuillier discovered should have been titled *Concert of the Gods for the Reciprocal Marriages of France and Spain* was originally intended to refer to the double marriages.¹⁷² Maria, in fact, had planned for at least four paintings of the cycle to be devoted to this subject, then reluctantly agreed to reduce the number to two and finally to one, since, as Peiresc wrote to Rubens, the Abbé advised him that this is something that concerned other persons more than the Queen herself.¹⁷³ Maria had placed her daughters in positions of power through their marriages; Henrietta Maria to Charles I of England, Christine to Vittorio Amadeo, the Duke of Savoy, her daughter Elisabeth wed Philip IV of Spain, and her son Louis XIII married the Spanish Infanta, Ann of Austria, in the celebrated reciprocal marriages of 1615.

Maria's bedroom at the Louvre was embellished with paintings of the weddings of her parents and herself and the Palais du Luxembourg was then also decorated with pictures on this theme. The Cabinet Doré was a small room which linked the Queen's private apartments and the state bedroom at the Palais du Luxembourg. Richard Symonds, during his visit to Paris in 1649 had been particularly taken with this room and described it in his diary:

The Cabinet de Madame is floord with wood wrought in little workes all severall formes pitcht in with silver. The sides wansscot with boxes of velevet. Guilt; above Italian pictures lesse

¹⁷² Thuillier-Foucart, p. 60 n 44.

¹⁷³ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 102.

the life of ye mariage of this Queenes grandfather and father¹⁷⁴

Paillet described the room, as well as the ten paintings representing scenes from Medici history in an inventory that is attributed to the period of 1686-1693. Seven of these paintings are now in the collection of the Earl of Elgin at Broomhall, Fife. Anthony Blunt linked these pictures with documents in the State Archives in Florence identifying their correct subjects, authors and original location in the Cabinet Doré.¹⁷⁵ Five of these works are on the subject of marriage; *Marriage of Caterina de Medici and Henri II*, by Francesco Bianchi, (Fig. 32.) *Marriage of Joanna of Austria and Francesco de Medici*, by Jacopo Ligozzi, (Fig. 33.) *Proxy Marriage of Maria de Medici*, by Jacopo da Empoli, (Fig. 34.) *Exchange of the French and Spanish Princesses (Marriage of Louis XIII)*, by Valerio Marucelli, (Fig. 35.) *The Embarkation of Maria de Medici at Livorno*, by Domenico Passignano. (Fig. 36.)

A second marriage ceremony took place in Lyons. The Cardinal Aldobrandini officiated for the second time. Maria chose not to illustrate the marriage scene again, but rather *The Consummation of the Marriage*, the physical act of marriage that had also occurred. The proof of the consummation was its legal issue, the heir to the throne. It was therefore Maria, as wife of Henri, who succeeds in assuring the survival of the monarchy and the French nation.

Duty Fulfilled

Nine months and fourteen days after the Queen's marriage, the Dauphin was delivered in the Oval Room at Fontainebleau on September 27, 1601. The Queen endured twenty-two humiliating hours of labour in full view of not only the King, but his sister Catherine, Duchesse du Bar, and

¹⁷⁴ Oliver Millar, "The Notebooks of Richard Symonds", *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Art Presented to Anthony Blunt*, London, 1967, p. 162, and Marrow, p. 33.

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Blunt, "A Series of Paintings Illustrating the History of the Medici Family Executed for Marie de Médicis", *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 109, 1967, (2), pp. 492-498 (pt. 1), pp. 562-565 (pt. 2).

other notables such as Madame de Nemours, and the Princes of the Blood, who had legitimate claims to the throne, Conti, Soissons and Montpensier. This child was the first of Henri's to be born in wedlock and also the first, first-born son in fifty seven years who would live to accede the throne and who, like his predecessor François II, happened to be the son of a Medici Queen.

Although the theme of motherhood is barely touched upon in the literature, it has to be remembered that the most important reason for Henri's marriage to Maria was to produce a legitimate heir. A Florentine resident, Signor Giovannini wrote to the Grand Duke September 2, 1601, describing the pregnant Maria a few weeks before the delivery:

More beautiful than ever, and has a big and very high belly, and everyone holds it so certain that the infant simply has to be a boy that, if it turns out otherwise, things would be all too stirred up and muddled and the French hearts and spirits might undergo to great a change.¹⁷⁶

Henri was no longer a young man and the death of an infant or the mother in childbirth was an all too possible danger. The birth of the successor to Henri's not too secure throne was an important event and caused him much concern. Louise Bourgeois the royal midwife described the King at the birth of the Dauphin:

I saw the King sad and haggard in countenance, having drawn apart and come close to me, since he still did not know what the child was.....Then his colour returned, and he came up to where I was along side the Queen and bent down and put his mouth to my ear and asked me: 'Midwife, is it a boy?' I told him, yes. 'I beg you, give me no brief joy: that would make me die.' I unwrapped Monsieur le Dauphin a little and made him see that it was a son.....He raised his eyes to heaven, clasping his hands, and rendered thanks to God. Tears ran down his face the size

¹⁷⁶ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo 4615-A, fol.V. Correspondence from Signor Giovannini to the Grand Duke, in Millen-Wolf, p. 238, IX n. 26.

size of big peas.¹⁷⁷

Now, the marriage of Henri to Marguerite de Valois had been annulled for the lack of a male heir. Motherhood must therefore be seen as the second step necessary for Maria's rise to power. Her potential for childbirth was one of the main reasons that Henri had chosen her for a wife. Moreover, part of her future success was linked to the production of more children, specifically a second son to secure the throne from mishap. Rubens' image of the infant cornucopia with five more little heads in *The Birth of the Dauphin* attests to Maria's fecundity. Maria is praised as a mother through her comparison to Cybele, the mother of the gods, who stands behind Maria in this painting. Von Simson even referred to Maria as "the Mother of Europe" (Fig. 37.) because the marriages of her children to the royal houses of Europe produced peaceful political alliances.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the sullied relationship of the Mother and her first-born son was also the source of all her troubles and the subject of much of the Medici Cycle.

As was customary when Royal or noble births occurred, or when succession to a title or fortune was at stake, definitive proof of legitimacy was necessary. This event called for witnesses to be present during the entire ordeal to ensure there had been no substitution of the heir. This practice was common in France but not in Italy, except under the most particular of circumstances. According to the account of the midwife, the Queen begged to not have to undergo so gross an infringement of privacy, but the King responded by assuring Maria that this was a practice common for the first childbirth of a Queen.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Louise Bourgeois, *Comment et en Quel Temps la reine accoucha de Monsieur le Dauphin à présent Louis XIII, des ceremonies qui y furent observées, l'ordre y tenu, les discours interuenus entre le roy et la reine, et sur plusieurs autres occurrences, par Louise Bourgeois, dite Boursier, sage-femme de la reine*. Nouv. coll., ser. Vol. XI, Paris, 1838. As quoted in Millen-Wolf, p. 93.

¹⁷⁸ Otto von Simson, "Richelieu and Rubens; the Significance of Rubens' Commission for the Paintings in the Medici Gallery," *Review of Politics*, VI, 1944, p. 436.

¹⁷⁹ Louise Bourgeois, as quoted in Millen-Wolf, p. 92.

Five more children were born to Maria and Henri: Elisabeth born in 1602; Christine born in 1606; Philippe, Duke of Orleans, born in 1607 and died in childhood in 1611; Gaston, Duke of Anjou, who took the title of Duke of Orleans after the death of his brother; and Henrietta-Maria, born in 1609.

The Consignment of the Regency and the Survival of the Monarchy

In order to assure the preservation of the monarchy an eventual transfer from the hands of the reigning sovereign to his successor must occur for the security of the state. Henri III designated Henri IV his successor in an official declaration, and Henri IV had prepared letters of consignment so that the Regency period of Maria would begin the moment a mishap befell the nation's leader. He had done this in 1603 and again in 1610 knowing that the promissary note of marriage that he had written to his mistress Henriette d'Entragues, and the covetous princes of the blood, especially Condé who was next in line to the throne, placed the accession of the Dauphin in jeopardy. The "letter" allowed Maria to take control of the government within hours of Henri's assassination. The regency, an interim period between the reigns of kings, offered protection to the Dauphin who had not yet reached the age of majority, allowing him time to prepare himself for the role that was his destiny. Most importantly for Maria, the fact that she was readied for this eventuality and designated Regent by the reigning monarch reinforces the idea that she was fully capable to rule in Henri's stead.

The legitimate transfer of power takes place four times within the two Luxembourg cycles. In the Henri IV cycle the transfer is made directly from Henri III to Henri de Navarre; in *The Reconciliation of King Henry III and Henry of Navarre*. (Fig. 38.) In the Maria de Medici cycle a legitimate transfer occurs three times to reinforce Maria's position. The transfer of the monarchy again occurs directly from Henri IV to Maria in *The Consignment*

of the Regency . (Fig. 39.) *The Apotheosis of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*, (Fig. 40.) was inspired by Rubens study of the classical literature on good government. The message of the *Panegyric to Trajan* is that with the help of *Providentia*, to choose the best successor for the securitas of the state, her mortal servant is rewarded with enrolment among the ranks of the demi-gods. With his death Henri ascends to assume his proper place among the gods, his nation secure in the capable hands of his designated successor. Confident in his choice " France" passes the orb of government to the Queen and Providentia offers her the rudder of the ship of state. ¹⁸⁰

Rubens prepared the sketch of *The Reconciliation of King Henri III and Henry of Navarre*, April 30, 1589, as a symbolic transfer of the crown and the rule of France from Henri III to Henri de Navarre. The actual transfer of power took place several months later, when Henri III was assassinated on August 1, 1589. The motive for the painting was the acknowledgement of Henri Roy de Navarre by Henri III as the legal heir to the throne of France. The accoutrements of kingship are clearly evident in the painting. The sceptre of France is placed in the hands of both kings as Henri III drapes the royal mantle around the shoulders of the future Henri IV. A putto holds the French royal crown in his right hand and points to Henri de Navarre's bare head with the left hand. The crown appears to have been lifted from the head of Henri III and is already in the act of being transferred to the next king, Henri IV. Henri's page holds the white plumed helmet that had become his personal badge of military courage. The extended right arm of the figure Concord holds at bay the evil powers of Fraud and Discord, while the left hand holds the wreath with two clasped hands that represent harmony.

Henri IV, knowing full well that Maria was the only person who could assure the continuity of the throne in case he should die, began to prepare his

¹⁸⁰ Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric to Trajan*, pp. 5-10.
68.

wife for her future role as regent. Maria was already educating herself for this eventuality by researching previous regency governments, especially those of Blanche of Castille and Caterina de Medici for information on how to rule successfully. She requested the registers in order to consult their records several years before she was even named regent.¹⁸¹ Blanche of Castille (1188-1252) the mother of St. Louis, had become a national heroine. She acted as regent during son Louis IX's, minority, and again when he was absent from France during the Crusades from 1248-1252. She used great strength and courage in pacifying the kingdom and in defeating baronial reaction. Maria learned to hold her counsel and informed herself on political matters, endearing herself to her husband and increasingly winning his respect and confidence in her judgment. As the Queen was far more politically astute than she had been given credit for Henri initiated Maria to the more important councils and negotiations of the government. As early as 1603, during a serious illness, Henri had readied letters of consignment, and requested the governors of the provinces to come to Paris and to swear fealty to the Queen, whom he would declare and create guardian of the Dauphin.¹⁸² By 1605 the King was already addressing his wife as Madame la Régente. The change in Henri's attitude was reported by Mézeray:

Not knowing how it would please God to dispose of him, he resolved to leave the regency to the Queen so as to assure his state and the crown to his children. He discussed this project many times with the Queen, and along with many general matters needful to observe in order to reign happily of which he spoke to her often and on various occasions he gave her some particular precepts necessary for governing this state.¹⁸³

This was also the year that Henri discovered the treasonous collusions of the d'Entragues family with Spain, and of their plot to kill him, oust Marie

¹⁸¹ Marrow, p. 65.

¹⁸² B. Zeller, *Henri IV et Marie de Médicis*, Librairie Académique, Paris, 1877, p. 180.

¹⁸³ François de Mézeray, *Histoire de la Régence de la reine Marie de Médicis*, Vol. 1, The Hague and Frankfurt am Main, 1743, p. 27.

and Louis, and declare Henriette as Regent, and her son as Dauphin. Her family still possessed the promissary note of marriage written in the King's own hand which they intended to use to initiate an annulment in the Court of Rome. ¹⁸⁴ Henri also knew that, to assure the continuation of the Bourbon line, he had to safeguard the monarchy against the covetous Princes of the Blood, especially the Prince de Condé, who had been next in line before the birth of the Dauphin. This only strengthened Henri's resolve to prepare Maria for the Regency to protect the Bourbon crown and to assure a smooth transfer of power to her as his successor.

Thus Rubens painted *The Consignment of the Regency*, the act of Henri IV conferring the Regency on the Queen, March 20, 1610. In the letter of April 22, 1622, Peiresc had suggested this topic to Rubens writing that :

the time when the King began to invite the Queen's participation in the councils and important negotiations of the the government of this state, when he was preparing his campaign outside the Kingdom, the which would be a noble subject and very pleasing to those persons with whom Y.W. has to deal. ¹⁸⁵

As always, Rubens researched the medals coins and other devices to which he had recourse to compress the historical content of the subject. Simson's research discovered that Rubens composition originated with a medal created by Guillaume Dupré and minted in 1604. It depicts the King, the nine year old Dauphin, and Maria with the motto *Propagio imperi*, pertaining to the perpetuation of the reign or the monarchy. ¹⁸⁶ (Fig. 41.)

In the painting the King is shown placing an azure globe strewn with lilies representing "France" into the right hand of the Queen. Thuillier states that the young Dauphin, who is the hope of the realm, is placed directly

¹⁸⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 58.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁸⁶ Otto von Simson, *Zur Genealogie der weltlichen Apotheose im Barock, besonders der Medicinalgalerie des P. P. Rubens*, Strasbourg, 1936, p. 322.

beneath the globe and his gaze is directed toward this emblem of power.¹⁸⁷ But the Dauphin's gaze is not clearly directed to the globe but to his mother. This is even more apparent in the sketch and clearly defines Louis' position in relation to her role as guardian of the Dauphin and the state. (Fig. 42.) The King's left hand gently turn Louis' body toward his mother and he looks up at her, and, like the child that he is, he has placed his hand in hers as if to be led. This one action clearly illustrates Rubens' intention that it be understood that Henri consigns the power to the Queen and that his son should seek out his Mother for guidance. The Queen looks only at her husband who is conferring the power of the monarchy directly upon her. This act of consignment unquestionably indicates the intention of the King to empower Maria to rule in his stead.

All the figures except one, the female resembling Rubens' wife Isabella Brant, who wears the diadem with the eye, look to the Queen. Thuillier-Foucart believe her to be Generosity or Magnanimity,¹⁸⁸ but Saward identifies her as Providentia. Placing her at the side of the Queen reinforces the wisdom of Henri's choice of successor.¹⁸⁹ From his study of the sketch, Held refers to the barefoot female figure as Wisdom, because of the serpent wound around her arm.¹⁹⁰ Thuillier-Foucart recognise her as Prudence¹⁹¹ and Saward describes her as *Salus Publica*.¹⁹² In the end Rubens suppressed her attribute in the finished canvas leaving the viewer to conclude that whichever figure she is, the reference is to Maria's ability to rule well.

This painting celebrates Maria in her new capacity as regent and proclaims her legitimacy to rule. It articulates the faith that the King had in her abilities, and expresses an outright challenge to those who would contest

¹⁸⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 82.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁸⁹ Saward, p. 94.

¹⁹⁰ Held, 1980, p. 108.

¹⁹¹ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 82.

¹⁹² Held, 1980, p. 108.

her authority. Henri declared his intention clearly with the first act; the consignment of the regency upon Maria and unequivocally with the further legitimisation of the coronation two months later. Malherbe's poem celebrates the Queen's new role:

O Queen who, rich in charms
To conjure off all kinds of woes,
Hath diverted the course of our tears
Into these miracles plain to see,
What can the public fortune
Dedicate to thee worthy of magnificence
If admitted to the ranks of immortals
By whose examples thy virtue is guided-
Thou dost not , like them, have within our temples
Thine own images and altars?¹⁹³

The final transfer of power, *The Coming of Age of Louis XIII*, (Fig. 43.) breaks with the sequence of delivering the monarchy directly into the hands of the sovereign. Maria stands by the side of her son offering him the rudder of the Ship of State but he still looks to her for guidance. Louis had taken the power from Maria by force, but his ability to rule is already placed in question by his youthful appearance, which shows his lack of maturity and experience, and his ineptitude at controlling the nation by his feeble grasp of the rudder. He may hold the *main de justice* and wear the crown, but the orb of government is not within his grasp. It rests in the firm control of "France" herself who holds it at some distance from Louis.

At the time of the commission, it had been Maria's intention to end the cycle with Louis assuming the role of the King in his own right. Rubens chose to allegorise and to reduce the historical event to its emblematic essence representing the image of the ship of state rather than the ceremony of majority. This was a familiar theme in French royal entries dating at least as far back as 1549, originating from Horace's *Ode to the Ship of State* , and was a

¹⁹³ François Malherbe, *A la Reine, Sur les heureux succès de sa Régence*, in *Vers du S. de Malherbe à la Reine*, 1611. p. 6.

favourite subject with the Valois and the Bourbons.¹⁹⁴ Rubens illustrates this scenario with some discretion knowing full well that the rest of the cycle concerns the problems between mother and son. Maria had ruled France for seven years, the last three at the request of the Dauphin, even though he had reached the age of majority. In fact he had publicly announced before the parlement, October 2, 1614, that he intended that the Queen, his mother should assist him "with her good counsel as she had done up to that day" declaring her Chief of his Council and adding that he would "always give heed to what his chancellor would say".¹⁹⁵ The Queen's intention was to continue to govern until Louis was ready to take command, but, it was certain that Maria was needed to help Louis rule. The condition of his health was a matter of concern, and even he did live to rule as a man, it was less certain that he would ever mature sufficiently to discharge his responsibilities in a suitable manner. The Queen's input was indeed necessary; in 1616 the Venetian Ambassador informed Maria that:

His Majesty her son was disinclined to understanding and applying himself to public affairs, that he offered nothing save his presence when he attended to important resolutions. He had great difficulty in speaking and was severely impeded in pronounciation. He was also an object of ridicule abroad for his weaknesses and foibles, and his preferences for his pastimes and hobbies, rather than affairs of state were well-known.¹⁹⁶

In 1617 Louis had Maria banished to Blois. Even after he had taken control of the nation the capabilities of the King were questioned. Lord Herbert of Cherbury who had been the English ambassador from 1619-1624 described Louis:

His words were never many as being so extreme a Stutterer, that he would sometimes hold his Tongue out of his Mouth a good while before he could speak so much as a word.....he

¹⁹⁴ Seward, pp. 160,161.

¹⁹⁵ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo 4629, Unnumbered. Letter from M. Bartolini to the Grand Duke, October 7, 1614: , from Millen-Wolf, p. 169.

¹⁹⁶ Millen-Wolf, pp. 172, 173.

were very laborious and almost indefatigable in the exercises of Hunting and Hawking to which he was much addicted. His Understanding and natural parts were as good as could be expected in one that was brought up in so much ignorance, which was on purpose so done that he might be longer governed; howbeit he acquired in time a great knowledge in Affairs as conversing for the most with wise and active Persons.¹⁹⁷

The Coronation and Sovereignty

Simson, in his dissertation published in 1936, considered the Medici cycle to be a prime example of the apotheosis of a secular prince in the age of the Baroque, and an outstanding instrument of propaganda for the divine nature of the monarchy. He writes:

It is certain that monarchy regarded as the fusion of the person and his office, invites the sacred or semisacred exaltation of the individual as the symbol of the idea on which his own sovereignty is founded or even the incarnation of divinity itself protecting and representing his people... Because he enlists the powers of the supernatural in aid of his merely human and transitory existence and destiny, he himself as a unique individual, is assimilated into the universal realm.¹⁹⁸

Seward writes that Henri himself was perfectly aware that his own Coronation was a sacramental confirmation and a seal of legality. Rather than waiting for his right to the kingdom of France to be beyond dispute he used the Coronation as an instrument to assume power and not as a consummation of his power. The event took place at Chartres on February 27, 1594 performed by the Bishop, rather than the Cathedral at Reims the traditional place for the coronation of French kings. Reims was held by the League, and the ornaments of the coronation; the mantle, spurs, sword, the sceptre, *le main de justice*, and the crown necessary for the ceremony had been destroyed and had to be remade for Henri.¹⁹⁹

¹ Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury, *The Life of Edward, First Lord of Cherbury Written by Himself*, ed. J.M. Shuttleworth, London, 1976, pp. 93-94.

¹⁹⁸ Von Simson, 1936, pp. 15-16

¹⁹⁹ Seward, pp. 100,101. and Held, p. 133.

The sequence in which the regalia was handed to the Monarch was of great significance. The instruments of the King's military function as protector of the state, the spurs and sword were delivered first. Next came the attributes of his supreme functions of priesthood and kingship. The King lay before the altar to be anointed with the oil contained in the ancient *sainte ampoule*, safeguarded by the monks of St. Martin at Tours, which had consecrated the kings of France since 496. Then he was vested by the priests in the dalmatic, the tunic and chasuble. The great Lords of the realm presented him with the gloves, the boots, the ring and the sceptre, and then the *main de justice* and, lastly, the crown was taken from the altar by the highest ranking cleric and placed upon his head to the cries of "Vive le Roy! Vive le Roy! Vive éternellement le Roy!", while the heralds threw fistfuls of gold and silver coins to the crowds. The *Te Deum* was sung and then the newly crowned King participated in the Pontifical High Mass at which he communicated.²⁰⁰

Seward describes what the act of the coronation meant to the French people:

The King was now an all but magic figure, an archetype from mythology, Heir to the God Kings of the pagan Franks he was also a sharer in the sacrificing Christian priesthood; alone of French laymen he had received communion in both kinds and worn the chasuble in which a priest celebrates Mass.....the psychological impact upon him and upon all Frenchmen was profound. This splendid and awe-inspiring sacrament, had consecrated Henri's divine election to be King no less than St. Louis, than Charlemagne, than Clovis. His destiny had been made holy. He had become France herself.²⁰¹

Maria chose the painting of the Coronation of Henri specifically to create a link between his ascension and hers and to emphasise that the transfer of power had been directly handed to her. The sketch of *The*

²⁰⁰ Seward, pp. 100-101, and Ladurie p. 238.

²⁰¹ Seward, p. 101.

Coronation of Henri IV (Fig. 44.) would not take up one of the larger spaces in the gallery and the composition is limited to the act of crowning the King. The painting of Maria's coronation made a political statement and addressed the issue of legitimacy that had been a cause of considerable concern for her. It is necessary to remember that the Salic Law, the ancient procedural and criminal code from which the French derived their justification for the exclusion of women from the throne, took precedence. It dated from the fifth century and was considered one of the fundamental laws of the French monarchy. The sixth article of the code stated that women were excluded from the *terre salique* or what was considered the land of the Salian Franks, the ancestors of the French. The law was eventually interpreted to mean that the French crown had to be handed down through the male line in order of progeniture bypassing all relatives of the female line. It was also the Salic Law which prevented Maria's permanent ascendancy because the female regency was strictly an interim government and women were denied the mystical power of the monarchy.²⁰² Millen-Wolf interpret the painting to mean that there is no suggestion that the crown had been granted to her only as Royal Consort, or as Mother to the King and as his Regent, with the obligation to protect and serve his purposes until his age of majority.²⁰³ Even though Maria was empowered to act fully it was only until the Dauphin reached the age of majority. His intention was specifically to protect the throne from the covetous the princes of the blood. Henri himself had invoked the law to become King, preventing the heirs of the Spanish Infanta Isabella, granddaughter of Henri II of France, and daughter of Elizabeth de Valois and Philip II of Spain from ascending the throne thus allowing Henri de Navarre to accede as Henri IV.

²⁰² Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des Institutions de la France aux XVII siècles*, Paris, Auguste Picard, 1923, p. 340.

²⁰³ Millen-Wolf, pp. 114-115.

May 13, 1610, Maria was crowned Queen of France in a ceremony in the Abbey of St. Denis, the first Queen to be coronated in forty years. (Fig.45.) This event was the passage from symbol to law and Maria was made Queen in her own right and name, by sacred anointment and royal sanction by the highest ecclesiastical authorities and with the assent of the highest nobility.²⁰⁴ The Baluze Memorandum specifies the importance of the act "the entire ceremony of coronation must be omitted, depicting only how Cardinal Joyeuse placed the crown on the Queens' head".²⁰⁵ Once that holy and monarchical rite had been accomplished she would have remained Queen, a partner in sovereignty and empowered to rule in Henri's stead. Matthieu writes:

The crowns are equal, there is no disparity, Jupiter has no more rays in his than Juno's. The one with which the Queen was crowned was the same the King received at his sacred investiture....so as to share in equal measure the thorns and the roses.²⁰⁶

Thuillier writes that this ceremony was not considered an indispensable act, but one that would equip Maria with enhanced prestige for her future role.²⁰⁷ This meant that her position as Regent would have authorisation that could be realised from the sanctity and legality of the ceremony in order for her to rule with power.

To make sure that the visitors to the gallery comprehend fully that Henri had acted with full confidence, he is shown overseeing the ceremony, sanctioning the interpretation of the coronation and the painting itself. The presence of the Dauphin urging his Mother to accept the crown, reinforces this interpretation. This fact, according to Millen and Wolf, is crucial to the

²⁰⁴ Held, 1980, p. 140.

²⁰⁵ Jacques Thuillier, "La 'Galerie de Médicis' de Rubens et sa Genèse: un document inédit," *Revue de l'Art*, IV, 1969, pp. 58-60.

²⁰⁶ Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire de France*, II, Paris, 1631, pp. 30-31.

²⁰⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 16.

understanding of the rest of the pictures in the cycle and the true meaning of the cycle as a whole.²⁰⁸

Rubens assignment was to depict the scene with the important personages necessary to deliver the message that Maria wanted to send regarding her legitimacy and also the confidence with which the King had made the decision to hold the coronation. Of the Queen's children, Louis plays an important role, not only in his position as Dauphin but in his urging Maria to accept the crown. Elisabeth had become Queen of Spain in 1615 and is conspicuously present in the painting because of her rank. Neither of the two younger girls, Cristine and Henrietta Maria, nor the two younger boys, Philippe, who was too ill, and Gaston, who was too young, participated in the proceedings.²⁰⁹

The guests whose presence Maria chose to portray were those who, by their act of participation, acknowledged her right to claim the throne. The Vendômes' prominence is portrayed to exhibit their willing participation in their stepmother's coronation as their own waiver of any claim to the throne, (lest it be forgotten that their mother Henriette d'Entragues had schemed long and hard to oust Maria and her legitimate children). The ex-Queen, Marguerite de Valois, had not only stepped aside to allow Henri to marry Maria, but also befriended the new Queen, and designated the Dauphin sole heir to her immense fortune and vast estates. Her presence also functioned as a guaranty of the legitimacy of Maria's marriage and of the respect that was her due. The Dowager Duchesse de Guise was not only honoured for her friendship and loyalty to Maria, but for the position she held as matriarch of the factions of the de Guise family ensuring their loyalty to the Queen as well.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Millen-Wolf, p. 115.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

According to Matthieu, the King, at the completion of the solemn rite, was heard complimenting his wife and announcing to everyone within hearing that he had never found Maria more beautiful. When Henri and the newly crowned Queen met at the portal of the Cathedral of Saint Denis Henri could not hold back his tears, "it seems as if he was embracing her for the last time".²¹¹

The Regency Period - Completion of the Mandate

Only twenty-four hours later the King was assassinated and Maria became Regent of France. The most faithful of the nobles, the Ducs de Guise, d'Epemon, Bellegarde, Bassompierre, Villeroy and Sillery, gathered around the Queen and pledged their support. Aside from the normal emotions resulting from the shock of the assassination, Maria immediately took complete control of the situation.

The King was murdered at four o'clock in the afternoon and by seven that same evening Maria had taken unusual measures by having the parlement make a sudden declaration of regency. She made the decision to ally herself with the three chief advisors of Henri and was officially declared regent before anyone had a chance to recover from the shock of the King's death. The Duc d'Epemon was sent to parlement to inform them that the Queen held letters of Regency drawn up by the late King when he was planning to depart for his military campaign in Germany.²¹²

Fortuitously for the Queen, her regency was declared without opposition. Thus Maria was raised to the governing power by the secular authorities and the will of the French people.²¹³ This was a rare occasion when the Princes of the Blood were not assembled in Paris. The Prince de Soissons had left angry before the coronation. The Prince of Condé was still

²¹¹ Pierre Matthieu, *Histoire de la mort déplorable de Henri III, ensemble un poème, un panégyrique, et un discours funèbre*, Paris, 1612, p. 42.

²¹² Ibid., p. 123, and Armand Jean de Plessis Richelieu, *Mémoires*, Vol. 1., Paris, 1929, p. 29.

²¹³ Millen-Wolf, p. 140.

in voluntary exile outside the realm in order to protect his bride Catherine de Montmorency from the amorous advances of the late King, and the Prince de Conti, although present in the city was incapacitated by his physical and mental infirmities.²¹⁴

Fifteen days after the assassination of Henri, Maria exchanged the portrait in the long gallery of the Louvre of the Valois King, Philip VI, with that of Louis IX (St. Louis), stating that she wished to present her son with an example of a hero of the Middle Ages, that he might imitate "the virtues , the valour, and the piety of this saintly king, even as he did inherit his kingdom".²¹⁵ This automatically compared Maria to Blanche whose regency was the first named by a letter of the king, and also because of the shared name of their first born sons. St. Louis was also the link between the Valois and Bourbon houses and, therefore, reinforced the legitimacy of Maria and her heir.²¹⁶

Henri had prepared Maria to take control and it was Maria's intention to follow his mandate. Maria's grand plan was to perpetuate the ideals and policies of her late husband, which had been to keep peace within the nation and the rest of Europe. Her first act as regent was to reconfirm Henri's Edict of Nantes of 1598 to assure peace within the nation. She also continued the negotiations for the Spanish reciprocal marriages that Henri had begun in 1608.

Although historians generally agree that the assassination of Henri changed the course of French history, Michael Hayden writes that his assassination did not bring about a sudden change in French foreign policy. This was due to Maria's decision to change Henri's plans as little as possible to assure stability within the nation, thus successfully forestalling the Thirty

²¹⁴ Armand Jean de Plessis Richelieu, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, p. 63.

²¹⁵ Thuillier-Foucart, as quoted on p. 17.

²¹⁶ Rubin, pp. 63-64.

Years War.²¹⁷

Responsibility made a new woman of Maria who took over the government with unhabitual efficiency. She applied herself to the affairs of the nation with a steadfastness of purpose, held her Council every morning and was always ready to give audience where questions of the public interest were to be discussed. Maria thrived on the exercise of power, so much so that her contemporaries found her "beyond doubt very much more handsome than in the time of the late King, as if her blood had been renewed when she took over the authority".²¹⁸

The Florentine envoy Cioli reported to the Grand Ducal secretary June 19, 1610 just one month after the assassination:

....the Queen has not an hour of quiet, because the Council of State held three times a week... in which she always takes part, there are also those Councils of War and Finances which also, for the moment she attends; and mornings, even before she gets up, there are ministers and princes; and by and large it can be said that she has no rest at all if not when she sleeps, which is very much less than before; and truly all this is to the marvel of everyone, and the chancellor and Villeroy are astounded by it, seeing that she has gone through such a grave change in her ways, and they praise her mightily, as do all the others.²¹⁹

The Warrior Queen and the Military Hero

Maria changed her late husband's diplomatic policies as little as possible. On July 26, 1610 Maria successfully executed a military campaign that had been postponed because of Henri's death. The succession of the Duchy of Julich-Cleve-Berg had been in dispute, Catholic Austria and set up a garrison to prevent the Protestant claimants from taking possession. The formerly Protestant Henri had entered into an alliance with the German Protestant Princes against the Catholic imperial power. At the time of his

²¹⁷ Hayden, p. 12.

²¹⁸ Thuillier -Foucart, pp.17, 59 n. 35.

²¹⁹ Archivio de Stato, Florence, Carteggio Mediceo 4624. Letter from Cioli to the Grand Ducal secretary, June 19, 1610. As quoted in Millen-Wolf, p. 167.

death he had mobilised a very large army with the intention of intervening but at the time of the assassination no military action had as yet been carried out.

The Queen undertook the military campaign in the first year of her regency to complete the action to which Henri had been obligated and to prove that she was capable of carrying out his commitments. Besides being faced with the practical problems of a huge army that had to be paid and demobilised, she was politically astute enough to realise that the more serious concern was that military action could alienate the Pope, the Emperor, the King of Spain and the Catholic majority of France, jeopardising the on-going negotiations for the Spanish reciprocal marriages.

Maria chose to have herself represented as a warrior in the same mode as her male counterpart in the equestrian portrait *The Triumph at Juliers*, (Fig. 46.) based on Rubens portrait, *The Duke of Lerma*. (1603). Thus she was justified in presenting herself carrying the commander's baton. The actual participation of the Queen in this event was minimal and Thuillier-Foucart consider this painting to be relevant only in the presentation of Marie as carrying out her dead husband's last political undertaking.²²⁰ The equestrian portrait was well understood as a depiction of the the hero in the 17th century and her portrait brought to mind the heroic actions of Joan of Arc and earlier French heroines. According to the limitations imposed by Salic Law, only men were able to bear arms, yet females like, Victoria, Zenobia and Joan of Arc were liberators, known as heroines, embodied male heroic characteristics and were illustrated participating in these pursuits. Politically and historically, women had played an important role in the destiny of Gaul. In the third century B. C., two Queens, Victoria and Zenobia had received recognition from the Roman troops and commanded with absolute authority.

²²⁰ Thuillier-Foucart p. 87.

Gaulois women and men equally shared the exercise of all political rights, and they fought side by side in battle.²²¹ Maria made an effort to align herself with historical female figures like Queen Blanche who reinforced her own accomplishments and the idea of equality.

Five of the paintings of the Henri cycle concern battles that the heroic warrior fought. The most famous being the painting of *The Battle of Ivry* (Fig. 47.) which was to take one of the three large spaces at the back of the gallery. The heroic Henri, who was a Protestant at this time, fought and won over the huge army of the League. This battle is considered the turning point of his career. More importantly, Henri was gaining the support of the French nobility which would propel him toward his final conversion and ascension to the throne of France.²²² The choice of the plumed helmet as Maria's headdress was also significant, for Henri always wore the plumed helmet to battle and had inspired his men never to lose sight of his white plume "you will always find it on the road to honour and to victory".²²³

The two canvases concerning Juliers were placed face to face in the Medici gallery with *The Consignment of the Regency* on the left wall showing Henri's preparation for battle, and *The Triumph at Juliers* on the right wall illustrating Maria's role in the fulfilment of his responsibilities as a *fait accompli*.²²⁴

After one month of battle, the city capitulated on September 1, 1610. The Protestant Princes regained a post strategically placed in relation to the Spanish Netherlands. Rubens painted the final scene of the siege of Julich and the surrender of the Austrian Imperial garrison to the French in league with the Protestant Dutch, English and German military forces. He depicted the besieged city of Julich in great detail compressing the topographical

²²¹ Andrée Lehmann, *Le Role de la femme dans l'histoire de la Gaule*, Paris, 1944, pp. 22-28.

²²² Held, 1980, p. 129, and Ladurie, p. 235.

²²³ H. de Beaumont de Péréfixe, *Histoire du Roy Henry le Grand*, Amsterdam, 1664, p. 148.

²²⁴ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 23, 87.

landmarks to present a better landscape. In true narrative fashion, Rubens combines the surrender and the fighting that preceded it.

Maria risked outright provocation by supporting the Protestant cause in her first regal act maintaining the Edict of Nantes that Henri had instituted in 1598. She asserted her conviction in the correctness of living in peace with her neighbours. As a result of this the Huguenots at home remained largely supportive of her policies at home and abroad.

Henri had already been seriously involved in marriage negotiations with Spain before his death. In fact Pope Clement VIII had advanced this suggestion to Henri in 1601, soon after the births of the infanta Anne and Louis in the same month. Negotiations began in 1608 through the papal nuncios, ambassadors and the Duke of Tuscany.²²⁵ Maria successfully concluded these negotiations and also allied France with Savoy and, eventually, also with England. Peace was of the utmost concern because war would result in an involvement with all of Europe.

With the announcement of the reciprocal marriages of France and Spain, 1612 became the year of magnificence and the fulfilment of the prophecy of a return to a golden age of peace. A woman had engineered the event and the final praise went to her and her regency placing her in the company of Bathsheba and Blanche of Castille.

Maria was convinced that she had laid out the order for world peace by marrying her oldest daughter Elisabeth to the future King Philip IV of Spain and securing the Infanta Anna of Austria, for her son Louis. She was in fact not entirely incorrect, for France and Spain refrained from any aggressivity until the Thirty Years' War pitted them against each other.

The marriages had to follow a strict protocol and the exchange of the Princesses had to occur simultaneously. The young Princesses were handed

²²⁵ Abel Desjardins, ed. *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane pendant la XVI^e siècle*, Paris 1886, 5: pp. 569-577, 577-580, 580-586, 689.

over to emissaries of their new countries on a float situated mid-way on the Bidassoa River, exactly at the frontier between France and Spain.

The Exchange of the Princesses had been impeded at every turn by the forces of the Prince de Condé whose greatest concern was that the marriage of Louis to Anne of Austria would produce an heir and thus end his own pretensions to the crown. He stirred up all the factions of discontent, the Princes of the Blood, the nobles and magnates and even the Huguenots to delay the progress of the court from Paris to Bordeaux where they were to be headquartered. The rebellion of Condé and his henchmen was grave since it could have been the instigation for a civil war and it had already subjected the country to the severest depredations. In the end they were too ineffectual and Condé too cowardly to commit *lèse majesté* in anything but words. Maria had overcome all obstacles and Malherbe wrote in praise of the Queen on the occasion of the wedding of Louis to Ann of Austria:

Thus after so long a sojourn (in heaven),
Fleurs de lis, here is the return
Of your prosperities;
And you are going to be our eyes
Fresh as the eyes of our fathers'
When you fell from the heavens.

.
Our festivities are full of the laurel
Of all sorts of warriors:
But, all flattery aside,
Were they ever embellished
By the miracle that Marie has wrought
For the salvation of the Fleurs de lis? ²²⁶

The Queen Triumphant and The Triumph of Henri IV

The Gallery where the illustrious life of Maria was displayed, was used as a waiting room for those visitors with whom the Queen held

²²⁶ François de Rosset, *Le Romant des chevaliers de la gloire contenant plusieurs hautes et fameuses aventures des princes et de chevaliers qui parurent aux courses faictes à la Place Royale pour la feste des alliances de France et d'Espagne*, Paris, 1612, Chap. 1, pp. 79, 81.

audience; they were mainly men who had official status and dealt with governmental affairs.²²⁷ The first and last painting to be seen by the visitor to the Medici Gallery, would have been *The Queen Triumphant*, (Fig. 48.) hung above the monumental fireplace at the southern end of the room. The Queen took her place before this painting during formal receptions standing right between the first and last pictures in the sequence, under the watchful gaze of her parents.

Thuillier and Foucart view this painting as the key to the meaning of the cycle which they conclude as being the concept of the Queen as a "heroine" a familiar idea from Renaissance poetry, a romantic heroine, a "*Femme Forte* ", who retains her great heart, even in adverse circumstances. For this reason they believe paintings of the events which took place after 1617 were included. Much of the popular literature of the period was based on this theme and was replete with comparisons to ancient heroes.²²⁸

Millen-Wolf believe that Rubens tried to sum up the life of the Queen in one heroic gesture. The image is that of the Queen as Minerva Victrix the specific embodiment of her emblematic tutelary goddess, as the helmet adorned with the sphinx makes clear, and not of Bellona, goddess of war, as has often been suggested. They contend that the placement of Bellona in the cycle would contradict the emphasis on peace in the rest of the gallery and, indeed, in her political life.²²⁹

Marrow writes that the Queen was not interested in heroic imagery for its own sake. She used it to strengthen her own position of authority because she had triumphed over the dangers present in the Medici cycle and could therefore be identified with the good of the state.²³⁰ This is especially significant since this painting had been executed at the time of *The Triumph*

²²⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 25.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 25-30.

²²⁹ Millen-Wolf, p. 224.

²³⁰ Marrow, p. 69.

at Juliers and was originally planned as its pendant. At the time of the commission, Maria had triumphed over Henriette d'Entragues, de Luynes, Condé and even her son Louis, by sheer force of will and courage.

Rubens' composition, *The Queen Triumphant*, could have been influenced by several sources. He was known to have researched the medals, devices and allegorical symbols associated with Maria and Henri in preparation for the cycles. A medal cast for Henri in 1599 with the Greek motto "Wingless Victory" (Fig. 49.) has similar elements and the same composition as the characterisation of "Nobilita" from Cesare Ripa's 1611 edition of *Iconologia*. (Fig. 50.) The "Victory", with wings discarded stands over a trophy. She holds a victory statuette in her right hand, and a palm frond in the left which lays across her shoulder much as the swirl of drapery in the painting of the Queen. The characterization of Queen as "Nobilita" is more closely associated with the description of the painting found in the Beluze memorandum. The use of the sceptre, is an accoutrement of her role as Queen, signifying fame and the Minerva figure she holds appropriately denotes valor.

Minerva is a recurring component of the Queen's imagery during the post regency period when the Medici cycle was commissioned. In her first appearance in the cycle *The Education of the Princess*, Minerva is seen teaching the future queen the art of government to which her life had been predestined. Minerva had been an important figure at the wedding feast in Florence and again at Lyons where Maria was described as the daughter of peace. This was not surprising considering the constant threat of war in Europe and the political unrest that plagued Maria's reign. Minerva also acts as protectress to the Queen and to her Regency. Minerva had many other attributes; she was the daughter of the supreme god, the patroness of domestic

skills and of the arts and she was virginal.²³¹ Maria shared these attributes with Minerva. She too descended from a noble line, she patronised the arts and was also considered chaste because she was a widow and widows were considered as chaste as virgins. Minerva possessed the masculine and feminine traits that encompassed the characteristics of the "hero-heroine" Maria, and Maria possessed the characteristics of Minerva.

In the cycle, Minerva, the goddess of militant wisdom appears as a key figure in her own personage and is also equated directly with Maria. In other instances her relationship with the Queen is tutelary, advisory or protective. According to Millen and Wolf the meaning of Minerva deepens and grows in the course of the cycle and is only fully revealed in the final apotheosis or deification of Maria as *The Queen Triumphant*.²³²

In Cartari's 1614 edition of *Imagini de i dei degli antichi*, with which Rubens would have been well acquainted, Minerva was described as the goddess of prudence and the inventor of all the arts. The theme of Minerva is repeated in the literature of the period and was performed during such court festivals as the *Ballet de Madame, soeur aînée du roi*, of 1615. It concerned the triumph of Minerva, the victory of the Monarchy and a return to the golden age that occurred because of Maria's prudent reign.²³³

It is the opinion of the author that *The Queen Triumphant* portrays Maria as the embodiment of all the characteristics that she wished to project in her cycle. In this painting Maria presides over her gallery and participates by moving forward to greet the viewer. In this composition, and as *The Regent Militant*, *The Coronation*, *The Felicity of The Regency*, she is dressed in the *Fleur de Lys* and her actions represent those of the monarchy.²³⁴ The Beluze Memorandum describes the painting and its meaning :

²³¹ Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology*, New York, 1991, p. 308.

²³² Millen-Wolf, pp. 46-47.

²³³ Rubin, p. 86,87.

²³⁴ See page 73.

The Queen will be painted as a queen triumphant, helmet on her head, the scepter in her hand; beneath her feet, armour, helmets, cuirasses, piles of arms, drums; overhead, two cherubs with butterfly wings, the mark of immortality, holding a laurel wreath over the Queen's head to show that her glory is immortal; and in the sky, two fames holding triumphs publishing her virtues and the good conduct of the government of the state; beneath her feet will be written *HIC EST ILLA*, meaning that here is the greatest queen on earth, the rarest virtue of the world which has never had any like her in all the centuries of posterity.²³⁵

A direct correlation can be drawn between this image of Maria and *The Triumph of Henri IV*. (Fig. 51.) This painting was one of three large canvases that was meant to be hung at the back of the gallery, centred between *The Battle of Ivry* and *The Surrender of Paris*. Evers in 1943, was the first to suggest that this painting was not a representation of the "Triumphant Entry into Paris" as it has been called since 1738, but as a "Triumph as such".²³⁶ Thuillier-Foucart agree with Jost's interpretation of the painting as an elaborate allegorical interpretation as a "symbolic Triumph" giving a prominent place to the "glorification of Henri's virtues as Prince".²³⁷

Held views this painting as the link between the warring side and peaceful side of the gallery but questions Jost's interpretation of it as a "symbolic triumph". Basing his opinion on the depth of Rubens' classical scholarship, he is doubtful that the artist would have disengaged the idea of triumph from that of victory. Noting the similarity of *The Triumph of Cardinal Infante Ferdinand* for the Arch of Ferdinand, which was intended as a sequel to *The Battle of Nordlingen*. and *The Triumph of Henri IV*, he assumes that the painting would have been a sequel to a battle.²³⁸ He further states that Jost is correct in pointing out that Henri had never made a

²³⁵ Jacques Thuillier, La 'Galerie de Médicis' de Rubens et sa Genese: un document inédit. *Revue de l'Art*, IV, 1969, p. 55.

²³⁶ Hans Gerhard Evers, *Rubens und Sein Werk: Neue Forschungen*, Brussels, 1943, p. 309, n. 42.

²³⁷ Thuillier-Foucart, p. 72.

²³⁸ Held, 1980, pp. 128, 129.

triumphant entry into Paris, but as Rubens was perfectly capable of blending the truth with metaphor, and especially since Henri himself had said that Paris was the only city in the realm “worth a mass”, it is possible to assume that it was indeed intended as a triumphal entry into the capital.²³⁹

Rubens’ letter to Pierre Dupuy in October 1630 clearly states that *The Triumph of the King*, , “one of those large and important pieces” was almost completed. However, he makes no specific comment about a triumphal entry into Paris.²⁴⁰ Millen-Wolf write that Rubens was a virtually exemplary Baroque artist and not a painter of history.²⁴¹ The analogy can be drawn that Rubens himself thought of the painting as a symbolic triumphant entry after the many battles Henri fought and won and not after any specific military campaign.

However, the idea of the symbolic entry coincides with the triumphal entry of a Roman Emperor and the French looked back to their Roman past and Trojan heritage with pride. The house of Navarre boasted direct descent from the Gallic Hercules.²⁴² Seward writes that Henri had adopted the homonym of Hercules as a symbol of his imperial power and role as a protector of the faith and a restorer of peace. The use of this image was based upon the idea of Hercules as a just ruler, and his heroic deeds are compared to the imperial acts to safeguard the kingdom.²⁴³ Henri was most often portrayed on coins, impresas and devices as Hercules or the Roman god Mars, when his actions were most like Ceasar. Maria had worded the contract specifically making the association with Henri and his Roman past stipulating that Rubens was to represent Henri with: “the triumphs of the said victories in the fashion of the triumphs of the Romans.”

²³⁹ Held, 1980, pp. 128, 129.

²⁴⁰ Thuillier-Foucart p. 130.

²⁴¹ Millen-Wolf, p. 5.

²⁴² Millen-Wolf, p. 27.

²⁴³ Seward, pp. 103, 104.

According to Vivanti the Triumphal Arch is a unifying structure used by Rubens to represent triumph over adversity and to link Maria with the heroic tradition of Henri in the cycles. The image and meaning of the arch is associated with Henri because of the classical references to Ceasar, the Roman god Mars, the Gallic Hercules and his Trojan past and is clearly evident in the painting *The Triumph of Henri IV*. A series of Triumphal Arches were constructed in Avignon in celebration of the royal marriage specifically for Maria and Henri to pass under on her arrival in France. (Fig. 52.)

Unfortunately Henri was detained at war with Savoy and she made a triumphal entry with her entourage rather than her husband.²⁴⁴ During their marriage Maria accompanied Henri on many of the "Joyous Entries" into the cities of France. The decorations designed for these events were politically important because they were highly visible and delivered messages that supported the authority of the monarchy.²⁴⁵ Thuillier-Foucart related the publications that illustrated these spectacles to the "truthful" narrative in the gallery.²⁴⁶ To celebrate the coronation Henri ordered the construction of a series of Triumphal arches along the route the Queen was to travel on the "Joyous Entry" into Paris. The King was assassinated while verifying that the preparations were on schedule and the event never took place.²⁴⁷

The Triumphal arch occurs in paintings that illustrate decisive moments in the lives of the King and Queen. Rubens' paintings *The Marriage by Proxy* and *The Consignment of the Regency* takes place under a double archway and in *The Death of Henry IV* and *The Proclamation of the Regency* he places Maria beside a Triumphal Arch. The sketch for *The Queen Triumphant* presents Maria framed by a stone archway. (Fig. 53.) In the final

²⁴⁴ Corrado Vivanti, "Henry IV, The Gallic Hercules," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 30, 1967, p. 186.

²⁴⁵ Marrow, p. 14.

²⁴⁶ Thuillier-Foucart, pp. 33, 34, 62 n. 98.

²⁴⁷ Vivanti, p. 176.

painting the bodies of the two cherubs form a symbolic arch. This structural formation is found throughout the galleries. Indeed, the idea of "Triumph" permeates the cycles, defining the lives of Henri and Maria, who overcome much adversity to finally arrive at an exalted state. More importantly for Maria, the image of the triumphant Queen reinforces the idea of the equality of the sovereigns.



Fig. 15. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Expulsion From Paris*, Sketch, oil on panel, 62.3 x 48.9 cm., Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 16. Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany*.
oil on canvas, 2.47 x 1.16 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 17. Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Johanna of Austria, Grand Duchess of Tuscany*. oil on canvas, 2.47 x 1.16 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 18. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of Maria de' Medici*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.

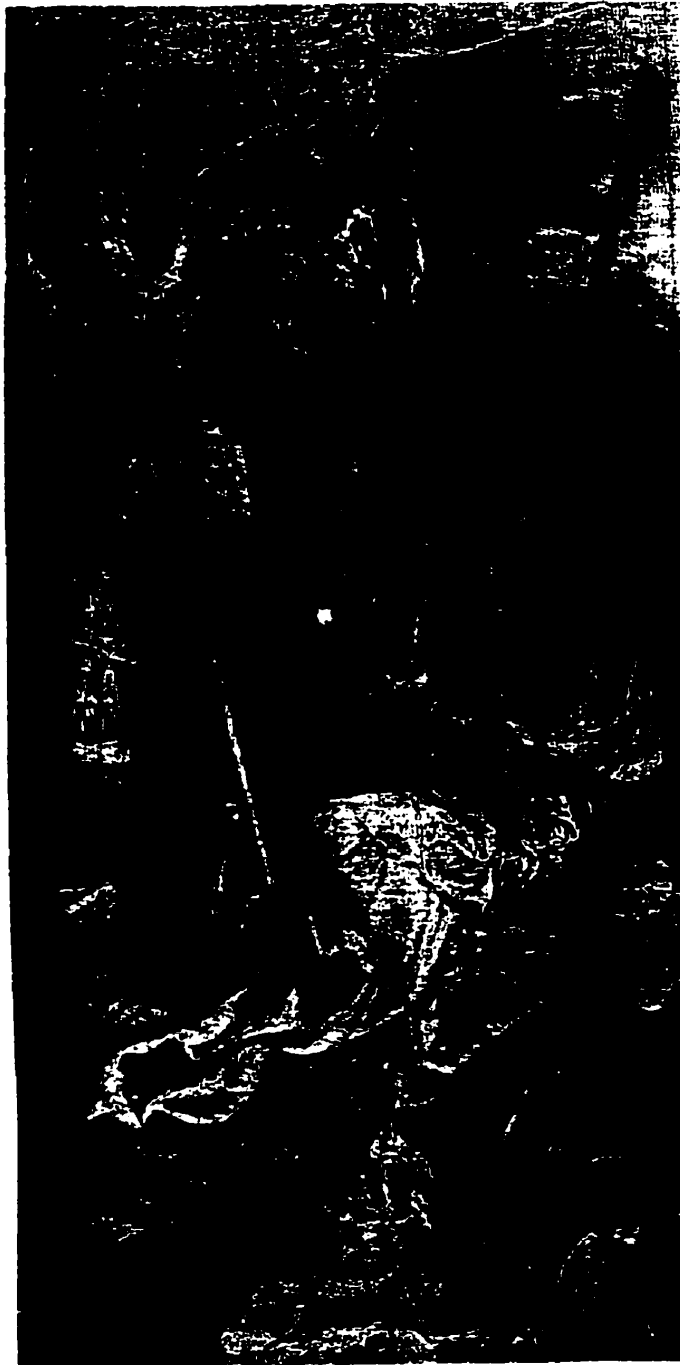


Fig. 19. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of Henri IV*, oil on panel, Wallace Collection, London.



Fig. 20. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Birth of the Dauphin at Fontainebleau*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 21. Cesare Ripa, *Monarchy*, *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611.



Fig. 22. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of the Princess*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 23. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Felicity of the Regency*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.

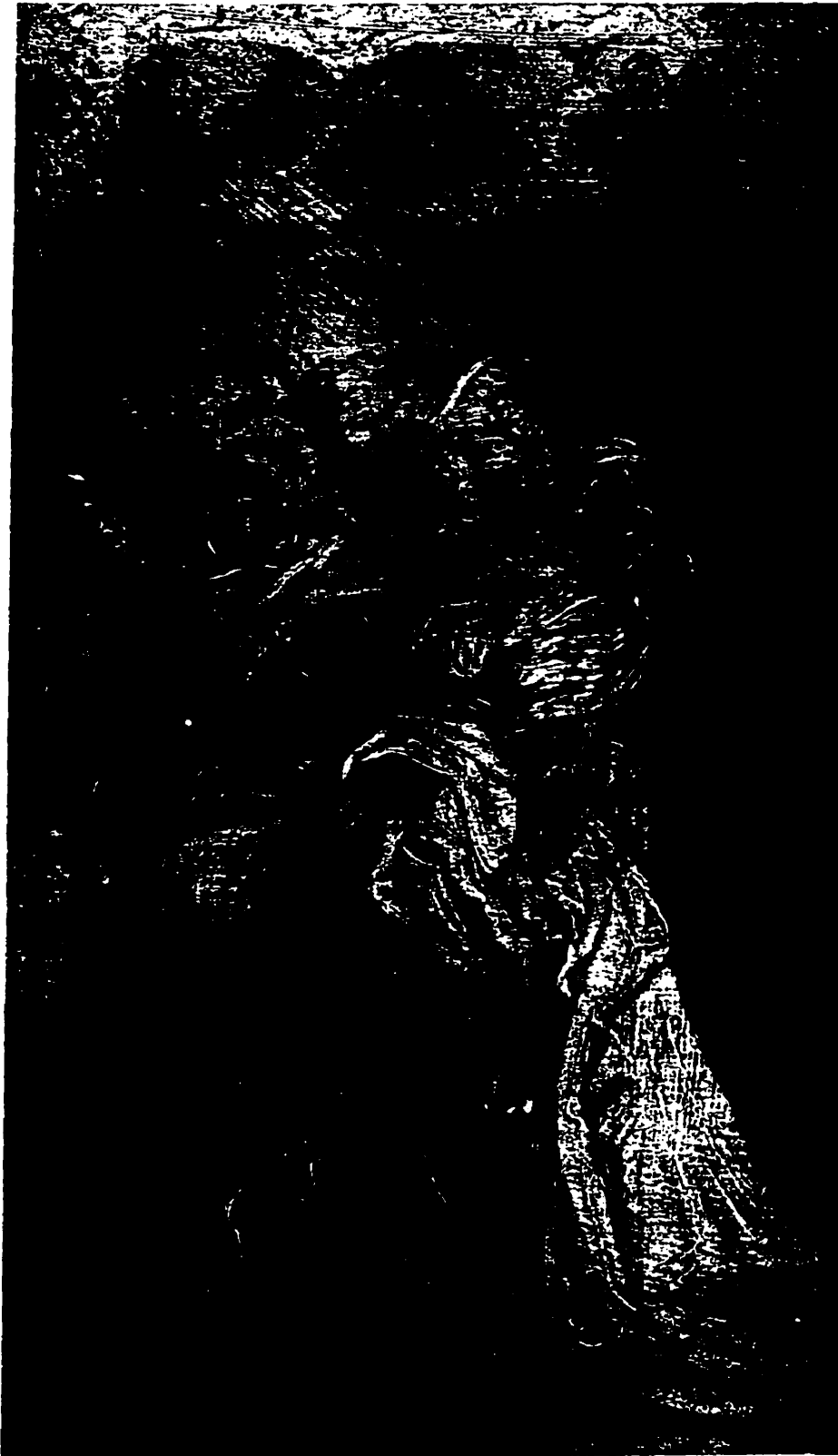


Fig. 24. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici*, 1628, sketch, oil on panel, Wallace Collection, London.



Fig. 25. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of Her Portrait to Henry IV.* oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 26. Anonymous, *Mirror of the Prince*, Title page for P. Belluga's *Speculum Principum*, engraving, 1655, Harvard Law School Library, Cambridge.



Fig. 27. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Wedding by Proxy*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 28. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Disembarkation at Marseilles*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 29. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marriage Consummated in Lyons*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris. .



Fig. 30. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Exchange of the Princesses at the Spanish Border*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 31. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Council of the Gods*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.02 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 32. Francesco Bianchi, *Marriage of Caterina de Medici and Henri II*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife.

Fig. 33. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Marriage of Joanna of Austria and Francesco de Medici*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife.

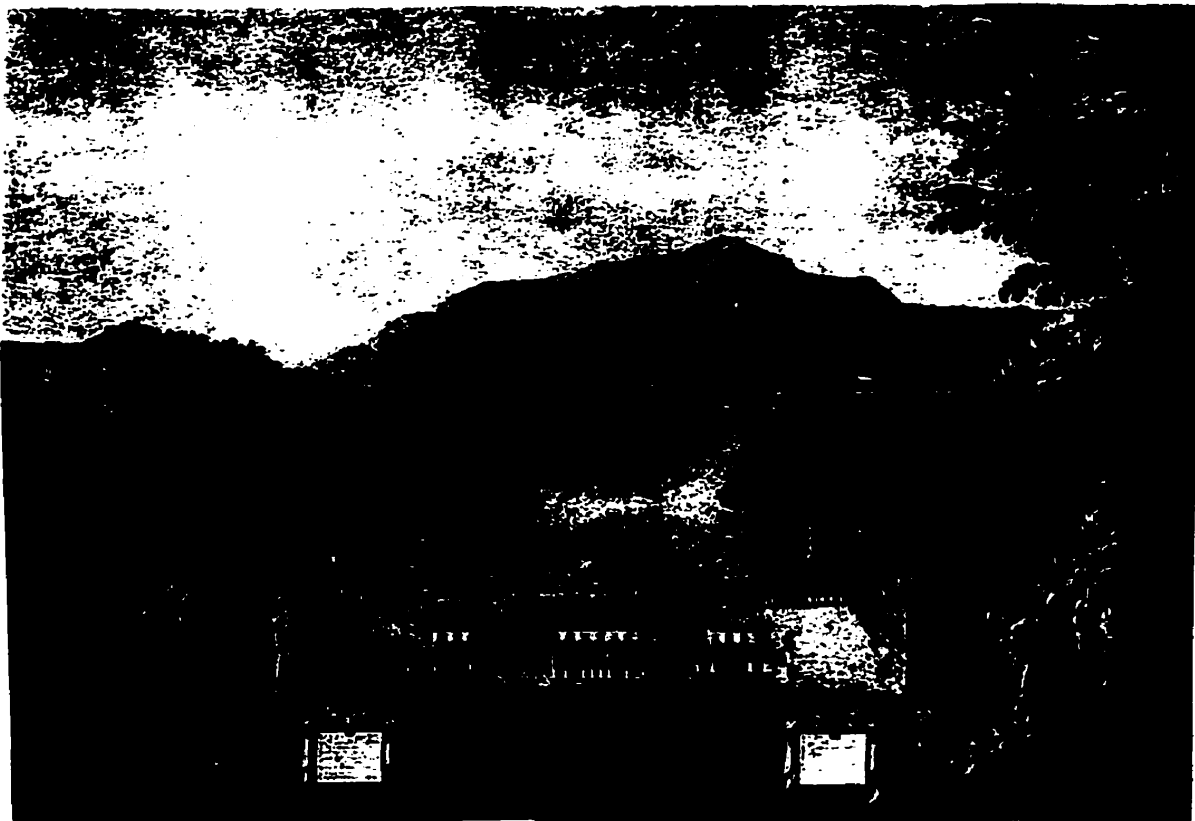


Fig. 34. Jacopo da Empoli, *Proxy Marriage of Maria de Medici* , 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife.

Fig. 35. Valerio Marucelli, *Exchange of the French and Spanish Princesses, (Marriage of Louis XIII)* , 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife.

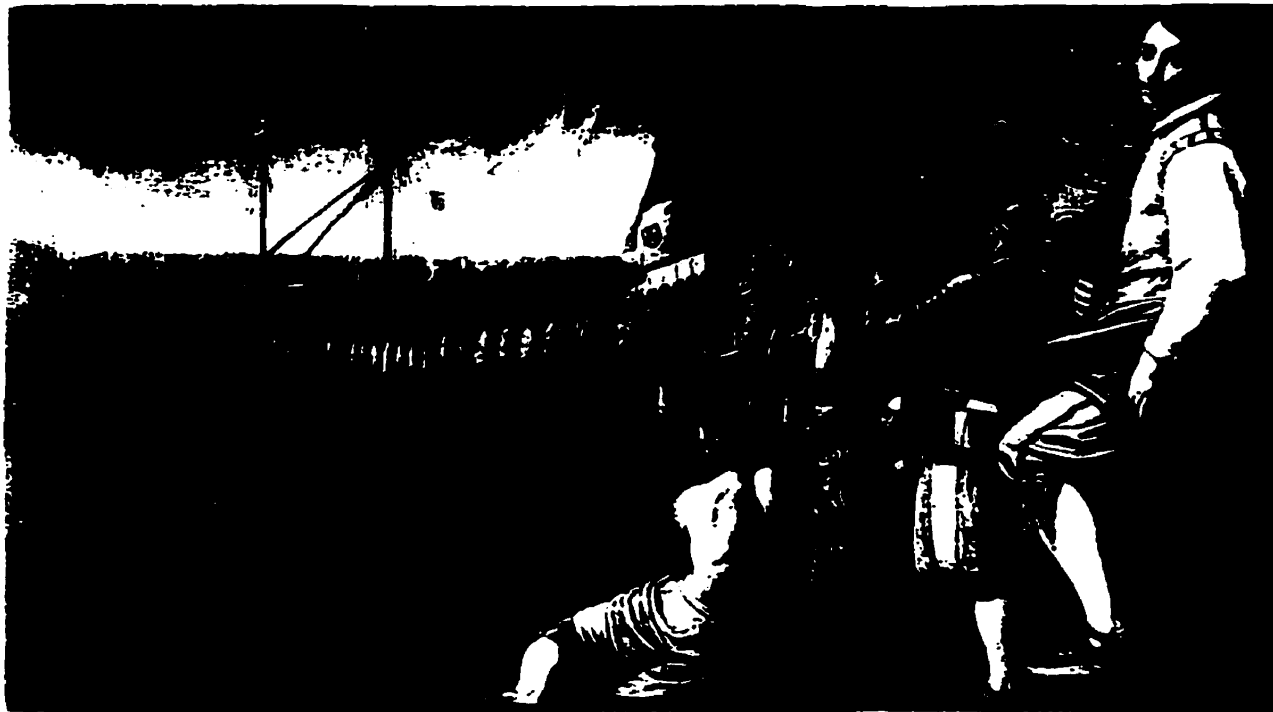


Fig. 36. Domenico Passignano, *Embarkation of Maria de Medici at Livorno*, 1624-27, Collection of the Earl of Elgin, Broomhall, Fife.



Fig. 37. *Maria de Medici and her Children*, from J. P. de la Serre, 1632.



Fig. 38. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Reconciliation of Henri III and Henri de Navarre*, 1628, oil on panel, Rochester Memorial Art Gallery.



Fig. 39. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consignment of the Regency*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 40. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.27 m., Louvre, Paris.

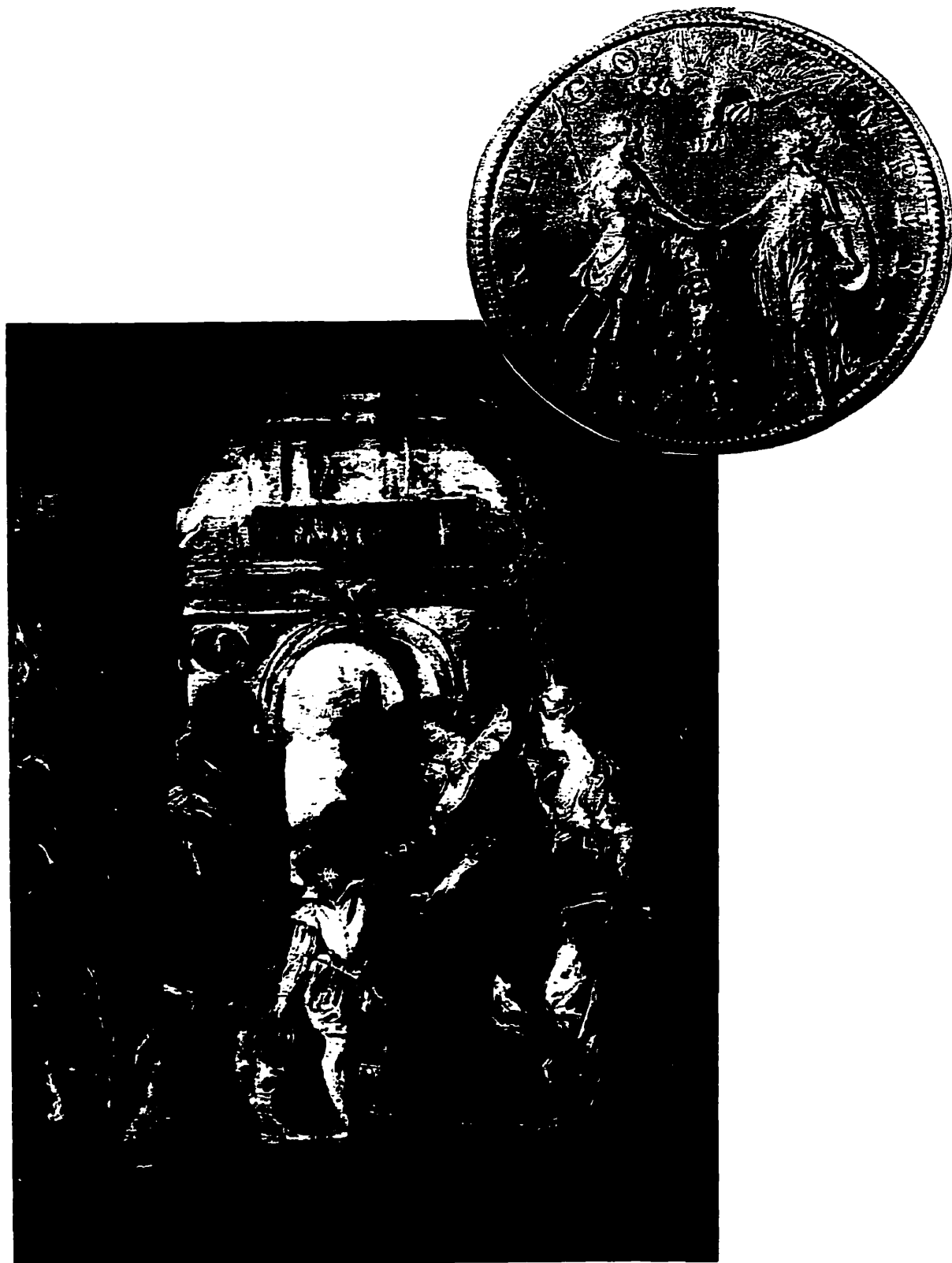


Fig. 41. Propagio Imperi, Emblem of Henri IV and Maria de Medici, 1604, Trésor de numismatique.

Fig. 42. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consignment of the Regency*, 1622, sketch, oil on panel, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 43. Peter Paul Rubens, *Louis XIII Becomes of Age*. oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 44. Peter Paul Rubens,, oil on panel, *The Coronation of Henri IV*, present location unknown.



Fig. 45. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Coronation in St. Denis*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 7.27 m., Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 46. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Regent Militant: The Victory at Julich.*, oil on canvas, 3.94 x 2.95 m., Louvre, Paris.

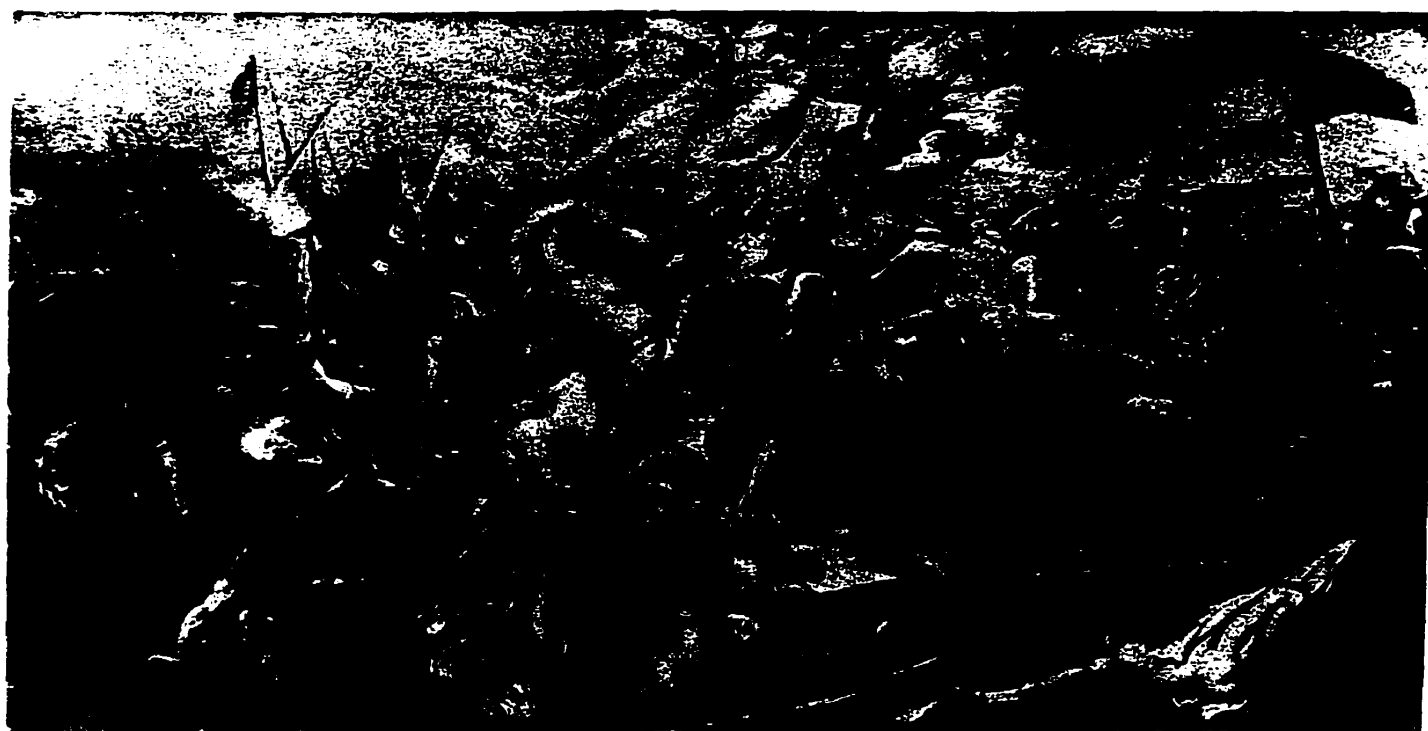


Fig. 47. Peter Paul Rubens, *Battle of Ivry*, 1630, Uffizi, Florence.



Fig. 48. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant*. oil on canvas, 2.76 X 1.49 m., Louvre, Paris.



N O B I L I T A'.



Fig. 49. Wingless Victory, emblem of Henry IV, 1599 from De Bie.
 Fig. 50. Cesare Ripa, *Nobilita*, *Iconologia*, Padua 1611.



Fig. 51. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Triumph of Henry IV*, 1630, oil on canvas, Uffizi, Florence.

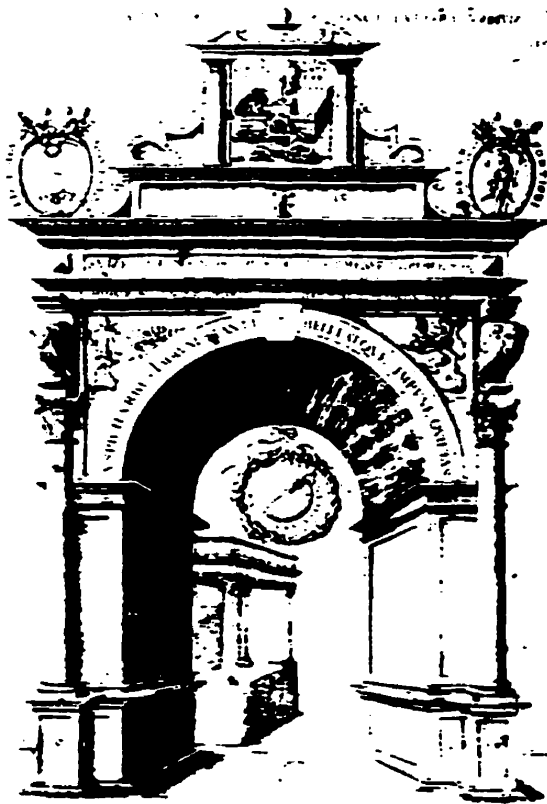


Fig. 52. André Valladier, *Triumphal Arch for Maria de Medici, Labyrinthe royal de l'Hercule Gaulois Triomphant*.

Fig. 53. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Queen Triumphant*., sketch, oil on panel, Stiftung, Kunsthof, Worms.

Conclusion

The motivation for Maria's commission for the two identical galleries of Maria's new home in the Palais du Luxembourg from Rubens in 1622 is still open to debate. This thesis supports the idea that the meaning of the Maria de Medici cycle cannot be disassociated from that of the Henri IV cycle. This paper proposes that Maria consciously made an effort to present an image of herself as an equal to her husband in her ability to rule the French nation. She accomplished this by relating the images in the two identical galleries to reinforce the idea that she was as capable to rule as her late husband Henri IV and by illustrating specific common themes that were addressed in both cycles that reinforced this notion. Although the Henri IV cycle was never completed, the paintings and sketches that exist clearly support the idea that the Queen and the King were destined, because of their exceptional qualifications to become the rulers of France. The events of their lives prepared them to meet the difficult challenges as heads of state.

At the time of the commission Maria was just a Dowager Queen with a limited say in the council. The images painted by Rubens were meant to present an image of a strong Queen who, like previous French heroines, was able to overcome obstacles in order to safeguard the nation. Even in her limited capacity and precarious political position it was her intention to give the impression that she was capable of acting as the monarch should Louis' fragile state of health and immaturity prevent him from performing his duties as King.

The focus of the images of the Queen's gallery illustrated Maria's success at overcoming and resolving issues that were directly related to situations that arose from the reign of her husband that jeopardised the legality of her marriage and of the heir to the throne. Because of his growing

confidence in her abilities Henri requested Maria's presence at the Royal Council in order for her to become familiar with the workings of the government. Ultimately she became the only person Henri could entrust with the preservation of the monarchy for her son and the Bourbon line and he designated Maria his successor knowing that only she was capable of completing his mandate. This was an important concept for the Queen to convey through the paintings. Rubens illustrated the King's choice of Maria as Queen and Regent in *The Consignment of the Regency*, *The Coronation* and *The Death of Henri IV and the Proclamation of the Regency* to reinforce this concept.

All important issues in the cycles stem from the pivotal ceremony of marriage. The position and composition of the final painting of the Henri IV cycle *The Marriage of Henri IV and Maria de Medici* physically links the two galleries. The holy sacrament of marriage through which the legal issue is produced preserving the monarchy and the Bourbon line links the cycles thematically drawing attention to the fact that Maria is central to the success of the monarchy. The fact that Maria was capable of producing more children allowed her to arrange political alliances through marriage which preserved the peace in France and Europe thus forestalling the Thirty Years war.

The commission for the Medici cycle was unusual because the artist was requested to paint the events in the life of a Queen who was still alive and aspiring to power. Rubens' use of the ancient literary panegyric was successful in associating Maria and Henri with the classical ideals of good government, statecraft and kingship that reinforced the ideas that Maria wished to portray regarding her own accomplishments. The Queen was politically astute and was conscious of the effect that the paintings would have on those who would have access to the galleries. The organisation of the panegyric succeeded in accomplishing Maria's objective of depicting

herself as an exceptional individual, uniquely qualified for her role as ruler of France by outlining the events of her life that prepared her to meet the challenges in her role as head of state proffering proof that she was worthy of the designation as a heroine Queen.

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