Performance in French Court Festivals under François Ier

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The term Court Festival embraces a wide range of entertainments, from public events such as royal entries, marriages, baptisms, funerals or tournaments, to more exclusive ones put on at banquets or other court ceremonies. Some were seasonal, associated with the liturgical calendar such as Epiphany or Carnival. Some stemmed from the initiative of the court itself, others were staged by the locality being visited and stamped with municipal tradition. Although essentially ephemeral, they were increasingly recorded in manuscript accounts, in published albums and in reports of memorialists and ambassadors, besides in the archives of the municipality or of the crown. Across the sixteenth century, these entertainments, whilst preserving elements of tradition, also became more elaborate and innovative, as courts and cities grasped the publicity and propaganda potential of spectacle. While there has been extensive research on the festivals of the later Valois (see Knecht 2004: 19-32) insufficient attention has been paid to those of the long reign of François Ier (1515-1547), apart from a study of the early years by Anne-Marie Lecoq (1987), and recent exhibitions in the Louvre. This is an important transitional period, when Italian influence increased on court etiquette, blending with chivalric tradition, and leading to the elaborate festivals of the king's son Henri II, whose entries to Lyon, Paris and Rouen of 1548-1550 were to set new standards in interdisciplinarity. This article seeks to bring out the theatrical elements of festival under François Ier, excluding tournaments or royal entries, on which more research has been done, and which would require a separate study (see Guénée - Lehoux 1968; Chartrou 1928). These more private events reveal a wide and evolving range of entertainments staged for diplomatic occasions, for marriages and baptisms, and of course for seasons like Epiphany or Carnival.

One of the favourite pastimes of the Valois court was hunting (Bourciez 1886: 25-36), which was to figure in festival under Henri II in mythological guise with pastoral idylls involving Diana the huntress. But François Ier had wanted at the very outset of his reign to offer to his court the authentic spectacle of a hunter overcoming a wild beast, in which he rather than an actor was to be the protagonist. The court was celebrating the marriage of Antoine II, duke of Lorraine, and Renée de Bourbon at Amboise, where the king had set up an arena in which he intended to fight a young boar. Dissuaded from risking his life, he nonetheless wanted, as a diversion for the ladies, to let the beast loose in the courtyard from where, on 26 June 1515, it escaped into the château, terrifying the courtiers, until the king confronted and dispatched it single-handed with his sword (*Combat de François Ier* 1841: 281-85; Lecoq 1987: 207-10).

Following his victorious return from Marignan, François made a tour of his kingdom, including Normandy in the autumn of 1517, when his sister Marguerite, as duchess of Alençon, invited the court to her town of Argentan. Three diplomats record the entertainments she devised for the start of the three-week stay[1], the centrepiece of which was a programme starting with the king himself playing a rôle fighting four errant knights, and a scenario involving 12 paladins and 12 damsels dressed in Italian, German and Spanish fashion. Marguerite and Philiberte, duchess of Nemours, took part in

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the performance by summoning help for two women imprisoned in the castle: the king on his way to rescue them to the sound of trumpets met a hermit who begged him to free the country from a ravaging lion, giving him a magic wand, with which François neutralised the beast by touching it three times. The lion opened up to reveal a blue interior, symbolising love, and a large *fleur-de-lys*. After a grand battle the following day, a banquet was held at which Montmorency presented the monarch with a golden heart, which he opened to reveal a figure of Cupid standing on a globe, fully armed on one side and ragged and pale on the other. The ladies present puzzled over it, "inanze al quale andavano molte dame che facevano diversi gesti a quel Cupidine, chi gioiosa e chi colma di dolore" ("before which there went many ladies making various gestures to that Cupid, some joyful some overcome with sadness") (Turrione 1517: busta 634): the ambassador left it to his master to guess the meaning, but we can imagine it might involve the two-fold nature of love, conquest and suffering. The reports make it clear that all this was only the beginning of the various planned diversions: "e cusì finche sua M[aes]tà sta qua glie sarà ogni giorno representate cose nove" ("and so, as long as His Majesty is here something new will be performed for him every day"), adding that "tutte sono inventione dela s[igno]ra Duchessa" ("everything has been invented by the Duchess"), Marguerite herself (Ariosto 1517: Modena, busta 5 and Mantua, busta 634).

In the following spring two happy events were celebrated in grand style in Amboise: the baptism of the dauphin François and the marriage in May 1518 of Lorenzo II de' Medici to Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, the future parents of Catherine de' Medici. The Ferrarese ambassador reported that the master of the royal chapel, Jean Mouton, together with a singer called Comone, were composing new music, "cosa nova", to be performed for the baptism (Sacrati 1518: busta 6). Inescapable military elements of court festival were jousting and sword-fighting, which remained current in France right up to the fatal accident of 1559, but of interest here are the ways in which imaginative variations could be introduced. This long festival in Amboise included a *pas d'armes* involving a two-day siege and storming of a fort made of wood and canvas, described in detail in a long dispatch of Stazio Gadio to the duke of Mantua (1518: busta 634; see Sanuto 1518: cols 412-14). The theatrical dimension on the first day lies not only in the military architecture but in the challenges issued, the speeches, the mock hanging and throwing out of corpses of straw men, the king urging his knights to seek vengeance, and the artillery breaking down the defences. The siege resumed the following day, with the king changing sides and successfully defending the fort: "Et con honore d'il invictissimo et virtuoso Re sono finite li simulacra bellici" ("and thus the mock battles are over, to the glory of the virtuous invincible king") (Gadio 1518, busta 634; see also Solmi 1914: 407). As a theatre for the celebrations, the king's Italian counsellor, Galeazzo Visconti, who had moved to France with his family (Bamforth - Dupèbe 1994: 277-82), had introduced an Italian innovation: the creation of a banqueting hall constructed by Domenico da Cortona, over which blue material had been suspended from ships' masts to keep out the weather, painted and studded with fleurs de lys and hung with tapestries (Sanuto 1518: col. 405). The baptism was celebrated in this arena after dark, "et neantmoins que ledit baptesme fust de nuyt, il y faisoit aussi cler que de jour pour le grant nombre de luminaires qui s'i trouva" ("and though the baptism took place by night, the large number of candelabras made it as bright as day") (*Le baptesme* 1518: fol. 1r); and following the banquet there was dancing "in maschera cum habiti longhi sin in terra et di diverse sorte" ("in masks and a variety of full-length costumes"), the Ferrarese ambassador specifying that the dancing was "allo modo d'Italia" ("in the Italian style") (Sacrati 1518: busta 6). This dancing style had been seen the previous January, when Visconti had been asked to put on a banquet and ball in Amboise under a similar blue awning held up by three tall masts and brightly illuminated, under which the king, dressed in German style, danced with the court ladies dressed in Italian, German or Spanish style, followed by a masquerade (Solmi 1914: 407).

One critic was convinced that Leonardo da Vinci had had a hand in these celebrations in May, but there is insufficient supporting evidence (Solmi 1914: 407). There is greater likelihood, however, of a role for Leonardo later that summer when, on 18-19 June, he received the court at the Clos de Lucé, the château François had assigned to him. A letter of Galeazzo Visconti, dated 19 June 1518 (Sanuto, col. 510; see also Solmi 1914: 409-10),

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the organiser of the Amboise festival and future impresario at the Bastille, described the event, which recreated some elements of Leonardo's *Festa del Paradiso*, put on in the Castello Sforzesco on 13 January 1490. As in Milan, blue material had been stretched over the courtyard of the château, and had been studded with golden stars, with the planets and with the 12 zodiacal signs and ivy festoons hanging down. By the light of 400 candelabra, "illuminati talemente che pareva fusse caziata la note" ("so brightly lit that the night seemed to have been driven away"), the king and courtiers feasted and danced the night away, with the ladies dressed in Spanish, German and Lombard style.

Important work has been done on the reception on 22 December 1518 of the English ambassadors in the Bastille to ratify the Treaty of London and to celebrate the betrothal of Mary Tudor and the dauphin (Lecoq, "Une Fête", 1987: 149-68; Bamforth - Dupèbe 1994: 256-315). Sufficient to note here that, following days of jousting in the rue St Antoine, Visconti had again been commissioned to construct a banqueting hall in the courtyard, covered in blue material as before, studded with stars and planets, the walls hung with tapestries and lit by 500 torches and 30 candelabras reflected in mirrors. Following the banquet there were Italianate musical interludes including pavanes, and displays by masked dancers in long robes, the women performing in Milanese costumes designed by Visconti's daughters, and joined by the leading nobility in masks, including the king himself in an outfit decorated with clocks and compasses. The concluding pavane involved 50 skilled masked dancers, who invited ladies from the court to join in, with forty or fifty couples taking part and the king himself having a prominent role. The reactions of observers are unanimous in their praise of the success and novelty of the evening with its Italian masquerade.

The Carnival celebrations of 1520 had a quite different character, and a change of impresario. Louise de Savoie was keen to welcome back her son to his birthplace, Cognac, where she had extensively rebuilt and extended the château. On Carnival Sunday, she chose to stage a triumphal Carnival procession through the hunting grounds in honour of Queen Claude, whose litter was drawn past a series of mythological tableaux, starting with Mercury who acted as her guide along the route, each scene ending in a military skirmish led by prominent French captains. After tableaux involving Diana and then Apollo, she was treated to the forge of Vulcan (cue for artillery and fireworks), then greeted by the trio of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars, accompanied by bands of warriors, one led by François I^{er} in person, who engaged in fierce combat. Arriving at the river Charente, she was met by boats full of singers and musicians, two boats in the form of Dolphins, two of Sirens and two of Swans, where they were rejoined by the earlier gods, who engaged in renewed skirmishing, before the queen, queen-mother and ladies were able to embark on a Venetian *bucintoro*, with all the various planets, sailing off to the sound of music and singing towards the château, where they arrived, despite an ambush by the gods of the underworld. A banquet followed with the guests all elegantly dressed in Italian fashion, who then donned masks and danced into the night (Cooper 2017: 336-50). The subsequent festivities in 1520 of the Field of the Cloth of Gold are well known, and need no rehearsal here, other than to note aspects which perpetuate recent French festivals: the construction of a vast banqueting hall, held up by a central mast and draped in blue with stars and planets; also of a pavilion 120-feet high, covered in cloth of gold, held up by two more masts; the importance of jousting, fireworks and artillery; the banquets, music, masques and balls (Russell 1969; Massie 2013: 55-79).

Twenty years later, the Italian influence on court festival had greatly increased, in part as a consequence of the arrival in France in May 1540 of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este to take possession of his new archdiocese of Lyon (Pacifi 1920: 62-65). Lyon was the most Italianate city in France, a fact reflected in its festivals, such as those put on for Carnival by Cardinal Niccolò Gaddi in 1541 and 1542. On *lunedì grasso* 1541, the Florentine community staged a performance of an Italian comedy in Gaddi's abbey of Ainay:

> Les Florentins jouarent une commedie au Refectoire du Couvent d'Esnay et firent un festin aux sieurs et dames de la Ville au souper et après soupper à heure de dix heures commençarent et finirent à une heure apprès minuict laquelle chose fust honnorable et bien ordonnée avec bons joueurs et bonne matière. Et y estoit en personne M le Cardinal Gady florentin et abbé pour lors dudict couvent ensemble la plus grand par des seigneurs et dames de la Ville (Guéraud, Ed. Tricou 1929: 33).

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> [The Florentines performed a comedy in the Refectory of the Convent at Ainay, and put on a banquet at suppertime for the lords and ladies of the town, beginning after supper at 10pm and finishing at 1am, and it was worthily staged and organised with good actors and parts. It was attended in person by the Florentine Cardinal Gaddi, abbot of the Convent at that time together with most of the lords and ladies of the town].

Though it is not known which comedy, the reference to "bons joueurs" suggests the actors were Italian. For the Carnival of 1542, the venue was changed to the archbishop's palace (which was to be used again for the 1548 entry of Henri II), and another comedy performed in six parts[2]:

> Les Florentins jouarent une comedie en langue tosquane dedans le cloystre de St Jehan à la grand sale où ils font la cour, laquelle salle estoit accoustrée tant magnifiquement et excellement qu'il estoit possible du plus, tant en paintures, tapisserie, antiques médailles, que flambeaux, le tout par l'ordonnance de Me Benedict Florentin (*ibidem*: 34)[3].

> [The Florentines performed a comedty in Italian in the cloister of St Jean, in the great chamber where the court meets, which had been decorated with such spendlur and magnificence as could not be bettered, whether with paintings, tapestries, ancient coins and torches, all to the design of the Master Benedict the Florentine].

This time the creators are known: the designer being the Florentine artist Benedetto Del Bene, who had worked with Maurice Scève on Ippolito's entry to Lyon in 1540; and the playwright the Florentine exile, Palla di Lorenzo Strozzi, representative of the Strozzi family in Lyon. A letter from one of his relatives in Lyon, Simone di Ruberto Strozzi, gives news of the preparations:

> Qui ci aspexiamo al carnovale, et si apresta una bella commedia composta per il nostro M. Palla, et per chi l'a vista è tenuta molto bella, et il parato serà bellissimo[4].

> [We are awaiting Carnival here, for which a fine comedy is being prepared written by our own Maestro Palla, and those who have seen it consider it very fine, and the staging will be very beautiful].

The fact that this new Italian comedy was performed in Ippolito's palace to the design of an Italian artist illustrates the growing italianisation of festival in France, which was to gather pace in the 1540s with more elaborate Carnival celebrations and after-dinner masquerades.

A foretaste had been given at Epiphany in 1537 for the wedding of the king's daughter Madeleine to James V of Scotland, where a week of celebration had included "giostre, feste e maschere" (Feruffino 1537: busta 13; see Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 14). At the wedding in the Louvre on 10 January 1539 of François Ier de Clèves, duke of Nevers, and Marguerite de Bourbon-Vendôme, a masked ball was put on at which the king appeared dressed as Mars, while his sons, the king of Navarre, the constable and cardinal of Lorraine figured as satyrs (Bendido 1539: busta 638; Chatenet 2002: 130; *ibidem* 2007: 225). A striking contrast was provided between new masques like this and the court's attendance for Pentecost in Paris, also in 1539, at a passion play – Arnoul Gréban's extensive *Mistere de la Passion.* The king and his children, together with the whole court, attended the first part of the cycle[5], performed by the Confrérie de la Passion at their theatre in the Hôtel de Flandre, which had been specially decorated and hung with tapestries to receive the large royal contingent, even impressing the Ferrarese ambassador (Sacrati 1539: busta 15)[6]. This was one of the last public performances of mystery plays in Paris before their final banning in 1548. The king and court ladies also attended a performance by the Basoche in June 1540, which they reportedly enjoyed "per essergli molte buffonarie, e papa, cardinali, re, imperatori, dame e cacciatori" ("because there was so much clowning, with pope and cardinals and kings, emperors, ladies and hunters") (Sacrati 1541: busta 16)[7]: the content suggests a farce or *sotie* by Gringore or Jean d'Abondance.

The evolution of court entertainment continued at Carnival in 1541. The Ferrarese envoy, Carlo Sacrati, described the masquerade in Fontainebleau (1541: busta 16)[8], at which the dauphin appeared as Diana (in honour of his mistress), followed by four young men as Nymphs with hunting dogs; the duke of Orleans was in a group disguised as gypsies, three of them female whose headdress sprayed perfumed water; Ippolito d'Este and Henri de Navarre were arrayed in cloth of gold and silver with vases on their heads sprouting palm fronds and heartshaped mirrors on their chests; the king and his fellow-masker the cardinal de Lorraine (see Chatenet 2001: 21-31) were dressed as trunks of trees wreathed in ivy, probably designed by Primaticcio (Cordellier 2004: 121). A month later in Blois, the entertainment involved the maskers dressing in "turbanti alla turchesca", but the

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ambassador had no idea why they suddenly put on this Turkish masquerade (Sacrati 1541: busta 16; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 60).

A climax to the summer of 1541 was offered by the marriage of the duke of Clèves to the very young (and extremely reluctant) daughter of Henri and Marguerite de Navarre, Jeanne d'Albret[9]. The court was at Châtellerault, where a grand pavilion had been built in the château courtyard covered by the usual blue material, held up by a mast sixty feet high, with galleries all around for spectators and a stage for the musicians who played throughout, the whole brightly illuminated by chandeliers. Following the betrothal ceremony on 13 June, the court danced till late, and in the morning the nuptial mass and lunch served as prelude to balls and dinner, before a bizarre series of *mommeries* described in the *Cronique du Roy François*, each entry terminating with dancing which went on till midnight (Chatenet 2007: 224). The first group of four actors were dressed as street vendors carrying a basket and a night-lantern, crying out their wares, "obblis, obblis", a sort of wafer called *oublies*, which they then threw to the assembly (Da Thiene 1541: busta 16)[10]. The second group of mummers was dressed in black and white stripes and carried glass clocks on their heads with feathers and wings on their feet. The third group was dressed as rabbis in blue and violet silk, each one wearing a gold horned mitre and carrying sickles. The fourth group in silk with long gold fringes carried spear and shield wearing German-style headgear. The fifth company was disguised as ostriches with feathered wings and tail, each one holding a horseshoe in its beak, as seen in heraldry. The sixth group appeared as Franciscan friars, the seventh as Roman nobles in short tunics wearing swords, the eighth in long robes and tall hats with great tufts hanging before and behind, and the ninth and last dressed as Turks. The Mantuan ambassador gave complementary details, which make clear that prominent courtiers were participating in the *mommeries*, not just actors and dancers. Thus the dauphin and five companions, including the bridegroom Clèves, were dressed

> come se depinge il tempo, ma de una bellissima maniera, con le barbe et capilli fatte di piume de struscio, bianche, et altre conciature, molto belle, essa fu estimata la più bella (Gambara 1541: busta 639).
>
> [to look like Time, but in a very fine way, with beards and hair made of white ostrich feathers and other very attractive disguises, and this was judged the best company].

They must have been in the second group. The duke of Orleans, with his five companions, "era vestito da proffeti molto bene" ("were very well dressed up as prophets"), perhaps in the group of rabbis; then "altri dui da struccio assai bene alla similitudine di tal bestia" ("two others well disguised to look like ostriches"), clearly in group five. Other courtiers took part in the first group of street vendors calling out "obbli, obbli". The envoy also confirmed that two were dressed as Franciscan friars, "d'il che la regina di Navarra era in molta colera per esser Sua Maestà protectrice di quella religione" ("which made the Queen of Navarre very angry, since Her Majesty is protectress of that order"). According to Gambara, the king and his fellow masker, Jean de Lorraine, completed the masquerade dressed in gold and each holding shield and thunderbolt, costumes which not all those present could interpret (1541: busta 639)[11], but the Ferrarese envoy does not associate this costume with the pair, writing that they entered just afterwards (Da Thiene 1541: busta 17)[12]. The celebrations continued over the following days with jousts and mock battles in a plot modelled on "Tirante il Biancho, et altri cavalieri della tavola rittonda" ("Tirant lo Blanch, and other knights of the Round Table"), with a major role for the dauphin, "imittando Amadis de Gaula" ("imitating Amadis de Gaule") (Gambara 1541: busta 639), not forgetting a part for two hermits:

> l'ung vestu d'une grand robbe de velours tanné, lequel portoit une longue barbe blanche, et l'autre estoit vestu de gris qui estoit à l'entrée dudict hermitaige et tenoit ung asne sur lequel estoit ung singe qui faisoit bonne mine (*Cronique*: 380).
>
> [one of them dressed in a great robe of brown velvet sporting a long white beard, and the other in grey, standing at the entrance to the hermitage holding a donkey on which sat the striking sight of a monkey]

The court was back in Paris to celebrate the Carnival of 1542, in combination with the marriage of Claude de Clermont, baron de Dampierre, and Jeanne de Vivonne, for which there are two ambassadors' reports. The Mantuan envoy Gambara noted that though the young

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courtiers had been able to indulge their love of chivalric sports, the king was frustrated to have so little time left before Lent for the costumes to be finished for the planned series of masquerades; this had not, however, prevented him from going around Paris with the cardinal, "con la cappa et una maschera al volto con la guarda dinanti" ("masked, wearing his cape and preceded by his guard") (1542: busta 639). On the Saturday evening, there were so many entries of maskers that Gambara lost track: "se videro di molte belle, et riccamente vestite mascarate di tante, et si confuse sorte, ch'io non le saprei dire distintamente" ("there were many striking and richly dressed masquerades of so many and varied types that I couldn't distinguish them"). His colleague from Ferrara had clearer notes: first came the dauphin and companions dressed as Hymen in costumes designed by Primaticcio, carrying wedding torches and draped in white veils representing the virginal hymen (Da Thiene 1542: busta 17)[13], and accompanying the goddess Nature with Cupid holding two nuptial crowns. His brother Orleans and friends were arrayed as the Five Ages of the World, ranging from gold on their heads to lead at their feet and with wings to represent transience (Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 70; Croizat-Glazer 2013: 1212). Another group followed dressed as Patience, before others, which Da Thiene found not worth describing, but which Gambara noted as wearing windmills on their heads, or dressed as dolphins, chickens, or seahorses, followed by others representing Winter or Summer, the sequence culminating in the entry of the king and Lorraine in red satin costumes of prawns or lobsters (*gambari*) designed by Primaticcio (Gambara 1542: busta 639)[14]. Da Thiene witnessed the "molte mascarate" on the Sunday, where the dauphin and friends appeared as "morescanti" – acrobatic dancers walking on their hands, with feet appearing to sprout from their heads and fake hands covering their feet (Da Thiene 1542: busta 17; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 70). His brother Orleans was resplendent as a triumphant Caesar, with breastplate and helmet embossed in figures modelled on Roman statuary (Occhipinti, "Un disegno", 2001: 240-41), others coming in as messengers distributing letters, before the grand entry of the king and his cardinal colleague in outfits of bears (Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 71; Croizat-Glazer 2013: 1228).

On the Monday, there were many masques, also designed by Primaticcio (Occhipinti, "Un disegno", 2001: 239-48), some of which the envoy found meaningless and not worth the effort to describe, including the dauphin's costume, which involved sprays of fruit and flowers from his head. That of his brother Orleans, however, who with his friends appeared astride dolphins six feet long, caught his attention, and was judged to augur future conquests by land and sea. Following an entry by seven courtiers dressed in senatorial togas, the king came in with Lorraine, each dressed as centaurs with mechanical rear legs, ridden by a female mannequin (Deianira?) gripping the centaur's neck, the whole costume in the richest materials covered with jewels meriting detailed description (Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 72), and again corresponding to a Primaticcio drawing (Occhipinti, "Un disegno", 2001: 242-43)[15]. The remaining evening of Mardi Gras was marked by a group of courtiers dressed as Ceres, sprouting ears of corn and fruit, followed by the dauphin and six friends all dressed as Diana (again in honour of Diane de Poitiers), sitting on a classical car drawn by two dragons. Others came in on horseback dressed as fishsellers (*chasse-marée*), and finally Orleans and friends spinning thread and sitting on a large turtle emblematic of slow but steady progress, another Primaticcio creation (Da Thiene 1542: busta 17)[16].

Despite the next day being Ash Wednesday, and therefore a time of abstinence, the king and cardinal of Lorraine persevered in masking, appearing dressed as two very large and convincing prawns or lobsters, whilst the dauphin and seven friends cross-dressed as French women (Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 74). The Thursday also saw another performance; that of the battle on the bridge or Ponte d'Orazio, borrowed from the Venetian carnival (Ponte dei Pugni), which the Ferrarese envoy thought unsuccessful, and unnecessary to describe anyway, since his duke had seen it many times before. As often at Carnival, the celebrations could also include elements of disorder. Gambara records that the younger courtiers in 1542 indulged in carnivalesque mischief, picking a quarrel with the students of the University, who reciprocated by killing a pageboy of the dauphin, and risking public scandal (1542: busta 639). One Carnival saw the intervention of matachins, masked acrobatic dancers associated with Carnival and with the *commedia dell'arte* (Mcdowell 2012: 659-

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70): in this case they borrowed ambassadors' costumes from the Venetian envoy and others (at the request of the Strozzi brothers, and on the understanding that the king was to take part), and having performed on muleback, returned the outfits in a ruined state, provoking a diplomatic incident (Gambara 1542: busta 639).

The baptism of the dauphin François at Carnival in 1544 was the occasion for yet more perfomances, to the extent that the Ferrarese envoy complained that this court was "più adatta alli piaceri et alle mascare e feste, che alle faccende, e fin qui non s'è ateso ad altro che a far gran ciera" ("more intent on pleasure, masquerades and celebration than on business, and till now they have paid attention to nothing except having a good time") (Calcagnini 1544: busta 19; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 89). These celebrations involved a relatively new element for France, though well known in Venice, the human pyramid of acrobats or Forze d'Ercole, which was put on after the dancing (Calcagnini 1544: busta 19; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 88), and had already been seen in Lyon at a banquet offered to the court in September 1541: during the meal "vene una moresca de tre nudi […] e feccero le forze de Hercule et altri giochi" ("there entered three naked men dancing a *moresca* […] and they did a human pyramid and other stunts"), much enjoyed by the king, who took part wearing a mask (Da Thiene 1541: busta 17; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 67-68). The newly completed château of Fontainebleau also had a lake, on which a sea-battle took place, with three galleys attacking a bastion (Cooper 2013: 23).

The final Carnival celebrated in style before the death of François Ier was in 1546 in Fontainebleau, where a new colouring was added to the iconography. Instead of the earlier Greco-Roman inspiration of masque costumes, drawn partly from classical statuary currently being copied for the palace, this Carnival marked a more exotic shift. Once again, the season coincided with a wedding, that of Mademoiselle d'Avrilly, which culminated in a ball "alla italiana al sono de trombone, piffari e corneto" ("in Italian style to the sound of trombones, pipes and cornet"), and an elaborate masquerade (Alvarotti 1546: busta 43; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 124-26). Six courtiers entered dressed as the victorious young David with sling, "mascarati in abito di Davit, con cazzafrusto in mano e la testa di Golia ataccata alla cintura" ("disguised as David, holding a sling and the head of Goliath hanging from his belt"), an outfit designed by Primaticcio[17]. The next entry was thematically linked and designed by the same artist, namely that of the dauphin and others dressed as either the giant Holofernes or Goliath (observers were unsure which), holding his own decapitated head (Occhipinti, *Categgio*, 2001: 126). This theme of gigantism had been announced by the costume of the king, who had entered first with the cardinal de Lorraine, each arrayed in identical baffling outsize costumes, which the ambassador was at a loss to identify, reporting that some thought it represented a faun or satyr. It was in fact a polymastic sphinx, designed by Primaticcio (Coizat-Glazer 2013: 1208, 1209, 1214; Cordellier 2014: 132, nº 30), an outfit inspired partly by the sphinx statues in Rome which François was having copied for Fontainebleau, partly by images of Artemis of Ephesus with her many breasts, and partly by a growing passion for Ancient Egypt following the publication in 1543 of the first French translation of Horapollo (tr. Martin; Coizat-Glazer 2013: 1208-09). That summer saw yet more masques performed in Fontainebleau over a number of days in July to celebrate the birth of the dauphin's daughter, Elisabeth. At one the dauphin entered fully armed "alla macedonica" (like Alexander?), and Orazio Farnese cross-dressed as a Nymph (Alvarotti 1546: busta 23; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 145). Two days later, after much jousting and dancing "a passameggi alla italiana", several bands of maskers came in wearing outfits on a maritime theme of fish, or the dauphin and friends disguised as large clams in their stucco shell, or a more fantastic creation of a twoheaded sea creature covered in mirrors and painted fish supporting a large green empty cage: the envoy found this to smack "più del mostro che d'altro" ("more of the monstrous than anything else") (Alvarotti 1546: busta 23; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 148).

It is evident that performances in the last years of the king's life were becoming ever more obscure and recherché (McGowan 2011: 47). Whilst the king and cardinal's disguise in August 1546 was relatively intelligible – weather-beaten hermits covered in foliage, fruits and vegetables[18], another in the parade of three masquerades on the same occasion of a "mascherata con tre statue in testa

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che sostenevano una fontana la quale gettava acqua profumata" ("masking costume with three statues on the head supporting a fountain spraying perfumed water"), was less so (Alvarotti 1546: busta 44; Occhipinti, *Carteggio*, 2001: 153). The Mantuan envoy reported that such strenuous efforts at novelty and bizarrerie were leading to "tanta confusione che no si può dissernere bene gli habiti loro et hormai si son tutti di tante man[i]ere che sono fastiditi per non sapper più trovar nuove inventioni di farsi" ("so much confusion that you can't tell their costumes apart, so that by now they have so much variety as to be frustrated at not being able to think up new ideas") (Gambara 1542: busta 639; Chatenet 2002: 224). This pursuit of the fantastical, in which the desire the amuse or astonish outweighed concern for intelligibility, contrasts with the contemporary plays being written by Marguerite de Navarre and performed by members of the court and of her entourage in the last dozen years of her brother's life (Millet - Hasenohr 2002). Like the grand court festivals, her playlets corresponded to the liturgical calendar, Christmas, Epiphany, Mardi Gras, and they involved music, dance and even figures like shepherds and court ladies. But in the remarkable simplicity of their language and costume (horns, big ears), they belong to a very different world of performance at court.

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