Henry IV as Artemisia: The Appropriation of Gendered Iconography in Seventeenth-Century France

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The Queen's Entry into Rhodes or *The Colossus of Rhodes*, represents the fifth panel of the *Stories of Queen Artemisia* tapestry cycle, a series of tapestries commissioned by Henry IV, illustrating the life of Artemisia of Caria (1605-1610). This panel shows Artemisia and her son rushing to the harbor, passing underneath the triumphant colossus that dominates the composition (Figure 1). The panel, in its treatment of war and victory, reflects certain aspects concerning the rule of Henry IV. The scene is taken from Nicolas Houel's manuscript, *Stories of Queen Artemisia* (1562), which he presented to the French Queen, Catherine de' Medici, when she assumed the role of Queen Regent of France for her second son, Charles IX. The program was meant to serve as a model for the queen and as a means to exalt her regency.[1] For Henry IV's commission, Antoine Caron's illustrations from Houel's manuscript were chosen and reworked by seventeenth-century artists, such as Henri Lerambert and Laurent Guyot.[2] In her article, "A change of plans: From Houel's *Stories of Queen Artemisia* to the tapestries of Henry IV," Valérie Auclair writes that the King commissioned the tapestries as a part of a program, which sought to revitalize the stagnant tapestry industry in Paris, formerly an important center of tapestry production in Europe.[3] However, the revival of the tapestry industry does not explain the King's choice of subject matter.

There is little consensus among scholars regarding Henry IV's reasons for executing the *Artemisia* tapestries. Scholars suggest such interpretations for Henry IV's commission as: to honor Marie and Catherine de' Medici, the two Medici queens of France; to establish a connection with the Medici and the Valois; to honor his own military achievements; or to draw a parallel between Artemisia's son Lygdamis and himself.[4] To add to these interpretations, the *Artemisia* tapestries reflect Henry IV's projects for the revival of France's war-torn economy. Furthermore, the choice of executing the scenes depicting the life of Artemisia was driven by the character of Henry IV's rule. His ascension to the throne as the first Bourbon King of France, following his conversion to Catholicism, was extremely contentious. In some ways, Henry IV's attempts to bring peace and prosperity to France is more befitting of this female iconographic program than the more aggressive, military-oriented imagery associated with male rulers. Taking into account the literary tradition, which characterizes Artemisia as both an ideal widow and a warrior queen, Henry IV's use of the tapestries certainly does not deny his own masculinity, but rather helps to cast him in a less threatening light.

The subject of the tapestries, Artemisia of Caria, stretched the boundaries of gender in her time, playing the roles of widow, mother, regent, and warrior. In his work *Famous Women* (1361-1362), Giovanni Boccaccio first describes Artemisia as "a lasting example of chaste widowhood and of the purest and rarest kind of love."[5] She is admirable for her virtuous femininity and her devotion to her husband.[6] At the same time, he praises her for her masculine virtues, describing her as "a woman exceptionally capable of masculine vigor, daring, and military prowess, she adorned with triumph the majesty of her name."[7] Boccaccio further stresses her masculinity in writing, "The king [Xerxes] watched from a safe place while Artemisia, in the midst of her admirals, was seen urging on her men and fighting bitterly; it was almost as if she had changed sex with Xerxes. If the latter had possessed as daring and brave a spirit, his ships would not have been turned to flight."[8] By comparing her to Xerxes, Boccaccio suggests that she is "manlier" than a king. More-

1 Sheila ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow," in *Rewriting the Renaissance; The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 227-28, 230-31.

2 Candace Adelson, *European Tapestries in the Minneapolis Institute of Art,* ed. Susan C. Jones (Minneapolis: The Institute, 1994), 187; and Maurice Fenaille, *État général des tapisseries de la manufacture des Gobelins depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours: 1600-1900* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1923), 110.

3 Valérie Auclair, "A change of plans: from Houel's *Stories of Queen Artemisia* to the tapestries of Henry IV," in *Women in Power: Caterina and Maria de' Medici: The Return to Florence of Two Queens*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Clarice Innocenti (Florence: Mandragora, 2008), 103.

4 Adelson, *European Tapestries,* 165-66 and 168; and Auclair, "A Change of Plans," 103-7; and Sara Mamone, "Caterina and Maria: two Artemisias on the French throne," in Innocenti, *Women in Power,* 41.

5 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 233.

6 Ibid., 235-37.

7 Ibid., 237.

8 Ibid., 241.

over, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus also describes Artemisia as having "courage" and "manly spirit."[9] Artemisia is "manly," confident, and assertive, all of which were decidedly masculine attributes in the early modern period.[10] In the literary tradition, the figure of Artemisia was seen not as a woman, but as a man with the body of a woman.[11] The use of this ancient paragon as a model thus presents Henry IV as less aggressive and militaristic. The program, instead, communicates ideas of peace and prosperity in France during his reign.

The individual panels address specific aspects of Henry IV's reign. *The Colossus of Rhodes* exemplifies the theme of peace in the set's iconographic program. This tapestry depicts the battle following the defeat of the invading Rhodians in Caria, when Artemisia takes the enemy ships, decorates them with laurel, and gains entry for her and her men to take over Rhodes. Upon entering the city, Artemisia and her men kill the rebelling Rhodian princes and end the uprising brought on by her rule.[12] Among the crowd to the left side of the composition, two figures appear to struggle against each other, the only indication of the violent battle that is meant to be taking place.[13] The tapestry, instead, celebrates Artemisia's military prowess through the triumphant entry of the queen, who, with her son Lygdamis, prominently occupies the center of the composition as she passes underneath the Colossus of Rhodes. Ffolliott states that the secondary nature of violence in the drawings is a reflection of Catherine de' Medici's desire for peace and her abhorrence for the violent spectacle that killed her husband, Henry II. Caron's drawings only imply or symbolically represent ideas of war and violence.[14] In all of the tapestry panels, the viewer is reminded of Henry IV's military strength, but the statement lacks forcefulness. Henry IV as Artemisia is an image of a strong, but non-threatening monarch. The emphasis on peace during Henry IV's reign is reflected in the subversion of violence in the iconographic program of the Artemisia tapestries. Instead, the panels focus on the aftermath of war: the prosperity that happens after the conflict.[15]

Although many modern scholars refer to Henry IV as a warrior king, contemporaries took note of his reluctance to engage in military conflict. The English ambassador to France, Robert Carew, said that the King "studiously avoideth all occasion of war."[16] Similarly, Boccaccio states that Artemisia twice led her men into war. The first was in defense of Caria and to quiet the rebellion in Rhodes and the second in response to Xerxes, her ally, and his need for help.[17] The period leading up to Henry IV's ascension to the French throne was wrought with international and civil conflicts. A Huguenot leader before his conversion to Catholicism in 1593, Henry IV stood at the center of the religious war in France.[18] He signed the Edict of Nantes of 1598 in an effort to unite Protestants and Catholics and avoid further conflict in the region. It was "a final peace treaty in the Wars of Religion," to resolve the civil wars that dated back decades, to the regency of Catherine de' Medici.[19] In addition to the religious conflict, his reign and the legitimacy of the Bourbon line met with constant opposition, owing to controversies around his ascension to the throne. The importance of establishing peace during Henry IV's reign is reflected in the suppression of violence in the *Artemisia* tapestries.

Similarly, *The Queen Distributing the Booty* represents the King's charitable and economic intentions (Figure 2). In the sonnet accompanying Caron's drawing, Houel writes:

> So having thus swiftly executed / A queen's duty, & having seen subjugated / to her power this captured city, She wished to show her liberality… Demonstrating by this that whoever wishes to solicit from a soldier his service & his life / Must also honor soldiery with presents.[20]

This sonnet characterizes Artemisia as the ideal military leader, who successfully leads her men in battle and also

9 Minke Hazewindus, *When Woman Interfer: Studies in the Role of Women in Herodotus' Histories* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben Publisher, 2004), 27.

10 Ibid., 27-28.

11 Boccaccio, *Famous Women,* 241-43. Boccaccio writes: "As we admire the deeds of Artemisia, what can we think except that the workings of nature erred in bestowing female sex on a body which God had endowed with a virile and lofty spirit?"

12 Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée, "Artemisia: a user's guide," in Innocenti, *Women in Power*, 130.

13 ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 238.

14 Ibid., 232 and 238.

15 Auclair discusses the importance of reading the cycle's representations of the themes of peace and diplomacy as essential to understanding its iconography and the final decade of the reign of Henry IV. See Valérie Auclair, "Changement de programme. De *L'Histoire de la reine Artémise de Nicolas Houel à la tenture d'Henri IV,*" in *La Tenture d'Artémise: À l'origine des Gobelins, la redécouverte d'un tissage royal* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2007), 19-26.

16 Robert Carew, as quoted in R. J. Knecht, *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France 1483-1610,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 487.

17 Boccaccio, *Famous Women* 237.

18 Hilary Ballon, *The Paris of Henry IV: Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 1-3.

19 Diane C. Margolf, "Adjudicating Memory: Law and Religious Difference in Early Seventeenth-Century France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 399-400. Margolf explores the implementation of "the policy of *oubliance*" in the Edict of Nantes in the seventeenth century and the collective identity that resulted from it.

20 Nicolas Houel as quoted in Adelson, *European Tapestries,* 256. Adelson provides a translation of Houel's sonnet. The original sonnets for Houel's *Histoire d'Arthémise* and their accompanying illustrations are housed in the Département des Estampes et de la Photographie of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

understands the burden of war and the sacrifice of her men. The sonnet describes Artemisia's, therefore Henry IV's, magnanimity as a ruler. Understanding the need to reward her soldiers, she shares with them the fruit of their labors. As in the drawings, the monarch's military intelligence and capabilities, while present in the tapestry, is implied only by the victorious distribution of booty. This is particularly important in seventeenth-century France, when oppositions to Henry IV's rule led to desertions of his armies.

In the same way, the tapestry, itself, is a symbol of luxury and wealth that proclaims the economic advantages of loyalty to the crown. The tapestry shows abundance and opulence in both the materials used and the objects represented. The panel is a very rich tapestry, woven with wool, silk, silver and gold. The figure of Queen Artemisia wears an elaborate gown, a helmet, and a breastplate as she sits on a chair placed upon a raised platform. Next to the queen is an array of arms, shields, urns, and jewels. The scene shows the queen distributing these precious objects to her men. Soldiers stand in a line, partially obscured by thick foliage, waiting for their turn to receive the queen's reward. This tapestry follows Caron's original composition very closely. However, the tapestry weavers added more treasures and foliage that spill across the barren floor of Caron's composition. The effect of these minor alterations is one of luxury and prosperity.

Furthermore, Lerambert's borders, much changed from Caron's designs which featured elements of Catherine de' Medici's widowhood, allude to the fruitfulness of Henry IV's reign and his dedication to the economic development of France.[21] In choosing from the 74 subjects provided by Houel, Henry IV understandably abandoned themes pertaining to widowhood altogether to create his own program.[22] Festoons fill the spaces between the different elements incorporated into the border. The panel gives the viewer an impression of abundance and opulence. It is also important to note that in their very nature, tapestries were symbols of wealth and economic success. They were labor-intensive and extremely expensive to create.

Many of Henry IV's projects and policies during his reign were directed towards the recovery of war-torn Paris and its economy. Most notable of his attempts to stimulate industry are the productions of silk, tapestries, and other luxury textiles.[23] Henry IV planted mulberry trees and encouraged the breeding of silk worms in order to establish a silk culture across the country and to halt the expensive importation of silks, which during this period, "fell to one-sixth of their pre-war value."[24] The promotion of the silk industry created large numbers of jobs in the city. It was "an excellent means of well-imploying abundance of poor. Orphans and Widows, and many old, lame, and other indigent and helpless peoples."[25] Moreover, as part of this project, Henry IV built the Place Royale, now the Place des Vosges, which was originally meant to be an incentive for foreign silk workers to come into the city, though its popularity quickly turned the square into prime real estate.[26]

Henry IV's turn to economic development also included the revival of the tapestry industry in France. To ensure the success and longevity of the industry in France, the King passed an edict regulating commissions, apprenticeships, and imports, while he made offers to attract the weavers through promises of housing and benefits.[27] Flanders was one of the leading centers of tapestry production in this period and Flemish weavers were considered among the best in the trade.[28] In 1601, Henry IV called the Flemish weavers Marc de Comans and François de la Planche to Paris.[29] Workshop and weavers' marks identify the origins of tapestries and serve as advertising for the city's skilled production. The marks, located along the borders of the each panel, clearly identify its origins.[30] For instance, along the galloon of the panel entitled *Les Deux Statues* is the mark of the Parisian tapestry—the fleur de lis flanked on either side by a capital "P." These marks may be seen as assurances of the quality of the finished products. They are evidence of the King's efforts to promote the production of tapestries in France. The tapestry industry grew immensely under Henry IV and the Parisian workshop became the foundation for the Gobelins Manufactory, which flourished during the reign of Louis XIV.[31]

The designs for Henry IV's set reveal the workshop's ability to compete with the Italian and Flemish workshops. A comparison of Caron's drawing and the seventeenth-century *Colossus of Rhodes* shows Lerambert's move away from the outdated mannerist style towards a more dynamic and dramatic composition (Figure 3). The figure of the Colossus of Rhodes breaks through the borders that frame the scene. A slight turn of his hips and angling of his bow shows

21 ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 234-35.

22 Auclair, "A Change of Plans," 103 and 107.

23 Knecht, *Renaissance France 1483-1610,* 485.

24 Knecht, *Renaissance France 1483-1610,* 485; and Joseph Gaudet, *Henri IV: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Ses Écrits* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 194.

25 "Of the Designed Progress to be Made in the Breeding of Silkworms, and the Making of Silk, in France,"*Philosophical Transactions (1665-1678)*, I (1665-1666): 87.

26 Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV: the struggle for stability* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1995), 180; for the development of the silkworks in the Place Royale, see Ballon, *Paris of Henry IV,* 57-68.

27 Adelson, *European Tapestries,* 189; and Ballon, *Paris of Henry IV,* 65-66.

28 Mamone, "Caterina and Maria," 41. Mamone names Florence and Flanders as the dominant centers of tapestries during the first decade of the seventeenth century.

29 Adelson, *European Tapestries,* 189.

30 Ibid.

31 Greengrass, *Age of Henri IV,* 179.

Lerambert's interest in portraying the dramatic, which is also reflected in the cresting waves of the bay. In addition, Lavergnée notes the iridescence of the fabric of Artemisia's garment that further promotes the high level of weaving in this Parisian tapestry.[32] Lerambert's design directly compares the skills of the Parisian weavers and artists to those of the famed Italian and Flemish designers by acknowledging the stylistic trends popular in Europe during this period. The high quality of materials and large size of these tapestries suggest they would have been displayed where important visitors could view and admire them, perhaps at the banqueting or reception halls of one of the royal palaces.

Henry IV's use of gendered iconography follows a pattern of image construction typical of female rulers in the early modern period. Early modern Europe did not readily accept the idea of a female ruler. Caterina Sforza's construction of her own identity in the fifteenth century demonstrates how women attempted to solidify their reigns. Joyce de Vries sums up Machiavelli's characterization of Caterina Sforza's role as ruler in stating, "Her political audacity is exemplified by her sexual audacity."[33] According to Machiavelli, by taking an active role in the government of Riario and its territories, Caterina Sforza did not adhere to society's expectations of widows, which was for them to remain chaste and virtuous and to remove themselves from the public sphere of Italian society. Joyce de Vries argues that, "Caterina balanced the gendered iconographies of the virtuous and chaste widow and those of the powerful ruler, itself coated with notions of masculinity."[34] In her discussion of the *Portrait Medal of Caterina Sforza,* de Vries states that Caterina Sforza represented herself as a widow, while the reverse shows a figure of Victory driving her chariot, an aggressive image of political strength, typical of representations of male rulers (Figure 4).[35] Caterina Sforza created a public persona of widowhood, which adhered to all the rules of society, in order to preface her assertions of her power.[36] By propagating an image of herself as the widow of Girolamo Riario, Caterina legitimized her and her son's claim to Riario's territories.

Finally, the inversion of gender in images of monarchs in order to secure power and authority was a tool of self-representation among European monarchs. The portraits of Elizabeth I of England, for example, are some of the most interesting and effective vehicles of self-representation in the early modern period. In her study of these portaits, Elizabeth Pomeroy discusses Elizabeth I's use of both feminine and masculine characeristics in order to advance her political agendas.[37] Her portraits became not likenesses, but symbols of queenship.[38] Elizabeth I's use of masculine attributes, for instance, communicates ideas of authority and stability.[39]

These women navigated patriarchal societies and fulfilled decidedly masculine roles. Caterina Sforza embodied feminine virtues and identified herself as widow and mother. The veil of widowhood provided her with a connection to her husband, which she used to proclaim her right to rule. In the same way, Henry IV, who succeeded Henry III Valois and reigned as the first Bourbon king of France, connected himself to the late king and his mother, Catherine de' Medici.[40] Through Henry IV's *Artemisia* tapestries and the association with the Valois and the Medici, the King utilized the same methods to construct his identity as early modern women had done before him. By rejecting masculine iconographies in this program, in the same way that Elizabeth I chose to subvert her own femininity, and by portraying himself in the guise of Artemisia of Caria, Henry IV identified himself in terms of his relationship with figures of power. In doing so, he strengthened his ties to both the Catholic community and to the previous ruling family of France, thereby legitimizing his right to rule.

The purpose of the tapestries was twofold: to associate his rule to that of the previous king and to push his political and economic agendas. Although the *Artemisia* tapestries commissioned by Henry IV include the necessary scenes of military prowess and dominance, war and violence are subdued to fit the King's desire for peace. While he could have easily commissioned cartoons featuring a male protagonist, Artemisia's masculine reputation likely made it possible to present a program that cast him in the role of the triumphant queen. While a different subject matter could have sufficed, given the long history of the *Artemisia* tapestry designs and Henry IV's own precarious political position, the representation of Henry IV of France as Queen Artemisia of Caria accomplished his goals at the time, which was to establish much needed peace and to rebuild the war-torn economy of seventeenth-century France.

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32 Lavergnée, "Artemisia: a user's guide," 130.

33 Joyce de Vries, "Casting Her Widowhood: The Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Allison Levy, 93-108 (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).

34 De Vries, "Casting Her Widowhood," 83.

35 Ibid., 82-83.

36 Ibid.

37 Elizabeth Pomeroy, *Reading the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1989), 17-21.

38 Anne Riehl, *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2010), 125.

39 Pomeroy, *Reading the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth,* 57-58 and 67. She uses the Siena and Ermine portraits, for example to show the queen with feminine attributes, but use the language of male portraiture (in the use of black and white) to communicate her authority.

40 Adelson, *European Tapestries,* 168. In her introduction to the *Artemisia* tapestries, Adelson discusses the various ways in which the *Artemisia* tapestries connect Henry to Catherine, his mother Jeanne of Navarre, and Henry III.

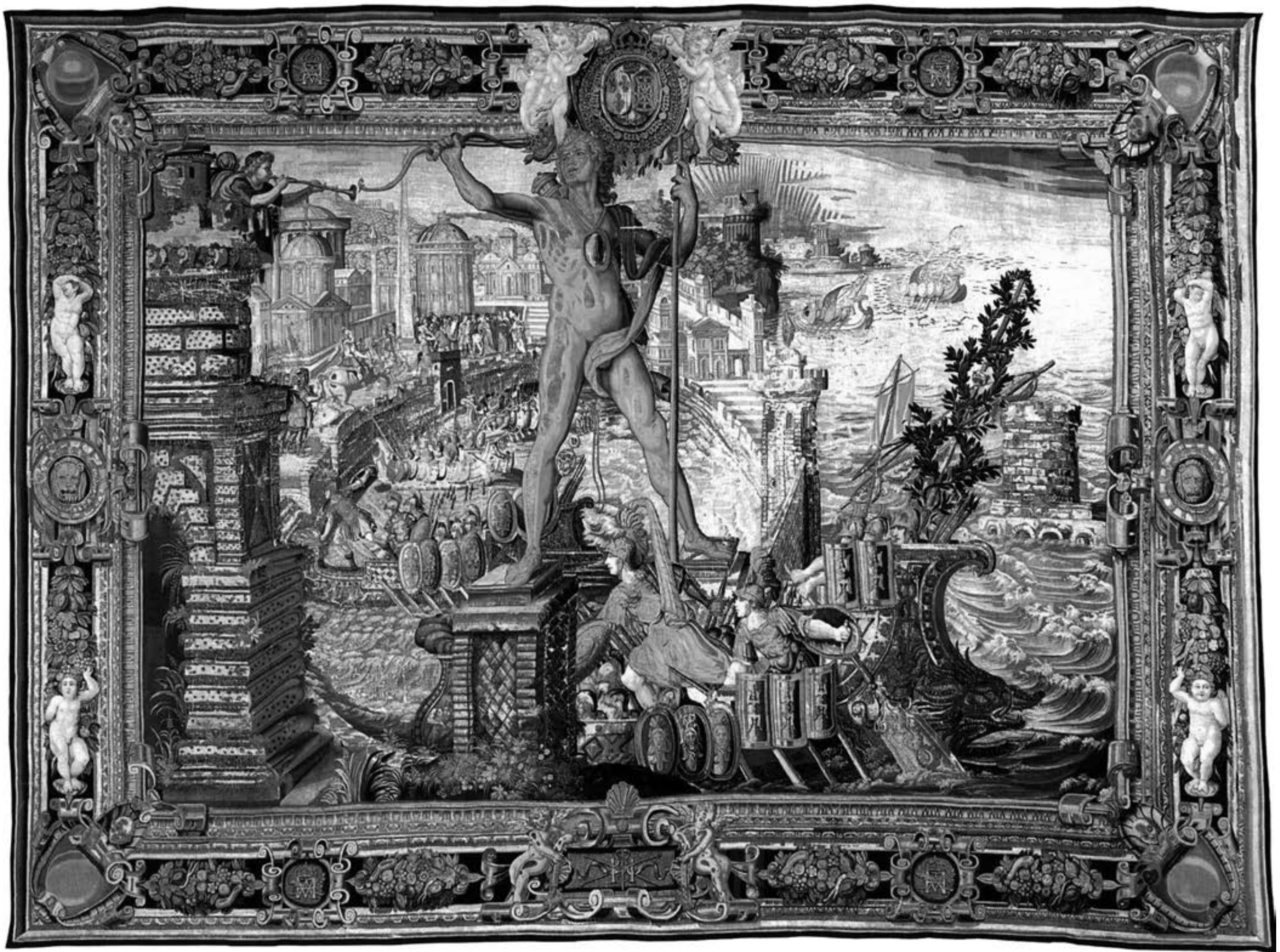

Figure 1. Henri Lerambert, after a drawing by Antoine Caron, *The Queen's Entry into the Harbor of Rhodes* or *The Colossus of Rhodes*, *c*.1605-1610, wool, silk, silver, and gold, 494 x 653 centimeters. Collection of the Mobilier National, Paris © Lawrence Perquis.

Figure 2. After a drawing by Antoine Caron, *The Queen Distributing the Booty*, *c*.1605-1610, wool, silk, silver, and gold, 497 x 660 centimeters. Collection of the Mobilier National, Paris © Lawrence Perquis.

Figure 3. Antoine Caron, *The Colossus of Rhodes*, 1563-70, pen and brown ink with white highlights over black chalk, 44 x 50 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.

Figure 4. Attr. to a follower of Niccolo Fiorentino, *Portrait Medal of Caterina Sforza*, c.1488-1490, lead, 74.5 mm (diameter). British Museum, London © Trustees of the British Museum.