

“Nel palazzo del Clu’”: 500 years of History

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Look at the light and admire its beauty. Close your eye and observe, what you have seen no longer exists and what you will see does not yet exist

LEONARDO DA VINCI, Ms. F at the Institut de France, f. 40 v, 1508

THE LAND of the Clos Lucé, according to the earliest archives, belonged to the Amboise family. The lords of the house of Amboise took part in the crusades to liberate the holy lands. Hugues II of Amboise took part in the siege of Nicaea and the battle for Jerusalem, alongside Godefroy de Bouillon. In the Middle Ages, the lords of Amboise were not only valiant crusaders, but also builders and donors. It was Hugues of Amboise, a great friend of the arts, who, between 1107 and 1115, built the first foundations of the domain on Gallo-Roman ruins. In 1214, another lord, Sulpice III of Amboise, gave the Bernardine monks at the Cistercian abbey of Moncé the land upon which the Clos Lucé would, at a later date, be built.

The residence, made of pink brick and white stone, built in the reign of Louis XI, became the property of one of the king's favourites. Louis XI, who was harsh with the rich and powerful, but friendly with those of humble origin, one day went down to the kitchens in his castle at Plessis-lès-Tours, abustle with a swarm of cooks. Simply clad as was the monarch's wont, he spotted a bright-looking young man at the roasting spit. He asked him who he was, and what he earned. The young kitchen-hand failed to recognize the king in the figure so unostentatiously dressed, wearing a threadbare hat. He said his name was Estienne and that he earned as much as the king. “So what does the king earn?” inquired Louis XI. “His costs like I mine”, Estienne proudly replied. This answer pleased the king. Turn by turn, he appointed Estienne “maistre d’hôtel”, keeper of the forests of Amboise and Montrichard, with a stipend of 600 livres, then bailiff of the town of Amboise. The ennobled spit-turner then had the idea of building a house and home that would reflect the importance of his responsibilities. In 1471, Estienne le Loup, Louis XI's protégé, erstwhile kitchen-hand, now king's counsellor, acquired the Domaine du Cloux, thanks to his sire. He purchased it complete with its gardens, vineyards, cellars and outbuildings. He built the present-day residence on the old lands belonging to the monastery. With its corner tower and its elegant octagonally shaped spiral staircase separating the

two main buildings at right angles, Le Cloux bears the architectural hallmark of the fifteenth century, when it was constructed. At the far end of the grounds, Estienne le Loup also had a “fuye” built, this being a square brick dovecote, designed to house a thousand birds in its pigeon-holes.

Ownership of such a huge dovecote was a sign of wealth and power. Le Cloux was then surrounded by a comprehensive system of fortified defences – a wall with postern, a drawbridge, a square watchtower, and a covered way around the battlements.

In the middle ages, Estienne le Loup installed on this covered way a cannon called a culverin, possession of which had been authorized by the king, to command the respect of the people of Amboise, but this act of violence was not to the king's liking, and his erstwhile protégé fell from favour. He was obliged to relinquish his property.

A Royal Residence

• SITUATED SOME five hundred yards from the Royal Castle of Amboise, the Château du Cloux was acquired in 1490 by Charles VIII for 3,500 gold crowns, and duly became a royal domain. The bill of sale, drawn up on parchment and dated 2 July 1490, is still held here. The Le Cloux estate remained attached to the royal crown until the French Revolution, although it was granted by various kings to others for use as diverse residences.

Charles VIII, we are told by Commynes, “had brought back from Naples several excellent workmen, such as stone-dressers and painters”. Deeply enamoured of his young spouse Anne of Brittany, Charles VIII turned Le Cloux into a *castel de plaisance* or “pleasure dome”, and it became the summer residence of the kings of France. It was in this pleasant retreat that Charles VIII could shed the burden of his responsibilities as sovereign, well removed from the hubbub of his court.

Charles VIII embellished the residence in the flamboyant style on his return from his first Italian campaign. The French coat of arms, borne by angels, are surmounted by a knight's helmet girt by the royal crown. Lower down on the corner tower were carved side by side in the stone the coats of arms of the duchies of Savoy and Angoulême. In a niche in the corner tower of the main building, a fifteenth century statue of St. Sebastian, patron saint of archers, surveys the courtyard.

The Gothic style entrance gate of Le Cloux leads to the principal building, known as the “royal residence”.

The covered battlement way and the watch tower, built in the

¹ Today known as the Château du Clos Lucé – the place name “cloux” comes from a term in widespread use at the time to describe an enclosed or fenced place. Amboise is said had been Julius Caesar's military camp, *Castrum Ambaciacum*.

reign of Louis XI, and the southern terrace look out over the grounds which run gently down through wide walks towards dense foliage, cool shade and a bridge over the Amasse. This pleasant river, a tributary of the Loire, slowly wends its way through the verdant valley which bears its name, then flows through the grounds and the town of Amboise, before meeting the much larger, wilder river.

In 1492, Charles VIII had built for his loving wife, Anne of Brittany, an oratory in flawless tufa stone in the castle courtyard, “une chambre pour Dieu” or chamber for God, a veritable jewel of Gothic architecture. Above the door of this elegant chapel are carved in the stone the coats of arms of the kingdom of France and the duchy of Brittany, which the marriage between Anne of Brittany and Charles VIII had incorporated in the kingdom. Anne of Brittany often went there to meditate, clutching her book of hours. From the Royal Castle of Amboise, the dauphin could easily make his way to Le Cloux. He would set out from the old postern, called the *Porte des Lions* or Lion Gate, then head down the *Chatelliers*. Commynes tells us that the king had a rustic wooden balustrade installed on this steep path, a “hand rail so that His Royal Highness the Dauphin and others from the castle might go more easily from the said castle to Le Cloux [...] The child’s pale face bent over the lilies, symbol of royalty, for he liked to look at and smell the flowers”. Far from the din of the court of Amboise, the queen in her oratory, Commynes again tells us, “would come and shed the most sorrowful tears that a woman can weep”, her book of hours in her hands. She was in fact in mourning for her four children, all dead in infancy, including Charles Orland, the dauphin, struck dead at the age of three and a half by an epidemic of measles.

Inside Anne of Brittany’s chapel, built by Charles VIII, royal lily flowers alternate with Breton ermine around the keystone bearing the coat of arms of France decorated with the necklace of St. Michael, an order of chivalry founded by Louis XI², a reminder of the residence’s royal status.

Beneath a ribbed romanesque vault, painted azure blue and studded with repeated patterns of gold stars, four restored frescoes are attributed to disciples of Leonardo da Vinci. A *Virgin of light*, an *Annunciation*, an *Assumption*, and the *Last judgement* were all probably painted under his supervision by pupils in his studio. One fresco depicts the virgin of light, *Virgo lucis*. This virgin, from

which the word “Lucé” probably originates, is carrying the infant Jesus, his feet resting on a crescent moon. Beneath the keystone are the three lilies of the French coat of arms.

After Charles VIII’s death, this royal residence was made available to Louise of Savoy, future regent of the kingdom, and her two young children, the fiery duke of Angoulême, future king Francis I, and his elder sister, Marguerite of Navarre.

So it was in this pretty castel of Le Cloux that the youthful duke of Angoulême spent his early boyhood years, surrounded by an adoring mother and sister. The young Francis would run down into these selfsame gardens to play ball games, including “l’escaigne”, and practice archery. With his merry childhood companions, who would become his future companions at arms, he trained in the art of combat, and played war games, building and attacking “castles and bastions” which then had to be “conquered and destroyed with much furious flailing of fisticuffs and sticks”. His entourage included Philippe de Chabot, future Admiral of Brion, Guillaume Gouffier de Bonnivet, future Admiral of France, Anne de Montmorency, who would later become the *connétable*, or supreme commander of the French forces, at the tender age of twenty-two, and Robert de La Marck, known as Flower-Angel the Adventurous, future marshal of France, whose *Memoirs* describe those wonderful adolescent years.

In one of the Clos Lucé bedchambers, as a very young bride, Marguerite of Navarre, “la Marguerite des Marguerites”, started to write her famous collection of short stories, the *Heptameron* – drawing inspiration from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* – some of which, in naturalist vein, were set in Amboise itself. Living apart from her husband, she developed a close attachment to the Clos Lucé, and made it her permanent residence.

The king’s sister was most erudite, and a poet, too, as well as a lover of music and theater. This modern and exceedingly open-minded woman surrounded herself with a court made up of all the cultured minds which the Renaissance had gathered around Francis I. The poet Clément Marot, the king’s valet, was at that time part of his household, and François Rabelais dedicated his *Third Book of Pantagruel* to her.

Louise of Savoy ruled the Kingdom while her son Francis I was away waging war in Italy and Spain.

With the Renaissance, the battlement walk was turned into a gallery, akin to an Italian-style loggia. The court and its ladyfolk gathered in this elegant grandstand to watch feasts, tournaments and other celebrations organized by Leonardo for his friend Francis I, and his courtiers.

² The order of St. Michael was introduced by Louis XI at Amboise on 1 August 1469. The Company included, in addition to the king, thirty-six knights, gentlemen “chosen from among the most powerful, most renowned and most virtuous”.

Leonardo da Vinci at the Château du Cloux (1516–1519)

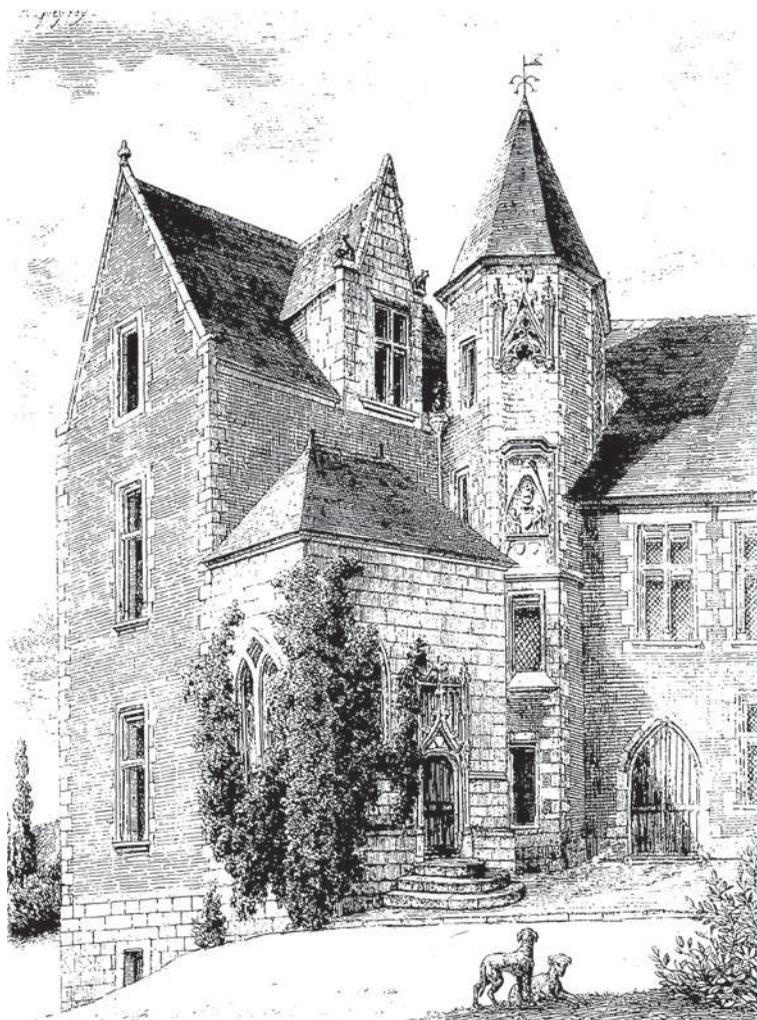
❖ THE GREATEST, at least as far as genius is concerned, of all those who passed through the Gothic gateway of Le Cloux was, beyond any doubt, Leonardo da Vinci.

In the wake of his first meeting with the young, twenty-year-old monarch in December 1515 in Bologna, shortly after the signing of the Concordat drawn up with the Pope, Leonardo da Vinci was invited to reside in France by Francis I, at that time basking in the glory of his victory at Marignan.

After the death of his benefactor, duke Giuliano de' Medici, the pope's brother, a jotting in his diary in March 1516 tells us that Leonardo was still in Rome that August. It was in the autumn of 1516, before the winter snows, that Leonardo da Vinci accepted the royal invitation. At the age of sixty-four, he embarked on his final journey, and settled in France. He crossed the Alps on mule back, accompanied by a handful of his disciples, including Francesco Melzi, the most loyal of them all, and Battista de Villanis, his Milanese servant. With him, in his leather saddlebags, Leonardo brought his *Mona Lisa*, *St. John the Baptist*, and *St. Anne*, as well as his note- and sketchbooks, his manuscripts, and a lifetime's worth of writings and jottings. To cross the Alps he took the Montgenèvre pass, tarrying no doubt to gaze upon Mont Blanc, far away to the north. He then crossed Savoy, following the course of the Arve, and noting that he passed through the village of Saint-Gervais, before climbing down into Grenoble and thence Lyon, and finally reaching the Loire Valley, by following the river Cher. He then set up home at Cloux, together with his entourage. Thus it was that the *Mona Lisa* arrived at the Clos Lucé, complete with her famous smile.

Francis I and Louise of Savoy welcomed Leonardo "with open arms". Francis I appointed him "First painter, engineer, and architect of the King". He put the Château du Cloux at his disposal, and paid him the princely retainer of one thousand crowns a year, for life. Leonardo da Vinci lived happily in this residence for the last three years of his life, painting and working enthusiastically on the thousand and one things that interested him. The young monarch paid him almost daily visits, for the sheer pleasure of conversing with him. Tradition had it that he take the underground passage that then linked the Château du Cloux with the Royal Castle of Amboise – its vaulted entrance being still very much in evidence to this day.

Leonardo da Vinci, who inspired both thought and fashion, was held in the king's most ardent affection, as he was by Francis's sister



The Clos Lucé, Amboise, nineteenth century engraving

Marguerite, and the whole court. Francis I held the old man in deepest, almost filial, esteem, and called him "mon père". According to the words of the great goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, who had also made the transalpine journey at the king's behest, "king Francis, who was so keenly enamoured of his great qualities, took such pleasure in listening to him hold forth, that he was only rarely not in his company [...] He said that he did not believe that any man had so much culture, in matters to do with painting, sculpture, and architecture, as Leonardo, as well as in philosophy, for he was a very great philosopher".

At Cloux, Leonardo lived with a small Italian community. It included the Milanese gentleman Francesco Melzi, his favourite pupil, Battista de Villanis, his new servant, and his maid, Mathurine, though she was French. In his new home he received many an illustrious visitor, drawn by his renown.

At the royal court of Amboise, throughout these flourishing Renaissance years, Leonardo, in his exile in France, once again met with many Italian artists. Amboise was steeped in the Italian art of living, and became the cradle of the French Renaissance.

Those artists were masons, stone-dressers, sculptors, master glaziers, wrought-iron craftsmen, carpenters, joiners and cabinet-makers, painters, gold- and silversmiths, and landscape gardeners, all busily involved with the beautification of the Royal Castle; and Neapolitan tailors had brought fabrics and embroideries with which to make the magnificent shimmering clothes and costumes for court revelries. Italian was spoken in both the town and court of Amboise. On returning from their Italian campaigns, the Valois kings would be accompanied by the greatest artists of their day: Domenico da Cortona, known as Il Boccadoro, the architect of Chambord and a famous sculptor with wood, the Franciscan monk Fra Giocondo, architect, engineer and humanist, who lived in the *Hostel Joyeuse* in Amboise, a splendid Renaissance edifice, the stone-dresser Paganino, the sculptor Gerolamo da Fiesole, the artist Francesco Primaticcio, who worked for several years at the Château d'Amboise, Andrea Solario and Marco d'Oggiono, both painters, Guido Mazzoni, the painter from Modena, known as Modanino, who also worked at the Château d'Amboise as a statue-maker, and Domenico Bernabei, a carpenter and cabinet-maker.

Also working at Amboise were the composer Francesco da Milano, Galeazzo de Sanseverino, son-in-law and former captain of Ludovico Sforza and superintendent of the Francis I's royal stables, Pacello da Mercogliano, a monk who was master-gardener, in lodgings at Château Gaillard³, close to Le Cloux, and in charge of the creation of the royal gardens and fountains at the castles of Amboise, Blois, and Gaillon.

The Italian Franciscan community was well represented among the monks at the monastery of the order of Minims at Amboise. Their number included St. Francis of Paule, an ascetic Calabrian monk, attached to the royal court, and founder of the monastery of Amboise, who came to France at the bidding of king Louis XI, godfather of the dauphin Charles Orland, and was then canonized in 1519. Throughout his life, Leonardo offered his itinerant services as engineer, architect and artist to the sovereigns of the day whose realms lay between Florence, Milan and Rome.

When he arrived at Cloux, his final home, he was at last at home. This is what lends this house its full historical legitimacy, imbued as it is with its at once authentic and outstanding character. Apart from the house in Vinci, in Tuscany, where Leonardo was born, there are no other known Leonardo da Vinci homes.

³ It was at Château Gaillard, in Amboise, that, for the first time in France, the first orange trees flowered and flourished, tended as they were by the green-fingered master-gardener Pacello, hailing from Mercogliano, near Naples.

Leonardo, painter, engineer and architect of the King – the royal commissions

✦ AT CLOUX, Leonardo was invariably very busy, as is illustrated by his numerous drawings and sketches produced in that French period at Amboise. The master noted in his own hand the first French date of the set of sheets, “Ascension Day at Amboise, at Cloux, May 1517”.

As court artist, Leonardo would introduce himself as the “the king's painter”, which did not stop him putting the final touches to the works he had brought with him, including the *St. John the Baptist* which now hangs in the Louvre.

On 10 October 1517, Leonardo received a visit from the Cardinal of Aragon, on his way through Amboise to pay his respects to the sovereign and his court, after paying homage to Charles V in Flanders.

Going by the words of Don Antonio de Beatis, the Cardinal's secretary, the visitors were struck by the painter's venerable appearance. Aged sixty-five, he looked more like seventy. Leonardo showed them, in particular, three finished paintings:

One of a Florentine lady, painted naturally at the orders of the late Giuliano de' Medici, a figure of St. John the Baptist, and, last of all, a virgin with the child sitting on St. Anne's knees, and all three of a rare perfection. It is true that because of a paralysis in his right hand, one can no longer expect any masterpieces from him. He has trained a Milanese disciple who works very well, for if the said my lord Leonardo is no longer capable of painting with the gentleness of touch which was his, he nevertheless continues to draw and teach. This noble mind has compiled a treatise on anatomy, most unusual, giving the design not only of the limbs, but also of the muscles, nerves, veins, joints, entrails and everything that may be studied in the body of men and women; and this in such a way that no other person before him has ever done. We have seen all this with our own eyes; and he told us that he has already dissected more than some thirty bodies, women and men alike, of all ages. My lord Leonardo has also written about the nature of water, about various machines, and other things still, which could fill countless tomes and all in common language, which, were they to see the light of day, would be beneficial and pleasing. He has obtained from the king of France, in addition to his expenses and his residence, one thousand crowns per annum as a retainer, and three hundred for his assistant.

This account is outstanding, because it gives us a faithful picture of Leonardo in his Le Cloux studio.

Sir Kenneth Clark nevertheless disputes the hypothesis of Leonardo's paralysis, as referred to by Antonio de Beatis. It would be inaccurate to say that Leonardo was paralysed in the literal sense of the word. There actually are a large number of Leonardo manuscripts written after the month of October 1517, among others a sheet of the Codex Atlanticus bearing this jotting: "the twenty-fourth of June 1518, day of St. John, in Amboise at the palace of Cloux".

As an engineer and architect, Leonardo worked relentlessly on several major urbanistic projects, all of them royal commissions.

Leonardo became involved in several hydrographic studies of the region, which he criss-crossed on horseback: maps of the Loire, Cher, Sône et Sauldre basins, improvement of the course of the Loire, plans for a canal from the Loire to the Sône⁴, and for another canal from the Loire to Romorantin, draining the insalubrious Sologne marshlands, projects to dig large irrigation canals with locks and mills, as well as other canals for river traffic, and a project to link up all the royal residences by waterways. Helped by Melzi, he also drew up road plans for the thoroughfare connecting Romorantin with Orléans.

For the king, he came up with an architectural project for a huge and grandiose royal palace, and a new ideal city at Romorantin, on the banks of the Sauldre, a tributary of the Loire. The king's ambition was probably to build his kingdom's new capital on that site. For this 'new Rome', Leonardo imagined a prestigious model castle, including a large pool for naval jousts, complete with telegraphic signalling systems, landing stages and piers, waterways, lift-locks, fountains and vast royal stables designed to accommodate twenty-eight steeds. On these same sheets he drew several plans for octagonal buildings closely resembling projects for churches. He also made plans for prefabricated wooden houses, which could be dismantled and moved. The king even inspected the proposed sites on several occasions, accompanied by Leonardo, but the royal project never got off the ground, because the work force was decimated by an epidemic of plague in 1518.

⁴ The goal of this ambitious project was to construct a canal connecting the Loire with the Sône, and thus, by means of the Lyon canal, bringing France that much closer to Italy. This canal was to link up with the Touraine region, by way of Blois and Romorantin. A port was planned at Villefranche. Its route then made its way across the Allier and Charollais regions, ending up in Macon, in Sône et Loire. This grandiose project, which was resumed two centuries later, was to serve as the basis for the construction of the Canal du Centre.

Leonardo drew a map of the island of Amboise⁵ and planned for the king a system of fountain machinery in a note in the Codex Atlanticus, where he made mention of a "royal fountain at Amboise".

Some historians reckon that the drawings of double spiral staircases and central building plans produced by Leonardo da Vinci inspired the architecture of the Château de Chambord.

According to A.E. Popham, "most of the Windsor drawings date from the final years of his life". These were end-of-the-world drawings and studies of floods and deluges, heads of old men, sketches for carnivals, jousts and feasts, as well as the sketch of the noble view of the Royal Castle of Amboise, drawn from a window in the Château du Cloux, probably by Francesco Melzi. A recent conservation project at Windsor has shown that a large number of sheets bore marks of French paper manufacturers. The greatest experts are agreed in acknowledging that the last drawings made by Leonardo da Vinci at the Clos Lucé were probably the *three dancing figures* held in the Portrait and Print Department of the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, graceful young women caught in the precarious balance of their dance.

Leonardo, organizer of royal feasts and celebrations

• IN MILAN, at the court of Ludovico Sforza, Leonardo da Vinci had already created and produced spectacular and extraordinary shows, revealing himself to be a pastmaster in the art of special effects. As early as 13 January 1490, he organized the *Feast of Paradise* to celebrate the wedding of Gian Galeazzo Sforza and Isabella of Aragon. For that occasion, at nightfall, in the Sforza castle's illuminated gardens, Leonardo re-created paradise and the seven planets, all in motion.

At Cloux, between 1517 and 1518, Leonardo da Vinci became the creator and great organizer of Court celebrations to thank the king of France for his good deeds.

He designed, created and staged wonderful royal feasts and celebrations, with complex sets and scenery, extravagant ceremonial décors, elegant and refined costumes, spectacles, balls and banquets, tournaments, masquerades, *tableaux vivants* [living pictures], wild animals, robots, and special effects involving both sound and light.

⁵ The *île d'or*, namely the "Golden Island", was once famous for having been, in the year 502, the meeting place between the Frankish king Clovis and the Visigoth sovereign Alaric II, whose discussions signed and sealed a temporary peace by recognizing the Loire as the border between their respective kingdoms.

On September 30 1517, at Argentan, Leonardo was the organizer of a feast given by the duchess of Nemours, widow of Giuliano de' Medici, and by Marguerite of Angoulême, the king's sister. For the occasion, Leonardo had built a mechanical lion which, when struck on the chest, released lily flowers, symbol of royalty. A similar lion had been presented for the first time in Lyon in 1515, in the form of a moveable robot with the features of the *Marzocco*, the emblematic lion of Florence, during a feast given by the large Florentine community living in the city on the banks of the Rhone, as a tribute to the King Francis I, who was passing through.

From 3 to 6 May 1518, during the Amboise festivals, Leonardo da Vinci organized two celebrations for the royal baptism of the dauphin Francis of France, and for the wedding of Lorenzo Piero de' Medici and Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, the king's cousin, and future mother of Catherine de' Medici. For that occasion, as described by Stazio Gadio secretary of Frederico Gonzaga, Leonardo designed a triumphal arch surmounted by a column, upon which stood a naked figure bearing a banner depicting, on the right, lilies of France and, on the left, a dolphin. On this arch, on one side, was a salamander, emblem of the Valois sovereign, with the motto *Nutrisco et extingo* ("I feed thereupon and I extinguish it") and, on the other side, an ermine, bearing the motto *Potius mori quam foedari* ("Rather death than tarnish").

On 15 May 1518, at Amboise, the court attended a new feast whose theme consisted in performing the spectacle of a siege, with the assault and taking of a fortress, to celebrate the victorious battle of Marignan, as told by Stazio Gadio. This involved the making of a mock castle, designed and built with lengths of fabric nailed to a wooden structure, with, at the top of the battlements, lots of young hawks spitting scraps of cloth and paper, deafening harquebuses and mortar fire, with "balloons full of air which, falling back on the square, bounced in all directions, to the great delight of one and all and without causing any damage, something new and most ingenious".

On 17 June 1518, at night-time, an open-air special event was given at the "palazzo del Cloux". It was not the staging of a play but a banquet with dances echoing some of Leonardo's ideas from his early *Feast of Paradise*. (See pp. 154-155, *infra*, for the full document, the second part of which rules out Leonardo's presumed organization of the feast.) It was a clever simulation of a starry firmament in honor of king Francis I and his court. In a letter of 19 June 1518 to an unknown Carlo in Milan, the nobleman Galeazzo Visconti, the real author of the event, gives a lively description of it:

The day before yesterday, the most Christian King gave a banquet at a wonderful feast, as you will see from what now follows. The place was Le Cloux, a most beautiful and grand palace. The paved courtyard was covered with sky-coloured cloth. Then there were the principal planets, the sun on one side and the moon opposite, which was a wonder to behold. Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were set in their order and right place, with the twelve celestial signs. Around the courtyard, top and bottom, there was a circular colonnade, which was decorated with the same blue cloth and stars. The architraves were decorated with crowns of ivy climbing with festoons. The cobbled threshold was covered with tautened expanses of cloth bearing the motto of the most Christian King; and on one side, but outside the square of the courtyard, which measured approximately sixty spans in length and thirty spans in width, was the ladies' stand, adorned with cloth and stars. There were four hundred two-branched candelabras, so illuminated that it seemed the night were chased away. [...]

The death of Leonardo da Vinci at the Clos Lucé

• ON 23 April 1519, on the eve of Easter, Leonardo, "considering the certainty of death and the uncertainty of his hour", drew up his last will and testament with the help of Maître Guillaume Boreau, notary to the Royal Court. Here are the main provisions: after recommending "his soul to God, sovereign Master and Lord", he bequeathed to Francesco Melzi, his most faithful disciple, "in recompense for his loyal services, all the books, instruments and drawings relative to his art and profession as painter", to Battista de Villanis, his servant, half the garden which he owned outside the walls of Milan, and the other half to Salai (Leonardo's handsome model for St. John the Baptist), who had already built himself a house there, to Mathurine, his maid, a garment made of stout black cloth, leather-lined, a bolt of linen, and two ducats. Neither the poor nor his brothers of the flesh were overlooked.

With the thought that "no being goes to nought", Leonardo passed away on 2 May 1519 at the age of sixty-seven, after receiving the last rites of the Church. He thus finally knew the fullness of light. Francois I was far away, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, busy celebrating the birth of his second son, the future Henri II. Melzi joined him there. But when the king heard the news that the maestro was dead, he wept in sadness. This was attested to by the Milanese poet Giovan Paolo Lomazzo, Melzi's friend and colleague, in 1587. On 1 June, Francois Melzi wrote to Leonardo's brothers: "I think you already know of the death of maestro Leonardo, which has caused me

suffering for which words fail me. And for as long as my limbs will support me, I shall have an everlasting affliction, as is only proper, because I felt such an ardent, deep love for him, every day. The loss of such a man causes pain for everyone, and nature no longer has any power over it.” Those simple words are the finest funeral oration. In accordance with his last wishes, on the day of his funeral, his body was accompanied in broad daylight by sixty paupers carrying torches. Leonardo da Vinci was buried at the collegiate church of Saint Florentin in Amboise. In the wake of the havoc wrought by the wars of religion, and then the demolition, in 1808, of the church and of Leonardo da Vinci’s tomb, his burial place was duly moved to the Saint Hubert Chapel at the Royal Castle of Amboise. The Tuscan painter is henceforth part and parcel of history and a fine illustration of the royal patronage of king Francis I.

The glorious days of the Renaissance

🚩 THE HISTORY of the Clos Lucé includes other proprietors. After the death of Charles VIII in 1499, Louis XII offered the use of Le Cloux to his cousin Louis of Luxembourg, count of Ligny and Saint Pol⁶⁸, in gratitude for his services during the Italian campaign, where he distinguished himself at the victorious battle of Novara. Louis of Luxembourg, count of Ligny, uncle of the duchess of Angoulême, had met Leonardo in Milan in 1499. He died heirless in December 1503.

The Clos Lucé then became the residence of Charles IV, duke of Alençon, a great captain who distinguished himself in Italy alongside Bayard against the Venetians at the battle of Agnadel, and who, in 1509, married Marguerite of Navarre, elder sister of Francis of Angoulême, the future Francis I. It was not a happy union, and soon after Marguerite of Navarre made the Clos Lucé her permanent residence.

⁶⁸ Louis of Luxembourg was the son of the *connétable* [i.e. literally “constable”, but in effect the supreme commander of the French forces] Louis of Luxembourg-Saint Pol, who was beheaded in the Place de Grève, by the Seine [i.e. traditionally a gathering place for disgruntled workmen], on the orders of Louis XI, for having been in league with Charles the Bold in 1471. His son, Louis of Luxembourg, count of Ligny and Saint Pol, accompanied Louis XII to Italy where he distinguished himself in battle and, as token of defeat at the battle of Novara in 1500, received the sword of the vanquished foe, Ludovico Sforza, duke of Milan, known as “the Moor”. The illustrious captive, Leonardo da Vinci’s patron for all of eighteen years, was incarcerated in the prison in the dungeon of Loches, near Amboise, where he lived out his last years alone and abandoned. For these feats of arms, Louis of Luxembourg was promoted to the rank of knight of the order of St. Michael, and appointed governor of Picardy. In Naples, he married Eleonora of Guévara, princess of Altemare, and thus laid claim to feudal rights to the kingdom of Naples, but without success.

In 1515, Charles IV, duke of Alençon, sold Le Cloux to Louise of Savoy. Later, Eleonora of Hapsburg, second wife of king Francis I, and sister of Charles V, crowned at Saint Denis in 1531, stayed at the Clos Lucé in 1532.

After those royal times, and those moments of genius, the Clos Lucé enjoyed further times both gallant and bloody. The beautiful Babou de la Bourdaisière, the king’s favourite, stayed there.

During the dark days and years of the wars of religion, Michel de Gast, owner of the Clos Lucé and a captain in Henri III’s personal troop, was involved in the assassination of duke Henri de Guise and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, at the Château de Blois on 23 and 24 December 1588.

The history of the Clos Lucé includes other famous visitors, too, such as Clément Marot, St. Francis of Paule, and Henri III.

An historic residence open to the public: a shared mission

🚩 IN THE eighteenth century, the Clos Lucé was once again in the hands of the Amboise family. During the Revolution, Henri Michel d’Amboise, deputy in the French National Convention (1792–1795), saved his residence from being looted and destroyed by shrewdly invoking the declaration of human rights.

Since 1854, the Clos Lucé has, for several generations, been the property of the Saint Bris family, which still owns it to this day. In 1954, Hubert and Agnès Saint Bris enthusiastically embarked upon a new venture and took the decision to open Leonardo da Vinci’s house in its entirety to the public, so that it might be discovered by as many people as possible. They committed themselves to a stone-by-stone restoration of the residence, with the help of craftsmen from the Monuments Historiques, proceeding with the same methods as their fifteenth and sixteenth century forebears in the way they treated wood, stone and stained glass alike, thus restoring the character it had enjoyed in the time of Leonardo da Vinci. Ever since, the Saint Bris family, loyal to the calling of the Château du Clos Lucé, has pursued its mission of handing on this world legacy, along with the memory and knowledge of Leonardo da Vinci. The Clos Lucé has nowadays become a hub of heritage-based tourism, and focal point of the cultural influence of the Loire Valley, now listed under the UNESCO World Heritage.

The goal of the Clos Lucé, in accordance with the wish dear to Hubert Saint Bris, is to “become a center of humanism and international thought, in a world which, through its trials and tribulations, is seeking the path of a new Renaissance”. The purpose of

the cultural project of the Clos Lucé is to be a center for scientific and technical studies dedicated to the memory the knowledge and the discovery of Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. A *Leonardo da Vinci Cultural and Scientific Institute* will be created and set up in a building on the estate that will be refurbished to this end. It will include permanent exhibition rooms devoted to Leonardo da Vinci, painter and architect, a scientific library, and a media center dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance, together with teaching facilities designed for schools, high schools, colleges, and universities.

Many temporary theme-based exhibitions are being planned in partnership with various cultural centres and European museums, the better to spread abroad the *œuvre* of Leonardo da Vinci.

To complete the restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's residence, the major project of the Saint Bris family is to faithfully reinstate the studio and workshop of Leonardo da Vinci at the Clos Lucé. These studio and workshop will be restored with the assistance of architects from the *Historical Monuments*, based in particular on the valuable descriptions left us by the Cardinal of Aragon in 1517, when he visited Leonardo da Vinci in his studio at the Château du Clos Lucé. After all at once bringing to light the walls, beams, fireplaces and frescoes⁷ of the three rooms for the studio and the workshop of the Tuscan maestro, the Clos Lucé will thoroughly revive the spirit that reigned in this house during the dazzling days spent in it by Leonardo da Vinci during the Renaissance.

⁷ A new initial operation to investigate and survey the walls and ceilings in these rooms covered with eighteenth century plaster, undertaken in 2005 with the architect in chief of the Ministry of Culture in charge of Historical Monuments, has helped to uncover, in this studio, the original oak beams, as well as fragments of frescoes and decorative panels dating back to the sixteenth century.



Monograms of Francis I and his mother Louise of Savoy in the Vatican arazzo of Leonardo's, *Last Supper*, c. 1515.
After Laure Fagnart (2001)

