The stay of Gianlorenzo Bernini in Paris ended in failure. Work on the eastern wing of the Louvre according to his designs ceased almost immediately after he left the city in September 1665. The equestrian statue of Louis XIV, an idea first mentioned during Bernini’s visit, was begun soon after Bernini’s return in Rome but arrived in France only in 1685, to mixed reviews.1 And even the most successful witness of Bernini’s work for the King, the marvelous bust now in Versailles, remained incomplete. The Diary that Paul Fréart de Chantelou kept of the artist’s stay mentions an elaborate design for a pedestal, never to be executed. [Figs. 1, 2]

In contrast to this poor record of artistic achievement, the early biographies of Bernini paint an intimate and warm relation between the artist and the monarch. If these texts cast the bust and the equestrian as the tangible outcome of this intimacy, they also suggest a familiarity between the two men that went far beyond the confines of the artistic endeavours that Bernini was asked to undertake. Bernini, the greatest artist of his day and age, and Louis, the greatest King on earth, are of the same mettle. Both are sublime.

This idea is most prominent in the biography that Bernini’s youngest son, Domenico, published in 1713, the Vita del cavalier Gio.Lorenzo Bernino. As the second Italian monographic biography of the artists, it shares much material with Filippo Baldinucci’s Vitta, published in 1682, barely two years after Bernini’s death. As Tomaso Montanari has shown, both books derive from a real biographical campaign instigated by the Bernini-family in the 1670s in order to ensure Gianlorenzo’s posthumous fame in the face of severe slights to his reputation, the failure of

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the trip to France one of them.\textsuperscript{2} If Baldinucci pays much attention to the honours bestowed upon Bernini by Louis XIV and portrays the stay in Paris as a culminating point in Bernini’s career, Domenico emphasizes the fundamental parentage between artist and King even more. He does so by developing and transforming the motive behind the third early biography of Bernini, the Éloge de M. le cavalier Bernin and Préface pour servir à l’histoire de la vie et des ouvrages du Cavalier Bernin by Bernini’s friend Pierre Cureau de la Chambre. The Éloge is a biographical sketch published in the Journal des sçavans in 1681 shortly after Bernini’s death, which was later extended and paired to the Préface, an outline for a more elaborate biography originally read in the Académie française in Paris on 2 January 1685.\textsuperscript{3} La Chambre motivates his biography by stating that

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_1.png}
\caption{Gianlorenzo Bernini, Bust of Louis XIV, 1665, Versailles.}
\end{figure}
