Daniel Marot and the 1st Duke of Montagu

Gervase Jackson-Stops

Despite their political differences, the cultural ties between England, France and Holland at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries were exceptionally close. The ‘Orange and the Rose’ exhibition, some fifteen years ago, showed how the Louis Quatorze style spread rapidly northwards after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 – and since then, links between Huguenot craftsmen working in all three countries have been explored by Professor Lunsingh Scheurleer and others.\(^1\) The engravings of Daniel Marot are known to have been of central importance in disseminating this heavy late Baroque mode of decoration. Closely based on the work of his master, the great *maître ornemaniste*, Jean Berain, they cover a vast range of the fine and decorative arts – from *trompe l’oeil* ceilings to garden urns, from patterns for damask to state beds and carriages.\(^2\)

Marot’s work for William III at Het Loo, and many of his other commissions in Holland, for instance at De Voorst, at Duivenvoorde and at Rosendaal, were described in Dr. M. D. Ozinga’s biography \(^3\), published before the war. Ozinga also found evidence that Marot had been brought to England to work for William and Mary shortly before the latter’s death in 1694, and that his two eldest children were baptised in London in 1695 and 1696. On the other hand he gave him little or no credit for the decoration of the English royal palaces during these years, and it was left to Arthur Lane \(^4\) to demonstrate that Marot had in fact played a leading role, at least at Hampton Court. Here he was almost certainly responsible for designing the interiors of Queen Mary’s apartments in the Water Gallery, where she lived while the main part of the palace was being reconstructed. This building was unfortunately demolished after the completion of Wren’s Fountain Court about 1700, but Marot’s Delft tulip-vases, and cream-pans for the Queen’s dairy, still survive at Hampton Court, together with some of the magnificent blue-and-white wall-tiles, also from the dairy, which are now in the Rijksmuseum.

In addition to this work, Arthur Lane proved convincingly that Marot was responsible for designing the great semicircular parterre on the east front. A drawing for this subsequently emerged at the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, signed by Marot and dated as early as August 1689 \(^5\) – proving that he visited England long before Ozinga had realised. The theory that he returned to Holland for good in 1697 (when his third son was baptised in Amsterdam) also seemed to be disproved by a large
payment made to him by William III in sterling, in March 1698. This is likely to be associated with further work on the garden at Hampton Court, carried out under the superintendence of another of Marot’s patrons in Holland, Hans Willem Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland.

If Daniel Marot came to England soon after the accession of William and Mary, and spent a large part of the following decade here, it would be surprising to find his work entirely confined to Hampton Court. In recent years, close parallels have been drawn between his engravings (and his known work in Holland) and a group of three important English houses, all built or remodelled in the early 1690s: Petworth in West Sussex, Boughton in Northamptonshire and Montagu House in London, demolished in 1845–52 to make way for Smirke’s British Museum. Like Montagu House, the west front of Petworth originally had a central squared dome in the French style reminiscent of Marot’s designs for the Wassenaar-Obdam palace at the Hague. The ‘pavilions’ at either end are decorated with his favourite paired brackets, very seldom used elsewhere in England; the busts on tapered plinths above the ground-floor windows can be compared to his chimneypieces at Voorst; and inside, the Marble Hall has close affinities with his celebrated Trèveszaal in the Binnenhof at the Hague.

One of the difficulties in establishing the precise extent of Marot’s work has always been that, as a pure designer or ornamaniste rather than a practising architect, his name rarely, if ever, appears in regular building accounts. Patrons would pay him simply for drawings which were then given to others to execute, and since such sums usually came out of their private purses, they would rarely bother to record the details. At Petworth one small payment to ‘Mr. Maro’ (of £20) has been found in the Duke of Somerset’s private accounts for September 1693, and a mention of ‘Mons. Marot’ borrowing a copy of Montaigne’s essays from the Duke’s library on December 2nd (probably of the same year), but these can hardly be taken as definite proofs of his involvement.

Petworth had formed part of the dowry of the Duchess of Somerset, formerly Lady Elizabeth Percy, and it was her stepfather Ralph, Earl (and later 1st Duke) of Montagu, who built both Montagu House and Boughton. Though a strong adherent of the Protestant Succession, Ralph Montagu was a lifelong Francophile in matters of taste. Between 1666 and 1678 he had been sent by Charles II as ambassador to France on four separate occasions, and later, when implicated in the Duke of Monmouth’s plots, he spent the years from 1682 to 1685 in voluntary exile in Paris. The first Montagu House was begun by him in 1675 to the designs of Robert Hooke, a contemporary and friend of Wren, and many of the rooms were painted by Verrio, whom Montagu had brought back with him from Paris in 1672, initially to make designs for the Mortlake tapestry factory.