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Elevated Infrastructure: The Aqueduct for the River Eure at Maintenon

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Upon entering the grounds, the first thing one sees is a monumental line of stone arches cutting across the full breadth of the park. The disproportionately large structure steals the show, distracting attention from the perfect geometry of André Le Nôtre's garden. At first sight, it looks like a particularly large folly, a fake ruin intended to recall the ancient aqueducts near the Via Appia of Rome. **fig.1** But the scenography does not quite work. The aqueduct is simply too large to be contained by the grounds of the Château de Maintenon, the estate of the mistress and later wife of Louis XIV, Françoise Aubigné de Maintenon. A brief stroll around the grounds confirms that the giant structure staggers on well beyond the garden's confines. This construction is not just a pastoral fantasy, but a large piece of infrastructure.

fig.1 The aqueduct for the river Eure, Maintenon. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed July 28, 2020).

The colossus in the garden is the spectacular remains of a project to build an 80-kilometer-long canal to direct water from the river Eure to the reservoirs of Versailles. From 1685 to 1688, the project devoured lives and treasuries, only to be eventually abandoned. The aqueduct never became operational. The structure greeting us today is not a decorative but an actual ruin: the decayed residue of an unfinished building.

Now coated with the patina of time and deprived of any hint of functionality, the ruined aqueduct coalesces these contradictions into a single poetic image of empire and its inevitable decline, ready material for the Romantic imagination. But upon closer inspection, the image unravels to reveal a signifier of quotidian failure of an engineering enterprise, testing planning capacity, resources and accountability. The evocative power of the ruined aqueduct points straight to the multiple and contradictory forces that shaped it. Intended to replicate the grandeur of Rome at the height of its power, the aqueduct was also a feat of modern mathematics and engineering. Planned as a monument to eternalize the peace which France enjoyed after a series of successful wars, it was to prove extremely vulnerable to the changing fortunes of the nation. Although it wore the guise of a public utility, it served only to water the king's private fountains at Versailles.

What makes the aqueduct so compelling is that these two dimensions—heroic myth and infrastructural enterprise—were completely intertwined from its conception, and this intricate

connection locked the project in a double bind. If few commentators since the early eighteenth century can resist reading the abandoned project as a metaphor for the reign of Louis XIV (Louis le Grand at the time of construction), it is because considerable energy was invested to present the aqueduct in just those terms. And if today the ruin at Maintenon suspends any ruminations on modern mathematics, logistics or military organization in favor of a strangely dislocated picturesque, it is because the aqueduct was in origin conceived as much as a compelling image as an efficient infrastructure.

Several voices contemporary to the project already hint at the polarity at the heart of the project, either explicitly, obliquely or by means of suppression. The most vocal testimony of the risks involved in the pursuit of modern myths was from Sébastien Le Prestre, Marquis de Vauban, a military engineer at the height of his fame, fresh from stunning victories on the battlefield and deeply involved in the fortification of France. Additionally tasked with conceiving, tendering and planning the canal, Vauban pointed to the confusion at the heart of the project in a letter to François Michel Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois, the state secretary of war and *surintendant des Bâtiments, Arts et Manufactures*. At the time of Vauban's letter, a concerted propaganda campaign, paradoxically both enthusiastic and tentative, had begun to frame the canal and especially the aqueduct as a part of royal iconography, casting the project as one the king's triumphs. Here, I will focus on how the aqueduct was inserted into the program of the notorious Place des Victoires in Paris. Finally, I will turn to an unexpected silence: in the gushing description of the fountains of Versailles that forms part of his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*, an emphatic celebration of modern achievements, the writer Charles Perrault *omits* the aqueduct. Written at the exact moment when the project came to a halt, this suppression reveals the ambivalence of the aqueduct as mythical image and modern infrastructure.

Une jeune beauté toute fraîche

"Nothing has ever been so pleasant as that which you tell me about this great beauty, who should appear at Versailles, all fresh, all pure, all natural, and who should efface all other beauties. I assure you that I was curious about her name, and that I expected some newly arrived beauty, brought to the Court; but now I discover suddenly that it is a river, which is diverted from her course, as precious as she is, by an army of 40,000 men; no fewer are required to make her a bed. It seems to me that it is a present from Madame de Maintenon to the King, of the thing he wishes

most. I was unaware of the name of this river, but even though it is not famous, those who are on its banks will not cease to be astonished by its absence." [1]

So wrote Madame de Sévigné to her daughter at court on December 13, 1684. Not without irony, the letter reflects the considerable excitement which greeted the project to divert the river Eure to Versailles, first aired publicly at Fontainebleau in October 1684. [2] It also immediately juxtaposes the two realms that would guide its realization: life at court, with its mythography centered on the king, and the huge operation of the building site. The image of 40,000 men making the bed for a single beauty under the command of Madame de Maintenon suggests that no effort be spared to please the king, whatever the object of his pursuit. Underlying the metaphor are images of conquest and seduction, of a new arrival overwhelming Versailles, under the watchful eyes of the king's mistress, and ultimately for the pleasure of the king. If requiring 40,000 men to make a bed seems to hint at the subservience of some males, it also ultimately signifies the unbridled virility of one.

Unleashing the royal libido required careful planning. The hydraulic demands of Versailles had been a persistent concern ever since the gardens were built. At the time of Sévigné's writing, more than a decade worth of efforts to supply Versailles with adequate water had been met with mitigated results. In his *Mémoires,* Charles Perrault recalled with wonder how the minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert, his superior, listened patiently to the most far-fetched proposals ("pure visions"). [3] Ad hoc projects were attempted, with little overall planning, based on different methods and principles and with varying degrees of success. [4] As early as 1674, it was proposed to divert a river towards the garden. The Loire was eyed as a limitless supply. This plan was shelved when, urged by Perrault, the astronomer Pierre Picard and "several others from the Académie des sciences" demonstrated, by means of a telescopic level of Picard's own invention, that the river was insufficiently elevated above Versailles to guarantee a consistent flow. [5] Using his own version of the telescopic level, in October 1684, the mathematician Philippe de La Hire found that at a point near Pontgouin, 80 kilometers west of Versailles, the river Eure stood at 27 meters above the garden; at this distance it could be connected to the reservoirs feeding Versailles by means of a canal declining 16 centimeters per kilometer. [6] It is this project that the king unveiled at Fontainebleau. The new "bed" for the Eure would consist of a combination of open conduits and aqueducts. Its centerpiece was to be the aqueduct that would span the valley of the Eure at Maintenon, 40 kilometers from Versailles. **fig. 2**

1 Marie de Rabutin-Chantal Sévigné, *Recueil des lettres de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille. Nouvelle édition augmentée*, vol. 6 (Paris: Durand, 1754), Lettre LX, 354–355. Sévigné's letter is part of a well-known corpus of contemporary comments on the canal. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

2 Philippe de Courcillon, marquis de Dangeau: *Journal du marquis de Dangeau avec les additions du duc de Saint-Simon*, ed. E. Soulié et al. vol. 1 (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1854) Oct. 19, 1684, 61: "[O]n parla fort de la rivière d'Eure."

3 Charles Perrault, *Mémoires 1628–1687*, ed. Éric de Bussac (n.p.: Éditions Paleo, 2012), 113.

4 Éric Soullard, "Les eaux de Versailles," *Hypothèses* 1 (1998), 105–112, https://www.cairn.info/revue-hypotheses-1998-1-page-105.htm (accessed July 22, 2020).

5 Perrault, *Mémoires* (see note 3), 108–13.

6 Anthony Gerbino, "The Académie des sciences and the Gardens of Versailles," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 6 (2008), 69–95, esp. 82–85. See also Anthony Gerbino, Introduction to *Geometrical Objects: Architecture and the Mathematical Sciences 1400–1800*, ed. Anthony Gerbino (Cham: Springer, 2014), 1–46, here 25–27.

As soon as de La Hire had established the plausibility of the project, Louvois consulted the Académie Royale d'Architecture with some urgency about the design of the central aqueduct. [7] The final project would, however, be drawn up by Vauban who, like Louvois, would spend several months at Maintenon in early 1685 to prepare the project. The aqueduct was planned as a construction of 505 meters in length, at a maximum height of 73.3 meters, on a basis of 46 pillars. Vauban described the building in a detailed *devis* to tender the work to private contractors, in the manner of military construction works. [8] Drafting the *devis* was paired to a survey of the future construction site to plan the works as well as the supply of building materials and man power. The project was advertised across the French territory to attract workers and expertise. [9] Vauban opted for the same construction technique as fortresses, requiring an enormous quantity of coal, bought in England and Amsterdam, for the production of tools, lime and bricks. [10] Quarried stone was delivered by means of purpose-built canals. The works necessitated an incessant supply of building tools and artisans. The main building force consisted of soldiers; ultimately totaling circa 20,000 troops, probably two thirds of the total workforce, regiments were positioned near the various construction sites from February 1685 onwards. Their accommodation, sustenance, health and discipline were a constant concern. Louvois micromanaged the whole process. Between 1685 and 1688, the yearly building cost of the canal amounted to 2 million pounds, about one fourth of the total budget of the Bâtiments du Roi. [11]

For Crying Out Loud

This enormous effort seems far removed from the sudden arrival of a new beauty at court, teasingly sketched in Sévigné's letter. The anticipated effect of her surprising appearance was dependent upon the gargantuan effort involved in making her bed. The work of both Vauban and Louvois focused on this aspect of the enterprise. Louvois saw the building of the canal as the culminating achievement of his *surintendance*. [12] The aqueduct was to be a monument. Versailles provided both the destination and

7 Henry Lemonnier, Introduction to *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie royale d'architecture 1671–1793*, ed. Henry Lemonnier, vol. 1 (Paris, J. Schemit, 1911), vii–lxiii, here xxxiii–xliii.

8 The *devis* is published in [Alexandre Corréard], "Aqueduc de Maintenon: Par le Maréchal de Vauban; Devis des ouvrages de l'aqueduc, avec des notes de l'un des rédacteurs du journal," *Journal de génie civil des sciences et des arts* 14 (Aug. 1846), 38–74. See also Pierre Pinon, "Les canaux de navigation et l'aqueduc de Maintenton," in Isabelle Warmoes and Victoria Sanger, eds., *Vauban, bâtisseur du Roi-Soleil*, exh. cat. *Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine*, Musée des plans-reliefs (Paris: Somogny éditions d'Art, 2007), 211 and cat. no. 24. Lemonnier, *Procès-verbaux* (see note 7), xliii, insists that the project described in the *devis* was designed by the Académie. d'Architecture.

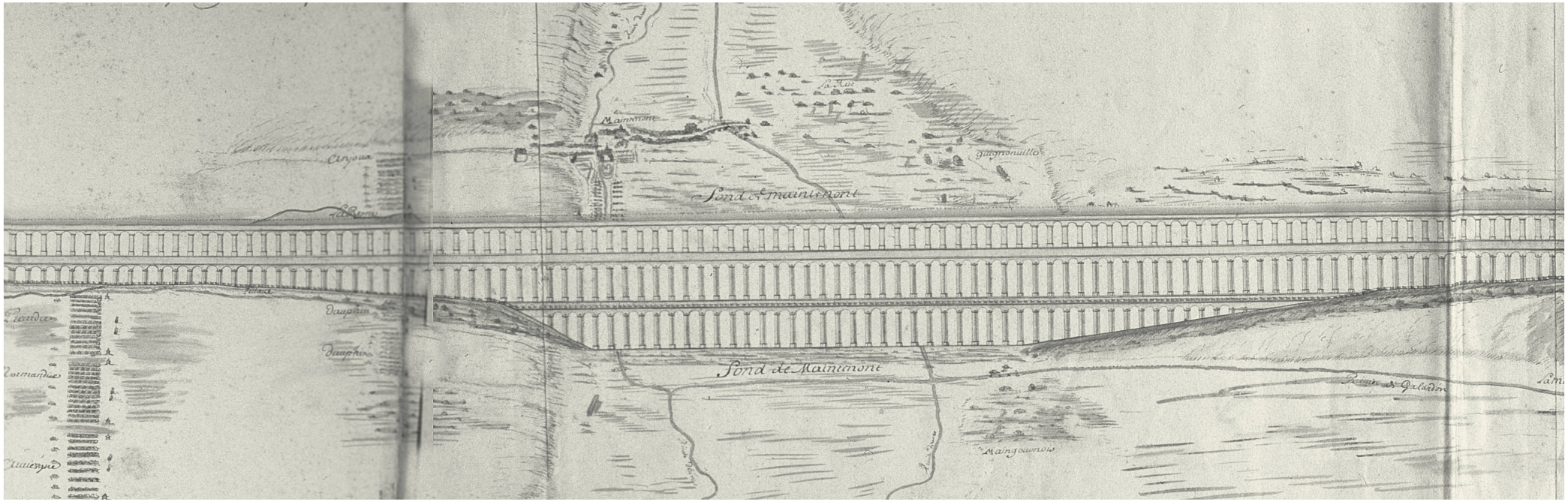
9 Lemonnier, *Procès-verbaux* (see note 7), xlii, n.2, mentions a "mémoire" drafted by a Fleming who had spotted the poster of the project for the canal on the door of the town hall in Ypres and wished to propose his own design.

10 Éric Soullard, "L'utilisation massive du charbon de terre pour les travaux de Versailles sous Louis XIV: l'aqueduc de Maintenon et la Machine de Marly," in Paul Benoit and Catherine Verna, eds., *Le charbon de terre en Europe occidentale avant l'usage du coke*, Proceedings of the XXth International Congress of History of Science (Liège, 20–26 July 1997) 4 (Liège: Brepols, 1999), 111–23.

11 André Corvisier, "L'échec d'une opération de prestige: 'Le détournement de l'Eure'; Mythes et réalités," in Jean-Pierre Bardet and Madeleine Foisil, eds., *La vie, la mort, la foi, le temps: Mélanges offerts à Pierre Chaunu* (Paris: PUF, 1993), 683–91, here 685–86; reprinted as "L'Aqueduc de Maintenon: Mythes et réalités," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir* 10 (1999), 1–20.

12 Thierry Sarmant, *Les demeures du Roi Soleil: Louis XIV et la surintendance des bâtiments du Roi* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2003), 141–47, 213–16.

fig. 2 Unknown artist, *Profil de l'aqueduc de terre et maconnerie entre Berchaire et le Village de Fourche ayant en longueur 6541 toises*, drawing, 35.3 × 478 cm.
Source: Stockholm Nationalmuseum, NMH CC 655.
→ 50/51


Mainmont
Pont de Mainmont
Pont de Mainmont
Dauphin
Dauphin
Normandie
Maingoumois

the rationale for the new canal, and so the symbolic projection of Versailles across the territory—the bed—mattered as much to the success of the canal as its ability to hold water. Shaping parts of the canal as an aqueduct similar to Roman models was crucial to this part of the endeavor. In early discussions of its design, the Pont du Gard served as a key reference, and the design approved for execution featured a three-story aqueduct.

Vauban saws things differently. From February 1685 onwards he proposed measures to reduce the necessary amount of masonry work, in an attempt to keep the cost and duration of the project under control. He suggested to use syphons rather than aqueducts to cross certain valleys, and limit the length and height of the construction at Maintenon. Louvois flatly refused, arguing that the king desired an aqueduct. Design work progressed accordingly, and a letter from Louvois in March states the king's satisfaction with the project; the final design was approved in May. [13]

Vauban would mount one last attack on the project in a remarkable letter to Louvois written on June 29, 1685, during a short break from the preparatory works for the canal. [14] In the letter, Vauban warns Louvois of the immense costs and efforts involved in building the canal, which would far exceed current estimates and continue to weigh on the royal budget and military preparedness; in Vauban's view, the construction would take at least eight to ten years to complete, rather than four to five. "Thousands" of incidents small and large could derail the works, such as the outbreak of a new war caused by political turmoil in Europe. The engineer further questions the very necessity of the project, pointing out that together with smarter water management, the Machine de Marly, a contraption to pump water from the Seine, could suffice to supply the Versailles fountains. He asks whether the money set aside for the canal would not be better spent on alleviating the famine that had hit the same region.

Vauban ends his enumeration of objections with a rhetorical question: "What do we seek? For crying out loud, since it is clear that we could do well without this great work; to surpass the glory of the Romans?" As far as military achievements are concerned, Vauban believes that the score has long been settled. If France had been armed and defended in antiquity as now, Caesar would have thought twice about crossing the Alps, he contends. In fact, beleaguered by "the greatest force of Christianity" for seven years, Louis had emerged victorious and even expanded France. Moreover, in the short span of his reign, the king had already built more than any emperor, including Justinian "whom Procopius praises so." "What remains there then to be surpassed?" Vauban wonders. Surely not the Egyptians, whose

13 On this dispute, see Pinon, "Les canaux" (see note 8), 212, with earlier literature. Louvois would finally allow the reduction of the aqueduct, from a three- to a one-story construction in a letter of August 26, 1686. See Fernand Évrard, "Les travaux du canal de l'Eure sous Louis XIV," *Revue de l'histoire de Versailles et de Seine-et-Oise* 3 (1933), 96–129, 131–51, here 133.

14 The letter is published in Thierry Sarmant and Raphaël Masson, eds., *Architecture et Beaux-Arts à l'apogée du règne de Louis XIV: Édition critique de la correspondance du Marquis de Louvois, surintendant des Bâtiments du roi, arts et manufactures de France 1683–1691*, vol. 2: Année 1685 (Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2009), xxi–xxiii, with an indispensable portrayal of the project on xii–xx. All subsequent quotes are drawn from the letter.

pyramids did not save their builders from oblivion. After all, Vauban writes, "these tall and enormous buildings did not have any utility, so one did not know how to praise those who built them."

To Vauban it is obvious that the canal and its aqueduct are pieces of infrastructure and should be evaluated in terms of its effect, and not via reference to the Roman emperors. Because in infrastructure only utility deserves praise, future generations will wonder why Louis built a useless aqueduct instead of, for instance, finishing the Louvre, in Vauban's view a much higher priority. Furthermore, the diversion of resources would weigh on the geopolitical position of France for years to come, even if the project were successful. And if France could not sustain the enterprise, "the work will languish, and languishing you will see the end only late or even never, in a time when you [Louvois] will not be able to enjoy it, because the King and you will be of an advanced age whose taste [*le goust*] will be perhaps quite different from today's."

What Vauban's letter emphasizes is that the aqueduct does not escape the vicissitudes of circumstance. The imagery of the aqueduct does not stabilize the meaning of the enterprise in terms of the achievements of the ancients; quite the contrary, it remains a matter of transitory taste, rooted in the political conditions of the present. The project is not to be confounded with the triumphs of war nor with the erection of monuments. In fact, Vauban suggests that the project itself could undermine its monumental role, by acting as an object demonstration of how unnecessary infrastructure could ironically modify the conditions of war and peace, and undermine the integrity of the territory. The infrastructure will only ever be a monument *ex negativo*, Vauban suggests, when its incompleteness symbolizes the disintegration of France's might.

A Peacetime Monument

While Vauban's objections went unheeded, they evince a keen understanding of royal propaganda. In fact, in his letter the engineer challenged precisely the association of the canal with royal magnificence and military prowess that would become a theme in the royal iconography for the next two years. The sheer scale of the enterprise, as well as the engagement of the military after a period of war concluded with the Truce of Regensburg (August 15, 1684), allowed commentators to cast the aqueduct as a peacetime monument on a par with Roman examples. Madame de la Fayette opens her *Mémoires de la cour de France pour les années 1688 et 1689* looking back at a moment when:

"France was in perfect tranquillity, no other arms were known than the instruments to stir the earth and to build.

The troops were employed for these uses, not just with the intentions of the ancient Romans, which was to draw them away from an idleness that was as dangerous to them as an excess of work, but the goal was also to move the river Eure against its will, to render the fountains of Versailles continuous. Troops were used for this prodigious project to advance the pleasure of the King for some years, and it was done with less expense and in less time than one had dared to hope." [15]

La Fayette describes a European political landscape where France would remain unchallenged for years to come, allowing Louis XIV to indulge in his passion for building "at immense expense." At the very onset of the works, in April 1685, the *Mercure Galant*, a magazine largely devoted to life at court, opened with praising Louis's decision to build the canal, not only in order to keep his troops busy and fit but also to provide work to the destitute and to entertain his court at Versailles. [16]

As a peacetime monument, the canal, and in particular the aqueduct, became a display of military power turned inwards, towards the very territory of France after the consolidation of its borders. In May 1688 the *Mercure Galant* published a sonnet by the Jesuit Tessier celebrating a visit to the construction site. It points out how Neptune, Minerva, Mars and Bellona all worked together to erect a monument that would "surpass the glory and the works of the Caesars." [17] An almanac for 1688 (a calendar illustrating a major event of the previous year) commemorated another visit of Louis XIV, now in the company of the Dauphin and Dauphine and probably Racine, on July 26 to 30, 1687. [18/fig. 3] Titled *The Wonderful Works of King Louis the Great in Times of Peace*, it presented the aqueduct as the centerpiece of Louis's peacetime works. The central inscription muses how "France has become an enchanted land / It is the lovely home of Felicity / Under a reign so beautiful everything conspires towards its glory / Fountains, aqueducts, temples, gardens, palaces / Bridges and ramparts built with the hands of victory / Are under Louis the Great the work of peace." The aqueduct is framed with vignettes of various buildings, all shown under construction: Trianon and the Château and the Machine of Marly, the Dome des Invalides, the church of the monumental hospice for wounded and maimed soldiers, and the Place des Conquêtes (now Place Vendome), a square celebrating Louis's military triumphs in Europe. In the center below the main image appears the Pont Royal des Tuileries, like the aqueduct a bridge across an obstacle, an easy allegory of peace and concord. The connection between military force and construction in times of peace is epitomized in the main image. The scene is set for the inspection of the troops and the firing of canons

15 Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, comtesse de La Fayette, *Les Mémoires de Mme. de la Fayette précédés de la Princesse de Clèves* (Paris: Flammarion, 1917), 277–78.

16 "Prélude, contenant plusieurs Actions de grandeur, de bonté, & de libéralité du Roy, & plusieurs Pièces à la gloire de ce Monarque," *Mercure Galant* (Apr. 1685), 1–8, gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed Dec. 26, 2019).

17 "Sonnet de l'abbé Tessier sur le déplacement du roi à Maintenon," *Mercure Galant* (May 1688), 320–25, http://obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr/corpus/mercure-galant/MG-1688-05a#MG-1688-05a_323 (accessed July 22, 2020).

18 On the almanac, see amongst others Warmoes and Sanger, *Vauban* (see note 8), cat. no. 23. The visit is discussed in Évrard, "Les travaux du canal" (see note 13), 137. Racine refers to a visit in company of the King in a letter to Boileau dated August 24. See, for instance, Pierre Clément, *Le gouvernement de Louis XIV, ou la cour, l'administration, les finances et le commerce de 1683 à 1689* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1848), 167–77, here 173.

that formed a regular feature of Louis's visits to Maintenon. In the foreground Louvois shows the trajectory of the canal.

The image of Louis XIV's military might, then at its height, unleashed on the construction of the canal, evokes the enormous energy invested in the transformation of his territory. Later, Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, would ascribe Louis's predilection for situating Versailles and his other residences in dry, remote and marshy places to his desire to bend nature to his will. [19] This ability was celebrated with the 1685 issue of the jetton (the annual mint commemorating an important accomplishment of the or his administration), which shows an aqueduct under construction in front of a mountain that is being levelled. The motto *attollit flumina, montes deprimit* ("he elevates rivers and lowers mountains") celebrates Louis's mastery over nature, a theme already evoked in the jetton of the previous year, devoted to the Machine of Marly, with the motto: *victis montibus vicis naturam* ("with your triumph over mountains you conquer nature"). [20]

fig. 3 *Les ouvrages magnifiques du Roy Louis le Grand en temps de Paix* (Paris: François Jollain l'aîné, 1688).
Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed July 22, 2020).

fig. 4 Detail from Claude-François Ménestrier, *Histoire du roi Louis le Grand par les médail-les, emblèmes, devises, jetons, inscriptions, armoiries et autres monuments publics. Edition nouvelle* (Paris: R. Pepie, 1693), 81.
Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed July 22, 2020).

19 Marquis de Dangeau, *Journal* (see note 2), vol. 16, 47–50.

20 Claude-François Ménestrier, *Histoire du roi Louis le Grand par les médailles, emblèmes, devises, jetons, inscriptions, armoiries et autres monuments publics. Edition nouvelle* (Paris: R. Pepie, 1693), 81.

21 See, for instance, Hendrik Ziegler, *Der Sonnenkönig und seine Feinde: Die Bildpropaganda Ludwigs XIV. in der Kritik* (Petersberg: M. Inhof, 2010), 85.

The demiurgic transformation of nature resonated with another intervention on French territory that coincided with the construction of the canal. On October 15, 1685, Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes, ending the toleration of Protestantism on French soil. Cast as the extirpation of heresy, the act became paired with the construction of the aqueduct. An almanac of 1686, titled *Louis le Grand la terreur et l'admiration de l'Univers*, displays the aqueduct as the support of the calendar of the coming year next to an allegory of the defeat of heresy. [21] Louis's religious zeal was also paired with the construction of the canal at the opening of the new *Académie des Belles Lettres,* in Angers on July 1, 1686;

both endeavors were set as topics for the annual literary competition. [22] The pairing emphasized how the might of the king was now turned to bending the territory of France to his will, in matters material, as well as spiritual: "stirring the earth" to allow water to flow to Versailles was a counterpart to demolishing Protestant churches in the service of state-sponsored Catholicism. This symbolical connection played out on the construction site of the canal as well: the regiments assigned to labor were reputed to have many Huguenots in their ranks who were subjected to campaigns of conversion. At the same time, the military presence in the region served as an instrument to reinforce the orthodoxy of the local population. [23]

Place des Victoires

The aqueduct would be most explicitly associated with Louis's military might at the Place des Victoires in Paris. Because of its hyperbolic setup, the Place tested, to its limits, the adequacy of the aqueduct as a symbol of royal power. Circumstances sealed the fate of this association. In a strange historical play of mirrors, the botched building history of the Place would erase the memory of the presence of the aqueduct. While the real aqueduct languished unfinished at Maintenon, its representation at the Place des Victoires was soon dismounted and forgotten.

The Place des Victoires was offered to Louis XIV by the Marshal de la Feuillade, who probably acted on the prompting of the royal building administration. [24] Built in the heart of Paris in accordance to designs by Jules Hardouin-Mansart, it consisted of a monumental sculpture, surrounded by uniform residential buildings. The streets leading up to the square were centered on the monument, fenced off and surrounded by four large lanterns, each supported by three columns. Each column was designed to bear six large bas-relief medals depicting royal achievements, identified by inscriptions on the convex base of the lanterns. The sculpture group showed the king being crowned by Victory, and beneath them the inscription *VIRO IMMORTALI* ("to the immortal man"). The pair of statues towered over chained slaves represented the nations Louis had vanquished, celebrating the king's victories over his European rivals. [fig. 5] The monument received a spectacular inauguration on March 26, 1686. On that occasion, François-Séraphin Regnier-Desmarais, perpetual secretary of the Académie Française, published an extensive description of the ensemble. As the author of all the planned inscriptions, Regnier-Desmarais pays extensive attention to the reliefs and medals that would be installed. The author points out that the king's numerous accomplishments had been restrict-

22 "Etablissement de l'Académie royale d'Angers, avec les particulariez d'une Feste qui a esté faite dans la mesme Ville le jour qu'on y a élevé un Buste à la gloire du Roy," *Mercure Galant* (Dec. 1686), 162–200, http://obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr/corpus/mercure-galant/MG-1686-12a#MG-1686-12a_162 (accessed July 22, 2020). See also Hendrik Ziegler, "Angers: Statue de Louis XIV," in François Lemée, *Traité des statues* (1688), eds. Diane H. Bodart and Hendrik Ziegler (Kromsdorf: VDG, 2012), vol. 2, 133–34.

23 Henry Lehr, *La reforme et les églises réformées dans le départment actuel d'Eure-et-Loir (1523–1911)* (Chartres-Paris: Garnier-Fischbacher, 1912), 415–38.

24 Isabelle Dubois and Claude Mignot, eds., *Place des Victoires: Histoire, architecture, société* (Paris: Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art, 2004).

ed to twenty-four so as not to overcharge the columns with too many medals, and that not everything was in place yet "for lack of time." [25] Amongst the planned medals and their epigrams there is no mention of the aqueduct.

To this day, the Louvre holds a medal intended for the Place that shows a female allegory of the Eure, pointing towards Versailles, with the aqueduct and the castle of Maintenon in the background. This medal was installed on the only lantern that would receive its full set of regalia. [26/fig. 6] The king saw it there during a royal visit to Paris on May 10, 1687. The breathless report of the visit in the *Mercure Galant* gives the associated Latin inscription: "What new works, elevating themselves into the air / by their vast size make yield all things / this is how LOUIS rests during peace / and enjoys the leisure he grants the Universe." [27] The report reads the epigram and the medal as referring to the royal building works in general, but a small booklet published in 1687 confirms that their actual topic is the aqueduct. Titled *Sur les travaux de la rivière d'Eure et sur les eaux de Versailles*, it is written by the same Regnier-Desmarais who authored the other inscriptions. [28] The Latin inscription "on the works of the river Eure," reported by the *Mercure Galant,* is given in the middle of the booklet together with its French translation and framed by the French and Latin version of a long poem celebrating the new course of the Eure towards Versailles.

25 François Séraphin Regnier-Desmarais, *Description du monument érigé à la gloire du Roy par M. le maréchal duc de La Feuillade, avec les inscriptions de tout l'ouvrage* (Paris: S. Mabre-Cramoisy, 1686), 11–12. The author mentions that simple stucco roundels served as placeholders for the reliefs, and the inscriptions were yet to be installed.

26 On the vicissitudes of the medal, see Ziegler, *Der Sonnenkönig* (see note 21), 93–94, fig. 83.

fig. 5 *Statüe à la gloire du roy dans la Place des Victoires et les Cérémonies faites le 22.me Mars 1686* (Paris: Chez Moncornet, 1687). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France (accessed July 22, 2020).

fig. 6 Jean Arnould, Pierre Le Nègre, Medal representing the canal for the Eure, bronze, bas-relief, 77.5 cm, Paris: Musée du Louvre, département des sculptures, inv. RF 3466. Source: https://www.akg-images.co.uk/archive/-2UMDHUKCZZYY.html (accessed July 22, 2020).

27 Raymond Baustert, ed., *Un Roi à Luxembourg, 10 mai–7 juin 1687: Voyage luxembourgeois de Louis XIV; édition commentée du "Journal du voyage de sa Majesté a Luxembourg," Mercure galant, Juin 1687, II (seconde partie)* (Tübingen: Narr, 2015), 123.

28 François Séraphin Regnier-Desmarais, *Sur les travaux de la rivière d'Eure et sur les eaux de Versailles: poème / Eburae fluvio iter ad Versaliam molienti: carmen* (Paris: S. Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687).

Regnier-Desmarais's publication of the poem suggests that somewhere between March 1686 and May 1687, one of the intended twenty-four medals was replaced with the aqueduct for the Eure; this interval coincides with the period of Louis's closest engagement with the project. The author provided a new, suitable inscription, and advertised it with the small booklet. In an ironic twist of faith, however, subsequent descriptions and depictions of the Place des Victoires would base themselves on Regnier-Desmarais's original list of twenty-four inscriptions published in the *Description*, and not mention the aqueduct. [29] When the lantern was dismantled in 1718, the medal became dissociated from the inscription, further pushing the conspicuous exaltation of the aqueduct amongst Louis's military victories into oblivion. The display of the canal of the Eure, one of the few achievements ever shown on the Place des Victoires, was largely forgotten.

29 Ziegler, *Der Sonnenkönig* (see note 21), 283–86.

Performance

Still, its presence lingered in other paraphernalia connected to the square. The year after Regnier-Desmarais produced the new inscription and poem, the lawyer François Lemée published the *Traité des statues*, an examination of the origin and nature of sculpture as an honorific practice. Its composition was occasioned by the European uproar caused by the Place des Victoires and its spectacular inauguration. Depicting nations as chained slaves caused offense, and the king was accused of indulging in idolatry. [30] Lemée came to his defense. The *Traité* acknowledged the close connection between the emergence of sculpture and idolatry, only to conclude that this nexus remained legitimate when it came to the celebration of Louis and his demiurgic powers; under these circumstances, divine agency could be transferred to objects. In Lemée's view, the historical development of sculpture in service of the cult of great men culminated with the Place des Victoires.

30 Ziegler, *Der Sonnenkönig* (see note 21).

Lemée builds his arguments on ancient precedent. His discussion of the habit of erecting colossal statues, for instance, is modelled on King Alexander's refusal of Dinocrates's proposal to remodel Mount Athos to his likeness. As Lemée recalls, the monarch deemed the "Caucasus, the Ennodian Mountains, the river Tanaïs and the Caspian Sea" sufficient "images of his feats." Similarly, Lemée projects the greatness of Louis XIV onto European territory, which becomes one enormous effigy of the king: "Such are today the glorious trophies of Louis the Great, the Pyrenees, the junction of the two seas, the Rhine, the Meuse, the Danube, the Raab, the very Seine, and the river Eure, where he leaves indelible characters of his power, of his value, and his

magnificence." [31] This enumeration hits the limit of what the Eure can carry in symbolical weight. In Lemée's enumeration, the provincial waterway—still entirely unknown to de Sévigné barely three years earlier—suddenly finds itself in the company of the rivers that formed the theater of Louis's military campaigns and defined the expanse of his kingdom. They draw their historical significance from military or political events which emulate the achievements of the ancients. The Eure, by contrast, can only sustain such comparison by dint of the aqueduct, and even this feature is not enough; as we have seen, the chronicler of Louis's visit to the Place des Victoires saw no reference to the Eure or the aqueduct in the medal or inscription, but only to royal works in general, "elevating themselves into the air."

31 Lemée, *Traité* (see note 22), vol. 1, 151.

Strikingly, the aqueduct itself is also missing from Regnier-Desmarais's poem devoted to the new inscription. The body of the poem offers a tour of the gardens at Versailles by describing how the water there flows, falls or spouts according to the shape and theme of the fountain it reaches. Water is a protean force of life, offering well-deserved distractions to Louis XIV while celebrating his unsurpassable greatness. Louis is cast as the creator who allows the water to extend itself in a "tranquil and pure lake" to "imitate calm and rest"; he captures the water in "long pipes" so that it erupts in "audacious jets," or simply allows the water to take on "a new and different figure" for his sole pleasure. [32] The opening stanza evokes the audacity required to bring the water so far by describing the astonishment of the Eure at the various scenes it passes on its new journey towards Versailles:

32 These and subsequent quotes are taken from Regnier-Desmarais, *Sur les travaux* (see note 28), [1]–3.

"The [river] Eure, which meanwhile follows the new route / Where the order of fate and of Louis calls it / With astonishment sees in the breast of mountains / Busy workers dig ample vales. / It admires on its course the deep valleys / Equaled to the height of mountains by their arms / And watches surprised the new shores / That they give each day to the stream of its waters."

By adopting the perspective of the water, the poem provides no view of the canal or aqueduct. The text only lingers on the movement of the river across the landscape facilitated by the king and his army. The monuments that emerge in the poem are not the new infrastructure works but the garden and the fountains the Eure discovers at the end of its journey. Strikingly, the first fountain described by Regnier-Desmarais contrasts the architecture generated by the water to a permanent, yet still unbuilt counterpart. It is the *Fontaine de l'arc de Triomphe*, where "anon in a noble and superb arrangement / with your streams in the airs pushing violence / you seem to want, new architect / to imitate the vault of a triumphal arch / of an arch such as Paris, full

of ardour and zeal / undertakes to erect for eternal memory / to the august Louis, Protector of Laws, / Avenger of Altars, and Arbiter of Kings." Contrary to the aqueduct of Maintenon, or indeed the Place des Victoires, the water of the Eure, elevating itself into an arc from an unseen and distant source, is the gesture most befitting the king. The true manifestation of royal power is its ability to render this ephemeral monument permanent by securing a continuous supply from the Eure.

Modern Silence

Regnier-Desmarais's poem shifts the perspective back to Sévigné's playful evocation of the beauty causing an uproar at Versailles. The enormous yet subtle power of the king is manifest in the sudden appearance of water in the royal gardens. Exactly this aspect of royal power is foregrounded again in one of the most sustained celebrations of Versailles as a symbol of Louis's greatness, the *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* by Charles Perrault. [33] This lodestone in the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* was published between 1688 and 1697, as a series of dialogues where the abbot takes on the president to proclaim the superiority of the Moderns over the Ancients in matters of the arts and sciences. The gardens and château of Versailles provide the setting of the dialogues and act as living proof of the superiority of the Moderns. [34] In-between their debates, the interlocutors explore the grounds and marvel at their splendor, deemed unlike any ancient example.

The fountains of Versailles are discussed at the very end of the second dialogue. [35] The *Bosquet des Trois Fontaines* serves to gauge ancient and modern merits when it comes to waterworks. The abbot points out how the fountains are so well designed that their beauty appears to emerge naturally. The subtle manipulation of the landscape reveals the beauty inherent to its components: a clearing with a gentle slope allowing water to flow down and feed the fountains. Only gravity seems at work. The abbot's praise for the Three Fountains rebukes the president's earlier remark that the moderns indulge in "those violent and forced gushes, that tire the eyes and the imagination due to their permanent coercion." The president contrasts the violence of spouting fountains to the grandeur of ancient waterworks. The ancients "generally preferred to see the water fall from high to low according to its natural inclination, which is perhaps no less graceful." When challenged by the abbot's assertion that modern "gushing rivers," too, allow water to fall down, the president argues that the ancients were not less magnificent than the moderns thanks to the "immense size" of their aqueducts. The abbot disagrees with

33 Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences. Nouvelle édition augmentée de quelques dialogues* (Paris, Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1693).

34 See, for instance, Christoph Oliver Mayer, *Institutionelle Mechanismen der Kanonbildung in der Académie française: Die Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes im Frankreich des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 319–31.

35 Perrault, *Parallèle* (see note 33), vol. 1, 166–67. Subsequent quotes are drawn from this source.

the president: "If you could see the infinite number of aqueducts that snake here underground at all sides, you would see that the difference is not so big as you imagine. I maintain moreover that already the machine that lifts the water from the Seine to be brought into this park has something more astonishing and more marvellous than all the aqueducts of the Romans." He concludes: "However it may be, if it is true that water is the soul of the gardens, which gardens would not seem dead or languishing compared to this one?"

A more explicit dismissal of the monumentality of the aqueduct is hard to imagine, all the more since the abbot does adduce the Machine de Marly, "the machine that lifts the water from the Seine," as a fine example of modern hydraulic artifices. Against the Romans who found pleasure in elevating their water conduits into the air and transformed them into monuments, the Moderns preferred the spectacle of fountains enabled by true feats of engineering. Crucially, these feats have been concealed and can only be imagined thanks to the success of their performance.

Afterimage

Perrault's silence on the aqueduct of Maintenon in his celebration of the royal waterworks coincided with the actual demise of the project. [36] The author must have been making final edits to this part of the *Parallèle* right when building works ground to a halt. Printing of the book was completed on October 30, 1688. [37] The royal visit to the aqueduct in May 1688 would be the last. By August 1688, most of the troops assigned to the construction site had left camp to participate in the war with the League of Augsburg. As Vauban had foreseen, the project never recovered from this diversion of resources. It languished until it was abandoned in the mid-1690s. [38] While large parts of the canal were built, the Eure never reached Versailles. Today, the landscape between Pontgouin, where the river was to flow into the canal, up to and beyond Maintenon, is strewn with traces of this gigantic undertaking, its trajectory apparent in the relief and vegetation of the landscape. [39]

If these material traces persisted, after 1688 the Eure disappeared from view in royal imagery; in that year La Bruyère would make an oblique and ironic reference to the project in the chapter "Des Grands" of his *Caractères:* "The greats take pride in opening an ally in a forest, in supporting lands with long walls, in gilding ceilings, in bringing ten thumbs of water, in furnishing an orangery." [40] From here on, the canal generated two divergent narratives, each with their own historiography. The first is a history of failure, decline and death. [41] Writing in the early

36 There is possibly a personal aspect to Perrault's silence as well. The author had been sidelined from the royal administration after Colbert's death and would hardly have been motivated to celebrate the undertaking that his successor Louvois saw as his defining accomplishment.

37 On the edition history, see https://parallele-anciens-modernes.huma-num.fr/Introduction_edition (accessed Dec. 29, 2019).

38 The letters published in Paul M. Bondois, "Lettres relatives aux travaux de l'aqueduc de Maintenon et de la rivière d'Eure en 1688," *Bulletin historique et philologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques* 45 (1944), 49–69, run up to December 1688, when provisions were made to continue the building works the next spring.

39 See Paulette Couturier, "Tourisme et Histoire: Le Canal de l'Eure," *Histoire locale Beauce et Perche* 37 (Mar. 1972), 3–26; Janine Christiany, "Mise en place des travaux du canal de l'Eure, septembre 1684–juillet 1685: Un ouvrage inachevé / The canal de l'Eure: The Final Attempt to Supply Water to the Fountains of Versailles," *Atti e rassegna tecnica della Società degli ingegneri e degli architetti in Torino* 151/72, no. 1 (June 2018): *Architettura, città, territorio: Ricerche e riflessioni critiche*, 102–108; Gabriel Despots and Jacques Galland, *Histoire du canal Louis XIV de Pontgouin à Maintenon*, ed. Association pour l'étude et la sauvegarde des vestiges du canal Louis XIV (Berchères-Saint-Germain: Comité archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, 2006).

40 The reference is given in Sarmant and Masson, *Architecture et Beaux-Arts* (see note 14), xvi.

41 The best assessment of the reputation of the project is Corvisier, "L'échec" (see note 11).

eighteenth century, Saint-Simon condemned the whole project as an act of royal hubris that fatally undermined the French army; as early as the summer of 1686, the regiments assigned to building the canal contracted diseases which they carried to the frontline. Saint-Simon was just one of the critics who blamed the "stirring of the earth" for infecting and killing an exceptionally high number of soldiers. The other narrative is a tale of more gradual infrastructural development. Large parts of the canal were in fact finished and used, and several modern authors bemoan the events of 1688 as the unfortunate interruption of almost certain success. [42] As an artifact holding out the promise of completion, the canal continued to tickle the imagination. Between 1777 and 1788 its trajectory was surveyed with an eye on the final completion of Versailles' water supply. [43] A proposal published in 1786 envisioned finishing and extending the canal, now with the aim of supplying Paris with fresh water. [44] This utilitarian iteration of the project became a matter of modern expertise rather than ancient imagery, of common sense rather than heroism, of efficiency rather than magnificence. At the end of the aqueduct there would be no king, admired by his court, but a grateful urban population. Finally, in 1846 the engineer Alexandre Corréard published Vauban's *devis* for the aqueduct, in its entirety, to prove that the French had nothing to learn from the English in matters of "grand ouvrages d'art." [45] Corréard had come across the aqueduct while plotting the trajectory of the new railway between Paris and Bordeaux, and his *Mémoire* on the subject compared some of his own engineering challenges to those faced by Vauban. At the same time, Corréaud's text signals that times had truly changed. The real value of the aqueduct is aesthetic, not functional, and his railway would finally deliver the economic benefits vainly promised by the royal waterworks. [46]

The divergence between these narratives can be measured by comparison with another public work that became part of Louis's imagery: the so-called "junction of the two seas," the canal connecting the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean, known today as the Canal du Midi. Vauban oversaw this project too, and it was represented at the Place des Victoires on the same lantern as the aqueduct. By the time the Place was inaugurated, the canal had been in service for five years. It is an exceptional piece of engineering that allowed shipping to go from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean ports without passing around the Straits of Gibraltar. [47] The medal devoted to the canal at the square did not seek to portray the canal as a monument, however, but emphasized how it transformed geography, showing the Pyrenees as if surrounded by sea.

42 See Louis-Alexandre Barbet, *Les grandes eaux de Versailles: installations mécaniques et étangs artificiels, description des fontaines et de leurs origines* (Paris: Dunod et Pinat, 1907), 74–81.

43 Évrard, "Les travaux du canal" (see note 13), 150.

44 Étienne-Claude Marivetz, *Observations sur quelques objets d'utilité publique, pour servir de prospectus à la seconde partie de la "Éric Physique du monde", ou à la "Carte hydrographique de la France", & au "Traité général de la navigation intérieure de ce royaume"* (Paris: Visse, 1786), 211–54.

45 [Corréard], "Aqueduc de Maintenon" (see note 8), 38.

46 Alexandre Corréard, *Mémoire sur le projet d'un chemin de fer de Paris à Bordeaux, partant de l'entrepôt des vins à Paris: Passant par Sceaux, Buc, Rambouillet, Maintenon, Chartres Châteaudun, Vendôme* (Paris: Librairie scientifique et industrielle de L. Mathias, 1838), 73–74, 141–42, https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-67690 (accessed July 22, 2020). The aqueduct would be classed as a historical monument in 1875. See "Ancien aqueduc de Pontgouin à Versailles (également sur communes de Berchères-Saint-Germain et Pontgouin)," *POP: la plateforme ouverte du patrimoine*, https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/merimee/PA00097145 (accessed July 22, 2020).

47 See Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 60–90.

In contrast, the monumental intention at the heart of the project for the Eure was materialized in the aqueduct. In fulfilment of Vauban's astute criticism, the structure remains standing as the residue of a grand but lost intention. As the engineer foretold, this residue has not escaped the mark of its time. Now it stands immobilized in the garden of Maintenon. In this state, it superimposes and blends two contradictory narratives: one of poetic heroic ruin and another of prosaic infrastructural failure.

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