

# Architectural drawing collections at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm: Reflection of French-Swedish exchanges during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

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## ABSTRACT

France and Sweden maintained artistic exchanges from the seventeenth century onward, which explains why the collections of French architectural drawings conserved today at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm are among the largest outside of France. In addition to French drawings, the museum has a large number of sheets from Italy, Sweden, and other locations, grouped together in what is commonly referred to as the “Tessin Collections,” but that actually consists of two different collections, the Tessin Hårleman Collection (THC call number), with nearly 9,000 drawings, and the Cronstedt Collection (CC), with approximately 5,000 drawings. These 14,000 sheets, most of which were digitized in the early 2010s, are almost all accessible in the database on the museum’s website, where they are much easier to consult than on site. However, the authors and subjects of a significant number of drawings remain to be identified, and the same is true of the later series that were added to today’s collections. It is indicative that the most important of these series, which came from Claude III Audran, has not yet been the subject of a detailed study.



Claude III Audran, project for a wall decoration or tapestry, pencil, ink, watercolor on paper, circa 1709, 35.7 x 42.6 cm. © Stockholm,

The architectural drawing collections at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm were created by the first four Swedish Superintendents of Royal Buildings during the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. Their purpose was to provide Swedes with esthetic models, “databases” that included sheets from different European countries, France in particular. They were also contemporary with the implementation and structuring of the Swedish administration for the Superintendence of Royal Buildings, and included other collections gathered by precursors to this new administration, especially the French de La Vallée dynasty.

## **Architects between France and Sweden**

The de La Vallée family was the first and only family from the world of Parisian building to settle in Sweden during the seventeenth century. It subsequently played a highly important role in French-Swedish exchange, one that remains largely underestimated. Hired in 1637 by Åke Tott to build Ekolsund Castle, the master mason Simon de La Vallée (1596-1642) and his two young sons Jean and Henri left the United Provinces, where he had settled, for Sweden. He was disappointed by Tott’s welcome, and did not refrain from complaining about it among Swedish nobles. In the fall of 1638 he entered into the service of Queen Christine, and was officially named “her Majesty’s architector” on March 9, 1639. His work for the queen and other aristocratic families is important despite his brief period of activity, which lasted just three and a half years. His career was abruptly cut short when he died shortly after being wounded during an assault on November 20, 1642. The punishment of the attacker (a member of the Oxenstierna family) was to take charge of the education for the eldest son, Jean de La Vallée, in order to “compensate for” the loss of his father. The young man subsequently undertook a study trip to the continent from 1646 to 1649, the first of its kind in Sweden. He stayed in Paris with his grandfather, the master mason Marin de La Vallée, before continuing his trip in Italy.

Upon his return to Sweden in 1650, he met the French architect-gardeners André and Jean Mollet, who had been working for Queen Christine for a year, and would remain in her service until 1653. The two Frenchmen were tasked by the sovereign to design a Tuileries garden of sorts near the royal castle in Stockholm, known as the *Kungsträdgården* (the king’s garden). During his stay, André Mollet also published a trilingual book (French, German, and Swedish) entitled *Jardins de plaisir* (Gardens of pleasure), which appeared in Stockholm in 1651, and was dedicated to Queen Christine. That same year Jean de La Vallée was appointed the queen’s architect, and was responsible for “the inspection and knowledge of all constructions belonging to the crown or the state,” a post he would occupy until his death in 1680.

## **Swedish collectors in France**

The French-Swedish contacts established and maintained by the de La Vallée dynasty proved useful to ensuing generations, and allowed different Swedish figures to be introduced in the world of artists, architects, engravers, printers, and collectors during their stays in Paris. These privileged relations were especially beneficial for Nicodemus Tessin the Younger (1654-1728) and his son Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695-1770). Tessin the Younger was appointed Superintendent of Royal Buildings in 1697, a position that he was the first to occupy, and also made a trip to Paris. Upon his death in 1728, Tessin’s son succeeded him in this post, assisted by Carl Hårleman (1700-1753). Carl Gustaf Tessin made major contributions to the ties between Sweden and France (and other European countries) through the contacts he established on his study trip to Paris during the 1710s, and especially through his activities as a diplomat, art collector, and ambassador in Paris from 1739 to 1742.

The networks and relations established during the seventeenth century were still useful during the trips of other

Swedes, such as Erik Dahlberg and probably Daniel Cronström. Similarly, it is telling that Nicodemus Tessin the Younger was able to rub shoulders in Paris with Jean Berain, Charles Le Brun, and André Le Nôtre. Other ties were also created thanks to the French artists called upon during construction of Stockholm Palace around the year 1700. They intervened to establish contacts, for instance the Chauveau family from Paris, and provided Sweden with painters and sculptors. These relations enabled Carl Hårleman to stay with Le Nôtre's nephew Claude Desgots in the early 1720s, and to study with Pierre Bullet's son, the architect Jean-Baptiste de Chamblain. Carl Johan Cronstedt (1709-1777) stayed in Paris with Claude III Audran at Luxembourg Palace during the mid-1730s, studied with Jean-Michel Chevotet, and made multiple trips to Dom Montfaucon in Saint-Germain-des-Prés: these Swedes enjoyed privileged access to the greatest artists and experts in the French capital.

These close ties were demonstrated by a favor granted during the ensuing years: when 4,000 sheets from Claude III Audran's collection were put on sale after his death in 1734, priority was given to Count Cronstedt, who was even granted time to think. His collection contains a considerable number of sheets and at least twenty books from the Félibien family, including works by André and Jean-Michel Félibien, which were probably purchased after the latter's death in Paris in 1733.

### **The Tessin Hårleman (THC) and Cronstedt (CC) collections**

The collections gathered by Nicodemus Tessin the Younger and his son Carl Gustaf, as well as Carl Hårleman, which number approximately 9,000 sheets, have been the property of the Swedish state since 1775, and were combined to form the Tessin Hårleman Collection (THC classification at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm).

In contrast to this first collection, the Cronstedt collection (CC classification) was gathered by a single person, Count Carl Johan Cronstedt, and remained private until the twentieth century. Appointed as Intendant of the Swedish court during his stay in Paris in 1733, Cronstedt succeeded Hårleman as Superintendent of Royal Buildings upon the latter's death in 1753, and held this post until 1767. He collected a very large number of drawings as well, which for a long time remained *in situ* at the family manor. It was only in 1929 that Count Axel Cronstedt deposited three notebooks, sketches, and approximately one hundred sheets (drawings and archives) at Sweden's National Museum of Science and Technology (*Tekniskamuseet*). Twelve years later, in 1941, Baron Eric Langenskiöld purchased most of the architectural drawings, numbering approximately 5,000 sheets, which he deposited at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. The Cronstedt family manor still includes an architectural library with a thousand volumes, drawing books, catalogs, lists, and manuscripts, as well as archival documents and a few drawings. The Cronstedt collection at the Nationalmuseum thus includes only a part of the initial documentation.

With these two collections, the Nationalmuseum nevertheless holds approximately 14,000 sheets, one third of which are Swedish and one third French, with the remainder primarily from Italy, Germany, and Russia. Together they offer a vigorous demonstration of the artistic exchanges between Sweden and other European countries, France in particular, which the Swedish visited in search of models. However, the collection calls for close study, in order to develop a detailed understanding of how it was constituted, and to better define the relations between the Swedish and the French.

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Online catalog of the collections of the Nationalmuseum: <https://www.nationalmuseum.se/en/samlingarna>

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