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The Verrue Sale Manuscript(s)

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Abbreviations

BGE	Bibliothèque de Genève
BmV	Bibliothèque municipale, Versailles
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
BnF Ms.	BnF, département des Manuscrits
FARL	Frick Art Research Library, New York
GAM	Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden
GRI	Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
INHA	Institut national d’histoire de l’art, Paris
NGL	National Gallery, London
RKD	RKD – Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis, Den Haag
TCZ	Tricottet Collection, Zürich
WCL	Wallace Collection, London

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NB. The initial version of this article was published on September 20, 2021. Remarkably, one of the titular manuscripts has since changed hands, and I thank Arnaud Mignan (TCZ) for alerting me to this fact. It seemed to me a justification to update the text, and thus a chance to introduce various changes, which on the whole I consider minor. The presented textual evidence was augmented in places, but otherwise remained how it was.

1 Introduction

Jeanne-Baptiste d’Albert de Luynes, the countess of Verrue, died in Paris on November 18, 1736. The next month’s *Mercure de France* carried a eulogy for Verrue, which dwelt on her taste for painting and the collection she had assembled in her home. In terms of Dutch and Flemish masters, claimed the eulogist, Verrue’s cabinet was among the greatest in Europe, and she had left many precious paintings to distinguished friends.¹ The rest was publicly sold to the highest bidder, as reported by *Mercure* in June 1737 with emphasis on a few standout purchases.² That report was, for well over a century, the most one could find about the Verrue sale in print.

Luckily, there were manuscript sources on the dispersion of Verrue’s cabinet, as stated by François-Charles Jollain already in 1786.³ In his *Trésor de la curiosité* of 1857, Charles

¹ “Les Amateurs des beaux Arts seront affligés. . .,” pp. 2744 sqq. ² “Le Lecteur curieux qui a fait attention. . .,” p. 1179. ³ Jollain, *Réflexions*, p. 191.

Blanc explained that the sale catalogue of Verrue's paintings had never been printed, but that there existed a few handwritten copies, and proudly became the first person to publish such a manuscript.⁴ In 1863, Louis Clément de Ris relied on Blanc's work to discuss Verrue's collecting and mentioned that such manuscripts resurfaced at long intervals, always achieving exaggerated prices.⁵ In 1881, Gérard Lérès reformatted Blanc's publication and appended it to his historical study of Verrue.⁶ The details of the Verrue sale thus became widely available, but the properties of the original carriers of this information, the manuscripts themselves, remained opaque.

Like many of Verrue's paintings, the Verrue sale manuscripts found their way to collections around the world. In his *Répertoire des catalogues de ventes publiques* of 1938, Frits Lugt identified four libraries and a bookseller as manuscript holders.⁷ By the time the Verrue sale was entered into the Getty Provenance Index (GPI), copies from two of those locations were lost, but five additional locations were identified, for a total of twelve manuscripts at eight locations in four countries.⁸ With the indexing came the recognition that the manuscripts differed, sometimes superficially, sometimes in the substance of the lots.

Most recently, in *Sheltering Art*, Rochelle Ziskin used the manuscripts in their written, published and indexed form to map the lots of the sale onto Verrue's inventory, creating a richly detailed snapshot of Verrue's cabinet at the time of her death. Ziskin, too, noted that there were differences between the copies.⁹

In this work, I aim to greatly expand the fund of empirical observations about the manuscripts, but also to move past it, guided by the question: do the differences between the copies mean anything? Can they be used to establish relations, say, that one copy is more correct, or more precise than another? If so, how trustworthy is the copy that gained disproportionate visibility via Blanc, and how reliable is GPI? When the copies diverge, which one was it that went astray? Is it possible to reconstruct the original text, before any differences were introduced? More generally and less formally: what stories do the manuscripts tell about themselves?

2 The manuscript

The descriptions of individual lots, about one hundred and eighty of them, are so similar over the surviving body of copies that they all must originate from the same document. This document is usually implied to be the unpublished sale catalogue of Verrue's paintings.

In 1737, when the Verrue sale took place, the publication of auction catalogues had not yet become an established practice in France, especially compared to the Dutch Republic.¹⁰ When it came to paintings, the only Parisian sale with a published catalogue was that of La Chataigneraie.¹¹ It is therefore not surprising that the Verrue sale was not supported by one, notwithstanding the importance of her collection. Meanwhile, a 240-page catalogue was published for the Verrue library sale,¹² the beginning of which was announced for June 12, 1737.¹³

Much like today, auction catalogues served to inform the public about the items on offer. During the sale, some attendees would annotate their copies with prices, buyers' names etc., which gave rise to annotated catalogues, an important tool for professionals in the art market. Given that the Verrue sale manuscripts self-classify as sale catalogues and that this classification was not challenged by Blanc, Lugt and others, it would seem that they are only special because they did not come off the printing press, but were copied by hand.

⁴ Blanc, p. iv. ⁵ Clément de Ris, "La Comtesse de Verrue," p. 607. ⁶ Lérès, p. 260. ⁷ Lugt, no. 470.
⁸ GPI, F-A14, F-A15. ⁹ Ziskin, p. 231, p. 282 n. 53. ¹⁰ Bonnaffé, *Causeries sur l'art et la curiosité*, p. 115.
¹¹ Lugt, no. 419. ¹² Martin. ¹³ "Catalogue des Livres de feuë Madame la Comtesse de Verruë," p. 984.

An immediate structural feature of most of the known Verrue manuscripts gives lie to this interpretation. Namely, they do not give the lots of the sale as a flat list, nor do they try to group them according to attributions or schools. Instead, they are grouped into sessions, which are in turn divided into two sales, or rather the sale of March 27, 1737 (fifteen sessions) and its resumption on April 29 (nine sessions). Overall, this means that the manuscripts give the lots in the order in which they were sold, along with the pauses between the sessions. No auction catalogue was organized like that, as the requirements of describing someone's cabinet in print differed from the logic of selling it in real time.

The independence of lot order in an auction catalogue from their sequence in the auction itself is strikingly exemplified in protracted, multi-day sales. In such cases, dealers could print sheets with per-date lists of lot numbers, so that prospective buyers could plan their attendance. For example, two paintings by Raphael were described in succession in the Conti catalogue of 1777,¹⁴ but were offered to the public more than a month apart.¹⁵

This structural incompatibility suggests that the Verrue sale document was not written and disseminated prior to the sale, but created during the sale and multiplied afterwards. The latter point is supported by the obvious dissimilarity of appearance of the surviving copies, which exhibit great variety in handwriting, orthography, lot numbering and layout. The reproduction of the original was therefore unplanned, decentralized and irregular, and the manuscripts could not have served the prospective function of auction catalogues proper.

The content of the manuscripts supports this conclusion. Dozens of descriptions of paintings omit any hint of their subject, even when dealing with canvases by esteemed painters: two works by Wouwerman, sold for over 5000 livres, are described only as very beautiful. Such lacunae are inconceivable in a sale catalogue, but consistent with notes taken during the event, reflecting limitations of time, lapses of concentration and varying personal interest. Similarly, the dimensions of the paintings are not given in feet and inches, but as “small”, “of medium size”, “large” and “very large”, or in comparison with the preceding lot (e. g. “larger”).

Another kind of evidence comes from transactions involving a work by Pietro da Cortona, estimated at 2500 livres in the inventory,¹⁶ which appeared in the first session of the resumption, was bought in at 2000 livres, was again offered in the fifth session with reduced expectations, and was then sold for 1501. Clearly, in no catalogue, prepared ahead of a sale, would a lot appear twice. In addition, two buy-ins from March were sold in April, and some April buy-ins were sold in a special, final session. This is why *Mercure* reported that all the paintings had been sold, “though a few had not risen to their value”.¹⁷

All this does not mean that every word coming from the creator of the original manuscript was put to paper during the proceedings. Several of the lots exhibit uncertainty (e. g. “copy after Correggio, Io or Leda”), suggesting attempts to enrich the manuscript from memory.

The circumstances of the creation of the original manuscript were therefore those of sale minutes, not of a catalogue. To tweak Blanc's explanation: it is not that *the* catalogue was never printed, but that *a* catalogue was never written. Nevertheless, as the manuscript and its copies served the retrospective function of auction catalogues to a great degree, everyone was satisfied to call them that. Had the terminology been better developed, like it was later in the century, maybe they would have been titled “sale done without catalogue”.¹⁸

¹⁴ Rémy, *Catalogue Conti*, p. 3. ¹⁵ *Cabinet Conti. Seconde feuille*, p. 1, April 15; *Cabinet Conti. Cinquieme feuille*, p. 3, May 17. ¹⁶ Inv. no. 367, Ziskin, p. 241. ¹⁷ “Le Lecteur curieux qui a fait attention. . .,” p. 1179. ¹⁸ *Vente faite sans catalogue les 17. 18. et 19. fructidor, an 3^e*. INHA, VP 16B/5.

The usual terminology of auction catalogues should therefore only be applied to the Verrue sale manuscripts with great care. Prices, buyers' names and derisive judgements of quality normally belonged to annotations, on the margins or interleaved pages of the printed catalogues, but they were integral to the original Verrue manuscript. Hence, if a copy is found not to contain them, it is to be considered systematically stripped, rather than closer to a never-existent, "non-annotated" state. It is to not lose track of nuances like this, that I insist on calling the surviving copies 'the Verrue sale manuscripts', with the singular form reserved for the lost original.

Unlike auction catalogues, the Verrue manuscripts provide insights about the flow of the sale. They show the warming up and the winding down, as the first day started, and the last day ended with a pair of sessions consisting of cheaper pictures (excluding the session of buy-ins). All other sessions opened with cheaper items, only to swell and reach, or at least expect, the highest prices in their second halves. On seven occasions, the very last lot proved the dearest one¹⁹. Miniatures and engravings served to open five of the sessions.

When Verrue died, her cabinet counted about four hundred pictures.²⁰ Over two hundred and forty featured in the sale, mostly individually, but often in sets of two and even four. Ziskin noticed that the works hanging together in Verrue's house in rue Cherche-Midi often appeared in proximity in the sale;²¹ for example, five out of twelve paintings from the first antechamber were sold in the initial session.²² This means that the picture sale, like the library sale,²³ took place in Verrue's home, and that the mercantile principle was superimposed on Verrue's own arrangement of her collection.

3 The manuscripts

3.1 Materials and methods

To properly assess the twelve surviving manuscripts and their relative value for scholarship, it is necessary to position each of them in a network of their relationships. The first step thereof is to imagine a tree, with the original manuscript branching into its direct copies, which grow or branch into their own copies etc.

The task of connecting known copies would have certainly been easier, had any of the copyists signed or dated their copy, or named their immediate source; but not even Blanc mentioned where he found the copy he published. As it is, my sketch of the manuscript tree chiefly relies on textual comparison. Firstly, if a manuscript has a certain feature, whereas all other manuscripts share the opposite feature, then no other manuscript derives from it: it is a leaf of the tree. Secondly, if two manuscripts share a certain feature, whereas all other manuscripts share the opposite feature, then it is either the case that one of these two derives from the other one, or that they both derive from an unknown prototype.

The applicability of these basic ideas rests on the choice of manuscript features for comparison. Some features are so idiosyncratic that they cannot be expected to be repeated even in faithful copies. Also, some striking shared features could be superfluous: if a group of manuscripts shared a modernized spelling, it could be due to their contemporaneity, not their genetic proximity. The most effective distinguishing feature is a random substantial mistake (like an omission of an attribution), as it is both highly unlikely and practically irreversible. It is exactly these mistakes, scattered and inherited across manuscripts, that enable an outline of the network to emerge.

¹⁹ E. g. Claude Lorrain's *Le Veau d'or* (Manchester Art Gallery, 1981.3) in the ninth session and the Van de Velde (WCL, P80) in the sixth session of the resumption. To identify paintings from the sale, I always rely on Ziskin, pp. 231–243. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242. ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282 n. 53. ²² *Ibid.*, p. 231. ²³ Martin, title page.

There is a vast field for mutations that make possible the tracing of manuscript lineages. The description of almost every painting mentions its shape, size, subject or attribution; for many paintings, all of those properties are specified. Almost all of the lots are priced, and about a tenth carry the name of the buyer, some distinguishing between the real buyer and the surrogate. There are also aesthetic judgements and various bits of supplementary information. All this makes for hundreds of sensitive points within each manuscript.

The preliminary image of the manuscript network as a tree suggests that the more reliable manuscripts are the older ones and that moving down the branches, imperfect copy after imperfect copy, only increases the information distance from the root. When, however, the creator of a new manuscript has access to multiple older ones, the resulting hybrid has the chance of being richer in information and truer to the root than any of its sources. With the branches thus intertwined, the image of the network increases in complexity, so that it can be seen as connecting tree-like subnetworks, while no longer being a tree itself.



To facilitate building and navigating the manuscript network, I will denote individual manuscripts with codes, typeset in small caps.

Manuscript group	Manuscript codes	Examples
lost prototypes	words evocative of important characteristics	FOUCHÉ, PASTEL
known copies of lost prototypes	MS- followed by A, B, C . . .	MS-A, MS-B
known hybrids	MS- followed by distinct Greek letters	MS-Γ, MS-Δ
known copies of known prototypes	prototype name followed by X, Y, Z	MS-DX, MS-ΘX

The original manuscript is itself a lost prototype, and I will denote it as VENTE (“sale”).

To simplify references to lots, I will use identifiers consisting of three numbers: the part of the sale (1 or 2), the ordinal of the session, and the number assigned to the lot. Since the copies can have different numbering, I will use such identifiers only when the manuscript in question is clear from the context, or when comparing two copies with the same numbering. Finally, for the copies that do not number their lots, I will use the first two numbers to denote the session, and add some local verbal identifier of the lot. For example, 2:3 denotes the third session of the resumption; and 1:12:82 means lot 82, from the twelfth session of the first part of the sale.

3.2 Lebrun’s copy, its twin and their parent

In early 1780, the art merchant Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun catalogued a cabinet with two cityscapes by Claude Lorrain.²⁴ Lebrun described the paintings and stated that they came from the cabinets of Verrue, Gaignat and Blondel de Gagny.²⁵ The Blondel de Gagny sale took place in 1776, and the Gaignat sale in 1768, but as neither of their catalogues mentioned the connection with Verrue,²⁶ Lebrun likely established it using MS-A, a Verrue sale manuscript from his vast collection of historical catalogues²⁷. Lebrun had bound the collection in an approximate chronological order of sales,²⁸ with MS-A comprising the second part of Vol. 1.

²⁴ Louvre, Paris, INV 4712 and INV 4713. ²⁵ Lebrun, *Catalogue Poullain*, pp. 54 sq. ²⁶ Rémy, *Catalogue Blondel de Gagny*, p. 76, *Catalogue Gaignat*, p. 44. ²⁷ *Catalogue de la Vente des Tableaux de M^e la Comtesse de Verruë année 1737*. BGE, BGE Ia 85/1 (2). ²⁸ Guichard, pp. 299 sqq.

MS-A is today hundreds of miles apart from MS-B,²⁹ yet they are as close as two copies get. They are in the same hand, they share material characteristics and they are extremely alike in form and content. In particular, they assign the same prices to lots, and as both calculate the total sum, they both end up with 106387 livres 9 sous for the sale. They are distinguished from each other by small sets of mistakes, meaning that they were carefully copied from the same prototype, not one from the other.

	MS-A expected	MS-A actual
1:3:15	<i>Rome ou Naples</i>	<i>Rome et Naples</i>
2:3:20	<i>moyens</i>	size omitted
2:8:58	Vleughels	attribution omitted
	MS-B expected	MS-B actual
1:2:11	<i>du même [Boulogne]</i>	<i>de M^r de Boulogne</i>
1:9:64	<i>des buveurs</i>	<i>deux buveurs</i>

The shared features of the twin copies MS-A and MS-B enable a reconstruction of their parent, which is not among the known manuscripts, nor is it identical with VENTE, as demonstrated by the mistakes it introduced. In addition, it lacked the names of two collectors, otherwise given as post-Verrue owners and/or real buyers (*chez M. de Ravanne* in 1:5:33 and 1:5:35, *chez M. le Duc de Chevreuse* in 1:10:69 and *pour M. de Ravanne* in 1:11:78).

Extraordinarily, the parent of MS-A and MS-B also contributed a correction, as it gave the two paintings of the very first lot to Nicolas Fouché (as Foucher), rather than Fouquiere(s) of the other branches. It was not necessary to recall Fouché's series from Verrue's home³⁰ to recognize the error, as engravings after the series were already in circulation.³¹ On account of this feature, I call this manuscript FOUCHÉ.

	FOUCHÉ expected	FOUCHÉ actual
1:3:15	no size for Gasparo views	<i>grands</i> inserted (emulating 1:2:7)
1:5:32	<i>tableau de Boulogne</i>	<i>tableau du même [Boulogne l'aîné]</i>
1:6:39	<i>manière de...</i>	<i>même manière de...</i>
2:2:10	40 livres	10 livres
2:2:12	150 livres 5 sous	sous omitted
2:3:19	<i>quatre petits ronds</i>	size omitted
2:4:24	<i>joli paysage de Pierre Guesche</i>	assessment omitted
2:7:47	<i>petite S^{te} famille par Boulogne</i>	attribution omitted
2:8:53	<i>deux petits Courtois jolis</i> (cf. inv. nos 24–25, Ziskin, p. 232)	<i>petit Courtois joli</i>

²⁹ *Catalogue de la Vente des Tableaux de M^e la Comtesse de Verruë année 1737*. RKD, 201101844. ³⁰ Inv. nos 8–9 and elsewhere, Ziskin, pp. 231, 235. ³¹ British Museum, London, 1917,1208.1904, 1917,1208.1905, 1917,1208.1906 and 1917,1208.1907; Martin, p. 236.

3.3 Another merchant’s copy and its sources

Over the second quarter of 1777, a participant in the Conti sale thoroughly annotated his copy of the Conti catalogue.³² As his interest extended to documenting non-catalogued lots, indexing artists’ names and sketching in ink carved Priapic gemstones,³³ I take it he must have been an art merchant. Regarding *A Horse Fair* by Wouwerman, he noted that the count of Clermont purchased it at the Verrue sale for 2001 livres.³⁴ For this information, the merchant likely relied on MS-E, the first manuscript in a volume of copies in his own hand.³⁵

Many sale catalogues of the 1770s placed artists’ names into lot headings, and the author of MS-E modernized his prototypes accordingly, even the published ones.³⁶ For Verrue’s sale, he left anonymous lots without headings (rather than using *Maître inconnu*, “unknown master”³⁷), and when consecutive lots shared an attribution, he repeated it (rather than using *Idem.* or *Du même*). He also tried to extract multiple names from lots, where applicable. However, by missing the import of the word *autre* (“another”), he anonymized three paintings by Gaspar van Wittel, given as *deux autres* and *un autre*, but following *deux tableaux de Gasparo*.

	MS-E expected	MS-E actual
1:1:1	<i>deux grands tableaux</i>	size omitted
1:2:9	<i>un tableau ovale</i>	<i>deux tableaux ovales</i>
1:4:21	heading <i>Gasparo</i>	attribution omitted
1:4:21bis	heading <i>Gasparo</i>	attribution omitted
1:6:38	<i>copie d’après Wouwermans</i>	<i>copie par Wouwermans</i>
1:7:47	heading <i>S. Paul</i>	<i>Paul Bril</i> (with correction in lot)
1:7:49	<i>sans bordure</i>	information omitted
1:9:67	<i>femme vêtue de noir</i>	<i>femme vêtue et non</i>
1:14:100	<i>petit tableau</i>	size omitted
—	<i>29 avril 1737</i>	<i>9 avril 1737</i>
2:2:14	<i>paysage</i>	genre omitted
2:5:29	engraving by Nicolas de Bruyn	item omitted
2:5:32	<i>paysage</i>	genre omitted
2:7:51	<i>paysage</i>	genre omitted

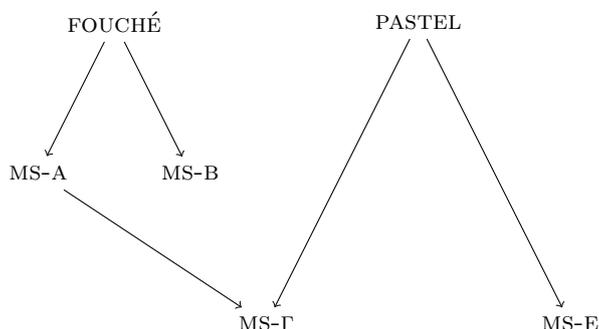
The very last lot of MS-E consists of “two paintings sold at another time” by Murillo. As this was the end of his copy, the merchant drew a large triangular ornament below. However, in February 1777, Pierre Rémy described two Murillos³⁸ in the Randon de Boisset catalogue and connected them with Verrue;³⁹ having realized this, the merchant returned to his manuscript and squeezed Rémy’s description around the ornament. Therefore, MS-E could have only been brought to its final state after the Randon de Boisset sale, even as its initial state could have been put to paper earlier.

³² BnF, département Estampes et photographie, Reserve 8-yd-126 (a). ³³ Ibid. pp. 372, 382. ³⁴ Ibid. p. 103. The connection was spurious, as Verrue’s painting (WCL, P65) was more than twice as large and of a different shape. ³⁵ *Catalogue des Tableaux de Madame la comtesse de Verrue dont la Vente a commandée [sic] le mercredi 27 mars 1737*. BnF Ms., NAF 4665 (1). ³⁶ BnF Ms., NAF 4665 (2) does this for *Catalogue Carignan*. ³⁷ Cf. e. g. Joullain, *Catalogue Caulet d’Hauteville*, pp. 20 sq. ³⁸ NGL, NG74 and its privately owned pendant. ³⁹ Rémy, *Catalogue Randon de Boisset*, p. 11.

As annotation to 1:10:72, PASTEL carried more recent locations of two paintings by Wouwerman: one at Blondel de Gagny’s, the other in Dresden.⁴² The former was true between the Lorangère sale of 1744⁴³ and Blondel de Gagny’s death in July 1776;⁴⁴ the latter, since the Tugny sale of June 1751.⁴⁵ The manuscript also mentioned Ravanne’s role as master of waters and forests, which would have made most sense before his death in 1758,⁴⁶ but could have, like the Wouwerman annotation, come from an even earlier manuscript. Therefore, it is only certain that PASTEL was finalized after June 1751.

3.4 A dubious hybrid in a familiar hand

Whereas MS-E originated from one lineage and later absorbed some information from another, a true hybrid of lineages is found in MS-Γ,⁴⁷ which is another known manuscript derived from PASTEL, but which also bears some of the markers from FOUCHÉ (the Fouché correction and the mistakes in 2:3:19, 2:7:47 and 2:8:53) and a mistake from MS-A (1:3:15).



MS-Γ had two sources, and thus a chance to be more informative than either; indeed, it avoids the PASTEL mistakes of 1:7:47 and 2:6:39 by relying on MS-A. Overall, however, it is poorer and less reliable. These counterintuitive results stem from the peculiar logic of its composition. To make it appear more like the familiar sale catalogues, its author retitled it (to include the word “cabinet” rather than “sale”) and denied it the articulation into sessions and dates. The numbering in MS-Γ is continuous throughout, because there is no longer a “resumption of the sale” where it would reset.

Sale catalogues carry a higher level of detail than the Verrue sale manuscripts, but the only recourse MS-Γ had in that regard was to verbosity, common knowledge and educated guesses. Where its sources mention *doguins*, MS-Γ inserts *chiens*; where they have *vues*, it adds *agréables*; where they have *Place del Popolo*, it adds *à Rome*; etc. On two occasions, it even invents the genres of the paintings (*sujets de la fable* in lot 13 and *paisages* in lot 16). However, it quickly gives up on such interventions, of which there are nine in the first 25 lots, but only six in the following 50, then just two in the following 75, and (picking up again at the very end) four in the remainder.

In addition, MS-Γ makes up the missing prices and dutifully calculates the total sum for the sale, but this number is meaningless, not only on account of inventions, but also because buy-ins are no longer indicated, so that some paintings contribute to the sum twice (once at the price at which they were bought in, and again at the price at which they were sold).

⁴² Louvre, Paris, INV 1955 and GAM, Gal.-Nr. 1444. ⁴³ Gersaint, p. 13. ⁴⁴ Rémy, *Catalogue Blondel de Gagny*, p. 43. ⁴⁵ Mariette, p. 8. ⁴⁶ Aubert de La Chenaye-Desbois and Badier, p. 641. ⁴⁷ *Catalogue des Tableaux du Cabinet de M^e la Comtesse de Verruë année 1737*. RKD, 201103285.

MS-Γ shares important non-textual properties with the twin copies MS-A and MS-B and with the six handwritten catalogues of sales conducted by Pierre Rémy between 1772 and 1775⁴⁸. All nine are in the same hand and designed in the same way, with columns for the lot number, lot description (usually in multiple rows), livres and sous. The running price sum is calculated at the bottom of each page and repeated in the first row of the following one. Yet, the affinity of MS-Γ to Rémy's catalogues is even closer, as they all have up to twenty lines per page, give verso running sums as *de l'part* (as opposed to *de l'autre part* of MS-A and MS-B), have drop titles for lot types (e. g. *Tableaux*) and are stamped with Frits Lugt's collector's mark.⁴⁹

These results suggest that MS-Γ was created in the 1770s. They might be even taken to point to Rémy as the intended owner of MS-Γ, were it only certain that the rest of the group of seven was meant for the famous merchant. In any case, I found no proof of Rémy's having used a Verrue sale manuscript in preparation of his auctions.

3.5 Joullain's unidentified source

In 1783, François-Charles Joullain published the provenance of about four hundred paintings, fourteen of which he tracked to Verrue's cabinet.⁵⁰ His basic tool in this endeavour were printed catalogues, duly referenced with sellers' names and lot numbers. Among the fourteen, he mapped four to their previously unpublished prices in the Verrue sale: a Teniers, a Wouwerman and two Claudes.⁵¹ To obtain this information, he must have relied on a Verrue sale manuscript.

Joullain also mentioned that the count of Clermont bought the Wouwerman, but remained silent on the buyer of the Teniers (a certain Morin) and did not cite any Verrue lot numbers. As will be seen, there is a single known unnumbered copy, which also happens to be incognizant of Morin; it is thus consistent with Joullain's references (and so is its lost prototype). However, Joullain's text could have omitted the numbers as impractical (seeing that very few individuals would have been able to look them up) and dropped Morin for whatever reason. I am therefore unable to confidently identify Joullain's manuscript source.

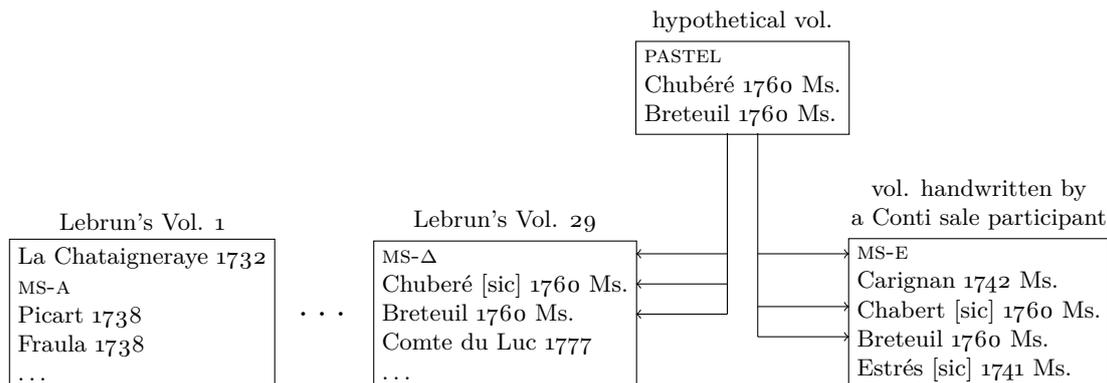
3.6 Lebrun's other copy

Lebrun's trove of catalogues by other merchants grew throughout his career. The old part of the collection was grouped in roughly chronological order (with certain items being swapped for practical reasons), and so were the newly published catalogues. However, when information about an older sale unexpectedly arrived, it was no longer possible to fit it in the chronologically appropriate volume, so it would be bound with whatever was being assembled at the time. This is how Vol. 29 came to consist of MS-Δ,⁵² two other manuscripts, and several catalogues with publication years ending in 1778.

In 1780, Lebrun produced an alphabetical index of his collection, sorting chronologically the entries which started with the same letter.⁵³ After that, new entries were appended as they became available. The first entry under "V" was for Verrue and it referenced both Vol. 1 and Vol. 29, while the rest of the latter was also indexed according to initials and years. Therefore, Lebrun had it bound between 1778 and 1780, and could not have acquired MS-Δ more than a few years earlier.

⁴⁸ RKD, 201109945, 201110073, 201110074, 201110075, 201111271 and 201111972. ⁴⁹ Cf. *Marques de collections*, L.1028. ⁵⁰ Joullain, *Répertoire*, pp. 17 sq., 48 sq., 58 sq., 61, 66 sqq., 84 sq. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 66, 84 sq. ⁵² *Catalogue des Tableaux du Cabinet de M^{me} la Comtesse de Verue*. BGE, BGE Ia 85/32 (1). ⁵³ *Table Alphabétique de la collection complète [...] jus qu'en l'année 1780 inclusivement*. INHA, VP 1B.

MS- Δ is in the same hand as the two manuscript copies that immediately follow it: the catalogues of the 1760 sales of Chubéré and Breteuil.⁵⁴ Catalogue Chubéré has only one other known copy, which is found precisely in the handwritten volume containing MS-E; what is more, Lebrun’s copy contains information that the other one does not, and vice versa. Exactly the same is true for catalogue Breteuil.⁵⁵ This means that these sets of three manuscripts each are imperfect derivatives of the same source: a compilation of PASTEL and the prototypes for Chubéré and Breteuil. A copy of this compilation was executed by the MS-E merchant, and another one was produced for Lebrun.



Since Lebrun already owned MS-A when he had PASTEL copied, the appointed copyist would have been wise to check the latter against the former. The feature set of MS- Δ demonstrates such an operation: it inherits most of the markers of PASTEL, while undoing its errors of attribution in 1:1:6 and 2:7:51 and picking up a few features of FOUCHÉ, like the Fouché correction of 1:1:1 and the item miscount of 2:8:53. Lot 64, however, shows that the control copy was not MS-A, but its twin, MS-B. Indeed, MS-B could have also belonged to Lebrun, and there would have been no need to bind it; it thus remained free-floating and easier to handle than the volume-bound MS-A.

Many different scenarios could have led to outcomes now legible in MS-E and MS- Δ . Here is one of them: a merchant acquired and copied a now lost compilation of Verrue, Chubéré and Breteuil prototypes. Lebrun borrowed the precious compilation from him, and had an associate copy it. In return, Lebrun presented MS-B to the merchant, which he used to add some missing information and a total sum to MS-E. Both participants in this exchange only risked to part with redundant copies.



Like MS- Γ , MS- Δ used PASTEL as its principal source and checked its lots against a copy of FOUCHÉ, which made it another hybrid of those lineages. It also paralleled MS- Γ in doing away with the division according to dates and sessions and in inserting the word “cabinet” in the title. This is not due to a direct relationship with MS- Γ , but to their shared notion of a proper catalogue. The original articulation, while eloquent about the rhythm of the sale, must have appeared a distraction to the copyists, which is why they chose to flatten it.

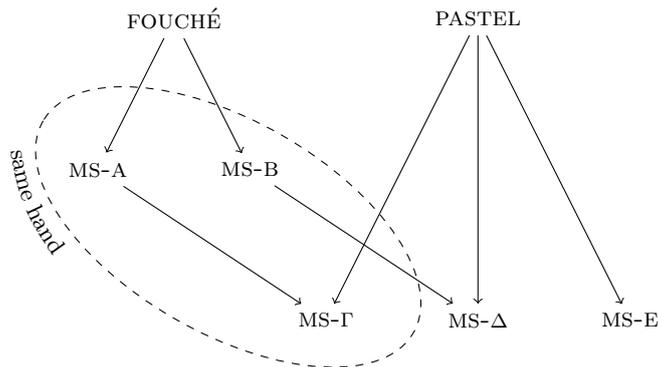
MS- Δ alters the text in its own way. It knows that Rembrandt was Van Rijn, that Pater was Jean-Baptiste, that women surrounding Calisto were nymphs, and that the girls with Europa were her

⁵⁴ BGE, BGE Ia 85/32 (2) and BGE Ia 85/32 (3). ⁵⁵ GPI, F-A101, F-A103; BnF Ms., NAF 4665 (3) and NAF 4665 (4).

companions. Elsewhere, the level of detail is reduced, as “horses” get replaced with “animals” and “a small boy” with “a young child”. Categories of information and types of lots that do not fit the intended visual scheme of the manuscript are mercilessly erased: surrogate buyers, a buyer without a price (Hebert), a country of destination without a buyer’s name (England), assessments of value and notes on frames. All the engravings are dropped, and it seems that the copyist recognized that some lots were reappearing (after being bought in) and dropped such duplicates too. The copyist ended the manuscript after the lots of the penultimate session with the word *fin* and appended the final session later.

Unlike MS-Γ, MS-Δ harvested its sources for sale dates, and its title page mentions both March 27 and April 29. It is also the only copy to consider and acknowledge that Verrue had bequeathed a part of her paintings to various personages, implying that the manuscript does not describe her entire cabinet.

It is possible that MS-Γ and MS-Δ neutralized some of the same mistakes of PASTEL when relying respectively on MS-A and MS-B, which would thus appear as mistakes introduced, rather than inherited by MS-E. This has no bearing on the relationship of these copies, but shows that PASTEL is more elusive than FOUCHÉ, another hypothetical manuscript. If my reconstruction of its influence on the surviving manuscripts is correct, then PASTEL had circulated a lot, could have suffered wear and tear, and become redundant when all the interested parties had copied it. Hence it would be no wonder if it was damaged and finally destroyed, and that this is the reason why it did not come down to us.



3.7 Blanc’s publication and its consequences

The long-lasting influence of MS-E was ensured by an intersection of its progeny with printed media. The manuscript Blanc published in his *Trésor* of 1857 was a careful copy of MS-E, with a unique elaboration of the penultimate lot. Namely, Blanc’s source enriched the description of two landscapes by Paul Bril⁵⁶, of which the first contained a tree and the second was “bushy” (*touffu*), with a pond and two hunters on the lookout in the first, and a river, Diana and her nymphs in the second.⁵⁷ As the fate of this manuscript is not known, I call it BRIL. The copyist’s familiarity with the landscapes may have had something to do with their increased visibility at the turn of the century, as they joined the Louvre as a revolutionary seizure in 1794 and were published as engravings in the second volume of *Le Musée Royal* in 1818.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Louvre, Paris, INV 1113 and INV 1114. ⁵⁷ Blanc, p. 15. ⁵⁸ Laurent et al., as *Chasse aux canards* and *Paysage*.

Blanc emphasized his fidelity to the original orthography of BRIL,⁵⁹ so it was BRIL itself that corrected the orthography of MS-E. The eight mistakes of BRIL are often driven by idiosyncrasies of its prototype. (For simplicity, and because assuming the opposite would not make a difference, I assume Blanc’s publishing process was impeccable.) For example, the author of MS-E routinely spelled the word “feast” as *fette* (instead of *fête* or *feste*) and did not cross out the t’s, so the BRIL copyist twice misread it as *fille* (girl).

	MS-E	BRIL
1:2:10	<i>deux tableaux achetés</i>	<i>deux</i> changed to <i>un</i>
1:4:20	<i>600</i>	200 livres
1:4:22	<i>gagni</i>	marginalia <i>gagni</i> (Gagny) omitted
1:9:65	<i>carlo Vanamer</i>	<i>Vanamer</i> trimmed down to <i>Vana</i>
1:15:110	<i>des filles</i>	<i>fettes</i> misread as <i>filles</i>
2:3:19	<i>d'après ou dans le genre d'Albane</i>	lot heading misunderstood as an attribute of the previous lot
2:4:27	<i>850</i>	800 livres
2:8:57	<i>fille de village</i>	<i>fette</i> misread as <i>fille</i>

At least twenty years after its publication, Blanc’s work was used, without crediting it, to produce BLANCX,⁶⁰ a unique expression of enthusiasm for Verrue. The title page of BLANCX is a pastiche of the Verrue library sale catalogue,⁶¹ while its frontispiece is a portrait of Verrue by the 19th century etcher Léon Gaucherel (after a miniature from the collection of the baron Jérôme Pichon⁶²). Pages 1–43 contain a manuscript copy of the chapter on Verrue from Clément de Ris’s *Les amateurs d’autrefois* of 1877 (distinguished from the same author’s earlier article only by having the date line “November 1863”⁶³). Finally, pages 44–74 contain a copy from *Trésor* in a different hand, in which BLANCX is also paginated throughout.

BLANCX replicated Blanc’s editorial notes, such as (*sic*) in 1:2:8 and 1:10:73. With a curious commitment to Verrue, it expunged all negative assessments of her pictures (*peu de valeur*, “of little value”, in 1:1:5, 1:2:12 and 1:4:27), as well as indications of buyers, buy-ins and later ownership. It later found its way to Jacques Doucet’s art library, which he would donate to Université de Paris in 1917.

Both BRIL and Blanc maintain the non-obvious readability of MS-E: every lot without a dedicated heading should be read as anonymous. In 1881, Lérés repackaged Blanc’s publication without having grasped this property;⁶⁴ in consequence, his version over-attributes 10% of the lots. Furthermore, while BRIL and Blanc use quotation marks to distinguish the original Murillo lot text from its later extension,⁶⁵ Lérés erases these as well.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Blanc, p. iv. ⁶⁰ *Catalogue des Tableaux de feu Madame la Comtesse de Verruë dont la vente aura lieu le mercredi 27 mars 1737 dans son hôtel rue du Cherche-midy*. INHA, VP RES 1737/1. ⁶¹ Martin, title page. ⁶² Cf. *Catalogue Pichon*, p. 101. ⁶³ Clément de Ris, *Les amateurs d’autrefois*, p. 181. ⁶⁴ Lérés, pp. 247–260. ⁶⁵ Blanc, p. 16. ⁶⁶ Lérés, p. 260. This made Ziskin, who relied on Lérés in *Sheltering Art*, conclude that the lot was added decades after the sale (p. 120). Via Lérés, Ziskin also inherits several generations of copyists’ mistakes: she does not recognize a Patel in the sale (claiming on p. 239 that there were none) and quotes the price of 100 instead of 1001 livres for Bon Boullogne’s *Jephté* (State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, GE-1244), which was estimated at 800 (inv. no 146, p. 236). Ziskin does, however, detect the ambiguity in Lérés’s rendering of attributions (p. 282 n. 52).

3.8 The indexed manuscript and its prototype

The only known copy without lot numbers, MS-C⁶⁷ stands apart from the complex relationships laid out in previous subsections. It introduces a few mistakes, mostly price omissions, but it also dates the sale to May instead of March, surely by misreading *mars* as *may*. It omits the annotation of buy-ins in a few places, but makes sure to refer to them later on, as they reappear in the sale. It emphasizes artists' names by writing them in larger letters. It is bound with copies of three of Pierre-Jean Mariette's catalogues from the 1740s.

	MS-C expected	MS-C actual
—	<i>27. Mars 1737.</i>	<i>27. May 1737.</i>
1:2, 1:3	6 prices in 13 lots	prices omitted
1:4	<i>un autre plus petit</i>	<i>plus</i> omitted
1:6	P. Brils bought in	<i>retirés</i> omitted (mapped from 2:4)
1:7	220 livres for S. Paul	price omitted
1:9	1460 livres for <i>Tentation</i>	1440 livres
1:14	350 livres for Pater	price omitted
1:14	—	Claudes from 1:12 repeated
1:15	Castiglione bought in	<i>retiré</i> omitted (MS-C-mapped from 2:3)
2:1	Cortona bought in	<i>retiré</i> omitted (MS-C-mapped from 2:5)

The Verrue sale coverage by GPI is primarily based on MS-C, with lot numbers coming from Blanc's publication (and a note to this effect is appended to every lot).⁶⁸ Unfortunately, MS-C carries the many faults of its prototype, and GPI neutralizes only a few of them by working from other manuscripts.⁶⁹ The prototype also had its advantages, and it is on account of its attribution of two paintings from 1:3 to Bonaventure Debar (as "Desbarres"), which was lost in other branches, that I call it DEBAR.

DEBAR was not numbered, indicating its proximity to the original manuscript, but it ended with a reference to the Randon de Boisset sale of 1777, meaning that it was, like MS-E, finalized after that date. It omitted the few derogatory remarks and, similarly to MS-Δ, it erased surrogate buyers, while preserving the true destinations of the lots. Thus, the names of Godefroid (who purchased expensive paintings "for England") and Ruel (who repeatedly acted as a surrogate for Ravanne and Clermont) were omitted. Maybe the buyers De Boulogne (1:2), Lassay and Morin (1:11) and Lockre (1:14) were also intentionally dropped.

Among other mistakes, DEBAR is confused about the achieved price of a Paul Bril painting. This painting was a pendant of one which appeared earlier in the sale, but as VENTE did not number the lots, such a reference could have only been established descriptively ('a pendant of the painting that was bought in at 1050 livres'). In DEBAR, the buy-in price of the referred lot is taken as the purchase price of the current lot. Another claim is revealed as erroneous by its twofold implausibility: that two unattributed paintings of very different dimensions were sold together for 2000 livres.

⁶⁷ *Catalogue des Tableaux de Mad^e la Comtesse de Verûe dont la vente a commenée [sic] le Mercredy 27. May 1737.* BmV, F.A. in-8 I 237 i. ⁶⁸ GPI, F-A14, F-A15. ⁶⁹ GPI at present suffers from losses or corruptions in over thirty entries, mostly inherited via MS-C.

Most of DEBAR features are losses of the size attribute, occurring in one-sixth of the lots which have it.

	DEBAR expected	DEBAR actual
1:1	<i>deux tableaux d'architecture</i> (cf. inv. nos. 11–12, Ziskin, p. 231)	<i>quatre</i>
1:2	<i>très grand tableau de nudités</i>	<i>très</i> omitted
1:3	<i>Rome ou Naples</i>	<i>Naples</i>
1:5	<i>marché aux poissons de moyenne grandeur</i>	size omitted
1:5	1350 livres for Paul Bril pendant	1050 livres
1:6	<i>Desbarres . . . de moyenne grandeur</i>	size omitted
1:6	<i>une marine et un paysage, fort beaux</i>	asesment omitted
1:6	<i>très grand tableau . . . histoire de Jacob</i>	<i>très</i> omitted
1:7	<i>petits tableaux . . . quatre saisons</i>	size omitted
1:7	<i>deux copies moyens</i>	size omitted
1:8	<i>moyens . . . copies d'après Wouwermans</i>	size omitted
1:10	Lemoyne & Restout before Gillot or Watteau	Gillot first
1:10	<i>Jacob moyens en hauteur</i> , 612 livres	size, shape and price omitted
1:12	<i>deux petits tableaux de Berghem</i>	size omitted
1:14	Pater pendants; Vleughels pendants	relationship omitted
1:14	<i>Claude le Lorrain . . . petit tableau</i>	size omitted
1:15	<i>tableaux modernes . . . Leda et Erigone</i>	<i>modernes</i> omitted
1:15	<i>tableau de Teniers plus grand . . . danses</i>	size omitted
2:1	<i>petit tableau de Carle Maratte</i>	size omitted
2:1	no prices for small Venus and large Calisto	2000 livres
2:1	<i>une centauresse . . . grand tableau</i>	size omitted
2:3	<i>paysage moyen avec un bucheron</i>	size omitted
2:3	<i>petits tableaux ronds, d'après ou dans le goût</i>	shape omitted, <i>dans le goût</i>
2:3	<i>tableaux moyens . . . dont un l'abreuvoir</i>	size omitted
2:4	<i>deux grand tableaux de Paul Bril</i>	size omitted
2:4	<i>beaux Berghem grand</i>	size omitted
2:6	<i>tableaux de le Nain, coloriés</i>	<i>coloriés</i> omitted
2:6	<i>quatre elemens . . . grandeur des estampes</i>	size comparison omitted
2:7	<i>petit paysage par Patel</i>	size omitted

3.9 The American holdings

Another surviving copy of DEBAR is found in MS-D.⁷⁰ Like MS-E, MS-D executes heading extraction, albeit less consistently (faltering towards the end of the manuscript) and with some different choices (to use *par le même* instead of repeated attributions, and to keep attributions to multi-

⁷⁰ *Catalogue des tableaux de Madame la Comtesse de Verrue dont la vente à [sic] commencée le mercredi 27 mars 1737*. FARL, Mar. 27, 1737.

ple painters inline). This modernizing ambition contrasts with the appalling orthography which permeates MS-D: it exclusively uses the plural form *tableaux*, gets grammatical genders wrong (e. g. *un marine*), misspells common and proper nouns (*ambassadeur de Naples*), corrupts artists' names (Gillot becoming "Guillot" and Maratta "Marotte") etc. In addition, MS-D introduces continuous lot numbering and twenty or so omissions and errors of substance.

	MS-D expected	MS-D actual
1:2	two paintings, then "a masquerade"	single lot of "two masquerades"
1:3:18, 19	2000 livres	200 livres
1:4:22	<i>un autre plus petit</i>	size omitted
1:4:23	Gagny	buyer omitted
1:5:37	1510 livres	1500 livres
1:6:47	<i>copies</i>	note omitted
1:7:49	S. Paul	attribution omitted
1:7:51	<i>sans bordure</i>	information omitted
1:8:61	<i>fête de village</i>	<i>filles de village</i>
—	<i>15^{me} vacation</i> drop title	drop title omitted
2:1:119	Pietro da Cortona heading	heading placed over previous lot
2:2:126	<i>deux petits tableaux</i>	fused into one, size omitted
2:5:143	<i>grand Teniers de Le Bas</i>	size and engraver omitted
2:5:145	anonymous	Watteau
2:5:149	<i>beau tableau</i>	assessment omitted
2:6:151	<i>petits tableaux de Le Nain</i>	<i>petits tableaux du même</i>
2:6:157	<i>copies</i>	note omitted
2:7:160	<i>de moyenne grandeur</i>	size omitted
2:7:165	<i>tableau des premières manières</i>	qualifier omitted
2:7:166	Patel	Pater
2:9:180	<i>deux grands tableaux</i>	size omitted

Messy as it was, MS-D was the only available source for the creation of MS-DX.⁷¹ This must have been frustrating for the copyist, who had to stay alert in correcting the orthography. The copyist, who worked in brown ink, also crossed out the erroneous plural endings in the first two sessions of MS-D before inevitably giving up. The wet ink then smudged the opposing pages of MS-D. Maybe it is not a coincidence that both MS-D and MS-DX, and only them, are found in institutional libraries of the United States.

Very few mistakes are unique to MS-DX. For example, 1:12:83 usually features *Io ou Leda, copie après le Corrège* by one of the Boullognes, but MS-DX boldly erases the uncertainty by writing *Io changée en vache* ("Io transformed into a heifer") and omitting the name of Correggio. The copyist may have been influenced by 1:3:18, an *Io changée en vache* by Rubens.⁷² Incidentally, Verrue's painting did represent Io,⁷³ but Correggio had painted the nymph in human form.

⁷¹ *Catalogue des tableaux de Madame la Comtesse de Verrue dont la vente a commencé le mercredi 27 mars 1737*. GRI, 86-P338. ⁷² GAM, Gal.-Nr. 962 C. ⁷³ Inv. no. 371, Ziskin, p. 241.

3.10 The great intertwining and its derivatives

The investigation so far has uncovered three lineages of Verrue sale manuscripts: those of FOUCHÉ, PASTEL and DEBAR. The first two have intersected twice, to produce the almost dead-ends of MS-Γ and MS-Δ. In both those cases, there was a clear idea how the output should look, but content-wise they degenerated. Maybe they were each executed in a single sitting, without having first carefully compared their sources and with mental fatigue setting in early, from the many lots to copy and from the unevenness of the descriptions.

The starting position of MS-Θ⁷⁴ was similar, though more fortunate, as its copyist had simultaneous access to manuscripts from all three branches. It was the approach that was radically different, as the copyist harvested the details of all three sources, and thus created a document richer in information than any of them. Those sources were MS-E, MS-B and DEBAR itself. If MS-E and MS-B really did at some point find themselves in the same collection, then all it took to enable this unique undertaking was to also cross paths with DEBAR; perhaps MS-Θ emerged from the flurry of activity surrounding the Verrue sale manuscripts in the late 1770s. In any case, it appeared in the Edmond Bonnaffé sale catalogue of 1904, where it was incorrectly described as containing only sixty six lots.⁷⁵

The basic tool of MS-Θ was aggregation: where some sources carried one category of information about a painting, and some carried another, the resulting description would carry both. Of course, not all differences could be reconciled like this. Working from one copy with extracted attributions and two with inline attributions, but also from two copies with the same numbering and one without numbering, MS-Θ followed the majority in both matters (though it somewhat renumbered the lots). Regarding conflicting attributions, MS-Θ heeded the majority voice in 1:1:1 and 1:1:6, but later tried to adhere to a more sensitive practice, giving both attributions separated by “or”. Some of these conflicts were a result of the ambiguous hand of MS-B; the hand of DEBAR is unknown.

MS-B	MS-E	MS-Θ	
<i>Signioni</i>	<i>Cignany</i>	<i>Signioni ou Signany</i>	1:7:51
<i>Carlo Vannamer</i>	<i>Carlo Vanamer</i>	<i>Carlo Van-Mander ou Van-Amer</i>	1:9:66
<i>Scholke</i>	<i>Scalken</i>	<i>Schalke ou Schalken</i>	1:11:77
<i>Girardou</i>	<i>Gerardow</i>	<i>Girardou ou Gerardow</i>	1:12:85
<i>Cl. Petit</i>	<i>Gelée dit Cl. le Lorrain</i>	<i>Claude Petit ou Gelée dit le Lorrain</i>	1:14:101
<i>Lermans</i>	<i>Hermans</i>	<i>Lermans ou Hermans</i>	2:6:38
<i>Girardou</i>	<i>Gerardow</i>	<i>Girardou ou Gerad Dowe</i>	2:9:64

An attribution to *Claude Petit ou Gelée*... occurred because MS-B had *Un de Cl. Petit*, i. e. a painting by Claude (Lorrain) and small in size,⁷⁶ whereas other sources had Claude Lorrain, but no indication of size. The MS-Θ copyist was not the first to misunderstand the haphazardly abbreviated description: MS-Γ and MS-Δ also feature an inexistent Claude Petit.

⁷⁴ *Catalogue des Tableaux de Madame la Comtesse de Verrue dont la Vente a com̃encée le Mercredi 27 Mars 1737*. TCZ. ⁷⁵ Chevallier et al., p. 57. The mistake happened because 66 was the number of the final lot of the resumption. As for Bonnaffé, he apparently believed, at least until 1873, that Verrue had died in 1715 and bequeathed her paintings to Lassay (Bonnaffé, *Les collectionneurs de l'ancienne France*, p. 65), so he must have obtained MS-Θ after that date. By 1878, Bonnaffé consulted both Blanc and the more recent bibliographic work of Duplessis (Bonnaffé, *Causeries sur l'art et la curiosité*, pp. 115 sq.; cf. Duplessis, p. 6). ⁷⁶ NGL, NG61.

Regarding the unrealistic 2000 livres for two unattributed paintings from DEBAR, the copyist indicated scepticism with the words “it appears”. Otherwise, the copyist resolved price conflicts of more than a few sous by always choosing the highest amount.

DEBAR	MS-B	MS-E	MS-Θ	
662.10	622.10	622.10	662.10	1:5:34
1050	1350	1350	1350	1:5:37
1001	1001	100	1001	1:7:52
160 <i>ou</i> 60	160	160	160	1:9:62
2005	2500	2500	2500	1:9:69
601	611	611	611	1:12:87
40	10	40	40	2:2:9
150.5	150	150.5	150	2:2:11
105	105	150	150	2:3:15
380	280	280	380	2:4:21

There were, of course, some missed opportunities for aggregation and some inherited mistakes, like the DEBAR ordering in 1:10, the artefact in 1:7:47 of MS-E, incorrect prices in 2:3:16 of PASTEL and 2:2:12 of FOUCHÉ and the subtle mutation in 1:9:64 of MS-B. Still, MS-Θ manages to undo most of the mistakes and omissions accumulated in its sources, while only making a few of its own.

	MS-Θ expected	MS-Θ actual
1:4:25	<i>deux grands tableaux</i>	size omitted
1:10:71	<i>histoire de Jacob</i>	<i>histoire de Job</i>
2:1	lot no. 4 for <i>Europe</i>	lot skipped in numbering
2:4:26	850 livres	810 livres

The copyist-aggregator also contributed the remark *prix fou*, “crazy price”, made upon noticing that *The Four Seasons* by Teniers were sold for only 290 livres. Three such sets, all attributed to Teniers, were publicly sold in Paris in the 1770s, achieving 1000, 911 and 1200 livres;⁷⁷ the remark is therefore understandable for a late 18th century copyist. Such a copyist, however, could scarcely have known that Verrue, in fact, owned *The Four Elements* by Teniers, not *The Four Seasons*.⁷⁸ This misidentification is a universal feature of the known manuscripts, and it may have occurred due to Teniers’ representation of both the seasons and the elements on small, upright paintings with a human figure in the foreground.⁷⁹

The margins of MS-Θ carry a small number of laconic annotations in pencil in a different hand, three of which refer to entries in John Smith’s enumeration of works of Claude Lorrain, as published in 1837: “Smith 129” for 1:9:69, “10 S.” for 1:10:74 and “65 S.” for 1:14:101.⁸⁰ Lot 2:9:65 is annotated with a correct reference to an earlier lot (*n°44 1^{ere} vente*). These additions testify to a later usage of MS-Θ and have no bearing on the manuscript proper.

⁷⁷ See annotated catalogues: GRI, 86-P3060 p. 36 and FARL, Apr. 19, 1776 p. 10 and Apr. 13, 1778 p. 8.

⁷⁸ Inv. no. 336, Ziskin, p. 240. ⁷⁹ Compare the engravings of *The Elements* from Verrue’s cabinet, with those of *The Seasons* from the cabinet of the abbot of Majinville: Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, JPLeBas AB 3.65–68 and PLSurugue AB 3.6–9. ⁸⁰ Smith, pp. 199, 226, 261.

The creator of MS- Θ went on to produce MS- Θ X,⁸¹ its somewhat less neat copy. Due to its smaller format, MS- Θ X has nine more pages than MS- Θ with almost the same content, the differences being the omission of the *prix fou* remark and a few newly introduced mistakes. Maybe MS- Θ and MS- Θ X were not meant for the same person, or maybe the copyist wanted to have a backup of MS- Θ , given the effort it took to create it.

	MS- Θ X expected	MS- Θ X actual
1:1:3	200 livres	300 livres
1:2:11	<i>du même [Boulogne]</i>	<i>du même grandeur</i>
1:10:71	<i>dans le Cabinet du Duc de Chevreuse</i>	note omitted
2:9:66	<i>Voyés le n°19 de son Catalogue</i>	note omitted

In addition to having a close copy in the same hand, MS- Θ also spawned MS- Θ Y,⁸² a hasty or impatient lot-by-lot summary with running sums per session. This brief manuscript is the only one to date the sale to “March 27, 28 etc.” Indeed, at over a hundred and ten lots, the first part of the sale could have easily taken more than a day; maybe this, and not the resumption in April, was meant by the reoccurring phrase “. . . whose sale started on March 27”.

3.11 The invisible paths

The deep history of the hypothetical manuscripts emerges in more detail with the recognition of a feature set present in FOUCHÉ and PASTEL, but absent from DEBAR. It proves that the first two were not direct copies of VENTE, but shared an intermediate prototype. That prototype numbered the lots, curiously following lot 21 with *21bis* and, in the resumption of the sale, lot 45 with *45bis*, which is why I call it BIS. In negative terms, it is characterized by only a small set of omissions.

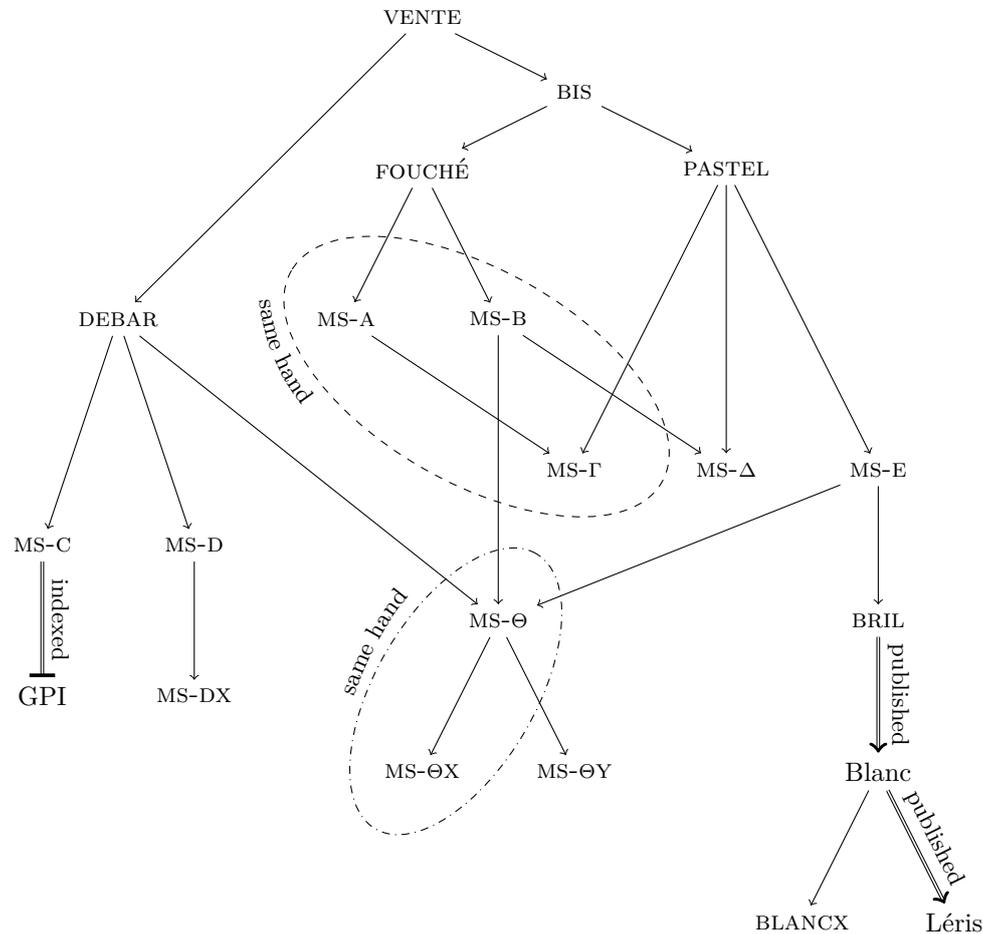
	BIS expected	BIS actual
1:1:4	<i>très grands tableaux</i>	<i>très</i> omitted
1:3:17	<i>par Desbarres</i>	attribution omitted
1:14:102	<i>l'écurie avec l'arcade</i>	<i>avec l'arcade</i> omitted
2:9:65	<i>un grand arbre</i>	<i>grand</i> omitted

There are many more differences between BIS and DEBAR, mostly the already listed faults of the latter, but also several conflicting prices, where the correct value cannot be determined.⁸³

Time and again, the *bis* numbering caused problems for the copyists. In PASTEL, lot 45 of the resumption was dropped, with the lot *45bis* taking its place and its number. In MS-B, the copyist initially followed lot 45 with 46, but then corrected the ‘6’ into a ‘5’ and prepended the letter ‘B’. In MS-E, lot 21 was at first followed by 22, which was then awkwardly corrected into *21bis*. The hybrids MS- Γ and MS- Θ were renumbered and thus do not inherit this feature; the hybrid MS- Δ , not wholly renumbered, clings to *21bis*.

⁸¹ *Catalogue des Tableaux de Madame la Comtesse de Verrue dont la Vente a comencée le Mercredi 27 Mars 1737*. RKD, 201103286. ⁸² *Catalogue avec les Prix de la vente la C^{tesse} de Verrue faite en 1737. les 27 28 28^e mars*. RKD, 201904918. ⁸³ These are the prices for the first Teniers of 1:5, the final lot of 1:9, the Rembrandt of 1:12 and the first lot of 2:4, respectively documented as 662 livres 10 sous, 2005 livres, 601 livres and 380 livres in DEBAR and as 622 livres 10 sous, 2500 livres, 611 livres and 280 livres in BIS.

The BIS hypothesis makes it possible to finally bring together all known copies and all necessary hypotheticals in a single image of the manuscript network.



The arrow pointing from VENTE to DEBAR does not mean that the latter was necessarily a direct copy of the former. The Randon de Boisset note shows that DEBAR was still being written or at least annotated in 1777 or later. There could have thus been intermediate manuscripts, which would then also account for a subset of errors carried by DEBAR. The same note brings up the question of the relationship between DEBAR and MS-E, as they both had it, though with varying levels of detail. Did two individuals independently attend the sale, learn of the Verrue provenance of the Murillos, and decide to enrich their Verrue manuscripts in the available space after the final lot? Or did the writer of MS-E also have a hand in DEBAR?

Similarly, due to its spelling of *fête* as *fette* with non-crossed t's, MS-E induced the misreading *filie* in BRIL; and MS-D made this same mistake when copying from DEBAR. Were the two prototypes in the same hand, or was it merely a common enough combination of spelling and handwriting? And again: how is it that only MS-C and MS-E have Gagny as buyer, the former inline, the latter on the margins, almost as an afterthought? Odd features like that, some amounting to no more than a stroke of the quill, hint that reality was richer in relationships, more dynamic and more surprising than suggested by the reconstructed network.

4 Conclusion

The original Verrue sale manuscript was created as the auction itself was unfolding. It was deemed a precious document, and as such it was multiplied; but the fate of neither the original, nor of the first generation of its copies is known today. It is at best on the copies of copies, and on even later generations, that an investigation can be grounded, and these later manuscripts show a remarkable variety of approach. Hardly anyone merely copied their prototype(s). The copyists were also modernizers, mystifiers, hybridizers, annotators, arbiters, aggregators, simplifiers, summarizers and standardizers. These were their intentional roles; but it was due to their impatience, incompetence or fatigue that, time and again, mistakes were introduced to manuscript lineages, enabling their tracing today.

The known manuscripts span well over a hundred years. One known manuscript is a copy of a publication of an unknown copy of another known manuscript. But there is no need to compare chronological extremes to come up with complicated relationships. Already the analysis of four fairly old manuscripts, three of which were in the same hand, necessitated the introduction of two hypothetical ones, and revealed such phenomena as: usage of external sources to supplement the text; lateral movement of information between lineages; simultaneous transcription from two prototypes; and an attempted reshaping into a different kind of document.

Such actions show that the manuscripts were more than static, archival items, replicated for the sake of posterity. They partook in the potent lifeblood of the Parisian art market, akin to the paintings they described. Envisioning them dynamically, it is obvious why the network of their relationships could not amount to a tree in the mathematical sense: living things produce complex behaviours. In the very unlikely event that another copy resurfaces and proves to be an old one, I would not expect it to neatly replace a hypothetical: the network would almost certainly have to respond to it by establishing novel pathways.

The twelve known manuscripts are in nine different hands. I could not name a single copyist, even as I recognized two of the hands in various catalogue annotations. Were a copyist known, this would fortify or challenge my claims about the copies. Likewise, some dating estimates could surely be mined from orthography, or the hands themselves. The physical properties of the manuscripts, such as their paper, ink, or binding, would yield additional insights to an experienced eye. All this would contribute to a sharper picture of the flow, spread and exchange of information in the art market of 18th century Paris.

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