One late summer day in 1499 a daughter was born to Jean de Poitiers, courtier and Seigneur of Saint-Vallier. Only five years before, in 1494, a mediaeval king of France had invaded Italy to return home a renaissance monarch; only a year before, in 1498, his successor had made a similar journey of conquest and discovery. Through king and attendant nobility the Renaissance swiftly spread to France. Thus it came about that the Seigneur of Saint-Vallier, who might have named his daughter after any in the long calendar of Christian saints (or even Jeanne after himself), called her after an antique goddess. The very name Diane de Poitiers is therefore one of the earliest expressions of the French Renaissance. Moreover, it has left a lasting imprint on the art of the time, giving the lie to Shakespeare's oft quoted query “What's in a name?”

Diane's fame rests of course upon her liaison with Henri II, which had existed even before he became heir apparent. At the age of fifteen she had married Louis de Brézé, Grand Sénéchal of Normandy. Louis died in 1531, but Diane continued to be known as La Grande Sénéchale until 1548, when the grateful Henri II made her Duchesse de Valentinois. In the brilliant court centered at Fontainebleau no stigma was attached to her relationship to the king. On the contrary, Diane looked upon herself as the emblem of respectability and was even a champion of religious orthodoxy. Never was a widow seemingly more loyal to a husband's memory; yet no mistress ever exercised firmer control over a lover. When Henri came to rule hers was the power behind the throne, with the nominal Queen of France, Catherine de Médicis, but a shadow in the background. Although nineteen years older than the French ruler, Diane triumphed over time.

Henri II was the most generous of lovers, and of all his gifts to Diane, the most renowned was that of the Maison d‘Anet. To this unique creation of renaissance architecture we now turn, since the two magnificent tapestries presented to the Museum by the children of the late Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, following the wishes of their mother, were made for it.

The property of Anet, situated about forty miles west of Paris, had belonged to the family of Diane's husband, the Brézés. As it stood when Diane came into possession of it, its mediaeval battlements were hardly suited to the favorite of a renaissance prince. Accordingly about 1543 Diane started adapting it to her personality, with Philibert de Lorme as her architect, and this rebuilding continued over a period of some ten years. Anet was at once opulent and chic. Though little enough of De Lorme's masterpiece remains, for it was partially demolished after the French Revolution and later restored in the turgid spirit of the mid-nineteenth century, on the basis of old prints we can visualize it as it once stood.

As one approached the imposing entrance portal, the personality of its owner immediately asserted itself. Over the portal was Cellini's famed relief of a Diana-like nymph (now in the Louvre), and high above, crowning the clock tower, a great bronze figure of Diana's stag, flanked by hounds of the chase. Beyond the entrance lay the Court of Honor, and immediately opposite, the main façade of the château, the central part of which was in the form of a memorial to Diane's deceased husband. (It is now part of the exterior of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.) In another court, to the left, stood the famous Fountain of Diana, the sculptured figure of which is also in the Louvre. From the crest of the roof to the pavement innumerable ciphers and in-
signia proclaimed with charming insouciance either Diane's royal liaison or her noble widowhood, and, as if to counterbalance the numerous interlaced D's and H's, funereal black marble was lavishly used throughout the building. This somber stone may have reminded the visitor to Anet that Diane herself wore nothing but black and white—colors, incidentally, which set off her blondeness—and that she even persuaded her constant lover to follow her example! Finally, the chimney tops resembling sarcophagi joined in Diane's ceaseless mourning. Such was the pleasure palace which a learned Florentine of the period proclaimed to be as rich and beautiful as Nero's Golden House and which the Winchells of the time deliriously called "Dianet."

Anet was furnished as elaborately within as without. Its chief interior features were its carved paneling done under the supervision of Francisque Sibec de Carpi; its stained glass after designs in recent times dubiously attributed to Jean Cousin; its paintings, which were mostly of Diane (sometimes nude as a goddess, sometimes clothed as a duchess); and its tapestries. Except for an occasional fragment of decoration and one set of tapestries, all these objects have disappeared. The two hangings from the Whitney collection are from this set of tapestries, which appropriately has for its theme the History of Diana.

For more than a hundred years Anet remained much as Diane had left it. Then during the sixteen-eighties Louis Joseph, Duc de Vendôme, who succeeded to the property, completely redecorated it in the contemporary taste of Versailles. The Diana tapestries presumably were removed from the château at this period, somehow finding their way into the possession of a member of the Grillo family of Genoa. At a later time—just when is not known—the set was broken up. In 1875 a Monsieur Moreau, who as owner of Anet was then concerned with its restoration, bought back four of the hangings, and these have since remained in the château. Their subjects are Diana Saving Iphigenia, Diana Slaying Orion, the Death of Meleager, and Jupiter Turning the Peasants into Frogs. One panel, which shows Diana asking Jupiter for the gift of chastity, is in the Rouen Museum, and an incomplete hanging, the Triumph of Diana, is at present held by a New York art dealer. The last two of the series, the Drowning of Britomartis and the Blasphemy of Niobe, are our chief interest here.

The Metropolitan's two tapestries are characteristic of the entire group. Following a custom of the period, each has its own descriptive label consisting of ten lines of verse in the centers of the upper borders. These are expertly written, and it may be supposed that they were specially composed by one of the court poets such as Joachim du Bellay, who often sang the praises of Diane and Anet.

The following is a free translation of the lines found on our Britomartis tapestry:

Fair Britomartis by Minos pursued,
In the deep woods resisting his seduction,
Preferred into the sea herself to fling,
Than to submit to his outrageous passion.
Apollo, honoring death in such a fashion,
Invented nets and snares with which to bring
Her body back to the god's sacred place.
Exultantly the Greeks called her Dictynna.
O holy death, which all mankind did grace
Through such deep woe with such a precious thing.

The representation in the tapestry of the ancient fable of the invention of nets and snares by Diana's brother, Apollo, is here so accurately described that one need merely note that Britomartis was a minor divinity of Crete and like Diana, with whom she was sometimes confused, a patroness of hunters and fishermen. This relation gives rise to the featured incident of the tapestry—Diana's arrival on the shore with three of her nymphs at the moment when Britomartis sinks into the sea.

In a similarly ambiguous vein Diana is represented in the guise of her mortal namesake, Diane de Poitiers. Now this likeness is of the utmost rarity, for although Diane was portrayed innumerable times, experts are generally undecided as to which are truly her portraits. The identification is made certain here by the presence of the ciphers and insignia of Henri's favorite on Diana's garments (see illustration on the cover) as well as by the resemblance to the few accepted likenesses of Diane. Although somewhat idealized, our portrait is essentially truthful. It reveals Diane's unusual
The Drowning of Britomartis, a tapestry after a design by Jean Cousin. Probably woven in Paris between 1550 and 1555. One of a pair recently acquired by the Museum.
height, her blonde hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. If it does not make of her another Helen, it should be remembered that writers of the age noted that only when her features were animated was she fully la belle Diane.

The engaging border of the Britomartis tapestry contains a variety of emblems (symbolic pictures with mottoes) and insignia. One emblem shows a woman sitting between an olive and a palm tree on Delos, a floating island. Its accompanying motto, Sic immota manet (“She thus remains unmoved”), alludes to the banishment of Latona to that Aegean island, where she gave birth to Diana and Apollo. Another emblem, a palm branch crossed with an olive spray, is likewise identified by its motto, Non frustra Jupiter ambas (“Not in vain [gave] Jupiter both”), as another reference to the children of Latona. It is a commentary on the age that this symbol of the gods was later used on the exterior of Diane de Poitier’s mortuary chapel at Anet in honor of the very human Diane and Henri II. Still another emblem consists of a votive figure of a woman holding a fish net in her hands and adored by fishermen. As shown by the motto hoc tua mors valuit (“This has thy death availed”), it alludes to the story of Britomartis. And in the same vein the phrase consequitur quodcumque petit (“He attains whatever he seeks”), repeated on two scrolls, refers to Minos’s pursuit of Britomartis.

Various insignia favored by the duchess are also found in the border—notably the bow and arrow, the crescent, and the letter delta. The arms and ciphers—interlaced G’s—are those of the Grillo family, having been substituted for Diane’s when the tapestry was in Genoa.

As for our Blasphemy of Niobe tapestry, its verses may be read as follows:

When mortal man, in pride counting his gifts,
To God the giver will not glory render,
Should woe or death o’ertake him as he drifts,
Should God forsake him, there is little wonder.
Proud Niobe of Thebes this lesson learned.
Seeking to halt all worship of Latona,
In boundless pride to blasphemy she turned,
Praised her sons o’er Latona’s, who light the earth.
The goddess then with those whom she gave birth
Shared the just anguish of a mother spurned.

Again poetry explains the composition of the tapestry. In the foreground a man with arm outstretched hinders another from leading a sacrificial bull to Latona’s altar; in the middle distance Niobe, standing among her sons and daughters before the altar of Latona, hurls insults at her; in the far-off heavens Latona describes her humiliation to Apollo and Diana, who are soon to avenge their mother.

The border of the Niobe tapestry is similar in layout and in motifs to that of the Britomartis panel. Particularly to be noted is the emblem of a lone woman shivering before a bonfire, which, with its motto he! mihi qualis eram (“Ah me! Such once was I”), suggests Niobe’s unhappy fate. Paired censers remind us of the priestess in the field of the tapestry engaged in the incensation of Latona’s altar.

The visitor who gazes upon the two Diana tapestries in their present temporary setting can well imagine the pleasure they must have given Diane de Poitiers, who lived on adulation, and her guests, who most surely were impressed by their brilliance. They were designed with the greatest gusto, and if, as we shall see, they are more characteristically French than the usual works of the Italianate school of Fontainebleau, that is all to their advantage. Their strong roots in French soil are also strikingly revealed in their color schemes. The lovely shades of blue, the evanescent greens, the gorgeous yellows, and other more strident tones used as accents harmonize with impressionistic ease. Even today they are breathtaking.

Jean Cousin, whose name is found in the title of this article, now enters the picture; for to appreciate fully the Diana tapestries we approach them from two viewpoints. First, their connection with Diane de Poitiers and her château identifies their subject matter and their locale. Secondly, their connection with Cousin throws new light on the elusive career of one of the foremost figures of the Renaissance in France.

Jean Cousin (he is to be distinguished from his son, Jean Cousin le fils) has intrigued and puzzled historians of art for the past hundred and fifty years. No single French artist of the
The Blasphemy of Niobe, a tapestry after a design by Jean Cousin. Probably woven in Paris between 1550 and 1555. One of a pair recently acquired by the Museum.
sixteenth century has been the object of so much study or the victim of so many scholarly misconceptions. Fortunately in recent years Maurice Roy, by dint of long searches among old documents, has at last brought his personality into focus. It was Roy, for instance, who first pointed out that there were two Jean Cousins, a noted father and a somewhat less talented son, and thanks to him the material is now at hand to identify the father as the author of the models for the Diana tapestries.

Cousin was a thoroughgoing product of the Renaissance in that he was a man of many talents. As the Eva Prima Pandora in the Louvre—the one painting universally attributed to him—reveals, he was a gifted and independent master; seemingly he was one of the first to offer a truly French reaction to the painting style of the Italian Renaissance. The few illustrated books and prints attributed to him (of which there are examples in the Museum's print collection) likewise show Cousin as a master of the graphic arts. He was also an architect and sculptor. In his early years in Sens he was employed as an expert in geometry to finish plans. And between 1535 and 1538 he is believed to have constructed for the chapel of Pagny, near Sens, the marble and alabaster choir screen with sculpured decoration now shown in the Philadelphia Museum. Then, too, he worked on the problem of representing things accurately in space. And like Vignola, his contemporary in Italy, with whom, indeed, Vasari coupled him in the 1568 edition of his "Lives," Cousin in his late years set down the results of his experience in his Livre de perspective (1560). Next to Viator's text, this is the most important work on the subject written in sixteenth-century France.

His was truly a highly developed, speculative mind, akin in many respects to that of his famous contemporary Bernard Palissy. If Cousin were living today he would certainly be a scientist or an engineer. Indeed his chief claim to fame seems to lie in the field of invention; for, as the many documents that have come to light indicate, a great many of his important commissions had to do with designs which more pedestrian artists of the day carried out in the appropriate final materials. In the words of Monsieur Roy, he was an entrepreneur of artistic compositions.

His work as a designer seems to have found its fullest expression in the field of tapestries and other types of wall hangings. Several documents illustrate, although incompletely, this aspect of Cousin's work. In 1541 he was commissioned by the Confraternity of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont to furnish three "patrons de tapisserie" painted on canvas and representing episodes from the life of Saint Geneviève. In 1543 Claude de Longwy, Cardinal de Givry, ordered him to prepare designs for a set of eight tapestries representing scenes from the life of Saint Mammès. Cousin evidently made them with great care; for the 1543 document describes them as being in precise colors (couleurs achevées), and an agreement of 1544 relating to the weaving of the tapestries mentions Cousin's patrons (models) and pourtraits (detailed sketches of the figures). The weavers, by the way, were allowed no license, being obliged to follow the designs with unfailing accuracy. There is a record of still another commission, by which in 1549 the fathers of the Parisian church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois instructed Cousin to make toiles peintes showing the life of their patron saint.

Until recently none of the hangings described in these records were actually known. Fortunately Monsieur Roy has been able to identify three of the Saint Mammès set, two of which are in the cathedral of Langres and the third in a private collection in France (see p. 117). These have a special importance for us, since they are the basis for adding the Diana tapestries to the list of Cousin's work. Although documentary evidence is wanting, and this new identification must therefore remain an attribution, it is none the less a secure one, based on convincing stylistic evidence.

It is clear, for example, that similar methods of treating the human form are used in Cousin's Saint Mammès tapestries and the Diana set. One characteristic type of figure—angular, stilted, abrupt—is illustrated by the men crowded in the middle distance of the
Diane de Poitiers as Diana. From the Drowning of Britomartis. This detail and the one in color on the cover are from photographs by Charles Sheeler.
Niobe panel and by the three men standing at the left in the hanging illustrated from the Saint Mammès series. In both sets one also finds the same contrast between large figures in the foreground and small ones in the background, the same individualized treatment of faces, and the same complicated draperies with floating ribbons. Even more telling an indication of a common origin is found in the curious drawing of some of the hands, the strong, nervous fingers of which are extended and spread wide apart except for the two fingers in the middle, which, as in Diana's left hand and Saint Mammès's right, are held closely together. Moreover, the use of buildings in the background and luxurious trees with drooping branches sharply etched against the sky—both hallmarks of Cousin's style—occurs in the two sets. The borders are also similar in style. All these details preclude the possibility of a chance resemblance.

The stylistic mannerisms of the Diana hangings also appear in the Eva Prima Pandora painting and a print of the Descent from the Cross, both of which are believed to be by Cousin.

Now that it appears certain that Cousin worked for Diane de Poitiers, the earlier assignment to him of the Anet stained glass may well be re-examined, despite the fact that critics, including Roy, have completely discounted it. The windows, which in respect to Diane's widowhood were mostly in black and white, are now lost or destroyed, but they must have been quite fine, for De Lorme particularly noted them in his description of the château. And on the basis of the present study an engraving of one of them, published in the early nineteenth century when the glass still existed, clearly shows it at least to be in the style of our master.

Can the old tradition again be accepted? It seems to present a consistent picture. In the construction of her Maison d'Anet, Diane de Poitiers always called upon leading artists, and Jean Cousin, with his exalted reputation as a designer, was the master most likely to be entrusted with both the tapestry and glass designs for this unique building.

One more question: when and where were the Diana tapestries made? They have been generally believed to come from the looms of Fontainebleau. Nevertheless, so few tapestries of the French Renaissance exist—only one complete set from Fontainebleau is known—and so meager is our knowledge of the state of the industry that such an assignment remains a shot in the dark.

The preponderance of evidence suggests a Parisian origin. Cousin, who designed the related Saint Mammès hangings, and the weavers Pierre Blacé and Jacques Langloix, who executed them, all worked in Paris. And Cousin presumably planned the Diana set in his Paris studio at a time when the work of decorating Anet was reaching its climax. In this connection it is worth noting that in 1553 Diane de Poitiers ordered for her château a set of eight large embroidered armorial hangings, now lost. It is tempting, then, to believe that the Diana tapestries were designed and woven at about this time. And since Henri II had established a royal manufactory in Paris at l'Hôpital de la Trinité in 1551, it seems likely that they were made there.

In the early seventeenth century another series of the History of Diana was woven in Paris, probably also at the Trinité. The able Toussaint du Breuil had supplied the models—not all of them, however, for by some curious reason Cousin's model of the Museum's Britomartis hanging found its way with scarcely any change among those of Du Breuil. Was this by any chance a case of arrant plagiarism? Until now, at any rate, the Britomartis tapestry has been considered one of Du Breuil's handsomest creations. Since Cousin's design of this subject must have remained where it would be accessible to Du Breuil and since a most natural location would be among the odds and ends of art that surely cluttered up the Trinité workshop, a Parisian origin of the Anet hangings is again suggested.

Such is the story of our Whitney tapestries as we today know it. From the jewel-like château of one of the most fascinating women of history, they may be counted among the few works of one of the fathers of French painting.
Episodes from the life of Saint Mammès, a tapestry after a design by Jean Cousin.
In a private collection in France. The border is not shown.

They represent the first full flowering in France of the renaissance pictorial style and a most felicitous moment in the long history of French weaving.

Maurice Roy’s Artistes et monuments de la renaissance en France (Paris, 1929) is the source of much of the material on Cousin used in this article. Facing page 58 of Roy’s work is a reproduction of the Eva Prima Pandora, to which the interested reader is referred. Reproductions of the print of the Descent from the Cross and of the panel of stained glass from Anet, mentioned in the text, may be found in Ambroise Firmin-Didot’s Receuil des oeuvres choisies de Jean Cousin (Paris, 1875), figs. 29 and 39.

The tapestry illustrated on this page is reproduced from Roy’s Artistes et monuments, plate facing page 46.