A design for a tomb does not ordinarily interest anyone but the designer and his client. There is, however, in the Museum Print Department a sixteenth-century tomb drawing of more than ordinary interest, since it presents a puzzle as rich in clues as a detective story.

Once folded in half and bound in a scrapbook with the shop drawings of an unidentified atelier, this drawing shows an elaborate architectural design for a monument. Perhaps the most obvious thing about it is that the designer knew the work of Michelangelo; it could only have been made after the creation of the figures of Night and Day on the tomb of Giuliano de’ Medici in Florence and after the creation of the idiom of the tomb of Cecchino Bracci in Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome.

Michelangelo is known to have been working on the figures for the Medici tomb as early as 1525. They were evidently finished by 1533, and practically from the moment they were installed they were studied by every artist in Florence, native and visitor alike. A drawing by Federigo Zuccaro, probably made between 1575 and 1579 and now in the Louvre, shows artists in the Medici Chapel making sketches from every angle. Before 1600 engravings of these tombs were available, notably those, dated 1570, by Cornelis Cort. Bracci’s tomb, executed in 1544 and 1545, was also known to artists all over Europe. It is perhaps a coincidence that an unfinished drawing in pencil and pen and ink, obviously copied from that tomb, was found in the same group of drawings with ours. Although the influence of these tombs is obvious in the design of our drawing, there is something distinctly French about the changed proportions: the scale of the reclining figures in relation to that of the portrait bust makes them much less important than Night and Day; their slenderness and elongation indicate a Frenchman.

A glance at reproductions of French sixteenth-century sculpture shows only one similarity: several fragments in the Louvre of the tomb of Christophe de Thou. They are a marble portrait bust of a middle-aged man and two bronze youths reclining in the positions of Michelangelo’s Night and Day. The Louvre’s labels and the catalogue of 1922 say that these three pieces are from De Thou’s tomb in the church of Saint-André-des-Arts in Paris and that they are attributed to Barthélemy Prieur (about 1540-1611).

These fragments had been part of the collection made by Alexandre Lenoir during and after the French Revolution, and unlike much of the contents of his Musée des Monuments Français were never returned to their original home, which no longer existed. Lenoir had scooped up every available thing that he took a fancy to in the way of French sculpture, including the tombs of Francis I and Henry II, now returned to Saint-Denis. Another monument from the church of Saint-André-des-Arts (also known as Saint-André-des-Ars), an allegorical figure in relief made by François Girardon in memory of Anne Marie Martinozzi, Princess of Conti, was removed from Lenoir’s museum to the garden of Malmaison by order of the Empress Josephine, was subsequently sold, and has finally come to rest in the Metropolitan Museum.

Lenoir’s journal mentions receiving the white marble bust of Christophe de Thou on January 4, 1794, adding that it was by Barthélemy Prieur and that it came from Saint-André via an agent of the Commune, named Sturler. In 1800, in his publication Musée des Monuments Français, Lenoir describes item 150 as a white marble bust, a chef-d’oeuvre by Barthélemy Prieur of Christophe de Thou, which he had placed with other sculpture in his restoration of the tombs from the De Thou chapel in Saint-André-des-Arts. He adds that he had obtained from the propriétaire of the church everything that belonged to the family’s chapel.

Lenoir assembled his acquisitions and arranged them in his museum the way he pleased,
French xvi century pencil design for the tomb of Christophe de Thou (d. 1582). Whittelsey Fund, 1949
Drawing of the tomb of Cecchino Bracci in Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome, designed by Michelangelo. From the same group of shop drawings as the one opposite. A comparison of these two drawings will show the difference between a projected design and a copy of an existing monument.
with small regard for the original purposes and compositions of the material. He constructed, for instance, a memorial to Jean Goujon, another to Jean Cousin, and a third to Germain Pilon, all from miscellaneous fragments and plaster casts he had collected. Even before the dispersal of the contents of his museum, there were complaints about his taste in assembling bits of dis-associated monuments. We are not surprised, therefore, to find in contemporary etchings showing the interior of the museum the bust of Christophe de Thou forming part of the tomb of his son, Jacques Auguste. Had he cared to, Lenoir could easily have reinstalled this tomb as it had existed in Saint-André-des-Arts. There were many pre-Revolutionary descriptions of it as well as an illustration (see p. 164), for it was always considered a masterpiece. By François Anguier, the tomb included Prieur’s portrait of Marie de Barbançon Cany (died 1601), first wife of Jacques Auguste (who died in 1617, that is, six years after Prieur) and portraits of Jacques Auguste and his second wife, Gasparde de la Châtre. These three life-size portraits are in the round although meant to be seen from one side, and were mounted on top of a screen which included a sarcophagus with seated atlantes. For no apparent reason except that they were left over, Lenoir decorated a doorway several galleries away with the reclining bronze youths from Christophe’s tomb. Obviously no clear idea of the original composition of Christophe’s tomb can be derived from Lenoir’s installation.

Approximately a century earlier, however, a drawing of the tomb had been made for François Roger de Gaignières (1642-1715). Gaignières, in an attempt to bring together a complete record of historical French art, hired draughtsmen to make drawings of tombs, tapestries, and stained glass in churches throughout the country. The drawing of Christophe de Thou’s tomb (see p. 160) shows an arrangement of architectural and sculptural elements closely resembling that of our drawing. Aside from differences of scale and proportions, the similarities are apparent, but there is one interesting difference: instead of the two elegant reclining youths in our drawing the Gaignières version shows two baby angels with torches held flame down. A second Gaignières drawing reproduces the epitaph on the tablet under the reclining angels, which tells us that the tomb was erected by Jacques Auguste de Thou for his father, Christophe, after the latter’s death in 1582. The drawing reproduced shows two additional figures, winged and robed, standing beside the portrait bust and holding torches, one up and one down. The figure on the right also holds a laurel wreath over the portrait.

There is a singular lack of invention here, for it would seem that one pair of winged torch-bearers would suffice. It is tempting to think that Gaignières’s draughtsman, after a cold, boring afternoon of copying monuments in Saint-André, was put out at dusk by the sacristan with his drawing unfinished, that he made a note to himself of two bronze genii reclining on the top of the sarcophagus, and that he later interpreted his note to mean two baby angels with torches. As for the standing figures, no longer part of the fragmentary tomb in the Louvre, it is worth remembering that although Lenoir might have been mistaken or misinformed, he said that he had acquired all the sculpture from the De Thou chapel, having to make several trips on several days—January first, third, and fourth, 1794—to complete the transfer. On the first trip he came away with two white marble figures of women in half relief by Prieur. If he was referring to the figures which flanked the bust of Christophe, what has happened to them?

An early guide to Paris, written by Gilles Corrozot and republished in 1588 with additions by Nicolas Bonfons and with an inaccurately illustrated second part, shows what is probably the earliest published view of the tomb. Unfortunately it does not agree very well with either the Gaignières drawing or ours. It would seem that Jean Rabel, the illustrator of the guide, was either too lazy or too hard-pressed for time to visit Saint-André-des-Arts and, instead of drawing the tomb itself, relied on the description of it in the Corrozot-Bonfons text: “... en vne chapelle d’icelle Eglise est inhumé Monsieur le premier President, esleu en chef, de marbre blâc representant le vif, fort bien elaboré, aux deus costez d’icelluy deux Colônes de Jaspre, au dessouz deus figures de bronze son epitaph est telle. ...” The phrase “fort bien elaboré” may be
Bust of Christophe de Thou and two bronze figures, by Barthélémy Prieur, originally part of the tomb in Saint-André-des-Arts, now in the Louvre
Topographical drawing of the De Thou tomb, made in the xvii century for François Roger de Gaignières. The reclining youths are replaced by two small angels. Bibliothèque Nationale
responsible for the jumbled clutter of decorative elements shown in the illustration, and the “deux figures de bronze” may have been interpreted as the symbolic figures of baby angels with reversed torches.

But no verbal description can enable an artist to make an accurate portrait, and Jean Rabel probably “collected” (his own word) his likeness from some published illustration or from a drawing or painting. One of the early catalogues of sculptures in the Louvre, by Barbet de Jouy, finds a perfect analogy between the face in Rabel’s engraving and that of Prieur’s bust but such a difference in the costume as could only be attributed to a caprice of the engraver. Two portraits of Christophe de Thou, both published later than Rabel’s, indicate a common source at present unknown to this writer. In them the face is turned slightly to the spectator’s left and the subject wears a three-cornered hat and a patterned damask or velvet robe with a long fur collar over a doublet buttoned up to the neck, where there is a tiny ruffled edging of white linen shirt. One of these portraits appears in Le Theatre d’Honneur de Plusieurs Princes Anciens et Modernes by Claude de Valles, published in Paris in 1623. The other is an engraving by Jean Morin (before 1590—1650) which disappointingly omits any name in the space where Morin usually acknowledged the painter whose work he had copied. Since Morin seems to have been born shortly after the death of Christophe de Thou, he certainly was not the artist responsible for the original life portrait. No matter where Jean Rabel found his likeness, he crowded it into an oval frame that it was never designed to fit and used the device, common in early portrait painting and, indeed, in Roman tomb sculpture, of a stone window sill to fill in the bottom of the oval frame. For some reason he paid no attention to the two jasper columns mentioned in the text. These are plainly shown in the Gaignières drawing as of colored stone. Incidentally, in Lenoir’s museum the doorway over which the two bronzes reclined was flanked by two composite columns of “brêche-dorée,” which may or may not have been the “Jaspre” of Bonfons’s text. Although the text does not mention them, Rabel added the figures of two seated females, robed and winged, without torches but

Woodcut illustration by Jean Rabel of the tomb of Christophe de Thou published in 1588 in the second part of “Les Antiquitez” by Corrozeti and Bonfons each holding a palm branch and wreath of laurel.

Of the many references to the tomb of Christophe de Thou, from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth century, the most complete ones only add to the confusion concerning the design of the tomb. One must suppose that the descriptions were made not of the tomb itself but of Rabel’s illustration. The 1742 edition of Piganiol de la Force describes a white marble bust on a black marble pedestal, with “above, two seated virtues” holding laurel wreaths and palms. “Below” are two children (enfans) who hold lighted torches reversed. Another description, by Luc Vincent Thiéry in 1787, also lists the white marble bust, two “virtues” holding laurel crowns and palms, and below, two “genies” holding lighted torches. In 1811 J. B. de St. Victor says that “the genies, the virtues, and the arms” have been destroyed but that the bust is in the Petits-Augustins, enframed with debris from the De Thou chapel in Saint-André-des-Arts. He seems
to have been misinformed about the destruction of the genies, presumably the reclining figures, for they were catalogued by Lenoir in 1802, approximately ten years after the destruction was supposed to have taken place.

Piganiol de la Force, Lenoir, Thiéry all say that Barthélémy Prieur was the sculptor, but where they found their information is not clear. The attribution to Prieur rested until 1949 entirely on the Mémoirs of Jacques Auguste de Thou, which were written to answer detractors of his famous Historia sui temporis. The latter had won for itself a place on the Index librorum prohibitorum, and the Mémoirs, written in Latin and published in Geneva in 1620, was not reprinted in translation until the first quarter of the eighteenth century and so was probably not known to the authors of the early guidebooks to Paris. Actually, De Thou says little more about the tomb than that he had Barthélémy Prieur carve it and that it took him two years. It is not easy to think of a valid reason why Jacques Auguste de Thou, a historian whose interest in recording the truth got him into trouble with the church, would have gone out of his way to mention this information if it were not so.

But that Prieur carved the tomb of Christophe de Thou is no longer open to question. In 1949 Mme Marguerite Lamy published an inventory found in the Archives Français of Prieur’s possessions at the time of his death in 1611. Item 31 of that inventory is a contract dated October 9, 1585, for several statues made by Prieur for the tomb of the late Christophe de Thou. Although called a contract in the inventory, the document is in effect a receipt, for Prieur’s agent, one Mathieu Labbé, is mentioned as having received payment of “cinquante six ecus dix sols” from Jacques Auguste de Thou. The separate works were itemized on the back of the contract, now lost.

Not enough is known about Prieur himself. He was probably born about 1540 and he may have been a student of Germain Pilon. He is mentioned in the household records of Henry III as Sculpteur de sa Majesté with a salary of 30 livres. It is known that he was a Protestant, for when he died in 1611 he was buried in the Protestant cemetery, and that he carved the monuments, after the designs of Jean Bullant, of another more important Protestant, the Connétable Anne de Montmorency (died 1567), and his wife Madeleine de Savoie (died 1586). In 1594, as Sculpteur du Roi, he was working on the ornamental sculpture of Lescot’s inner façade of the south wing of the old Louvre, carrying out Jean Goujon’s designs. In 1601 he was a witness to the marriage contract of Étienne du Pérec, another architect who was also an engraver and who had spent many years in Italy, among other things etching views of Rome and accurate elevations and sections of contemporary Roman buildings. In November 1608 Prieur signed a contract apprenticing his son Paul, fourteen years old, to Martin Le Clerc, a medal-maker, and in the same year he earned 600 livres in the king’s household as Premier Sculpteur du Roi. His daughter Marguerite was married to the sculptor Guillaume Dupré, who in turn became the Premier Sculpteur du Roi, after Prieur’s death, and who is known to have collaborated with Prieur on several funeral monuments. In 1610 Prieur worked on the decorations for the entry of Marie de Médicis into Paris, and in 1611, the year of his death, he is again mentioned as Premier Sculpteur du Roi, although he was paid but 30 livres.

It is not known that Prieur ever went to Italy, but if he did not he certainly knew the work of Michelangelo from prints, drawings, and casts. The inventory of his possessions lists, in addition to several plaster casts of Michelangelo’s sculpture, three pages of sketches after the Louvre’s Igmidi, at that time still at the château of Écouen, where the Connétable Anne de Montmorency had taken them as gifts from Francis I, and more than 150 drawings of sculpture and architecture after the antique, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Polidoro Caldara. The wording makes it impossible to decide what proportion of those drawings was after Michelangelo or what the subjects were, but it states quite clearly that the drawings were not all by Prieur. Perhaps some had been made in Italy by his friend Étienne du Pérec.

In any case Jacques Auguste de Thou relates in his Mémoirs that while he was traveling extensively in Italy in 1573 he spent a good deal of time in Florence, where he was shown about by no less a person than Giorgio Vasari. He must
Design for a chimney piece. Inscribed: "C'est le dessin de la Cheminée que nous avons marchandée pour Le Chaur. de Sy avecque M. Barthélemy Prieur, Sculpture, le troisième de janvier mil V c. quarevingtz diz neuf [1599] Apprové La Vieuville. Prieur." In the Albertina, Vienna
therefore have known the Medici tombs at first
hand, for it is inconceivable that Vasari would
have neglected to show him one of the most
important Florentine monuments. He may in fact
have specifically commissioned Prieur to do
something in the style of Michelangelo.

Since Prieur is known to have carved Chris-
tophe’s tomb it seems likely that he also made
the Museum’s drawing. The design could there-
fore be dated 1582-1585. Closer to the figures
of Night and Day than the De Thou bronzes them-
selves, our drawing shows a mind remembering
Michelangelo and considering possibilities, not
copying a monument already built.

The only known drawing with a signature by
Prieur has a great deal of brushwork added to the
underlying pen and ink. Ours may be by the
same hand but differences in technique and the
necessity for relying upon photographs for com-
parison make it difficult to be certain. Further-
more, the signed drawing is not necessarily by
Prieur. It is a contract for a chimney piece,
signed (and dated) also by the client, and could
be simply a finished drawing prepared for con-
tract purposes by someone in Prieur’s atelier.
It must also be remembered that in at least two
cases Prieur worked from the designs of others,
as noted above. It does seem unlikely, however,
that anyone worthy of becoming Premier Sculp-
teur du Roi would not ordinarily make and ex-
icute his own designs. And if some more illustrious
designer (who, for instance?) was called in to
plan the De Thou monument why did Jacques
Auguste not mention him in his Mémoirs when
he so proudly tells us that he had Barthélemy
Prieur make the tomb?

For the first time, at any rate, there is some
contemporary pictorial proof to reconcile the
conflicting evidence of two bronze reclining
Michelangelesque adolescents who come sup-
plied with a long tradition of being from the
tomb of Christophe de Thou, and the pictures
of the tomb before it was disturbed showing two
baby angels with reversed torches. If it is im-
possible to declare unequivocally that the Mu-
seum’s drawing was made by Barthélemy Prieur
in 1582 or shortly thereafter, it is at least certain
that it was made by the designer himself, not by
a topographical draughtsman, between 1582,
when Christophe de Thou died, and 1585, when
Prieur’s agent received payment.

The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Jean

The tomb of J. A. de Thou in Saint-André, etching by
Flamen (working 1648-1669). Bibliothèque Nationale

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