



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

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'Charles II and tapestry'

The importance of tapestry in early seventeenth-century Britain is well known. For some twenty years the Mortlake workshop, founded in 1619, wove the finest tapestries in Europe for Charles I who secured Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* as models for the manufactory and presented lavishly woven tapestry sets as diplomatic gifts. What is less well known is that Charles II was also an active patron and collector of tapestries. On his Restoration in 1660 a new Yeoman Arrasworker was appointed, Francis Poyntz, and the accounts of the Treasury and Lord Chamberlain record the large number of new tapestry sets made for the king, many of them following the designs of the previous reign: the Seasons, Hero and Leander, the Acts of the Apostles. Palace inventories and accounts reveal the constant movement of old and new tapestries between the various Royal residences under Charles II, with subjects carefully chosen for particular occasions and settings.

Drawing on arguments recently advanced by Anna Keay on the importance of court ceremony in stressing the sanctity of Kingship after the Restoration, and on Thomas Campbell's writing on the role of tapestry in conveying the Aristotelian concept of Magnificence, this paper will argue for the central role of tapestry in the reconstruction of monarchical authority by Charles II. More specifically, I will show that the predominance in the 1660s - 1680s of designs first woven in the 1620s - 1630s was not simply an economy but a conscious reference to the collecting and taste of the previous reign. The use of tapestry can be placed within the wider context of Charles II's re-acquisition of much of his father's art collection. Tapestry enabled the King not only to express his own cultural power but that of the Stuart dynasty, by stressing continuity across the interregnum period.