The sequence of inscriptions in the Hall of Mirrors revealed by cross-section

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The sculpted and painted decor of the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, a masterpiece created by Charles Le Brun, was recently conserved. This conservation project has received scientific support dedicated to forming a better technical understanding of the place.

Particular attention was given to the inscriptions written in different colors on the cartouches, arranged above and below the paintings, sculpted or painted directly on to the wall or ceiling.

Information retrieved from archival documents, observations made in-situ in raking light and a study of infrared photographs predicted the underlying inscriptions, that at times were different from those visible on the surface.

The study of these inscriptions involved taking micro-samples: around one hundred were removed; their locations were chosen to assist the study of the composition and layer build-up of the letters and backgrounds on which they are placed.

Three discoveries provided by cross sections.

**Latin inscriptions:** Were these actually painted? Yes, on the two-thirds of the ceiling in a north-south direction.

The transparency of the upper layers in the small cartouches painted on plaster allows the underlying Latin inscriptions to be read and the colors of this text to be surmised.

In the case of large painted cartouches, the existence of these Latin texts is suggested by the incomplete state of the surface layers. Stratigraphic study reveals the association of colors used for this Latin text, at the end replaced with a version in French.

**Original colors of the inscriptions:** The colors apparent in 2006 did not correspond to those dating from 1684 or from later alterations.

It is sometimes possible to read two superposed versions of French text in the octagon.

A stratigraphic study proves that these two inscriptions consist of blue small letters applied on a gilt background. The oldest small is less deteriorated. A black overpaint can be observed on the surface.

The underlying inscriptions are visible through the thickness of the paint layers in the sculpted cartouches.

Here the original French inscriptions have been painted in blue smalt applied on to the gilt background and the upper layers are due to later restorations. This situation is the same as that in the octagon.

**Concealment of the inscriptions:** These symbols of monarchy were covered during the French Revolution.

The stratigraphic study of the green backgrounds of the large sculpted and painted cartouches included the discovery of a bronze layer located immediately under the green overpaint and covering the small letters or the gilt background.

The deterioration of this bronze layer has probably suggested the tint used for the background applied by Moench in 1815, who modified the earlier color scheme used for these inscriptions.

**Results of the restoration**

In order to return to the state approved by Louis XIV and to respect the deterioration occurring over time, the restoration process involved covering the green background with an application of gold leaf and the re-emphasizing the letters in a brown color simulating the tonality of the deteriorated small.

For more information: The Hall Of Mirrors - History & Renovation, June 2007, Edition FATON