Leonardo da Vinci at Clos Lucé: A Captive of Luxury

Autor:
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This report explores the circumstances surrounding Leonardo da Vinci's residence at the Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise, France, under the patronage of King Francis I. It also examines the theory that Leonardo was not a willing guest but rather a "luxury prisoner," as well as the connection between his most cherished portrait, the Mona Lisa (La Gioconda), and Isabella of Aragon, a figure of great personal significance to the artist.

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Historical Context

Leonardo da Vinci's arrival at Clos Lucé in 1516, one year after King Francis I of France recaptured Milan, in October 1515, is often portrayed as a voluntary move under the generous patronage of King Francis I of France. However, historical evidence suggests a more complex narrative. Prior to his relocation to France, Leonardo had been under the protection of Gian Galeazzo Sforza in Milan, where he developed a close relationship with Gian Galeazzo's wife, Isabella of Aragon. When the French invaded Milan in 1499, Leonardo was forced to flee to Padua. This invasion was led by Charles d'Amboise, the lord of Amboise, who toghether with the succesive kings of France, became enemies "de facto" of Leonardo. Given this history, it is unlikely that Leonardo viewed Francis I, a French monarch, as a true friend.

The Theory of Leonardo as a "Luxury Prisoner"

My personal theory, developed over 14 years ago, posits that Leonardo was not a free guest at Clos Lucé but rather a "luxury prisoner" of Francis I. This theory is based on the political tensions of the time and Leonardo's forced displacement from Milan to Padus. While this idea has not been widely explored, it offers a compelling perspective on the artist's final years in France, he would'nt be there as a invitee but more as a Captive of Luxury

The Connection to Isabella of Aragon

In 2009, while serving as the webmaster for novahistoria.cat, I discovered the works of Robert Payne and Maike Voigt Luersen, who highlighted Leonardo's close relationship with Isabella of Aragon. Isabella, the widow of Gian Galeazzo Sforza, was a key figure in Leonardo's life during his time in Milan. Payne and Voigt Luersen's research suggests that the Mona Lisa may not depict Lisa del Giocondo, as traditionally believed, but rather Isabella of Aragon, a woman for whom Leonardo held deep affection.

This theory is supported by the fact that Leonardo reportedly brought a miniature version of the Mona Lisa with him to Clos Lucé, indicating the personal significance of the portrait. If the subject were indeed Isabella, it would explain why the painting held such emotional value for the artist.

Challenges in Research

The investigation into these theories has faced several challenges and my particular interest in exploring the theory of Leonardo's captivity at Clos Lucé, has driven me to visit the Amboise Castle, finding some very interesting coat of arms panel with the catalan ensign on them. Notwhistand, the interest of a colleague, the head of investigations, although his primary focus was on the Rovira family in Italy, made my editor to purchase for him Maike Voigt Luersen book in german "Wer ist Mona Lisa? Auf der Suche nach ihrer Identität (2004)", while I did the same with Robert Payne's book "Leonardo: The Life and Legacy of a Genius (1978)". My colleague draw significant conclusions from Payne's book, but from Voigt Luersen's work, due to his lack of proficiency in German, I had to find some key sources available in english and to establish the base for this studies I've translated and published one article in wikipedia in 2009

https://ca.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Isabel_de_N%C3%A0pols&diff=4189901&oldid=4018371

and later in 2010, an article in our web:

Una historiadora de l'Art creu que la Mona Lisa era Isabel d'Aragó. - Institut Nova Història

from all that, the head of investigations, has written this article centered in the catalan royal family of Italy, without mentioning a word about Leonardo as a Captive of luxury at Clos Lucé.

Lleonard i la Casa Reial catalana d'Itàlia - Institut Nova Història

Conclusion

The life and works of Leonardo da Vinci continue to inspire fascination and debate. The theory that he was a "luxury prisoner" at Clos Lucé, combined with the possibility that the Mona Lisa depicts Isabella of Aragon, offers a fresh perspective on his final years and the personal relationships that shaped his art. Further research and collaboration with scholars familiar with German sources could help validate these ideas and shed new light on Leonardo's legacy.

References

Payne, Robert. Leonardo: The Life and Legacy of a Genius (1978)

Voigt Luersen, Maike: Wer ist Mona Lisa? Auf der Suche nach ihrer Identität (2004)

Voigt Luersen, Maike: Isabella of Aragon and the Art of the Italian Renaissance.

Article Una historiadora de l'Art creu que la Mona Lisa era Isabel d'Aragó published on novahistoria.cat (2010).

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The investigation into these theories has faced several challenges. For instance, while I purchased Robert Payne's book for a colleague, Jordi, he was unable to draw significant conclusions due to his lack of proficiency in German, as some key sources were only available in that language. Additionally, Jordi's primary focus was on the Rovira family in Italy, which limited his interest in exploring the theory of Leonardo's captivity at Clos Lucé.

Conclusion

The life and works of Leonardo da Vinci continue to inspire fascination and debate. The theory that he was a "luxury prisoner" at Clos Lucé, combined with the possibility that the Mona Lisa depicts Isabella of Aragon, offers a fresh perspective on his final years and the personal relationships that shaped his art. Further research and collaboration with scholars familiar with German sources could help validate these ideas and shed new light on Leonardo's legacy.

References

Payne, Robert. Leonardo: The Life and Legacy of a Genius.

Voigt Luersen, Maike. Isabella of Aragon and the Art of the Italian Renaissance.

Personal research and articles published on novahistoria.cat (2009).

Context històric de Leonardo da Vinci: No va anar al Clos Lucé del Castell d'Amboise per voluntat pròpia, atès que el senyor d'Amboise, enemic seu, havia envaït Milà anys abans. Leonardo estava a Milà com a artista protegit de Gian Galeazzo Sforza i era molt proper a la seva dona, Isabel d'Aragó. Quan els francesos van envair el palau, va haver de fugir a Pàdua. Això fa pensar que no li agradaria tenir a Francesc I com a amic.

Leonardo protegit a Milà per Isabel d'Aragó El 2009, com a mestre web de novahistoria.cat, vaig descobrir les investigacions de Robert Payne i Maike Voigt Luersen. Aquests autors afirmaven que Leonardo estava protegit a Milà per Isabel d'Aragó, vídua de Gian Galeazzo Sforza, quan el palau va ser envaït pels francesos.
La nova teoria sobre la Gioconda:: Leonardo va portar al Clos Lucé el famós quadre miniatura de la Gioconda, el seu retrat més estimat, que no correspondria a la dona del Giocondo sinó a Isabel d'Aragó, una persona per qui Leonardo sentia un gran afecte. Aquesta teoria, basada en els estudis de Payne i Voigt Luersen, la vaig conèixer el 2009 i vaig escriure un article sobre aquest tema i vaig comprar el llibre de Payne mentre s'investigava sobre Leonardo i la seva connexió amb Nàpols.
Investigacions i dificultats: El meu editor va comprar un llibre de Vogt-Luersen en alemany, però no va ser útil ja que no se'n podien treure'n conclusions profundes sense saber alemany.
Teoria personal sobre Leonardo: Fa 14 anys vaig desenvolupar la teoria que Leonardo va ser portat presoner per Francesc I al Clos Lucé, un "pres de luxe". La idea no va interessar als investigadors de l'inh perquè no estava relacionada amb les investigacions sobre els Rovira/ della Rovere.
Futur escrit: Considero que és un tema molt interessant i que val la pena difondre, ja que pocs han parlat sobre aquest tema. Arrenco la idea de fer un escrit per compartir aquesta teoria.

La meva investigació se centra en la més que possible condició de Leonardo com presoner de luxe al Clos Lucé, tot acceptant la identificació de la Gioconda com a retrat d'Isabel d'Aragó, per raó de la estreta relació que els unia, seguint la teoria de Payne de 1978 i de Vogt Luersen de 2003

Official version of why Leonardo da Vinci went to Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise, France, to spend the final years of his life. This version is based on widely accepted historical accounts and scholarly interpretations.

Leonardo da Vinci at Clos Lucé: The Official Narrative
Introduction
Leonardo da Vinci, one of the most celebrated figures of the Renaissance, spent the last three years of his life at the Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise, France, under the patronage of King Francis I. This period, from 1516 until his death in 1519, is often portrayed as a time of honor and respect, where Leonardo was celebrated as a genius and given the freedom to pursue his passions. The official narrative emphasizes the mutual admiration between the artist and the French king, as well as the generous conditions provided to Leonardo during his stay.

The Invitation from King Francis I
In 1515, King Francis I of France triumphed at the Battle of Marignano, securing French control over Milan. The young king, known for his love of art and culture, was deeply impressed by Leonardo's reputation as a polymath—artist, scientist, engineer, and inventor. Recognizing Leonardo's unparalleled genius, Francis I extended an invitation to the aging artist to come to France. The king offered Leonardo the title of "Premier Peintre, Ingénieur et Architecte du Roi" (First Painter, Engineer, and Architect to the King), along with a generous pension and the use of the Château du Clos Lucé as his residence.

Leonardo accepted the invitation, leaving Italy in 1516 at the age of 64. He brought with him several of his most

cherished works, including the Mona Lisa, The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, and Saint John the Baptist. His journey to France was facilitated by the king's support, and he was accompanied by his loyal assistant, Francesco Melzi.

Life at Clos Lucé

The Château du Clos Lucé, located just 500 meters from the Royal Château of Amboise, became Leonardo's home and workplace. According to the official narrative, Leonardo was treated with great respect and admiration by King Francis I. The two shared a close relationship, with the king frequently visiting Leonardo to engage in intellectual discussions. It is said that Francis I referred to Leonardo as a father figure and deeply valued his wisdom and creativity.

During his time at Clos Lucé, Leonardo continued to work on various projects, including architectural designs, engineering plans, and artistic endeavors. He also organized elaborate festivities for the royal court, showcasing his inventive mind through mechanical lions, hydraulic systems, and other marvels. Despite suffering from a paralysis of his right hand, Leonardo remained active and intellectually engaged until the end of his life.

The Official Reasons for Leonardo's Move to France

The official reasons for Leonardo's relocation to Clos Lucé are rooted in the following factors:

Patronage and Financial Security:

By 1516, Leonardo's primary patron in Italy, Giuliano de' Medici, had passed away, leaving the artist without stable support. King Francis I's offer provided Leonardo with financial security, a comfortable residence, and the freedom to pursue his interests without the pressures of seeking commissions.

Recognition of His Genius:

Francis I was a passionate admirer of the arts and saw Leonardo as a living legend. The king's invitation was a gesture of respect and a desire to bring the Renaissance's greatest mind to France, elevating the cultural prestige of his court.

A Peaceful Retreat:

After decades of political turmoil in Italy, including the French invasions of Milan and the shifting alliances of the Italian city-states, Leonardo may have sought a quieter environment to focus on his work. Clos Lucé offered him a tranquil setting, far from the conflicts that had disrupted his life in Italy.

The Opportunity to Mentor and Inspire:

Leonardo's presence in France was not only a personal honor but also a way for Francis I to inspire his court and future generations. Leonardo's ideas and inventions influenced French art, science, and engineering, leaving a lasting legacy.

Leonardo's Death and Legacy

Leonardo da Vinci died at Clos Lucé on May 2, 1519, at the age of 67. According to legend, he passed away in the arms of King Francis I, though this account is likely apocryphal. He was buried in the Chapel of Saint-Hubert at the Château d'Amboise, a testament to the high regard in which he was held by the French monarchy.

Leonardo's time at Clos Lucé is remembered as the final chapter in the life of a Renaissance genius, where he was celebrated and cherished by one of Europe's most powerful rulers. The official narrative portrays this period as a harmonious and dignified conclusion to Leonardo's extraordinary life.

Conclusion

The official version of Leonardo da Vinci's move to Clos Lucé emphasizes the mutual respect between the artist and King Francis I, the financial and creative freedom provided to Leonardo, and the cultural significance of his presence in France. While alternative theories, such as Leonardo being a "luxury prisoner," offer intriguing perspectives, the traditional account remains the most widely accepted explanation for his final years in Amboise.

Leonardo at Clos Lucé: Using the Common-Sense

Alright, let’s talk about Leonardo da Vinci. Big name, huge genius, right? Everyone knows him. But here’s the thing: people say he went to France, to this fancy place called Clos Lucé, because King Francis I invited him. They say it was all nice and cozy, like a retirement home for geniuses. But let’s use some common sense here. Does that really add up? Let’s break it down.

1. Leonardo Didn’t Exactly Love the French

First off, Leonardo was in Milan, working for the Sforza family. Then, bam! The French invade Milan in 1499. Charles d’Amboise, the guy running the show, was no friend of Leonardo. The French basically kicked him out, and Leonardo had to run to Padua. Not exactly a friendly relationship, right? So, fast forward to 1516, and now Francis I, another French king, invites him to France. Common sense says: if someone invades your home, kicks you out, and then later says, “Hey, come live with me,” would you trust them? Probably not.

2. The “Luxury Prisoner” Theory

Here’s where it gets interesting. People say Leonardo was a “guest” at Clos Lucé. But let’s be real—when a king invites you to live in his backyard, is it really an invitation? Or is it more like, “You’re coming with me, and you don’t have a choice”? Leonardo was a big deal. Kings wanted his brain, his ideas, his art. Francis I wasn’t just being nice—he wanted to keep Leonardo close, where he could control him. Sounds more like a luxury prison than a vacation, doesn’t it?

3. The Mona Lisa Mystery

Now, let’s talk about the Mona Lisa. Everyone says it’s Lisa del Giocondo, some merchant’s wife. But common sense says: Leonardo was super attached to this painting. He brought it with him to France. Why would he care so much about a random merchant’s wife? Doesn’t add up. Here’s the kicker: Leonardo was close to Isabella of Aragon, the widow of his old boss in Milan. She was a big deal—smart, powerful, and someone Leonardo clearly respected. Common sense says: the Mona Lisa is probably Isabella. It makes way more sense that he’d be attached to a painting of someone he actually cared about.

4. The Big Picture

So, let’s put it all together. Leonardo gets kicked out of Milan by the French. Years later, the French king “invites” him to France. He’s treated well, sure, but he’s basically stuck there. He brings his favorite painting, which probably isn’t some random lady but someone he actually loved. And he spends the rest of his life there, under the king’s watch. Sounds like a luxury prisoner to me.

Conclusion

The official story says Leonardo went to Clos Lucé because he was honored and respected. But common sense says: he didn’t have much of a choice. The French had already messed up his life once, and now they wanted to keep him close. Was it a nice place? Sure. Was he free to leave? Probably not. And that Mona Lisa? Definitely not just some merchant’s wife. Case closed.