

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

CHAPERON, Paul-Romain

Libourne 19.IV.1732–4.XI.1793

Chaperon was the son of a procureur au présidial, Jean-Joseph Chaperon and his wife, Anne Desèze. He was a conseiller du roi at the Sénéchaussée de Libourne 1777–90, exercising the functions of procureur du roi at the assemblée de la noblesse de Libourne. A cousin of Louis XVI's defender Raymond de Sèze; he was guillotined as a counter-revolutionary by the commune militaire in his native town, in spite of an offer to marry his servant ("un singulier témoignage de patriotisme" according to Souffrain 1806) and a failed attempted suicide. He was interested in philosophy, corresponding with Raymond's brother Paul-Romain de Sèze about topics from Paracelsus to Helvétius. He was said to be a connoisseur of the arts and generally presumed to be the author of the anonymous but influential *Traité de la peinture au pastel* (Paris, 1788); its signature, "Par M. P. R. de C.... C. à P. de L." remains a little cryptic: contemporary sources do not give Chaperon the particle "de", while the second component may possibly stand for "conseiller [au] présidial de Libourne." The volume was on sale at a price of 1 livre 10s.

While it may seem surprising that a magistrate in Libourne should demonstrate the the author of the treatise's intimate knowledge of Paris as well as having a professional knowledge of the preparation of colours, the identification is confirmed in an almost contemporary history of the town by another Libourne magistrate, and cannot be in doubt (Souffrain 1806). The copy in the Frick Art Reference Library is annotated "l'Auteur est M^r Chaperon avocat a pres de Bordeaux mort victime guill de la revolution 1794...cet ouvrage fort instruit laissera longtems a desirer les heureuses decouvertes de l'auteur." (Hoisington 2006, p. 291).

Chaperon made an earlier appearance, in the *Année littéraire* (VII, 1756, pp. 89ff), with a poem submitted to a prize competition proposed by the Académie de Pau on the subject of *L'utilité des découvertes faites dans les sciences & dans les arts sous le règne de Louis XV*. While he failed to win, the anonymous critic (Fréron) preferred his submission, and printed an extract dealing with inoculation.

Fournier claims that he was an excellent pastellist and tentatively attributes to him the Bordeaux pastel of his cousin, the magistrate Saige (also condemned to death by the Revolutionary powers), which is characteristic of the work of Jean Valade.

Bibliography

Chatelus 1991, pp. 128; 134f, 176; Fournier 1976; *Généalogie de la famille Chaperon*, 2^e éd., Brest, 1873; Ann Massing, "Painting materials and techniques: towards a bibliography of the French literature before 1800", *Die Kunst und ihre Erhaltung*, Rolf E. Straub zum 70, Worms, 1990, pp. 57–96; Claude-Odet Portefin, *Histoire et généalogie de la famille Chaperon*, 1967; Jean-Baptiste-Alexandre Souffrain, *Essais historiques et notices sur la ville de Libourne...*, Bordeaux, 1806, III/3, pp. 476, 511 etc.

Pastels

François-Armand SAIGE (Bordeaux, m.AD, inv. 72.2.9) [v. Valade]