

Boze, Pierre-Paul Nairac

NEIL JEFFARES

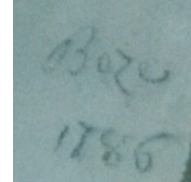


[Joseph Boze Zoomify](#)

Pierre-Paul NAIRAC (1732–1812)

Pastel on paper, 63.5x53 cm, oval

Signed, middle right “Boze/1786”



Private collection

PROVENANCE: Commissioned 1786, 384 livres. [the sitter's granddaughter Angélique-Pauline Raymond, Mme Jean-Jacques Luetkens; her son Oscar Luetkens; M. Gergonne, a Bordeaux dealer]; acquired in an antiques shop in Bordeaux, c.1920 by a private collector in Arles; by descent to his son; Monaco, Christie's, 30 June 1995, Lot 113

EXHIBITED: *Joseph Boze (1745–1826): portraitiste de l'Ancien Régime à la Restauration*, Martigues, musée Ziem, 18 November 2004 – 20 February 2005, cat. Gérard Fabre, no. 36, reproduced colour

LITERATURE: Jeffares 2006, p. 77, reproduced; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [1.177.28](#)

ICONOGRAPHY: (I) oil on canvas, by Pierre Lacour, 0.71x0.82, Salon de Bordeaux de 1782 (France, private

collection). Lit.: Mesuret, reproduced; *Le Port des Lumières*; (II) anonymous profile, crayon (Bibliothèque nationale de France, N2); (III) engraving after Edmé Quenedey (Paris, musée Carnavalet, G.20815)

GENEALOGY: [Nairac](#)

THE PORTRAIT SHARES the brilliant handling of Boze's masterpiece, his self-portrait in the Louvre; in particular, the range of blues and greys are employed on the silk coat, the folds of which are remarkably similar. Gérard Fabre summarises the artist's achievement in this work:

Le parfait accord entre les tonalités du fond et le vêtement du modèle est un des points saisissants de ce portrait. Ici, cette caractéristique de l'art de Boze atteint un degré particulièrement poussé. La parfaite unité des couleurs est frappante, et malgré la sobriété de tons, le modèle conserve toute sa présence par le traitement même de la matière. Pour M. Nairac, Boze fait usage d'une touche plus vigoureuse, plus "masculine", qui dégage la personnalité du négociant. La juxtaposition de traits fractionnés par petits touches, savamment ordonnés, confère toute sa puissance et son caractère au visage. D'une facture vibrante, la veste est exécutée avec virtuosité. De larges zébrures de pastel bleuté colorent le vêtement et en marquent les reliefs, rehaussés judicieusement par quelques hachures blanches.

Acquired as of an unknown man, some detective work was required to rediscover the subject of this pastel. Boze's *Livre de comptes*, preserved in the Bibliothèque d'Art et

d'Archéologie, cover the years 1783 to 1788. These show that most of the year 1786 was taken up with making numerous copies of his portraits of the Royal family as well as some miniatures. However, in December 1786, Boze recorded a debt of 384 livres "Pour le Portrait en Buste de M^r Nairac", and in the same month, the same sum "Reçu de M^r Neyrac p^r son Portrait en buste". This is surely a member of the Nairac family of Bordeaux, whose name is variously spelt Nairac, Nayrac, Nerac and Neyrac.¹ We also note that during this period, Boze bought a number of frames from M^r Joly, Doreur & Peintre (probably the Louis-Quentin Joly, peintre, rue Saint-Honoré, à côté de l'Opéra, listed as a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc,² reçu 1770); the Nairac portrait may well be in one of these, since the moulding is found in a number of other Boze portraits of the period.

The Nairac family were Protestant, originally from Castres; Antoine-Paul Nairac (1694–1759) settled in Bordeaux and established himself as a merchant-refiner in Bordeaux in 1732. The family made part of their fortune from the slave trade; by 1756 the house had 8 ships and over the previous 20 years had transported over 30,000 blacks to Santo Domingo and Martinique. Antoine-Paul Nairac married Suzanne-Marguerite Roulland; there were eight children. The eldest son Pierre-Paul Nairac (1732–1812), the subject of the present portrait, was a ship-owner and the head of the family's international trading business. In 1773, he acquired the sugar-refining business from Bonaventure Journu. In 1760, he married Jeanne-Barbe Wetter, the daughter of a merchant from Orange, of Swiss extraction.³ The couple had several children, of whom Marie-Julie married the merchant Paul Raymond; Suzanne married Jean-Théodore de Lacroix, contrôleur-général de la maison du comte d'Artois, while Laurent-Paul married Constance-Jeanne Lavaud, an intimate friend of Thérésia Cabarrus. The young Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793) was the children's tutor for some two years.⁴ Marat's essay *The Chains of Slavery* was first published anonymously in London in 1774, and reissued as *Les Chaînes de l'esclavage* by "Marat, l'ami du peuple" in 1793. (Boze's painting of Marat, now in the Carnavalet, was done soon after the artist's release from imprisonment, no doubt to reestablish his revolutionary credentials; he also published Beisson's print in 1794.) Although in August 1791 Nairac signed a petition⁵ opposing the abolition of slavery (along with 300 or so bordelais merchants, whose livelihoods depended on the practice), it must not be assumed however that Nairac was unprincipled: his refusal to convert from Protestantism meant that he was never ennobled despite several attempts by him and his brother Élisée to take advantage of the arrêt du Conseil of 30 octobre 1767 to provide letters de noblesse to the most deserving négociants. The report on their application May 1775 was positive: "La maison des sieurs Nairac est une des plus fortes de cette ville par l'étendue de leur commerce qu'ils font avec une noblesse et un désintéressement qui les distinguent de leurs concitoyens, ayant actuellement eux ou leur famille, huit navires employés au commerce et à la traite des nègres, que leur probité, leurs bonnes mœurs, et leur zèle à se prêter dans toutes les occasions aux vues du gouvernement, les rendent recommandables à tous ceux sous les yeux desquelles ils font leurs opérations qu'ils dirigent

¹ See *Archives historiques de la Gironde*, xxx, 1895, p. 292; E. de Sallier Dupin, *France généalogique*, 8^e a., 1966, p. 28-31; E. Labadie, *La presse bordelaise pendant la Révolution*, Bordeaux, 1910; Edna Hindie Lemay, *Dictionnaire des Constituants 1789–91*, Oxford, 1991; *Le Port des Lumières, La peinture à Bordeaux: 1750–1800*, exhibition catalogue, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux 1989; contains article on Wertmüller by Bernadette de Boysson; Paul Butel, *Les Dynasties bordelaises de Colbert à Chabon*, Paris, 1991; Eric Saugera, *Bordeaux port négrier XVII^e-XIX^e siècles*, Paris, 1995; Hugh Thomas, *The slave trade*, London, 1997.

² As was Boze's other framer, Dulac. There seems to be no other Joly listed for this period; Jules-Joseph Guiffrey, "La communauté des maîtres peintres et sculpteurs dite l'Académie de Saint-Luc depuis 1391...", *Archives de l'art français*, ix, 1915, p. 273.

³ The marriage contract, dated 16 June 1760, was exhibited in *Bordeaux, 2000 ans d'histoire*, 1970, no. 251.

⁴ Olivier Coquard, *Jean-Paul Marat*, Paris, 1993, pp. 44ff. The Marat literature seems to be clear that his Nairac association dates to around 1760, and Coquard infers that Marat must have been tutor to the children from an earlier marriage. Unfortunately the reference he cites, to Marat's *Journal de la République de France*, no. 40, 8 novembre 1792, does not appear to be correct; while J. M. Thompson, *The English historical review*, xlix/193, January 1934, p. 56, cites Marat's autobiographical article in *Le Publiciste de la Révolution française*, 19 mars 1793, where he lists the places he stayed from the age of 16, including two years in Bordeaux. It may simply be that all sources have incorrectly inferred that the list was chronological. A later date towards the end of the 1760s would not require the hypothesis of an earlier marriage. Whether Nairac met Marat on one of his trips to Paris and brought him back to Bordeaux or the association was through the Wettin family's connections in Geneva is uncertain.

⁵ See Albert Rèche, *Dix siècles de vie quotidienne à Bordeaux*, Paris, 1983, p. 162.

toujours de la manière la plus avantageuse à l'État.” This was forwarded to Trudaine in June with a recommendation by the intendant, Esmangard, who said of the brothers “Il est peu de négociants qui méritent autant que les sieurs Nairac les grâces du Roi. Ils ont une des maisons les plus considérables de Bordeaux et elle y jouit ainsi que dans toute l'Europe de la meilleure réputation et du crédit le plus étendu.” but was unsuccessful, as was their application the following year. Nairac tried again in 1786, and Vergennes enquired of the new intendant, Duchesne de Beaumanoir, if they deserved “une grace aussi considérable”; the report again highlighted the Nairac's trade in blacks as “aussi avantageuse à nos colonies qu'elle a été considérable pendant plus de vingt années sur plus de soixante vaisseaux expédiés par ces négociants. L'importation a été de cinq à six mil nègres.” Once again however only their religion stood in the way, as it did to Nairac's acting as director of the chamber of commerce in Bordeaux in 1787, in spite of his position as the dominant merchant of the city. In 1787, the comte d'Angiviller ordered a copy of Duplessis's portrait of Louis XVI destined for M. de Neyrac (at the standard price of 300 livres).⁶ Nairac's wealth was estimated at some 2 million livres.⁷

Nairac was the deputy for the Gironde to the États généraux in 1789, resident member of the Société des sciences, arts et belles lettres de Bordeaux and president of the Société philanthropique, founded in 1786 and comprising some 100 of Bordeaux's leading merchants and people of distinction.⁸ Working with the abbé Sicard, the Société undertook various



Figure 1

charitable activities recorded in the *Journal de Guienne*. Nairac was an enthusiastic supporter of the musée de Bordeaux founded by Dupont des Jumeaux as a more broadly based rival to the Académie de Bordeaux, which had no membership among the merchant class.

Nairac's choice of Boze for his portrait may also be due to his religion. Although not himself a member of the reformed church, Boze had developed an extensive clientèle among protestants. Under the influence of his friend Rabaut-Saint-Étienne, Boze had published (in 1785) an engraving by Henriquez of Boze's drawing of *L'Assemblée des protestants à la Lecques à Nîmes*; it was a commercial disaster

– Boze had spent over 4300 livres on the plate and planned to sell an edition of 825 copies, but despite heavy discounting only a handful were sold.

In 1788 Nairac led a delegation of 12 merchants from Bordeaux to Versailles, where he presented his colleagues to Necker.⁹ He was the first to inform his fellow citizens of the fall of the Bastille in a letter¹⁰ to the *Journal de Guienne*, to which he was a frequent contributor. In 1789 Nairac commissioned Jean-Laurent Mosnier to execute a painting of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, maire de Paris for the chambre de commerce de Bordeaux.¹¹ The Nairac family, like many Bordeaux merchants, were generally in favour of new political ideas, despite their involvement with the slave trade; it was said that they represented “cette bourgeoisie jalouse des anciens privilégiés et dont on a pu dire souvent qu'elle avait voulu accaparer la Révolution dans l'espoir de substituer

⁶ Jules Belleudy, *J.-S. Duplessis*, Chartres, 1913, p. 301.

⁷ Butel, *Les Négociants bordelais*, p. 281.

⁸ William Doyle, *The parlement of Bordeaux*, p. 133.

⁹ A journal by Nairac exists (MS 5F63, Archives départementales de l'Eure, mentioned Timothy Tackett, “Nobles and third estate...”, in Gary Kates, ed., *The French Revolution: recent debates and new controversies*, 1997, p. 225.

¹⁰ AM Bordeaux, D227, cited Stephen Auerbach, “Encourager le commerce et répandre les Lumières” unpublished dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2000. Nairac was a frequent contributor to the *Journal*, as well as to the *Affiches de Bordeaux*, in which he regularly advertised, including a lost property notice for two bank notes of 600 livres each lost on 24 December 1774.

¹¹ Two letters, concerning the commission, transportation costs etc., were published by Arnaud Communay, “Lettres de J.-L. Mosnier”, *Nouvelles archives de l'art français*, II, 1886, pp. 167ff.

leur domination à celles des nobles qu'ils jalousaient" (Labadie). That they escaped the fate of Antoine-Auguste Journu, another liberally minded négociant guillotined in 1794, may have had more to do with the protection of Tallien for his mistress's in-laws.

The identification with Pierre-Paul Nairac is confirmed by the resemblance with the 1782 portrait of him by Pierre Lacour (fig. 1): note only is the general structure of the face the same, but there is an exact correspondence in details such as the asymmetric eyebrows, the right of which rises in a characteristic arch. Mezuret describes the painting: "Dans un bibliothèque dont le fond s'ouvre sur le port, l'armateur Nairac est assis à son bureau. Il étudie une carte à l'aide d'un compas, tandis qu'il désigne du doigt un navire mouillé sur la Garonne... Suivant l'exemple de Saïge, l'armateur Nairac fait bâtir par Louis son hôtel du cours du Jardin-Royal et se fait peindre par Lacour, une carte à la main, montrant d'un geste orgueilleux le port chargé de ses navires."¹² The house, built by the fashionable architect Victor Louis between 1775 and 1777 (at a cost of some 233,000 livres), is at 17, Cours de Verdun; it is now occupied by a bank. Another portrait of Nairac is the engraved profile by Quenedey (fig. 2),¹³ which seems to show the same wig.

A number of portraits by Wertmüller were made of Paul's relatives, including his wife, Mlle Wetter; his younger brother Élisée-Étienne (1734–1791), consul de la Bourse; and two of the latter's daughters (some of which are reproduced in *Le Port des Lumières*). The Élisée family died without posterity, but Paul was survived by his grand-daughter Angélique-Pauline Raymond, who married Jean-Jacques Luetkens in 1800. A group of family portraits (including the Wertmüller portrait of Élisée) seem to have thus passed via Luetkens's son Oscar, to M. Gergonne, a Bordeaux dealer, and thence to Henri Cruse (1861–1944), who owned the Lacour portrait of Paul in 1937. While a group of Wertmüller portraits of some members of the family was disposed of by the family in 1956/57, it appears that the Boze portrait was with a Bordeaux dealer by 1920, and therefore probably followed the same line as the portrait of Élisée. Members of the next generation of Nairacs were portrayed by Gautier-Dagoty, and remained in the family Dussumier-Latour in Bordeaux at least until 1974.¹⁴



Figure 2

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¹² Robert Mesuret, *Pierre Lacour 1745–1814*, Bordeaux, 1937, pl. VI, cat. no. CXLIX; reprinted in *Le Port des Lumières*, p. 182. It was probably the Lacour rather than the Boze portrait which was shown at the *Exposition iconographique bordelaise* in Bordeaux in 1928; see anon., "Une visite à l'Exposition d'iconographie bordelaise", *Revue philomathique de Bordeaux et du Sud-Ouest*, 1928, p. 56 (not reproduced).

¹³ Copies of the engraving are in the musée Carnavalet, reproduced in Bernd Pappe & Juliane Schmiegitz-Otten, *Miniaturen der Revolutionszeit 1789–1799 aus der Sammlung Tansey*, Munich, 2005, p. 18, and in the BnF, Dc65b.

¹⁴ Jacqueline Du Pasquier, *Pierre-Edouard Dagoty 1775–1871 et la miniature bordelaise au XIX^e siècle*, Chartres, 1974, pp. 134ff.