

Labille-Guiard, *Le chevalier de Gibert*

NEIL JEFFARES



[Adélaïde Labille-Guiard](#)

Charles-Dominique-Joseph de GIBERT

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Pastel on paper, 60.5x49.6 cm, oval

Signed, dated lower left
“Labille [F.]
Guiard/1776”



Private collection

PROVENANCE: Raphaël Garreta, from 1901; vente p.m., Rouen, Hôtel des ventes, M^e Boivin, 16–17 March 1931, Lot 124, reproduced; Thureau-Dangin. Paris, Drouot, Damien Libert, 29 April 2009, Lot 30

EXHIBITED: *L'Art du XVIII^e siècle*, Rouen, musée de Peinture, 1929, no. 136

LITERATURE: Roger Portalis, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard*, Paris, 1902, p. 96, reproduced p. 67; Raphaël Garreta, *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 1918;

Fernand Guey, *Journal de Rouen*, 19 mars 1931, “le grand et le solide mérite de ce pastel”; Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Le Pastel en France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1946, p. 108n; Anne-Marie Passez, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard*, Paris, 1973, no. 6, p. 78, reproduced pl. v, as unknown; Lemoine-Bouchard, *Les Peintres en miniature actifs en France 1650–1850*, Paris, 2008, p. 317; Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. Artist in the age of revolution*, Los Angeles, 2009, p. 123; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [1.44.193](#)

RELATED WORKS: miniature of same subject in a red coat, inscr. *verso* “Charles-François-Dominique de Gibert/Lieutenant-Colonel des Dragons de Lorraine/Promu le 15 Avril 1784” (Garnier, ancien ministre plénipotentiaire; Paris, Drouot, Lair-Dubreuil, 30. November – 1 December 1923, Lot 105 reproduced, as of C. J. D. de Vibert; Elle Shushan, exhibited TEFAF, Maastricht, 2011, adv. *Apollo*, March 2011, p. 86, as of “Charles Jacques-Dominique de Vibert”). Lit.: Passez 1973, no. 7 reproduced; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008

AS MME PASSEZ OBSERVED, “le visage affable” of this “mystérieux Chevalier de l’Ordre militaire de Saint-Louis” “contraste avec cet étrange bandeau noir, probablement destiné à dissimuler une blessure de guerre.” The long-standing enigma of his identity can now be resolved with the re-emergence of an autograph version in miniature (fig. 1) with the sitter’s name engraved on the back of the case. The name was transcribed incorrectly, as “C. J. D. de Vibert”, in the 1923 sale catalogue, while the engraving on the back of the miniature reads

One child is recorded, Marguerite-Antoinette-Cécile (1771–1858), who was born in Saint-Amand-Montrond. (In 1792 she married Jean-Baptiste de Lacodre, a juge au tribunal at Saint-Amand and later maire of Orval; they had seven children, but it has not been possible to trace the provenance of the pastel to them.) On both documents Gibert was described as capitaine aide major in the La Reine regiment.

Very little is known of Gibert's early career.¹ His award of the Saint-Louis is not recorded,² although it surfaces between the 1780 and 1783 editions of the *État militaire*, from which the outline of his career can be traced: his first appearance was in 1767 (as Guibert), as aide-major with the La Reine-Dragons; he was subsequently capitaine aide-major (1769–74), then capitaine en second (1775–80, as Gibert until 1778, de Gibert 1779–80), with the same regiment, moving to the Lorraine-dragons with the same rank (1783), where he is first shown with the Saint-Louis; he appears as major with the same regiment the following year, and as lieutenant-colonel thereafter. In the 1791 edition, his name is followed by “✠17 août 83”, presumably the date of his Saint-Louis.

The sitter wears the croix of the order of Saint-Louis, suspended from a flame-red ribbon with a rosette, normally reserved for chevaliers pensionnés; it is apparently showing the reverse of the medal, where the écharpe blanche can be seen rather than the figure of St Louis. If the *État militaire* can be relied upon (which is by no means certain), Gibert's promotion to the Saint-Louis would have been after the execution of the pastel, suggesting that the order must have been added later.³ The decoration also appears in the miniature, although without the rosette. The coat is also different; that in the miniature (but not that in the pastel) is in the regimental colours of the Lorraine-dragons, although the brandebourgs and cut retain a civilian ambiguity. Although the miniature also bears the date of 1776, it is tempting to suggest that the pastel was made in that year, with the Saint-Louis added by Labille-Guiard in 1784 at the same time as she was commissioned to make the miniature version in celebration of his promotion. The execution date of 1776 is also consistent with the presence of the La Reine-Dragons regiment at Versailles on 24 September 1776, according to a document signed by the prince de Montbarrey, then assistant, shortly to succeed Saint-Germain as war secretary.⁴

One may also speculate that Gibert was sufficiently pleased with his portrait to recommend the artist to the young Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre (1757–1792), whom Labille-Guiard portrayed in the uniform of the La Reine-Dragons some time between 1777, when the grandson of the maréchal de Clermont-Tonnerre was commissioned into that regiment, and 1782, when the pastel was exhibited at the Salon de la Correspondance. Although now lost, the portrait also had another autograph replica, this time in oil: the uniform is depicted with extensive licence, using blue instead of green. This may well have been because of the notorious difficulty of making a stable green crayon.⁵ Was the same substitution made in the pastel, and if so was it dictated by the difficulty of sourcing a stable green crayon? And was exactly the same substitution made on the Gibert pastel? By 1785 the artist was again called upon, to paint Clermont-Tonnerre's wife, née Delphine de Rosières-Sorans, dame pour accompagner Madame Élisabeth; the princesse herself was, only two years later, the subject of one of the most important series of Mme Labille-Guiard's portraits.

“Gibert, capitaine au régiment de la Reine dragon à Joigny” appeared among the

¹ He may be the “chev. de Gibert” in charge of one company in the bataillon de Saumur at Tours in December 1759 recorded in A. Corvisier, *Les Contrôles de troupes de l'Ancien régime*, Paris, 1970, III, p. 416: “C^{ies} Castelfranc, chev. de Gibert”; further down the list appears “Degebert (ou Gibert)”.

² For example, in d'Hozier's *Recueil de tous les membres composant l'Ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis...*, Paris, 1817, Alexandre Mazas, *Histoire de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis...*, Paris, 1860 or L. de Colleville & F. Saint-Christo, *Les Ordres du roi*, Paris, n.d.

³ There is no technical evidence to support this (Deborah Bates, personal communication, 20 May 2009); but it was a not uncommon requirement, and must have happened with another pastel executed by Labille-Guiard that year, of the naval lieutenant Jean-Richard Butler who was promoted two years after.

⁴ Cited A. Corvisier, *Les Contrôles des troupes*, 1970, III, p. 209.

⁵ Chaperon's celebrated *Traité de la peinture au pastel* (1788) resorted to a mix of Prussian blue and stil de grain, but this may have been treacherous. The difficulty with the colour may even explain why so few landscape artists chose the medium.

subscribers to the 1773 London edition of the *Collection complète des œuvres de M^r de Voltaire* in 35 volumes, along with three other officers from the regiment: the comte de Seuil and MM. de Montcanisi and de la Bissière, chirurgien-major who had won the Académie royale de chirurgie's prize for a learned essay on cauterising wounds.

There is a little more on Gibert's subsequent career during the Revolution. It seems that the regiment (now renamed the 9^e régiment de dragons, no longer in the ownership of the Lorraine family), garrisoned near Avignon, had a form of mutiny, as described in a letter sent by Gibert and read before the Assemblée nationale, 27 May 1790:⁶

Un membre a donné lecture d'une lettre écrite à M. de la Tour-du-Pin, le 19 de ce mois, par M. Gibert, lieutenant-colonel du régiment de Lorraine, dragons, en garnison à Tarascon. A cette lettre est jointe la délibération prise par ce régiment. J'ai rendu compte, il y a peu de jours, des troubles survenus dans ce corps. La délibération porte entr'autres que les officiers gentilhommes qui tiennent au corps se reitereront chez eux jusqu'après la nouvelle constitution; & que les guidons & la caisse du régiment seront rendus à M. Gibert, en le priant de conserver le commandement. Les autres articles tendent à obtenir quelques douceurs dans la discipline. Sept officiers se sont retirés en conséquence.

The willingness of the soldiers to accept Gibert reinforces the suggestion that nobility was not the basis of his position. The story is taken up in another source which reports Gibert's speech to his troops endorsing their decision to ally themselves with the garde-nationale at Tarascon in terms which suggest no lack of revolutionary ardour (if tempered by continuing allegiance to the king):⁷

Dragons, ces drapeaux, enseignes de la liberté, vos guidons entremêlés & flotans au milieu de cette assemblée citoyenne & guerrière, sont l'emblème de l'alliance que nous allons former en qualité de frères & de compagnons d'armes, avec les braves citoyens de cette ville & tous les bons Français. Le jour que nous avons prononcé notre serment civique a été un jour de fête; que celui-ci le soit aussi; & ajoutons à notre serment de maintenir & de défendre jusqu'à la dernière goutte de notre sang la constitution & les décrets de l'Assemblée nationale sanctionnés par le roi... Que désormais notre mot de ralliement commence toujours par celui-ci: *Honneur aux braves citoyens de Tarascon*; & notre cri général: *Vive la nation, la loi & le roi!*

The following year, the 9^e dragons were called upon to support Général Choisi suppress a rising in Avignon following the "massacre de la Glacière", in which revolutionaries and Catholics carried out a series of murders and brutal reprisals which were only brought to an end when the Assemblée nationale declared a general amnesty in March 1792. By this stage, Gibert was gravely ill, as we can follow in the memoirs⁸ of the vicomte de Dampmartin, appointed Gibert's second-in-command in July 1791. He refers to the Tarascon events from his own viewpoint:

M. de Gibert, premier lieutenant-colonel, commandait; les officiers jouissaient de titres incontestables à l'estime et à la considération; presque tous possédaient des talens distingués, pas un seul n'aurait encouru sans injustice le reproche de médiocrité. Cette surprenante composition provenait en partie d'un privilège que M. le prince de Lambesc devait à sa place de grand écuyer. ...Les dragons étaient de superbes hommes, leur zèle révolutionnaire bien connu devenait une source abondante de licence et de plaisirs...

Dampmartin goes on to describe Gibert's difficulties during 1791 in maintaining discipline while attempting to retain some of the officers (including Dampmartin himself, whose aristocratic leanings were unpopular and led to his emigration), while at the same time becoming gravely ill. He is reported as having been dead for some three months in a letter to Narbonne of 11 February 1792.

The pastel belonged to Raphaël Garreta, a collector of antiquities in Rouen, since at least 1901; he appealed for help identifying the sitter in 1918. An old label, not hitherto recorded, identifies another (presumably subsequent) owner as "Thureau-Dangin", possibly the

⁶ Étienne Le Hodey de Saultchevereuil, *Journal des États généraux*, Paris, 1790, XII, pp. 51f. The matter was reported also in Marat's *Le Junius français*.

⁷ Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Anecdotes du règne de Louis XVI*, Paris, 1791, III, p. 272.

⁸ Anne-Henri Cabet, vicomte de Dampmartin, *Mémoires sur divers évènements de la révolution et de l'émigration*, Paris, 1825, I, pp. 250–53, 263, 300, 386, 394.

Assyriologist whose mother, the daughter of the engraver and pastellist Henriquel-Dupont, presented a pastel by Nanteuil to the Louvre in 1905. It may also refer to her or her husband, the secrétaire-perpetuel de l'Académie française, who makes a cameo appearance in *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Neil Jeffares