

Mosnier, *La duchesse de Laval*

NEIL JEFFARES



[Jean-Laurent Mosnier](#)

La maréchale-duchesse de LAVAL, née Jacqueline-Marie-Hortense de Bullion de Fervaques [ZOOMIFY](#)

Pastel on paper, 81.2x65 cm, oval

In original giltwood Louis XVI oval scotia frame, stamped A•LEVERT

c.1775

Private collection

PROVENANCE: the sitter's daughter, duchesse de Luynes, née Guyonne-Joséphine-Elisabeth de Montmorency-Laval (1755–1830); her daughter, duchesse de Montmorency, née Pauline-Hortense d'Albert de Luynes (1774–1858); her daughter, duchesse de Doudeauville, née Elisabeth-Hélène-Pierre de Montmorency-Laval (1790–1834); her son, Marie-Charles-Sosthène, vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, 4^e duc de Doudeauville, duca di Bisaccia (1825–1908), ambassadeur à Londres; his son, comte Édouard-François-Marie de La Rochefoucauld Doudeauville, duca di Bisaccia (1874–1968), château d'Esclimont; sa fille, Marie-Carmen-Élisabeth-Françoise-Gabrielle, comtesse de Mailly-Nesle (1902–1999); Grandes Étapes françaises; Paris, Drouot Richelieu, Salle 4, Damien Libert, 14 November 2008, Lot 34 reproduced, *Éc. fr.*

LITERATURE: Ernest de Ganay, "Esclimont, demeure féodale", *Connaissance des arts*, mai 1958, pp. 60–65, reproduced p. 63; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [J.548.101](#)

GENEALOGY: [Bullion](#); [Montmorency](#)

HORTENSE DE BULLION was a member of a family that came to prominence under Henri IV. Claude de Bullion, conseiller au parlement de Paris, accumulated considerable wealth, and in 1639 acquired the château d'Esclimont which had been built in 1543 by Étienne de Poncher, archevêque de Tours, and which was to become the home of this pastel for more than 200 years. Claude de Bullion's grandson, Anne-Jacques de Bullion, marquis de Fervaques, known as marquis de Bonnelles (1679–1745), had a military career, and became gouverneur du Maine. He also had the rare distinction of being a chevalier both of the Saint-Esprit and of the Toison d'or. In 1708 he married Marie-Madeleine-Hortense Gigault de Bellefonds (1683–1766), a great beauty named in honour of her grandmother, Hortense Mancini, duchesse de Mazarin, niece of the cardinal and Charles II's mistress. They had three daughters. Marie-Étiennette, the eldest, became duchesse d'Olonne in 1734; the youngest, Augustine-Léonine-Olympe, born in 1721, married the duc de Beauvilliers in 1745.

The date of birth of the middle sister, Hortense, is not found in any source, but must have been before 1721; it was possibly suppressed because she was older than her husband – she married the 17-year-old Guy-André-Pierre de Montmorency-Laval¹ in 1740. Then known as the marquis de Laval, he was a member of one of the most aristocratic families in France claiming

¹ Among the usual sources, see Saint-Allais & al., *L'Art de vérifier les dates*, Paris, 1818, XII, pp. 113ff.

nobility for 24 generations. He was to become duc de Laval but among his other titles he was premier baron de la Marche, marquis de Lezay, marquis de Magnac (the title had come into the family through his grandmother, a Fénelon), baron d'Arnac, seigneur d'Esclimont etc. The king signed the marriage contract. A few months later the marquise was presented at court. Laval joined the mousquetaires in 1741, and commanded a company of the Royal-Pologne regiment in 1743. He fought at Dettingen the following year, and was awarded an infantry regiment in his own name a few months later. He continued to play an active role in the campaigns in the Low Countries (he was wounded at Raucoux in 1746), and was made maréchal de camp in 1748.



Figure 1

Further service during the Seven Years War in the Mediterranean (where he distinguished himself in the assault on Fort St Philip in Minorca) and in Germany led to his being created duc héréditaire de Laval in 1758 (a rank somewhere between that of a duc et pair and a duc à brevet, a source of considerable confusion). He was promoted to lieutenant-général des armées du roi in 1759. By the time of his appointment as maréchal de France in 1783 he had retired from active military service. He was made a chevalier de Saint-Lazare in the promotion of 1779 (the decoration is shown in an anonymous family portrait known from a later copy by Ansiaux at Versailles, fig. 1), receiving at the same time the grand-croix de Saint-Louis. Laval was appointed premier gentilhomme de la chambre de Monsieur in 1771, having been made gouverneur of

the château de Compiègne (as well as of Aunis and the principautés d'Orange et de Carignan), an appointment that would devolve upon his son Mathieu, vicomte de Laval; both their wives were accordingly admitted to the “souters du petit château”, as Mme du Deffand reported to Walpole (letter, 6 August 1770). Hortense was granted the entrées de la chambre du roi in 1772.

In 1766 she inherited the territory of Gallardon from her uncle, Auguste-Léon de Bullion, marquis de Bonnelles. In 1776 she and her husband sold the hôtel de Bullion (rue Plâtrière, Paris), to Marie-Louis-Cesar Roulleau for 44,000 livres.² Although of “indifferent architecture”, the property had been in her family for 160 years, and housed the famous gallery painted by Simon Vouet for the surintendant des finances; it was divided up into small apartments, and became during the nineteenth century the principal auction rooms in Paris. The maréchal and his wife then retired to the château d'Esclimont, where a life of domesticity was pursued, according to the picture painted by Mme de Boigne (*Mémoires*, p. 60): “L'intimité de ma mère avec la marquise de Laval la menait souvent à Esclimont, chez son beau-père de maréchal. Là, tout était calme; on y menait une vie de famille. Le vieux maréchal passait son temps à faire de détestable musique dont il était passionné, et sa femme, parfaitement bonne et indulgente, quoique très minutieusement dévote, à faire de la tapisserie.”

The duc's interest in the arts is confirmed by an account by Wille of a dinner hosted by Grimod de La Réynière: “Comme depuis peu nous avons reçu M. de La Réynière à l'Académie, en qualité d'honneur [1787], il a trouvé bon et convenable de donner successivement à dîner à ceux qui ont voix et le droit d'élire. Je fus donc invité aujourd'hui et me rendis à son hôtel. Le repas était magnifique. Plusieurs convives s'y trouvaient, entre autres, M. le maréchal de Stainville, le duc de Laval, le baron de Wurmser, lieutenant général, M. l'abbé Barthélemy, garde des médailles du Roi. Après le repas et la visite des magnifiques appartements, je reviens avec Voiriot.”³

At the church of Fervaques, a bell, founded by Jean-Charles Cavillier in 1782, weighing 1800 lbs, was named Hortence [sic] in honour of the duchesse, whose arms appear with those of her husband with the dedication to “très haute et très puissante D^e Mad^e Jacqueline Hortence de Bulion de Farvacque Duchesse de Laval D^e Baronne Dauquainville et autres lieux”.⁴

² Rosalys Coope, *Salomon de Brosse and the development of the classical style in French architecture from 1565 to 1630*, 1972, p. 246.

³ H. Thirion, *La Vie privée des financiers au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1895, p. 233.

⁴ Dr Billon, “Épigraphie campanaire”, *Bulletin monumental de la Société française d'archéologie*, 1861, pp. 551ff.

Only two pastels have hitherto been recorded as by Mosnier, at the château de Dampierre, but this portrait, of the mother and mother-in-law of the two recorded subjects, can be attributed on the basis of general stylistic similarity, including the dark but strong colours, the dynamic composition and the exquisite hands of the subject. A comparable work in terms of composition and colouration is the miniature *Allégorie de la Peinture in Cincinnati*,⁵ but there are numerous parallels in his painted œuvre, particularly in relation to the positioning and execution of the hands. Gerrit Walczak argues that Mosnier's compositions underwent a crucial development in response to shifting aesthetic standards in the 1780s, where a group of half-length portraits, including the marquise d'Aramon and the artist's wife Mlle Pasquier, used ledges or tables to mark out the pictorial space.



Figure 2

The present portrait clearly presages that transformation. It must have been around 1775 that Mosnier portrayed the duchesse in this work since the frame is stamped by Antoine Levert. This maître menuisier was awarded mastery on 14 December 1774 (registered 23 August 1775), providing a *terminus post quem* for the work. Levert's death some ten years later provides an endpoint (it seems improbable that a frame of this unusual size would have been manufactured for stock). Levert's known output includes some 9 frames or pairs, most of which are oval.⁶

Of the duchesse's seven children, four made important alliances. The eldest son, Guy-André-Marie-Joseph, marquis de Laval, married at the age of 16; his bride died six weeks after the wedding, and he soon after, of smallpox.⁷ The second son, Anne-Alexandre, was created duc de Laval in 1783 (and thus confusingly used the same title as his father while both were alive); he became lieutenant général, pair de France, commandeur de Saint-Louis, and was known as a freemason. He married a princesse of the Montmorency-Luxembourg branch; she was appointed dame d'atours to Madame Adélaïde in 1781.⁸ Their eldest son married the marquis de Voyer's daughter, but died very soon after; the second son Adrien became an ambassador, and like his great-grandfather, was appointed to both the Saint-Esprit and the Toison d'or; he was also a grandee of Spain, becoming duque de San Fernando Luis. Adrien was to marry Henriette-Lucy Dillon (the future Mme de La Tour du Pin) but despite his mother's friendship with Mme Dillon, the maréchal decided that he should marry Mlle de Luxembourg, another cousin. During the Revolution Adrien, his brothers and their mother fled Paris via Valenciennes with the comte d'Artois in 1789 and by 1790 were reported as in Treves.⁹ Hortense's youngest daughter, Guyonne-Joséphine-Élisabeth, born in 1755, married, at the age of 13, the maréchal-duc de Luynes; her portrait by Mosnier, together with the present work, accordingly found its way to Dampierre, along with



Figure 3

⁵ Julie Aronson, Marjorie E. Wieseman, Cynthia Amneus, *Perfect likeness: European and American portrait miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, New Haven, 2006, p. 240 reproduced.

⁶ Edgar Harden, private communication, 10 December 2008; see also Henri Vial & al., *Les Artistes décorateurs du bois*, Paris, 1912, I, p. 314 and Neil Jeffares, "Antoine Levert, maître menuisier-ébéniste", 4 March 2018, neiljeffares.wordpress.com.

⁷ In his posthumous sale (hôtel de Bullion, 5–8 April 1784, Lot 53) were Six têtes, peintes au pastel, sous verre & dans des cadres dorés; the whole lot fetched 15 livres 1.

⁸ In 1789 she had an apartment at Versailles, in the Aile Gros Pavillon, first floor, near those of the comtesse de Châtelux and the duchesse de Beauvilliers (Vatout, *Souvenirs historiques des résidences royales*, 1837, p. 404).

⁹ Félix Feuillet de Conches, *Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette et Madame Élisabeth*, 1866, IV, p. 36; Jean-Baptiste Jullien de Courcelles, *Histoire généalogique*, p. 41.

that of her sister-in-law, Catherine-Jeanne Tavernier de Boullongne (1749–1838), daughter of a trésorier de l’extraordinaire des guerres, of a family of fermiers-généraux, who married the third son Mathieu-Paul-Louis, vicomte de Laval (1748–1809). While Dampierre remained within the Luynes family, Esclimont, and the present pastel, returned to the Laval family when the duchesse de Luynes’s daughter married the son of the vicomte de Laval, and thence, via their only daughter, who married a La Rochefoucauld of the Doudeauville branch. Their son, known by his Neapolitan dukedom of Bisaccia (he held more dukedoms than any other Frenchman), was an ultra-royalist and ambassador in London. A photograph from 1958 shows the pastel in the grand salon at Esclimont. Catherine’s uncle, Boullongne de Préninville, married into the Martainville family, closely connected with Mme de Pompadour. The Martainville salon collected a society including the duchesse de Laval and her daughters, the duchesse de La Trémoille, the marquise de Sérán, the Osmont family, the marquis de Chastellux etc.¹⁰ The vicomtesse de Laval led a dissolute life: after only three years of marriage, she took a series of lovers, including Talleyrand and Narbonne. Mme de Staël saved her from the guillotine, allowing her and the vicomte de Laval to escape to Switzerland, but she again resumed her affair with Narbonne. At the restoration her salon was famous for such intrigues: Aimée de Coigny described her as “changeant d’amants presque autant que d’années”, adding “maîtresse de M. de Talleyrand quand elle était très jolie, actuellement son amie très exigeante”.

Neil Jeffares

¹⁰ Thirion, *op. cit.*, p. 189.