

Perronneau, M. & Mme Ollivier¹

NEIL JEFFARES



Jean-Baptiste Perronneau

Presumed portraits of Philibert Chanousse-Ollivier (1700–1773) & son épouse, née Anne Boyely (1705–p.1773)

Pastel on paper, 71x57 cm

1748

Private collection

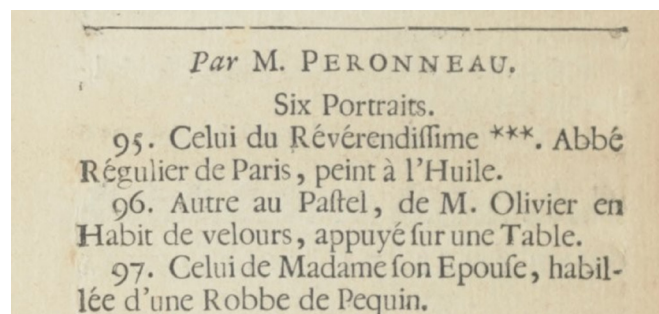
PROVENANCE: desc.: famille Olivier, Marseille; dep.: Union des arts, 1863; Groult, Paris, 1885; desc.; Galerie Bernheimer–Colnaghi 2004 (International Fine Art Fair, New York 2004; Salon des antiquaires, Paris, 2005); British PC

EXHIBITIONS: Salon de 1748, no. 96/97; Paris 1885a, no. 74; Paris 1908a, no. 98/99, pl. 85/86

LITERATURE: Philippe Burty, *La Presse*, 6.X.1863; Portalis 1885, p. 447 n.r.; Tourneux 1896, pp. 15, 410; E. & J. de Goncourt, *Journal*, 8.1.1890; Guiffrey 1908, p. 644, repr. pp. 645/643; Flament 1908, visible in display; Fourcaud 1908, p. 232; Lemoine 1908, p. 26 n.r.; V&RdL 1909, no. 19/20, pl. 65/66; 1923, pp. 22, 212; Lemoine 1941b; Bordeaux 1989, p. 66 repr., as of Louis Olivier, ingénieur de la Marine & épouse, née Jeanne Gautier (c.1700–); *New York times*, 7.V.2004; Arnoult 2014, no. 43/44 Pa, repr. pp. 45/44, as ?Philibert Chanousse Olivier, intendant [sic] du garde-meuble de la Couronne; & son épouse, N

GENEALOGY: Ollivier

AT THE SALON DE 1748 Jean-Baptiste Perronneau exhibited six portraits, one in oil, and five pastels, of which the descriptions of two are sufficiently precise for them to be identified beyond reasonable doubt as the present works:



¹ This essay may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “Perronneau, M. & Mme Ollivier”, *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/PerronneauOllivier.pdf>.

They immediately attracted the praise of the critics, prompting various suggestions that the artist was La Tour's natural successor: as Léoffroy de Saint-Yves put it,

Deux portraits (nos 96 et 97) qu'il a exposés cette année sont d'heureux présages de la gloire qui l'attend.²

They then disappeared for over a century, reappearing only the Union des arts in Marseille in 1863 (they were part of, or on loan to, the permanent collection, not exhibits at the temporary exhibition³) where they had apparently descended – Vaillat & Ratouis de Limay noted in 1909, p. 13, that “la tradition veut que les personnages représentées appartiennent à une famille marseillaise.” Philippe Burty wrote about them enthusiastically:

d'abord deux beaux pastels; peints par Perronneau en 1784 [*sic*], les portraits de quelque riche banquier et de sa femme. Il s'en faudrait de peu qu'on les prit pour des La Tour; au reste, on se rappelle que Perronneau, grâce à l'enthousiasme toujours un peu exagéré de Diderot, obscurait la gloire vieillissante du vrai maître du pastel.

They were then identified as the pastels from the 1748 salon, and bought by the avid pastel enthusiast, Camille Groult. Successive exposures, at the Paris pastel exhibitions of 1885 and 1908, confirmed them as among the artist's finest works, and continued to elicit high praise, as in baron Roger Portalis's account in 1885:

Les deux magnifiques portraits de M. et de Mme Olivier, rapportés récemment de Marseille, peuvent soutenir la comparaison avec n'importe quelles œuvres pour leur exécution toute de verve et de libre facture. ... Les visages de Perronneau conservent toujours cette fleur, ce prime saut, cette fraîcheur, ce prisme où se joue la lumière, qui sont les précieux apanages du pastel. Si l'on passe aux vêtements, l'exécution de la robe à ramages et des dentelles de Mme Olivier, dont l'agréable pose accoudée fait valoir la main, laisse bien loin derrière elle l'ajustement sans accent de Mlle Sallé qui dissimule les siennes dans ses manches, avec une réserve par trop exagérée. Que l'on compare aussi le velours et la main de M. Olivier avec les accessoires du portrait de M. de la Reynière qui est voisin. Ces portraits furent exposés par l'artiste au Salon de 1748, et bien accueillis par la critique.⁴ « Qui peut aussi, dans le genre de M. de La Tour, voler comme lui de merveilles en merveilles? Ce sera M. Perronneau, s'il veut continuer ainsi qu'il a commence. »

Louis de Fourcaud's review of the 1908 exhibition noted again that M. Ollivier was a “riche bourgeois de Marseille”: “avec sa bouche tombante et sa mine furibonde”, he is “volcanique” in contrast to his wife: “vraiment belle de tranquillité, de santé, de maturité, d'aplomb, de vie. La facture a le piquant de sa liberté. Couleur et technique ne se recommandent de personne que de Perronneau.” An article published in *L'Illustration* in 1908, just after Groult's death, shows M. Ollivier in its opulent frame hanging in the central gallery of the collector's home:



The pastels remained within the Groult family until 2004, when they were bought privately by Colnaghi, and sold shortly after to a private collection. The transaction was not publicised, but one may assume that this pair may have achieved the highest price ever paid for a work by Perronneau – and entirely understandably. (The Fr35,000 at

² Anon. [Charles Léoffroy de Saint-Yves], *Observations sur les arts et sur quelques morceaux de Peinture et de sculpture, exposés au Louvre en 1748, où il est parlé de l'utilité des embellissements dans les villes*, Leyde, 1748.

³ Tourneux's loose reading of Burty's text seems to be the source of this confusion repeated until now; I am most grateful to Gérard Fabre for confirming that the pastels were not in the Marseille 1863 exhibition of the Société artistique des Bouches-du-Rhône.

⁴ Citing another passage from the same text by Léoffroy de Saint-Yenne.

which they were valued in 1908, at Groult's death, probably equates to only £150,000 in 2017 values at standard inflation rates.)

But one puzzle has to be addressed: who were M. & Mme Olivier? The matriarch of Perronneau's great patrons, the Journu family of Bordeaux, was Mme Claude Journu, née Jeanne Ollivier (1694–1771), daughter of an armateur at La Rochelle; but Perronneau's connection with the family was not until later. For the same reason, Meaudre de Lapouyade's proposed identification as of Louis Olivier, ingénieur de la Marine and his wife, née Jeanne Gautier was rejected by Dominique d'Arnoult in 2014, noting in particular that Perronneau's Paris commissions in 1748 made it highly unlikely that he travelled to Bordeaux that year. She concluded that the sitters were probably Parisian, and tentatively suggested (while recognising how common the name Oliver is) that they might depict "Philibert Chanousse Olivier, intendant du garde-meuble de la couronne", the successor to Claude Nérot whose daughter (Mme Tourolle) Perronneau had already painted.

That suggestion was I believe correct, or at least, on the basis of the investigations below, can be converted from possible to probable. D'Arnoult however offered few biographical details for Olivier, and none for his wife (nor did Pierre Verlet or Stéphane Castelluccio in their studies of the Garde-Meuble), so even such matters as the apparent ages of the sitters were not adduced in support of the suggestion. She did however quote the passage in the duc de Luynes's *mémoires* (11.IX.1750), in which he mentioned the death of Nérot, and that "M. de Fontanieu présenta hier pour remplir cette place M. Olivier, qui étoit dans les bureaux de M. d'Argenson." However the pastels were made in 1748, two years before this, so further support for this tentative identification is needed.

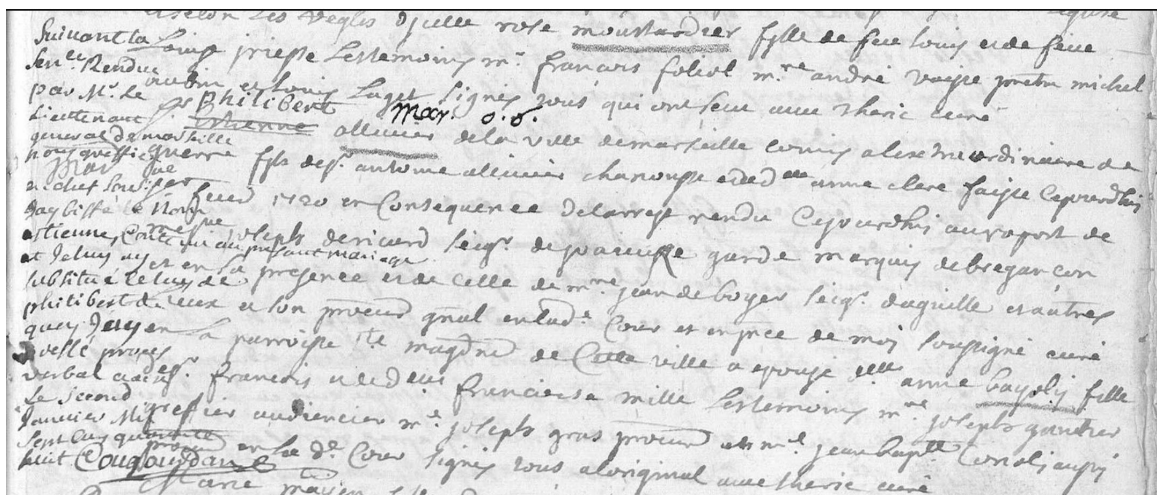
Philibert Chanousse Ollivier (to give him the more frequent spelling) is indeed an elusive character, and it has taken some considerable patience to establish his état civil. The confusions multiply from the fact that his father was plain Ollivier Chanousse, the son of Pierre Chanousse from Montjay, while his mother, Clere Faix, who was illiterate, came from Marseille, where they married in 1678; Ollivier Chanousse was later known as Antoine Ollivier Chanousse. Philibert's brother and son both used Chanousse as the family name, while he added Ollivier as a surname (see the genealogy to which I have posted a link above). This has caused numerous problems in locating records.

Philibert was the second son, baptised, like his siblings, at the church of Saint-Martin, Marseille: it is his connections with Marseille where the pastels descended into the nineteenth century that reinforces the identification most immediately. Here is the entry for 17.III.1700:


Philippe Benoît Chanoine fils de M. Antoine Chanoine de la paroisse de St. Pierre
Léon au lieu d'aujourd'hui pour le mariage de son fils
Estienne et Dany directeur général de la gabelle de Bayonne
marquise de la paroisse de St. Pierre de Bayonne
Cicoine figure à Longjumeau

His parrain was Philibert Estienne d'Augny (1665–1737), who came from a wealthy family of financiers who had progressed to nobility through the purchase of offices at the parlement de Metz. D'Augny became a fermier general, and was succeeded by his son Alexandre-Marc-René Estienne d'Augny (1715–1798), who was best known for getting Charles-Étienne Briseux to build a lavish hôtel particulier at the rue Neuve Grange-Batelière for one of his mistresses, a singer at the Opéra (he had several). He also had a lavish collection of jewellery. He was also one of the administrateurs of Bachelier's École gratuite de dessin 1768–73.

We next find Ollivier at his wedding, aged still just 19, which took place in Aix-en-Provence, Sainte Madeleine on 1.II.1720:



His bride was Anne Bayoly ou Bailloly who I believe must be the girl of this name baptised at Les Arcs (Var) on 8.X.1705; but although the date appears in the index for the parish register, the whole of the register including all the actes in 1705 is missing. We can see further evidence of the difficulties surrounding his name, as this marriage is indexed as Étienne Ollivier, not Philibert Chanousse: there was evidently some confusion in the church (in which Chanousse took his godfather's family name, not his forename), and the register was only corrected after a court order.



More interestingly we can see how his family's social ascent had continued: his witnesses included the powerful Joseph-Paul, marquis de Ricard et de Brégançon, who would become doyen at the parlement de Provence. He was an art collector⁵ and appears to have been an amateur artist to judge from his 1736 portrait by Jean-Baptiste Van Loo (Nice, mBA), also known from an engraving in reverse by Hardouin Coussin (of which Ollivier might well have owned an impression). Is it entirely coincidental that Perronneau's portrait shows the head at a similar angle?



The second witness at Ollivier's marriage was also of some importance. Pierre-Jean de Boyer d'Argens, seigneur d'Eguilles, was reçu conseiller au parlement d'Aix en 1709 et procureur-général en 1717. His son was the marquis d'Argens, the writer and correspondent of Voltaire who famously compared La Tour to Van Dyck.

But perhaps the most significant element to be gleaned from the marriage entry is Ollivier's office: he is already a commis de l'Extraordinaire des guerres – an official in the department set up to finance wars, notorious for its rapid path to wealth for its staff. It seems likely he was still employed in this function when the duc de Luynes referred to him as in d'Argenson's office; the comte d'Argenson was secrétaire d'État de la guerre from 1743 until 1757.

⁵ See the exh. cat. *France in the Golden Age*, New York, 1982, no. 24 for a work by Daret that belonged to him.

Showing these dazzling pendant portraits at the salon was a typical gambit for the social ascendancy of these wealthy functionaries, and particularly appropriate if he was aiming to take charge of the royal furniture, works of art and jewels as Garde général des Meubles de la couronne which he became shortly after the salon.

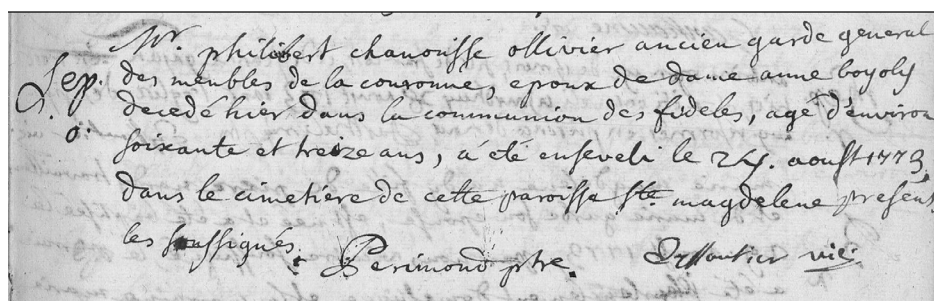
Ollivier was of course never the Intendant, an office that belonged to the Fontanieu dynasty: the position he took over from Nérot as garde général was in fact a commission, not an office, and neither received the same scrutiny nor enjoyed the same security of tenure. Accordingly there is very little surviving documentation concerning his career apart from the brief period when he held his commission. Although the salary is not recorded, that of a later occupant was 12,000 livres.⁶ He was sworn in on 28.IX.1750, a couple of weeks after the entry in the duc de Luynes's diary, a recommendation endorsed by Louis XV in a letter of 17.IX.1750, where he believed that he—

ne pouvoir faire meilleur choix pour la remplir que du S^r Philibert Chanousse-Olivier. Les différents emplois qu'il a exercés, la distinction et le désintéressement avec lesquels il s'en est acquitté et les preuves qu'il y a donné de sa capacité nous ont d'autant plus volontiers déterminés à lui accorder cette charge que nous sommes persuadés qu'il la remplira avec zèle et à notre satisfaction.

Nevertheless Ollivier resigned after just two years, on 16.XII.1752. His appointment had become mired in the long-running controversy between the king and the parlement, which crystallised in this case on a question of jurisdiction. The Garde-Meuble thought they were answerable only to the king, while the Chambre des Comptes wished to control the mobilier which belonged to the crown. The point had been avoided under previous intendants – Gédéon Berbier du Metz was both intendant of the Meubles and president aux Comptes, but Fontanieu was not (although the decision to have his portrait show him in the outfit of a magistrate may well have been intended to address this debate). The Chambre insisted on Ollivier as the new garde-général delivering five years' audited accounts, and withheld his salary (and that of the intendant) failing delivery. This resulted in his resignation only a couple of years later.

His successor was Jean-François Gentil de Cœur (c.1670–1764), from an old family of noblesse de l'épée, and it is perhaps no coincidence that (lost) pendant portraits of him and his wife, née Madeleine-Marguerite Bégau, by Glain, were exhibited at the Salon de Saint-Luc in 1762. Gentil's nephew was a drawings collector, while his widow was marraine to one of the children of the engraver Malœuvre in 1785 and also supported Jean Daullé's widow.

Despite the brevity of Ollivier's tenure, it is by this commission that he was described on the parish register when he was buried at Aix-en-Provence at the Sainte-Madeleine:



No posthumous inventory has been located to confirm the presence of the Perronneau portraits, but it is clear that his descendants remained in the Aix/Marseille region.

⁶ Lemone de Crécy in 1785; Pierre Verlet, *Le Mobilier royal français...*, Paris, 1945, p. 18; see also pp. 17, 23 for Chanousse, as well as Stéphane Castelluccio, *Le Garde-Meuble de la Couronne et ses intendants du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 2004, pp. 128, 132 & *passim*. Claude Nérot was paid only 2000 livres according to the *État de la France*, various editions to 1749.

One further piece of circumstantial evidence concerns the intendant for whom Ollivier had worked, Gaspard-Moïse-Augustin de Fontanieu (1694–1767), who in addition to his office of intendant des meubles de la Couronne, was a conseiller au parlement de Paris from 1719, maître des requêtes etc. He displayed a profound understanding of decorative arts, and was described by Castelluccio as an “amateur éclairé”, collecting books and prints, and travelling to Italy; his wife collected objets-d’art and porcelain. After his death, his son (who took over his office) commissioned a portrait engraving (perhaps with a view to publishing the important recueil⁷ de dessins which the king bought at the sale of Fontanieu’s enormous library in 1766). The engraving, by Longueil after Queverdo, is known, and raises some curious questions beyond the magistrate’s outfit mentioned above. Was there an earlier portrait from life on which it was drawn? Why does it seem to have been reversed (as evidenced by the buttons on the cassock)?



But on closer inspection, and a comparison with the pastel of his subordinate, there are parallels (in the overall composition and lighting, but also in minute details such as the eyebrows) which cannot be explained as broad coincidence. It seems that in the creation of this portrait, Queverdo must have been aware of the Perronneau (unless indeed he drew from a lost Perronneau of Fontanieu himself). This must have been based on more than the younger Fontanieu recollecting pastel seen publicly twenty years before: this seems compelling evidence that the Perronneau of Ollivier was known to Fontanieu fils and available to inspire his artist.

Neil Jeffares



⁷ See the exh. cat. *Designing the décor*, Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 19.X.2005–15.I.2006.