

Perronneau, *Le marquis d'Aubais*

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[Jean-Baptiste Perronneau](#)

Charles de Baschi, marquis d'AUBAIS (1686–1777)

Pastel on paper, 63.2x54 cm

Signed, mid right: “Perronneau/1746”

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Laurent Laperlier; Paris, Drouot, 11–13 April 1867, Lot 71 n.r., inconnu, 48 francs; baron de Beurnonville; Émile Lévy (1826–1890), peintre; his widow, née Céline-Joséphine Bidard de La Noë (1835–), novelist under the pseudonym Paria Korigan. Paris, 26 March 1925, Lot 22; Marius Paulme; Paris, 13–15 May 1929, Lot 195, est. ₣75,000, ₣70,000; Germain Seligman, New York, a.1952. E. V. Thaw & Co., Inc., New York, 1983; Artemis/David Carritt, London, 1990, catalogue reproduced

EXHIBITIONS: [?Salon de 1746, no. 146]; *Exposition de pastels français des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, Hôtel Jean Charpentier, 23 May – 26 June 1927, no. 95; *The rococo age*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 1983–84, catalogue Eric Zafran, no. 81 repr.; *A magic mirror: the portrait in France 1700–1900*, Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, 12 October 1986 – 25 January 1987, catalogue George T. M. Shackelford & Mary Tavener Holmes, no. 9 repr.

LITERATURE: Pierre-Marie Gault de Saint-Germain, *Les Trois Siècles de la peinture en*

France, Paris, 1808, p. 283, as “marquis de Dubail”; Louis de La Roque, *Armorial de Languedoc*, II, frontispiece; *Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 1864, 33, 141, 174; Anatole de Gallier, *Le Marquis d'Aubais*, Marseille, 1870, pp. 19f n.r.; M[aurice] T[ourneux], “Charles de Baschi, marquis d'Aubais”, *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, XVII, 1884, 33; 141, 172 (identifying Laperlier pastel with subject of Daullé print); Prosper Falgairolle, *Le Marquis d'Aubais, célèbre érudit du XVIII^e siècle et ses lettres autographes*, Paris, 1887; Dilke 1899, p. 168 n.r.; Maurice Tourneux, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau*, Paris, 1903, pp. 11f, 55, 57; Léandre Vaillant & Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris, 1909, no. 6; 1923, pp. 14, 161, 210; Émile Dacier & Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Pastels français des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, 1927, no. 75, reproduced pl. LII; *Le Gaulois artistique*, 30 April 1929, p. 257; *Le Gaulois artistique*, 28 May 1929, p. 310 (“un superbe pastel”); Germain Seligman, *Oh! fickle taste; or, objectivity in art*, Cambridge, 1952, no. 24 reproduced; Theodore Reff, *Degas: the artist's mind*, London, 1976, p. 115 (“in these years, an important pastel by Perronneau was acquired by Émile Lévy”); John Richardson, *The collection of Germain Seligman: paintings, drawings and works of art*, New York, 1979, no. 60 reproduced; Émile G. Léonard, *Mon village sous Louis XV: d'après les mémoires d'un paysan*, Paris, 1984, p. 34 n.r.; Bénézit; Jeffares 2006, p. 398, reproduced; Norbert Lynton, review, *The Art Book*, XIV/4, 2007, p. 37 reproduced

RELATED WORKS: Perronneau, oil painting; engraving by Jean Daullé; preparatory drawing, attributed to Daullé

GENEALOGY: [Baschi](#)

CHARLES DE BASCHI, marquis d'Aubais et du Caila, seigneur de Junas, Gavernes, Saint-Christin et autres lieux (Beauvoisin 1686 – Aubais 1777), belonged to the *noblesse de l'épée*.¹ The family, which had moved from Umbria in the fourteenth century, acquired the

¹ In addition to the works cited in the literature relating to this portrait, there are numerous biographies of the marquis, including a notice in the *Dictionnaire de la biographie française*. The greatest detail is found in Léonard, *op. cit.*, which draws on sources such as the memoirs of d'Aubais's secretary Pierre Prion, *Mémoires d'un écrivain de campagne au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1985, a work which “a fait reviver la figure originale du marquis d'Aubais”, according to G. Bertier de Sauvigny, *Le Comte Ferdinand de Bertier (1782–1864) et l'énigme de la congrégation*, Paris, 1948, p. 25n.

territories of Aubais and Caila by the marriage in 1591 of Balthazar de Baschi and Marguerite du Faur. Their sons Charles and Louis respectively founded the branches of Saint-Estève (Charles's great-grandson François, vicomte de Saint-Estève, ambassadeur, married Charlotte-Victoire Le Normant de l'Étiolles, sister-in-law of Mme de Pompadour) and d'Aubais, which was again subdivided when Louis's grandson Henri founded the Baschi-Pignan branch (which later included the comte du Cayla and his wife, née de Jaucourt, the subject of a fine bust by Houdon now in the Frick).

Charles de Baschi was the son of Henri's brother Louis (1646–1703), who seems to have been a Huguenot, as he fled to Geneva in 1685² and married an Anne Boisson. Nevertheless Charles was educated at the collège de Toulouse and later at the collège de Clermont in Paris. He enlisted with the Mousquetaires at the age of 18, and fought in the campaign of 1705. The army was not to his taste, any more than the court (possibly because the family's conversion from Protestantism was too recent to make them fully trustworthy at Versailles). He retired almost immediately to his estates at Aubais (see fig. 1) and devoted the rest of his life to history and genealogy.



Figure 1

Almost all contemporary accounts give a positive description of M. d'Aubais. “Son génie supérieur, son mérite infini, son esprit sublime et pénétrant, sa science profonde, sa grande naissance, ses honnêtes manières, tous ces belles qualités le rendent un des plus accomplis de ce siècle”, according to one commentator in 1729. He was also unusually popular with his vassals, who turned out to welcome him with great enthusiasm after his frequent trips to Paris. A number of works portray peasant life in Aubais in this era, including the colourful

occitan play *L'Opéra d'Aubais* and novel *Jean-l'ont-pris* written by the abbé Jean-Baptiste-Castor Fabre (1727–1783), whom the marquis chose to be assistant priest in Aubais between 1753 and 1755 when the works were conceived.³

M. d'Aubais married Diane de Rozel, dame de Cors et de Beaumont in 1708. A son and three daughters survived into adulthood; of these, the eldest daughter, Diane-Henriette, who became marquise de Montfrin, was his favourite, and helped her father by writing genealogies after dinner. These had to be completed by her father, as the girl's modesty forced her to omit any illegitimate offspring. D'Aubais's real enthusiasm was his vast library. He started collecting books from the age of 7 and added as many as 5000 volumes in a single trip to Paris. He spent over 20,000 livres on his collection of maps alone. Among the manuscripts were works on the Languedoc, geography in general and genealogy. He made his library freely available to scholars – Séguier noted that its holdings on Spain had spared him a trip to that country, while the chevalier de Ramsay was staying with d'Aubais when a copy of the Black Book was ordered,⁴ no doubt for his *Vita Riccardi II*. D'Aubais's most significant publication was the series which he published jointly with his compatriot Léon Ménard from 1759. The *Pièces fugitives pour servir à l'histoire de France* included a curious mixture of topographical, historical and genealogical information; stories of battles interwove with determinations of nobility given by Besons, the intendant of Languedeoc under Louis XIV.

D'Aubais had been a member of the Académie de Nîmes since 1712 but seems not to have attended actively (although he protested against a proposal in 1766 to limit the rights of members who had not attended sessions for over three years). There appears to have been some connection with the portraitist Arlaud, whom d'Aubais encountered on a visit to his maternal aunt Mlle Boisson in Geneva; the marquis facilitated his visit to France in 1726. On the artist's

² See Th. Dufour, “Communication d'une inscription en l'honneur du marquis d'Aubais”, *Société d'histoire*, 1867.

³ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *L'argent, l'amour et la mort en pays d'oc*, Paris, 1980 is an in-depth study of the abbé and his novel.

⁴ *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, Oxford, 1885–1921, x, p. 106, 11 March 1728/29.

voyage through Grenoble he wrote to his patron to report on the nine-year-old Mlle d'Aubais's progress at the convent of Montfleury. Nothing of his relations with Perronneau has survived, although he was the subject of an oil painting (fig. 2) as well as the present pastel; the latter seems to have been the subject of the engraving by Daullé, for which a preparatory drawing in wash was once attributed to Perronneau. Were any of these among the 15 portraits of the marquis and his family recorded as in the grande salon at Aubais in the 1777 *inventaire après décès*, or more likely one of the six family portraits in M. d'Aubais's bedroom? The differences between the apparent ages of the model in the two portraits – while the distinctive facial features are unchanged – create troubling difficulties⁵ about the identification. It is not clear from the livret whether the work in the 1746 salon⁶ was in oil or pastel; both subjects are shown *en cuirasse*.⁷ The legend on the Daullé engraving⁸ precludes a simple difference in the date of execution. However many of Perronneau's portraits show his models rather younger than their chronological age, and it could be that d'Aubais felt the pastel was too flattering, and instructed Perronneau to do the oil “warts and all”.



Figure 2

We know that d'Aubais was in Paris on two occasions during 1746, the first trip commencing from Aubais on 5 December 1745 and returning probably in the spring or early summer, and the second commencing on 19 November 1746. It seems more likely that both portraits were executed on the first trip, and, in accordance with the unusually precise wording on the engraving, the painting may have been finished after the marquis's departure from Paris. Gallier describes the pastel thus:

Sous l'épaisse encolure de l'obésité, on discerne encore la distinction native du descendant des vieilles races. Le front largement développé et bien ouvert indique l'intelligence; les traits d'un dessin correct ne semblent respirer que la fatigue et l'ennui; peut être doit-on s'en prendre aux soucis du ménage un moment secoués, revenant à la charge. Les lèvres épaisses et sensuelles décelent l'amateur de bonne chère, que nous faisons entrevoir tout à l'heure le facétieux chanoine Folard. Les grands orages se sont bien gardés de troubler les allures un peu monotones de cette vie maintenue près d'un siècle, grâce à un judicieux équilibre des facultés. L'imagination n'a pas joué là son rôle dévastateur.

These exhausting trips to Paris continued throughout his life, sometimes required by the numerous legal actions which he pursued with apparent relish, notably against his relatives over the Fimarcon inheritance⁹ after the death of his sister in 1733, and which continued throughout his life. During them his wife seems to have travelled within the Languedoc, staying with her children. The favourite eldest daughter died in 1755, and, after his wife's death (before 1766), the marquis was dependent on his remaining daughter, the comtesse d'Urre. It seems that she did

⁵ I am grateful to Dominique d'Arnoult (private communications, April 2007) for drawing these doubts to my attention. She believes the sitter in the pastel is not d'Aubais.

⁶ The subject of the present pastel has been confused (in the index to the *Procès-verbaux*) with the comte de Baschi, who was one of the eight associés-honoraires, a new category of non-voting honorary members of the Académie royale de peinture created in 1747. The Académie accepted the initial nominations of the directeur des Bâtiments, Le Normant de Tournehem, Baschi's brother-in-law. The *Procès-verbaux* indicate that he was too ill to attend his reception, and there is no evidence of a particularly active role.

⁷ Plate cuirasses of this type were no longer made, and not much used in battle, in the 18th century, but were considered appropriate accessories for portraits of the *noblesse de l'épée*. The long plated straps on this were typical of the mid-17th century (Dr Tobias Capwell, private communication, July 2007).

⁸ “Peint par Peroneau Peintre du R./Juil. 1746.//Grave par J. Daulle G.r du R./Janv. 1748.”

⁹ Perhaps foreshadowed by Dangeau's description of the marriage terms: “Le roi...signa le contrat de mariage...de M. de Fimarcon, maréchal de camp, avec mademoiselle d'Aubais, demoiselle de Languedoc, à qui on donne 50,000 écus argent comptant, et qui n'a qu'un frère mousquetaire, qui a plus de 20,000 livres de rente en fonds de terre.” (*Journal*, Paris, 1857, x, 19 avril 1705).

not share her father's interest in books; and it was perhaps on account of this that d'Aubais, at the age of 80, moved to Paris and commenced a series of engagements with much younger women (Mlle de Surlen was only 20 years old when they were engaged in 1770). All of these were broken off, for reasons that have not been recorded, and d'Aubais returned to his home. When he made his final testament, on 10 December 1776, he had no choice but to nominate his remaining daughter as légataire universelle.

The marquis died in 1777. In less than a fortnight, the comtesse d'Urre had commenced the sale of his library. The remaining volumes were destroyed in a fire during the Revolution. Aubais is now something of a tourist attraction, with a community of artists attracted by the southern light. A vineyard carries on the Baschi tradition on his territories. The remains of the vast and imposing château itself are now protected; the 17th century architecture, by Alexis de la Feuille de Merville and the nîmois builder Gabriel Dardaillon, include an outstanding staircase in the northern pavillion as well as the plan des Théâtres, modelled on bull fighting arenas popular in this area. The "Odyssey" described by Maurice Tournoux of this pastel between the Laperlier and Lévy collections had in fact already begun.

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