Perronneau, Les trois "marquis d'Aubais"

NEIL JEFFARES



Jean-Baptiste Perronneau

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

Pastel on paper, 63.2x54 cm

Signed, mid right: "Perroneau/1746"

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Laurent Laperlier; Paris, Drouot, 11-13 April 1867, Lot 71 n.r., inconnu, 48 francs; Étienne-Edmond Martin, baron de Beurnonville; Émile Lévy, peintre; his widow, née Céline-Joséphine Bidard de La Noë. Paris, 26 March 1925, Lot 22; Marius Paulme; Paris, 13-15 May 1929, Lot 195, est. Fr75,000, Fr70,000; Germain Seligman, New York, by 8 April 1948, when the work was offered for \$35,000 to the Kress Foundation by letter to Stephen S. Pichetto, trustee; transferred to gallery 1949; Jacques Seligmann files, box 429, folder 9, Smithsonian Archives of American Art; stock no. 7461, insured for \$3500; on Seligman's death, sold to E. V. Thaw & Co., Inc., New York, with Artemis/David Carritt, London; Artemis, Master prints and drawings, 15th to 20th centuries, 1990 catalogue, no. 27, reproduced

EXHIBITIONS: 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. Shackleford & Mary Tavener Holmes, no. 9, reproduced; Artemis/David Carritt, London, 1990, Master prints and drawings, 15th to 20th centuries, catalogue, no. 27. reproduced

LITERATURE: Ch. L., de Nîmes & 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); Lady Dilke, French painters of the XVIIIth century, London, 1899, p. 168 n.r., identifying Lévy's pastel as of d'Aubais; Maurice Tourneux, Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, Paris, 1903, pp. 11f, 55, 57; Louis de Fourcaud, "Le pastel et les pastellistes français au XVIIIe siècle", Revue de l'art ancien et moderne, XXIV, July-December 1908, p. 230 ("de cet air d'autorité voulu, un peu étrange, des personnages auxquels Perronneau tient à prêter de l'ampleur ou de la force"); Gils Blas, 1 May 1909, p. 1 ("délicieux"); Léandre Vaillat & Paul Ratouis de Limay, Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, sa vie et son œuvre, Paris, 1909, no. 6; 1923, pp. 14, 161, 210; Léandre Vaillat, "Le costume dans l'œuvre de J.B. Perronneau", L'Art et les artistes, XI, 1910, p. 247 ("une perruque moutonne très frisée"); Journal des débats, 24 March 1925; Émile Dacier & Paul Ratouis de Limay, Pastels français des XVIII et XVIIII siècles, Paris, 1927, no. 75, reproduced pl. LII; Gersaint, "Les pastels français des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles", Le Gaulois artistique, 2 June 1927, pp. 144-45; Le Gaulois artistique, 30 April 1929, p. 257; Le Gaulois artistique, 28 May 1929, p. 310 ("un superbe pastel"); Soubeiran de Pierres, Charles de Baschi, marquis d'Aubais et son château, Montpellier, 1937, repr.; "Le portrait du marquis d'Aubais", L'Éclair, 15.IV.1937, p. 3 repr., "[gravure de Daullé] une trahison de l'original"; Germain Seligman, Oh! fickle taste; or, objectivity in art, Cambridge, 1952, no. 24, reproduced; Theodore Reff, "The pictures within Degas's pictures", Metropolitan Museum journal, 1, 1968, p. 143; Theodore Reff, Degas: the artist's mind, London, 1976, p. 115 ("in these years, an important pastel by Perronneau was acquired by Émile Lévy"); Joachim Durand, Languedoc et Provence: Alphonse Daudet, le marquis d'Aubais..., 1978, p. 46 ("magnifique portrait au pastel"); John Richardson, The collection of Germain Seligman: paintings, drawings and works of art, New York, 1979, no. 60, reproduced; Bénézit; Rena Hoisington, Maurice-Quentin de La Tour and the triumph of pastel painting in eighteenth-century France, unpublished thesis, New York University, 2006, p. 205, pl. 122; Jeffares 2006, p. 398, reproduced; Norbert Lynton, review, The art book, XIV/4, 2007, p. 37, reproduced; Arnoult 2014, no. 14 Pa, pp. 78, 101, 211, 216, 232, 361, repr. p. 32, 202, ??d'Aubais; Perronneau 2017, fig. 41b, p. 76; Wine 2018, pp. 186, 397; Dictionary of pastellists online, J.582.1041

RELATED WORKS: (A) Perronneau, pastel of d'Aubais, Salon de 1746, no. 146. Lit.: 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 la noblesse de

Languedoe, Montpellier, 1860 II, frontispiece, reproducing Daullé grav.; Anatole de Gallier, Le Marquis d'Aubais, Marseille, 1870, pp. 19f n.r.; François Duris, "Ex-libris et portraits", Le Vieux Papier: bulletin de la Société archéologique, historique & artistique, juillet 1907, p. 315 n.r., refers to Daullé print as an ex-libris, petit in-fol.; Émile-Guillaume Léonard, Mon village sous Louis XV: d'après les mémoires d'un paysan, Paris, 1941, p. 34 n.r.; (B) engraving by Jean Daullé, possibly with the assistance of Wille; (C) copy or preparatory drawing, attributed to Daullé

ICONOGRAPHY OF SITTER: (I) An engraving of Stanislaw Leszczyński by Pierre Fillœul, after Louis de Fontaine, was reissued as of the marquis d'Aubais; (II) a painting catalogued (until 2012) as by Carle Van Loo, of the marquis d'Aubais, sd 1734 (Stanford, Cantor Center, inv. 87.188) is not of d'Aubais, but a portrait of an unknown chevalier de l'ordre de Saint-Louis, by Louis-Michel Van Loo family, dated 1754

GENEALOGY: Baschi

In 1884, MAURICE TOURNEUX, the eminent French art historian and author of perceptive studies of a number of artists including Perronneau, put a note in L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux wondering what had become of the portrait of the marquis d'Aubais of which only the engraving by Daullé was known. Soon after he spotted the verbal description of the present pastel in the unillustrated Laperlier sale catalogue from seventeen years before, noting that it would correspond well with the lost portrait. He didn't at that stage know the whereabouts of either. From that point, confusions have multiplied. By 1899, Lady Dilke had no hesitation in referring to Laperlier's pastel (then belonging to Émile Lévy) as the portrait of d'Aubais from the 1746 salon. Four years later, when Tourneux issued his monograph on Perronneau, the matter was no longer in dispute: when he described the "Odyssey" of this pastel between the Laperlier and Lévy collections, he cannot have realised just how far astray he would send it. When Marius



Figure 1

Paulme had it, in 1925, this portrait of an unknown soldier had become the official Perronneau pastel of the marquis d'Aubais, the differences with the Daullé engraving (fig. 1) being dismissed as "de nombreuses variantes". And so what should have been obvious became harder to see (or perhaps to concede) in the hands of successive connoisseurs: Germain Seligmann, Eugene Thaw, David Carritt. Setting aside such a weight of authority should not be done without examining some of the rather curious aspects of three Perronneau portraits.

* * *

Charles de Baschi, marquis d'Aubais et du Caila, seigneur de Junas, Gavernes, Saint-Christin et autres lieux (Beauvoisin 1686 – Aubais 1777),² belonged to a family which had moved from Umbria in the fourteenth century, acquiring the 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

¹ An extensive file in the Jacques Seligmann archive now in the Smithsonian shows that the pastel was part of Germain Seligman's private collection. A document date 8 June 1949 includes it in a list of works "removed from Mr Germain Seligman's apartment to the Galleries." As Richardson 1979 (published by E. V. Thaw) makes clear, in accordance with Germain Seligman's wishes, at his death in 1978 virtually his entire collection was taken on by Artemis in collacoration with E. V. Thaw & Company and Robert M. Light.

² 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.* 1941, 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 congregation*, Paris, 1948, p. 25n. See also Prosper Falgairolle, *Le Marquis d'Aubais, célèbre érudit du XVIII^e siècle et ses lettres autographes*, Clermont-l'Hérault, 1887; Émile G. Léonard, "La bibliothèque du marquis d'Aubais", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, LXXXIII, 1922, pp. 470–73; "La vieillesse du marquis d'Aubais", *Foi et vie*, 16 December 1922.

(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)³ 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 1685⁴ 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 (fig. 2) and devoted the rest of his life to history and genealogy.





Figure 2

Figure 3

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.⁵

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 innocence forced her to omit any illegitimate offspring. D'Aubais's real enthusiasm was his vast library: fig. 3 shows his exlibris. He started collecting books from the age of seven 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

³ The marquis d'Aubais 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.

⁴ See Th. Dufour, "Communication d'une inscription en l'honneur du marquis d'Aubais", Société d'histoire, 1867.

⁵ 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.

⁶ British Museum, inv. 1979,U.547. The coat of arms shown, d'argent à la fasce de sable, is common to several branches of the family; later versions of the ex-libris change these to the personal arms found also on the Daullé print. Arnoult 2014, p. 211, includes a reference to an article by François Duris, "Ex-libris et portraits", Le Vieux Papier: bulletin de la Société archéologique, bistorique & artistique, July 1907; here, on p. 315 (rather than the pages cited), he refers to Daullé print as an ex-libris. There is no independent engraved portrait, and no d'Aubais item was in the 1903 sale mentioned.

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,⁷ 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 Langudeoc 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 sesions 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 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. 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. Nothing of his relations with Perronneau has survived, but if the unusually precise wording on the Daullé engraving⁸ is to be trusted, Perroneau's portrait must have been executed on the first trip, and finished after the marquis's departure from Paris. Gallier describes the portrait thus:

Sous l'épaisse encolure de l'obésité, on discerne encore la distinction native du descendant des vieilles races. Le front largement dévelopé 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 décellent l'amateur de bonne chère, que nous faisait 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 were 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 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. Fifteen portraits of the marquis and his family were recorded as in the grande salon at Aubais in the inventaire après décès, with a further six family portraits in M. d'Aubais's bedroom. 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 vinyard 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

⁷ Remarks and collections of Thomas Hearne, Oxford, 1885–1921, X, p. 106, 11 March 1728/29.

^{8 &}quot;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).

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.

While it is obvious that the Daullé print is not a direct reproduction of the pastel, a further source of confusion is the Perronneau oil painting (fig. 4) also of a man in a cuirasse, ¹⁰ formerly in the collection of the baron de Mortemart, and, since a sale in Paris (Palais Galliera, 23 March 1968, Lot 73), put forward as also of the marquis d'Aubais. Undated, the composition seems remarkably close to the Daullé engraving, while the face seems to be a hybrid of elements from the Daullé and Laperlier pastel. In earlier editions of this essay, the ambiguity was thought sufficient (combined with Perronneau's remarkable uncertainties about the ages of his sitters, and the very limited evidence of his consistency in obtaining an accurate resemblance, since so few of his sitters were portrayed by other artists) to retain the possibility of the pastel being of d'Aubais. D'Arnoult however treats the matter very straightforwardly: these are unrelated portraits of three different sitters, and the Daullé print is a direct reproduction of the lost Perronneau from the 1746 salon. Even the medium of that portrait has had to be established indirectly: the salon livret lists five, of which three are in pastel; and only recently has the second oil been identified¹¹ to imply that the marquis d'Aubais exhibited in 1746 was a pastel. Curiously, the other oil – that of the painter Gilquin – also belonged of Laurent Laperlier.





Figure 4

Figure 5

One of the unanswered questions is what happened to that pastel immediately after the salon. Was it not delivered to the sitter? In which case, what source was used by Daullé (or Wille, if indeed he was responsible for the engraving as Charles Le Blanc believed)? Might Perronneau have commenced a new oil portrait for d'Aubais, who may have felt the pastel was too flattering, and instructed Perronneau to do the oil "warts and all"? Perhaps this was still in progress when the plate was lettered, and the date of the earlier pastel inserted (is the date indeed of the exeuction, or perhaps a reference to Perronneau's becoming "peintre du roi"?). The idea of the engraving as a straightforward reproduction of a single work is by no means uncomplicated: for example, the engraving by Pierre Fillœul (fig. 5) purporting to be a portrait of d'Aubais after the obscure painter Louis de Fontaine: the print is in fact a reissue of a portrait of Stanisław Leszczyński (after the subject ceased to be of importance) with the lettering changed. It indicates

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ Jeffares, https://neiljeffares.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/perronneau-rectification-derreur/, published several weeks before d'Arnoult's monograph reached the same conclusion: the Hermitage oil painting must be that of the artist's brother, to join Gillequin as the two oils shown in 1746.

that while the marquis d'Aubais enjoyed sufficient celebrity to merit issuing the revised plate, the adequacy of any resemblance was not paramount.

But however hard we try to defend Tourneux's position, the differences with the Daullé print are insuperable. The Copernican simplicity of d'Arnoult's position trumps the multiplication of explanations. The pastel of d'Aubais has disappeared, possibly for ever; the maréchal de camp cannot the librarian; and the subject of the Laperlier pastel is someone quite different.

To begin with, he is surely far younger: perhaps 40–50. More significant is his pose. The engraved d'Aubais and the maréchal de camp in the oil, like the oil of the duc d'Humières, adopt entirely conventional poses: the body at three-quarters, the head turned towards the spectator. The importance of the Laperlier pastel is that he breaks away from this mould: his body is full



Figure 6

on, but his head turns away, and his eyes are lost entirely. This was the first version in Perronneau's œuvre of a strkingly personal model which, as d'Arnoult points out, he would use again and again – but for intimate portraits of artists and friends, among them some of his greatest masterpieces: his great friend Gabriel Huquier (fig. 6) – and his daughter (1747); the "comte de Bastard" (also 1747); the monumental Olivier couple (1748); the architect Chevotet (1751). Then after an interval he returns to the idea – for a portrait of his wife en Aurore (1767).

To be the pioneer for such a bold statement suggests a particular level of connoisseurship and perhaps a degree of mutual trust indicating a level of intimacy with the artist. We have few clues from the available information: but one document, overlooked by d'Arnoult, includes the witnesses to his sister's marriage contract (23 October 1749):

among them "Dame Suzanne Lavery Epouse de Messire Malachi O'Donnely Ecuyer, Lieutenant Colonel du Régiment de dragons de Sa Majesté Le Roy d'Angleterre"; O'Donnelly, or O'Donnell, himself signed the contract too.¹³ This regiment of dragons à pied became the régiment de Rothe (after being Lord Dorrington's); another officer in it was John Towneley, portrayed by Perronneau in 1749. Might O'Donnelly himself be the subject of Laperlier's pastel – or is this Odyssey in danger of becoming a wild goose chase?

D'Arnoult describes the pastel as follows:

Le pastel est une mise en œuvre magistrale des principes d'Oudry sur le coloris: par "comparaison" des tons les uns avec les autres, le peintre obtient des rapports subtils d'intensité et de nuance, des gris bleutés de l'étoffe à l'éclat du métal, des blancs du linge à ceux de la poudre, mettant en valeur la

¹² I am grateful to Dominique d'Arnoult (private communications, April 2007) for drawing these doubts to my attention some years before presenting her case in full in the 2014 monograph.

¹³ Records for this Jacobite regiment of dragons à pied are incomplete; but O'Donnelly was no doubt from the family of Ballydonnelly, a kinsman of several Irish priests, including Patrick, bishop of Dromore and Hugues, a priest at the college des Lombards. He may have been the son of Hugh O'Donnelly, chevalier de Saint-Louis (said to have died at the Battle of the Boyne), and Margaret O'Neill. Suzanne Lavery may well have been descended from Arthur Lavery, valet de chambre of the exiled Stuart queen Maria Clementina Sobieska in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and his wife, née Suzanne Hendrick. Malachie Donnely was married first on 8 February 1697 at Dunkerque, Saint-Éloi to Cornelia (or Helene) MacDaniell, aged 24 (one of the witnesses was "Coll MagDaniell", no doubt her father, and the Jacobite colonel commanding Boyle under Tyrconnel in 1689). On 19.III.1699 in the same parish a son, Artur-Joseph, was baptised to "Loughlin Donnely" [sic] and "Helene Magdaniel", the father being absent. In September 1701 O'Donnelly buried both his wife (witnessed by a John Power) and their two-year-old son Arthur. At an unknown date he was remarried to Suzanne; on 13.III.1714 the daughter of "Malachias Donnelly, officier Hirlandois" and "Súzanne Lavery", Anne Elizabeth, was baptised at Valenciennes, Saint-Géry; the godparents were described as "Barthelemy Bousel capitaine de Dragon" and "Anne Elizabeth Kerchen, de la Rivière".

fraîcheur des tons de la chair. La perruque est dessiné très poudrée. La caractérisation et les finesses du dessin sont l'illustration des recherches de la ressemblance savante.

Neil Jeffares