

# Claude-Léger Sorbet (1716–1788), collectionneur<sup>1</sup>

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**D**IX-HUITIÉMISTES KNOW that the French art world was quite a small place, and the familial relationships between artists were surprisingly extensive. And while there were few if any intermarriages with the haute noblesse, there was an important layer of patronage at the bourgeois level, among professionals: writers, lawyers, scientists, architects and medical people in particular seem not only to have commissioned their portraits, but to have provided the hidden mortar that cemented so many of these relationships. All too often they survive only in footnotes from which some at least deserve to be excavated: their patronage was informed, and their intimacy with the creators often gave their images a special verve.

One such figure is surely Claude-Léger Sorbet (1716–1788), surgeon and art collector. Google will throw up Moitte’s engraving of Cochin’s profile (above), from which you learn that he was “Ancien chirurgien Major de la 1<sup>re</sup> Compagnie des Mousquetaires, Chevalier de l’ordre du Roi.”

Persist and you will discover that he was a witness to the marriage of the sculptor Pigalle’s nephew, and presumably a friend: indeed the footnote in that old collection<sup>2</sup> of actes quotes Cochin’s letter of 28.XI.1785: “Personne ne sait mieux que Sorbet les details de la vie de M. Pigalle.” (The context in the full letter<sup>3</sup> concerns the erroneous story published by La Blancherie concerning the inspiration for Pigalle’s tomb for the maréchal de Saxe which is related back to a dinner in the Abbaye de Saint-Denis attended by Pigalle, abbé Gougenot and Sorbet.) The Pigalle catalogues (Rocheblave 1919; Réau 1950; Gaborit 1985) include his bust of Bernard Sorbet (below right,

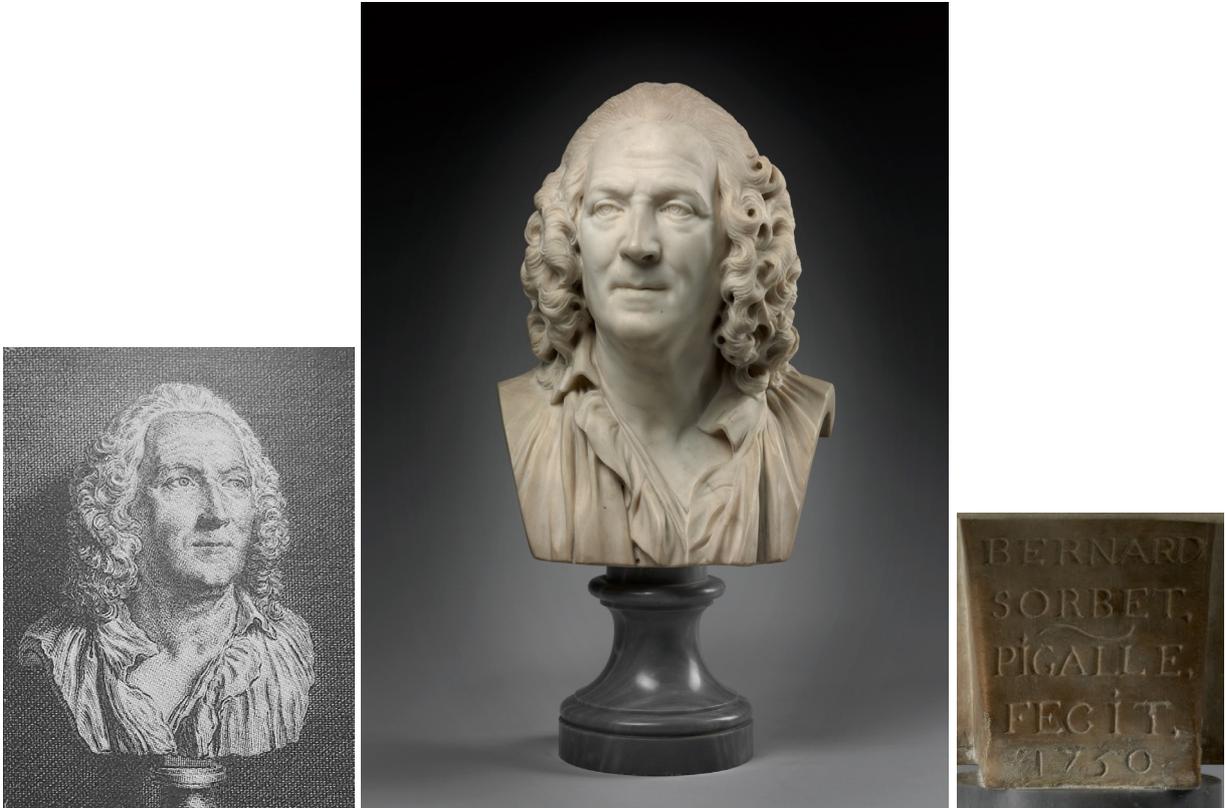
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<sup>1</sup> This essay was first published on this site on 14.VII.2022. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “Claude-Léger Sorbet (1716–1788)”, *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/Sorbet.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole de Montaïglon, “Actes de l’état civil relatifs à...Pigalle...”, *Archives de l’art français*, 1859, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Revue universelle des arts*, I, 1855, pp. 128f.

private collection, sd 1750; together with Moitte's engraving of it, left), without being clear about his precise relationship with Claude-Léger, or indeed with its owner, the descendant Mme Rivière. Rocheblave however does situate Sorbet within the context of the amateurs abbé Gougenot and Aignan-Thomas Desfriches, citing another Cochin letter to the latter, of 17.IX.1769, referring to "notre ami Sorbet."



Pigalle was also a friend of the sculptor Guillaume Coustou who beat him for the 1735 Prix de Rome but generously shared his bursary with Pigalle when they both travelled to Rome, so it is a pleasure to find that Cochin's 1769 medallion of Sorbet (left, from which the print was made) had Coustou as a pendant (right)<sup>4</sup>:



<sup>4</sup>The pair was sold Neuilly, Aguttes, 19.XI.2019, Lot 147, sd C. N. Cochin filius delin 1769 and C. N. Cochin Delin 1769.

My interest in the Sorbet collection arose through my research on the provenance of the La Tour pastel of the abbé Nolle (even the 2022 Munich pastel catalogue gave no provenance before 1904), for which see the catalogue entry in my La Tour catalogue raisonné<sup>5</sup> (J.46.2424); see also the entry for the lost pastel of Marie-Isaïe-Louise-Françoise d'Heckbourg (J.46.18865) who turned out to be the owner rather than Sorbet as I'd assumed. It was this that led to my discovery of the unpublished letter from the curator at Versailles with the contents of the 1866 sale that I discuss below and transcribe in full in the appendix to this essay.

The La Tour pastel did indeed later pass to Anathole-Marie Sorbet, the great-grandson of Claude-Léger Sorbet through the chain I describe in my catalogue entry, and it is also true that the connections between Sorbet and Nolle were close. (Beware however that the Pigalle bust identified by Réau as of Nolle<sup>6</sup> is not of him.)

Incidentally the letter after the 1866 sale (offering the pastel to the Louvre, unsuccessfully), the starting point of my unravelling the Nolle provenance, was signed by a M. "Sorbet de Rouany", Rouany being a fief that had belonged to Claude-Léger Sorbet. It has a slightly curious history. If you look at old almanachs royaux for the company of musketeers to which Sorbet was chirurgien major (the mousquetaires gris), you will note an officer called M. de Rouany. You might assume that Sorbet had married his daughter or something of the kind, but in fact this officer was Jean-François Legagneur du Guay, chevalier de Saint-Louis; as it happens he was related to the Jacques-François Chomel, médecin du roi, intendant des Eaux minérales de Vichy – but not (closely, anyway) to Sorbet. He had in fact sold the fief in 1754 to a Michel-Alexandre Lepaige, écuyer de main de Mme la Dauphine, from whom Sorbet bought it eight years later. Sorbet seems himself not to have used "de Rouany" as a name, although he had received letters of ennoblement in June 1757: confusingly he did not receive his cordon noir until 1773.<sup>7</sup> (Pigalle incidentally got his Saint-Michel in 1769, Cochin in 1757.) The fief was at Itteville and the house that went with it became Sorbet's country retreat. Cochin's 1769 letter to Desfriches referring to "notre ami Sorbet", mentioned above, goes on to note that the Viens were staying with Coustou in Gentilly, "où est Mme Roslin à Itteville petite terre appartenante à notre amy Sorbet à dix lieues de Paris." Mme Roslin, you will recall, did the spectacular pastel of Pigalle, triumphantly wearing his cordon noir, as her morceau de réception (J.63.142), now in the Louvre. You might not know that Suzanne was marraine to a child of Vien, baptised Jean-Marie or Jeanne-Marie (secondary sources<sup>8</sup> differ, and the original register was burnt), at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois on 5.IX.1765; Pigalle was the parrain. Whether the portrait of Sorbet's son Anne-Jacques, attributed to Roslin in the 1866 sale, is connected cannot now be ascertained (the portrait was not known to Gunnar Lundberg in his 1957 Roslin catalogue).

In 1766 Sorbet commissioned an altarpiece for the church of Saint-Germain at Itteville; the artist was Jean-Baptiste Alizard (1737–1817), a first cousin, twice removed of the abbé Nolle.<sup>9</sup> Despite winning the prix de Rome in 1764, Alizard remains a shadowy figure in art history books: a pupil at the Académie royal in 1758, he won prizes in 1762 and 1763, the latter with his *Cléobis et Biton*

<sup>5</sup> All fascicles available online from <http://www.pastellists.com/LaTour.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Bronze bust by Pigalle, c.1760 (*olim* collection Courty; Choppin de Janvry, 9.XII.2002, Lot 22): apart from the physiognomy, the maître des requêtes jabot in place of Nolle's diaconal bands casts doubt on the identification suggested (Louis Réau 1950, pp. 114f, 169, pl. 43; although on p. 180 he wondered if M. Courty's bust was not of the abbé Raynal).

<sup>7</sup> Christian Michel, *Charles-Nicolas Cochin et l'art des Lumières*, Rome, 1993, a work with surprisingly few mentions of Sorbet, lists (p. 622) the Moitte print as sd 1771; if so, that cannot be the state commonly seen which mentions the Saint-Michel.

<sup>8</sup> Genealogical sources all give Jeanne, a daughter of whom there is no other evidence, but Gaetgens & Lugand 1988 think this record is an error for Vien's son Jean-Marie; other sources give his baptism as 1762.

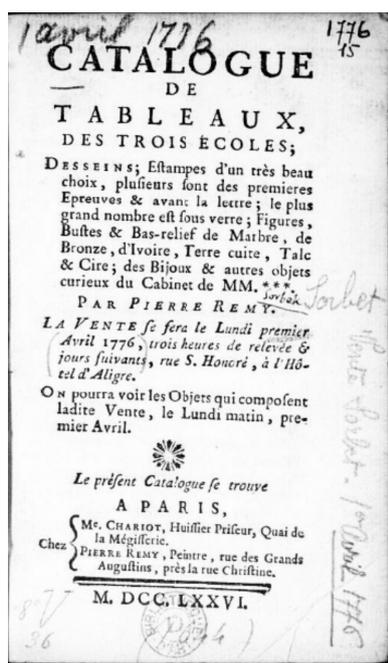
<sup>9</sup> The relationship to Nolle is apparently reported as "neveu à la mode de Bretagne" in an entry in the parish register at Saint-Germain d'Itteville of 24.X.1766 according to the transcription in P.-A. Poulain Motte de Vareille's *Monographie historique de la commune d'Itteville...*, 1874, p. 87f, although the parish register consulted online shows only conventional BMD entries. "Jean-Baptiste Alizard, artiste, ex-administrateur mun." was recorded at 246 rue Thomas, Paris 1<sup>er</sup>, chosen as an elector for the primary assemblies, along with Pajou fils, in 1799.

(ENSBA, inv. PRP 11). Marigny's brevet d'élève peintre à Rome, issued 26.VIII.1766, identified him as a pupil of Deshayes, citing his age (28) and his being "natif de Compiègne".<sup>10</sup> Although hard to find, his acte de décès<sup>11</sup> shows that he died in Paris, 3.V.1817, aged 80 (agreeing with Marigny if his information predated the brevet by a few months); one of the witnesses was Sorbet's grandson Pierre-Joseph Sorbet (see below). Alizard is described with enthusiasm by Boucher's pupil Johann Christian von Mannlich<sup>12</sup> whom he accompanied on their journey to Rome in 1766. Before setting off by river boat, their group first spent a week at Nollet's country house at Monts-sur-Orge on the banks of the Seine: Mannlich describes how the abbé treated his "nephew" as a son, and how a party was thrown by Alizard's "Base, Fräulein Nollet" who looked after the abbé's household. She must have been Mlle d'Hecbourg.<sup>13</sup> A *Massacre des Innocents*, sd 1776, is in Saint-Pierre, Douai. In 1781 Alizard married a Marie Robert; she died in 1801.<sup>14</sup>

The connections between all these figures are further demonstrated in Nollet's will: he left 3000 livres and other items to Alizard, while to Sorbet he left three pictures which he described with precision in his will:

17° Je lègue à M. Sorbet, chirurgien-major de la première compagnie des Mousquetaires, un tableau qui est dans ma salle à manger de Paris, représentant un esclave qui médite, ayant un couteau à la main, plus, un autre tableau représentant un paysage qui est dans ma salle à manger de Mont-sur-Orge, et encore un esquisse d'une descente du croix qui est dans ma chambre à coucher du même endroit.

The three items are found in these locations in the abbé's inventaire après décès, each marked with Sorbet's name in the margin. The "tableau sur toile représentant un Esclave qui médite sur un poignard" was valued at 72 livres. The "tableau représentant des Religieux solitaires, sur un fond de paysage", 12 livres; while "Une descente du croix, dessin au crayon par Alizard sous verre dans son filet de bois doré" at 24 livres. Only the third can be clearly identified in the 1776 sale, as Lot 104 (24 livres, as valued).



Some of you will be aware of the document on which Sorbet's fame as collector has depended – the catalogue of that anonymous sale in 1776 where a large number of pictures, sculptures, objets d'art etc were disposed of. The sale, as Gaborit suggested, was probably in response to financial pressures. Indeed we know that Pigalle lent 13,000 livres to Sorbet by a deed<sup>15</sup> of 1783, on which interest of 650 livres p.a. was due, but evidently not paid, as in Pigalle's will made two years<sup>16</sup> later he forgave Sorbet and his wife the arrears due on his own death and deferred payment until after theirs. Sorbet retired in 1775 with a pension of 3344 livres: 2200 awarded on his retirement, 1000 from his appointment in 1749 and an additional 144 livres as interest on arrears. He does not appear

<sup>10</sup> *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon & Jules Guiffrey, Paris, 1902, XII, no. 5917. He was a grandson of Nollet's cousin Jean Alizard who was commis to the maire of Compiègne when he married there in 1701. His parents were living in L'Isle-Jourdain, Vienne, when his brothers were born, but must have returned to Compiègne by 1737. However his acte de baptême has not yet been located. The relationships are inferred from his will naming his nephew as heir.

<sup>11</sup> Etat civil reconstitué, as "Jean Alizard".

<sup>12</sup> *Ein deutscher Maler und Hofmann. Lebenserinnerungen des Job. Christian v. Mannlich*, ed. Eugen Stollreither, Berlin, 1910, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>13</sup> See the entry for her in my *La Tour* catalogue, at [J.46.18865](#).

<sup>14</sup> The "J. Alizard" responsible for a pastel copy of *La Tour's* portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau recorded in 1850 was surely Julien-Antoine Alizard (1827–1912), who exhibited pastels in the salon de 1850. He does not appear to have been closely related to Jean-Baptiste Alizard.

<sup>15</sup> AN MC/ET/XCH/851, 14.II.1783.

<sup>16</sup> Rochebalve 1919, p. 378.

to have had other sources of wealth, so the extent of the collection demonstrates his commitment.

The sale catalogue is available [online](#), and I don't propose to analyse it in depth – that would be a Ph.D. thesis, not a blog post. Although many of the pictures are lost, there is an illustrated copy<sup>17</sup> of the sale catalogue with Saint-Aubin's tantalising sketches in the Morgan Library. The highest price was achieved by a carved ivory cylinder by Viterbe (820 livres). Among the many treasures were pictures by Watteau (a picture with ten figures known as *Le Docteur*; 600 livres: this is presumably a reduced version of the painting<sup>18</sup> known as *Le Docteur Beloît de la Comédie-Italienne*, formerly with Jullienne); a number by Boucher (the *Femme en chemise au chat*, or *Le Surpris*, 700 livres; there are at least four versions, of which the one in the New Orleans Museum of Art<sup>19</sup> is best known: right), Vernet, Robert and five paintings by Chardin, among them the curious *Huit enfants jouant avec une chèvre* (Rosenberg's Chardin 1979 exh. cat. no. 33 has the most detailed discussion).



One caution<sup>20</sup> is required: the catalogue is described as “du Cabinet de MM. \*\*\*”, and while the main section of lots 1–213 are accepted as being Sorbet's, the Supplément, lots 214–226, may not be his; a further 8 lots, 227–234, seem to display his broad interests.

There are only a handful of pastels, among them versions of Boucher's famous pendants *La Voluptueuse* and *La Dormeuse*, which may well have been originals (“le Propriétaire les tient directement des mains de feu M. Boucher”, according to Remy – but these are in the Supplément, and so do not confirm Sorbet's direct friendship); as well as the curious pastel Lot 46, also said to be by Boucher, described as “Une Femme tenant un papier de musique; elle est vue presque de face; des fleurs ornent sa tête”. I think it's a copy after the Rosalba, quite possibly by Boucher, and it may even have survived as the pastel in Chantilly J.21.032.



Among the works of Pigalle that Sorbet owned was a terracotta *Tête de naïade* (left), sd 1735, his earliest known work, purchased in 1961 by the Skulpturengalerie in Berlin and the subject of Gaborit's 1987 article; it was lot 179 in the 1776 sale.

<sup>17</sup> Sold by Christie's, 18.IV.1767, Lot 45, passing to the Wrightsman collection and since 1997 in the Morgan Library: <http://corsair.themorgan.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=110064>.

<sup>18</sup> Plate 35 from the set reproducing paintings from the collection of Graf Brühl published in Dresden in 1754; originally plate 152 from *L'Œuvre d'Antoine Watteau*, advertised in the *Mercur*, XI.1727; engraved by Caylus, but finished by Joullain. A rather poor copy is in the musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes, also too large to be Sorbet's.

<sup>19</sup> See the entry in the exh. cat. *The Odyssey continues*, New York, Wildenstein, 2006–7, cat. no. 25. Others were that in the Kraemer sale in 1913; one with Robert Simon; and one sold in Paris in 2010. I am grateful to Alastair Laing and Joseph Baillio (private communications, .VII.2022).

<sup>20</sup> I am most grateful to Alastair Laing for drawing this to my attention (private communication, 14.VII.2022).

The idea that many of Sorbet's artworks were commissioned, or at least acquired, directly from the artists is at least partly supported by the infrequency of his name as purchaser in public auctions (*v.* Getty provenance index): he bought ten items in the Cottin and Coytel sales of 1752 and 1753, just after his father's death; but only one other item – a Chardin still-life in the Aved sale of 1766. But he may have bought through agents.<sup>21</sup>



Also curious is Lot 87, a copy of the Moitte print (above) after Boucher of *Vénus sur les eaux*, retouched by Boucher. It was followed with another version of the print retouched by Cochin; and a drawing of the same subject by Liottard [*sic*]. The print itself (Jean-Richard 1430) is dedicated by “Sorbet Ecuyer”, to “Monsieur le Marquis de Jumilhac Lieutenant General des Armées du Roy ... Chevalier de l’Ordre Militaire de S.t Louis”; Jumilhac was capitaine-lieutenant (effectively commanding officer) in the 1<sup>ère</sup> Mousquetaires of which Sorbet was chirurgien major. The print relates to the painting commissioned by comte Tessin, executed in 1740 and sent the following year to Stockholm where it remains today.<sup>22</sup> But that Moitte engraved it (for his *morceau de réception*) years after it had left France evidences Sorbet’s links to the engraver, as well as his access to Boucher’s studio, where some *ricordo* must have been retained. Curiously the 1776 sale did not seem to include Moitte’s own preparatory drawing for the print, although this was exhibited in 1779 at the salon de la Société des beaux-arts de Montpellier, no. 86, “du cabinet de M. Gourgas”.

<sup>21</sup> Subsequently in the Marcille collection, the version Sorbet owned is thought to have been the one in the Louis-Michel Van Loo sale, 14.XII.1772, Lot 80 where it sold for 199/19/- livres to Joullain (was he bidding for Sorbet?). In the Sorbet sale just four years later, it sold for half that amount (100 livres). See also Michel, *op. cit.*, p. 273 for Cochin’s favourable comparison between the Chardin and the Oudry imitations of Duquesnoy, published in 1771: did his enthusiasm prompt Sorbet to buy?

<sup>22</sup> Grate 1994, p. 56 reports Alastair Laing’s communication connecting the dedicator to the retouched proofs in the 1776 sale. This is also discussed in Colin Bailey’s Tessin lecture printed in the *Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum*, XXIII, 2016.

Jean-Louis Gourgas (1738–1819) was a négociant, a Protestant from Geneva, and a founder member of the Société. One wonders if in fact there is some confusion between this sheet and the Liotard – and although there is insufficient evidence it is tempting to speculate that this sheet may indeed have been prepared by Liotard (surely Jean-Michel, as Colin Bailey inferred, rather than his better-known twin) while the painting was still in Paris (Jean-Michel Liotard made two prints after Boucher which Jean-Richard appears to date to 1744), and that it was the source of Moitte’s print rather than being derived from it. The theory requires Jean-Michel Liotard to have been back in Paris in 1740/41, earlier than Roethlisberger & Loche suggest (based on an I think unnecessary inference from the publication of his Venice prints in 1743).<sup>23</sup>

Before turning to the 1866 catalogue I should just remind you that there are as usual iconographical genealogies of the [Nollet](#) and related families on my website, although for reasons explaining the Nollet connection with La Tour’s childhood friend Dachery, Mlle d’Hebourg etc. you also need to follow the broader connections set out under the [Laubry](#) family pedigree. But it may be helpful to extract the Sorbet part. You can see that Bernard was in fact Claude-Léger’s father, not his brother. The genealogy has been constructed from multiple sources, parish registers, notarial minutes etc. too numerous to list individually, and takes the descendance down to more recent generations where the provenance of specific works discussed below requires.

Jean Sorbet ∞ Gabrielle Darrouy

⇒ Bernard Sorbet (1683–1751), maître en chirurgie, chirurgien-major des mousquetaires gris {*Pigalle*} ∞ 1° Paris 1714 Marie-Catherine-Marguerite Leger (–1740); 2° 1743 Louise-Anne-Marguerite Leroy (1704–p.1765) {*Cochin*}

⇒⇒ **Claude-Léger Sorbet**, sgr de Rouany (Paris 15.v.1716–25.iii.1788), chev. Saint-Michel, chirurgien-major des mousquetaires gris {*Cochin; Greuge*} ∞ Wissous 4.iv.1741 Marie-Anne Lecomte (1718–p.1761) {*Greuge; Lecomte*}, fille de René Lecomte & de Marie-Anne-Catherine Laubry *q.v.*

⇒⇒⇒ Anne-Jacques-Léger Sorbet (1745–1822), avocat au parlement {*Roslin?*} ∞ Paris, St Sulpice 1777 Elisabeth-Monique de Bordenave (1758–1787) {*Dugour; Lecomte*}, fille de Toussaint de Bordenave (1728–1782), professeur royal de chirurgie {*Monby*} & d’Anne-Julie Lamoureux de la Genetière (–1770)

⇒⇒⇒⇒ Anne-Sophie (1779–1817), tombeau à Saint-Denis, église des Carmélites

⇒⇒⇒⇒ Pierre-Joseph Sorbet (21.ix.1783–a.1866), négociant à Versailles {*Peuvrier*} ∞ 20.ix.1808 Thérèse-Joséphine Sauvage (–1822)

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Elisabeth-Joséphine (Paris 28.vi.1809–13.vi.1876) {*Peuvrier*} ∞ Versailles 29.ii.1832 Auguste Peuvrier, graveur de médailles

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Amédée-Joseph-Thomas Sorbet (17.ix.1810–), soldat au chasseurs d’Afrique en 1836

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Jules-Louis Sorbet (2.vii.1816–), étudiant en pharmacie en 1836

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Anathole-Marie Sorbet (3.vii.1816–p.1885), libraire ∞ Thémire-Apollonie Liquart (1826–1885)

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Elisabeth-Joséphine-Marie de Sorbet (1848–1919)

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Claude-Louis Sorbet (1784–1872), avoué honoraire à la cour impériale, chevalier de la Légion d’honneur ∞ 1812 Emilie-Thérèse Villetard

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Ernest-Louis-Léger Sorbet (1813–1886)

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Paul-Edouard-Emile Sorbet (1834–1886) ∞ 1866 Marie-Claire-Léonie Le Prince-Duclos (1844–1905)

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Jeanne-Marie-Genève (1868–1952) ∞ 1888 Marie-Théophile-François-Joseph Rivière (1860–1909), notaire à Paris

⇒⇒⇒⇒⇒ Alphonse-Jules-François Sorbet (24.ix.1786–1791)

We can of course take this further apart than most readers’ patience will tolerate. From a document<sup>24</sup> in the Archives nationales, for example, we learn that Bernard Sorbet’s second wife (whom he married aged 60, when the connoisseur was already 27) was the daughter of a half-sister of his first wife. Louise-Anne-Marguerite Leroy was herself 39; she had been baptised in Jouarre, with marraine Anne-Marguerite de Rohan-Soubise (1664–1721), abbesse de Jouarre (she was the

<sup>23</sup> See my article on Jean-Michel Liotard in pastellists.com.

<sup>24</sup> Dispenses de consanguinités (AN Z1° 185<sup>B</sup>, 20.II.1743).

sister of Hercule-Mériadec, 1<sup>er</sup> duc de Rohan-Rohan). Claude-Léger's stepmother would be portrayed by Cochin in 1765.

Claude-Léger Sorbet was born on 15.V.1716, but not baptised until six days later (the delay usually implies that the infant was sickly), at Saint-Séverin, Paris; his parents were then living in the rue de La Harpe. His godparents were Claude de Vienne, premier commis de l'extraordinaire des guerres, rue vieille du Temple, and Catherine Léger, femme de Pierre Simon (1659–1728), bourgeois de Paris, porte Saint-Landry. Simon was a salpêtrier and lieutenant de robe longue à la Capitainerie de Montceaux; his wife, probably Claude's great-aunt, must have died shortly after the baptism, as Simon remarried in Jouarre in 1719.

Claude-Léger qualified as a maître en chirurgie in 1739, sharing the address of his father who had moved to a house immediately opposite the Hôtel des mousquetaires, at the corner of the rue du Bac and the rue de l'Université. Both streets are given by both Sorbets as their address at various dates, suggesting they did not move from this building.

We know next to nothing about his medical career, although it must have extended well beyond amputating musketeers' limbs in battle, as he was consulted on a gynaecological condition in the one recorded case study I found. That concerned a lady from Jouarre (evidently Sorbet had maintained the family's links there, as the consultation took place on his visit to the town), who had already been examined by the surgeon at the abbaye there; as he diagnosed her condition as pregnancy that lasted 35 months we may wonder at the depth of his medical skill.

We should also note that while Claude-Léger inherited his position of chirurgien to the mousquetaires gris from his father (indeed he held the position "en survivance" as early as 1745, when his son was baptised at Saint-Sulpice), he did not inherit his art collection. Bernard Sorbet's 1751 inventaire après décès (presumably required because he had remarried with séparation de biens and a child, Claude-Léger, survived from the first marriage) is a disappointingly modest document with no artworks listed beyond a snuffbox. The Pigalle bust is not listed, suggesting that it had been commissioned by the son.

I have yet to trace an inventaire après décès for Claude-Léger Sorbet, and suspect one may not have been taken as his wife predeceased him and their only child was presumably the sole heir.

We come now to the Greuze pendants, surely the ones now in the musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans.<sup>25</sup> There is however a puzzle. According to the Orléans records, and the entry in the exhibition catalogue in 2012, they are signed and dated "J B Greuze/1749". However Soulié's letter (Appendix) explicitly states that they are both signed and dated "J Greuze 1755". This turns out to be correct (the Sorbet couple were married in 1749 and one wonders if this was the source of the confusion). Not only is this stylistically more credible, it is also consistent with the fact that Greuze's early work is signed with the single initial with which he was baptised – "J Greuze" – before, soon after 1755, restyling<sup>26</sup> himself as "J B Greuze", but it also makes far more sense biographically and in the context of Sorbet's story: for Greuze was taken up and promoted by Pigalle in the run up to the 1755 salon. Shortly after he painted members of the Gougenot family in a very similar vein.

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<sup>25</sup> Huile sur toile, 54x46 ov. Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 999.40.1/2, acqu. 1999 from Galerie Turquin, Paris. They were reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Richesse des musées en région Centre 1988–2011*, 2012, p. 171.

<sup>26</sup> The point is discussed by Edgar Munhall in the introduction to his 1976 exhibition catalogue at the Wadsworth Atheneum, p. 8f.



In a further letter to Desfriches of 13.1.1780, Cochin again mentions Sorbet:

Voici maintenant, mon cher ami, un service que je vous prie de me rendre. Vous connaissez mon ami Sorbet, de l'avoir vu chez Pigalle; or, comme vous le connaissez sûrement, vous l'aimez, car c'est un bon garçon. Un de ses amis aurait quelque tentation d'acquérir la terre de la cour de Ligny en Sologne.



Cochin goes on to request Desfriches's advice on the estate at La Cour de Ligny en Sologne which is up for sale at a suspiciously attractive price; Cochin is sceptical of the veracity of the printed brochure.

De plus, ce futur acquéreur est un aimable garçon qui fera un bon voisin pour les environs. Il est, en quelque sorte, parent avec Sorbet, parce qu'il a épousé la sœur de la femme de Sorbet le fils.

Sorbet fils was of course Anne-Jacques-Léger Sorbet (the lawyer's baptismal entry has not been found, so his parrain is unknown); his wife's sister Edmée-Josèphe de Bordenave was married to Jean-Marie-Louis Menyer de Vallancourt conseiller en la cour des Monnaies de Paris.

Among the other family portraits must be mentioned the portrait of the father of Sorbet's daughter-in-law. Toussaint Bordenave was also a distinguished surgeon, and his successful delivery of the heir to the throne, Louis-François-Joseph-Xavier, in 1781 earned him too the Saint-Michel, although he died the following year. The bust by Mouchy, sd 1782 (left), identified as of him in Soulié's list, must be the bust which was recently

sold in Paris as of an unnamed son of Sorbet, *avocat*: the *jabot*, *petit collet* and other items of dress were the academic robes worn by medical men rather than *avocats* at the time. Louis-Philippe Mouchy (1734–1801) was reçu at the Académie royale in 1768; he was a student of Pigalle and married his niece in 1761. It isn't clear from the date if the bust was made while Bordenave was still alive, although its vitality suggests it must have been.

We cannot judge the success of the posthumous bust of Sorbet's daughter-in-law, née Élisabeth-Monique de Bordenave, by the sculptor Félix Lecomte (1737–1817). Dated 1788 it remains possible that Sorbet commissioned it. Lecomte was a pupil of Falconet and Vassé rather than Pigalle; any relationship with Sorbet's widow, née Marie-Anne Lecomte, is far from obvious. Even less is known of the 1771 profile of Élisabeth-Monique: the artist, Jean-Démosthène Dugourc (1749–1825) was in Rome 1764–66 and may have known Alizard there.

After Sorbet's death no further portraits were commissioned until much later, when Elisabeth-Joséphine Sorbet, sister of the descendant who tried to sell the pastel of Nollet to the Louvre, married the medal sculptor Auguste Peuvrier, and medallions of her father Pierre-Joseph Sorbet and his daughter Mme Peuvrier were struck at the time of that marriage, in Versailles in 1832. Sorbet's immediate son, Anne-Jacques-Léger Sorbet, an *avocat au parlement*, seems to have lived comfortably in Paris until the Revolution (he is recorded as a creditor to the municipalité of Lyon for 13,000 livres in 1790), and died in Itteville. His son Pierre-Joseph was a marchand de draps in Paris, recorded at various addresses of declining prestige, from à l'Abeille d'Or, rue saint-Honoré in 1811 to the rue Quincampoix in 1822 when his wife died, just a few months after his father: her inventaire après décès indicates that he had not yet inherited the family collection. By 1832 when his daughter married, Pierre-Joseph had retired to Versailles, at 16 avenue de Paris. His son, Anathole-Marie, began his career as a bookseller, but decided to set up a business making furniture, under the name A. de Sorbet Rouany & C<sup>ie</sup>, at 277 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Antoine, and his attempts to sell the family collection was motivated by the need to raise capital for the business. Soon after he petitioned for the repeal of a law of 1841 forbidding the sale of new merchandise at auction (designed to protect the interests of retailers); it was debated by the Sénat on 9.VI.1868.

## APPENDIX

*Letter from Endore Soulié, conservateur au musée de Versailles*

A Monsieur le Comte de Nieuwerkerke,  
Sénateur, Surintendant des Beaux-Arts

Palais de Versailles, 15 février 1866

Monsieur le Comte

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser le Catalogue d'une vente qui se fera à Versailles après demain Samedi, avec quelques détails sur les objets qui y sont portés.

- |    |                    |   |
|----|--------------------|---|
| 1  | Pigalle.           | Buste en marbre de Bernard Sorbet, chirurgien. Signé: Pigalle fecit 1750. Avec la gravure par Moitte.   |
| 2  | Mouchy.            | Buste en marbre de Bordenave, de l'académie royale de chirurgie. Signé: Mouchy - 1782.  |
| 3  | Lecomte.           | Buste en marbre d'Elisabeth de Bordenave femme de Jacques de Sorbet, avocat en parlement. Signé: Lecomte fecit 1788.  |
| 4  | Cochin fils.       | Vue du Village des Echelles en Savoie; dessin.  |
| 5  | ditto              | Avanture du passage des Alpes; dessin qui doit être un épisode du Voyage de Cochin en Italie.   |
| 6  | ditto              | Claude de Sorbet, chirurgien, dessin signé: Cochin filius 1768 – avec la gravure de Moitte.   |
| 7  | ditto              | Marguerite Leroy, épouse de Bernard Sorbet, dessin signé: Cochin filius - 1765.   |
| 8  | ditto              | Mr Coustou; dessin signé: Cochin 1769.  |
| 9  | ditto              | Portrait d'un prélat; dessin signé: Cochin 1781.  |
| 10 | Latour             | Portrait au pastel de l'abbé Nollet, de l'Académie des Sciences, avec la gravure de Beauvarlet d'après ce portrait qui n'est pas signé, mais que la gravure indique bien comme étant de Latour. |
| 11 | Greuze             | Claude Léger de Sorbet, chirurgien – buste ovale de grandeur naturelle. Signé: J. Greuze 1755 avec cadre sculpté du temps. Beau portrait, bien conservé.  |
| 12 | Greuze             | Marie Anne Lecomte, femme du precedent. Buste ovale de même grandeur. Signé aussi: J. Greuze 1755. Bordure semblable. Très beau et très agréable portrait, bien conservé.                       |
| 13 | attribué à Poilly? | Paysage ovale, sur bois, Vue d'Italie. Bon.   |
| 14 | attribué à Chardin | Portrait d'homme – très belle ebauche.  |
| 15 | Blarenberghe       | Danse dans un parc; costumes genre Watteau. Signé B. pas très fin.  |
| 16 | attribué à Roslin  | Portrait de Jacques Sorbet, avocat. Assez bon portrait.   |
| 17 | Dugoure            | Elisabeth de Bordenave à l'âge de 13 ans, joli profil à l'aquarelle et au pastel. Signé: J. D. Dugoure – 1771.  |

- 18 Inconnu Miniature sur ivoire. Portrait d'homme. Cordon bleu, manteau doublé d'hermine, perruque poudrée. Paraît être un grand personnage étranger. Bonne et curieuse miniature.
- 19 ditto Portrait de femme, époque Louis XV; jolie miniature largement faite.

Ce qui me paraît le plus important dans cette Vente c'est le portrait de femme par Greuze, que j'ai indiqué sous le n° 12, et le portrait de l'abbé Nollet par Latour (n° 10). Les trois bustes en marbre sont aussi très remarquables et j'ai cru, Monsieur le Comte, devoir vous signaler une vente qui offer plus d'intérêt que celles qui se font ordinairement à Versailles.

J'ai l'honneur d'être avec respect,

Monsieur le Comte,

Votres très dévoué serviteur

Eud. Soulié

VICTOR BART  
COMMISSAIRE PRISEUR  
DE LA LISTE CIVILE  
DE LA PRÉFECTURE  
DE SAINT-GERMAIN  
RUE DE LA POMPE  
VERSAILLES

**VENTE**  
Par suite du décès de M. de SORBET,  
DE  
**BEAUX OBJETS D'ART**  
DU XVIII<sup>e</sup> SIECLE,  
TELS QUE BUSTES EN MARBRE, SIGNÉS PIGALLE, MOUCHY ET LECOMTE,  
TABLEAUX DE GREUZE, LATOUR, CHARDIN, ETC.,  
MINIATURES DONT UNE DE VAN BLARENBERGHE,  
**ET DE MEUBLES, LITERIE,**  
**GLACES, RIDEAUX, TAPIS, VINS VIEUX,**  
BIJOUX ET DIAMANTS,  
**A VERSAILLES, AVENUE DE SAINT-CLOUD, N° 23,**  
Le **SAMEDI 17 FEVRIER 1866**, à midi.

Par le ministère de M<sup>e</sup> BART, commissaire-priseur.

Cette vente comprend : batterie de cuisine, vaisselle et ustensiles divers de ménage et autres objets courants.  
Meubles à tous usages en acajou avec ancienne.  
Matelas et autres objets de literie de maître, grands rideaux, tapis et glaces, cassolletes, etc.  
OBJETS D'ART. — A deux heures, trois beaux bustes d'hommes et de jeune femme, de grandeur naturelle, en marbre blanc, signés Pigalle, 1750, Mouchy, 1782, et Lecomte, 1788.  
Deux dessins signés, et trois portraits, le tout de Cochin fils, également signés.  
Un portrait au pastel de Latour et deux char-

mants portraits d'homme et de femme, de Greuze (signés et datés).  
Un joli tableau de Poilly, avec miniatures du dernier siècle ; — une esquisse de Chardin.  
Un médaillon de Van Blarenberghe, représentant une fête champêtre.  
Enfin, trois belles pendules du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.  
Plus un manuscrit très-ancien, sur velin, orné de miniatures et vignettes rehaussées d'or.  
Vins : 250 bouteilles de vins vieux et liqueurs.  
Argenterie, bijoux, diamants : diverses pièces et médailles en argent, montres et bijoux d'or, couteau à lame d'or et boutons de chemises garnis de brillants.

Au comptant, et six centimes par franc en sus.

**VICTOR BART,**  
Commissaire-priseur de la liste-civile, de la préfecture et du mont-de-piété,  
à Versailles, rue de la Pompe, 12 (*Hôtel des Bains*).

NOTA. — Les principaux objets de la vente pourront être visités le *vendredi 16 février, de une heure à trois heures.*

Versailles. — DUFAYRE, imprimeur, rue de la Paroisse, 21.