

Vigée, *Le marquis de Bonnac*

NEIL JEFFARES



[Louis Vigée](#)

François-Armand d'Usson, marquis de BONNAC (1716–1778)

Pastel, on four sheets of paper, 90.4x.71.8 cm

c.1752

Private collection

PROVENANCE: Paris, Tajan, 26 November 1996, Lot 73 (as “Un architecte”, École française du XVIII^e siècle), reproduced

LITERATURE: Neil Jeffares, “The marquis de Bonnac: a suggested identification of a portrait by Louis Vigée”, in *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 2002, xxv/1, pp. 45–74;¹ Jeffares 2006, p. 540, reproduced; David Fiozzi, *Les Tableaux hollandais: des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles du musée des Augustins: catalogue raisonné*, Toulouse, 2004, p. 93, not reproduced

ICONOGRAPHY: (I) oil on canvas, by Aved, 65x54 cm, oval (M. le comte de Luppé, château d'Asson). Lit.: Wildenstein, *Le Peintre Aved*, Paris, 1922, no. 13 reproduced, with pendant of wife. (II) anonymous drawing, red chalk, previously attributed to Nattier, inscribed “le Marquis de Bonac” (Jean Masson; Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 7–8 May 1923, Lot 158, reproduced). Lit.: Xavier Salmon, *Apollo*, November 1997, p. 10, n. 11. (III) oval pastel, copy by comtesse Louis de Luppé, née Louise-Marie-Aldegonde de Rivière (1844–1897) of an anonymous portrait; with pendant of wife.

(IV) watercolour, by Carmontelle, inscribed “Le marquis d'Usson-Bonac”, 30x16 cm (Chantilly, musée Condé, inv. 108, VIII, no. 21); Gruyer no. 108, not reproduced

GENEALOGY: [Usson de Bonnac](#)

THIS PASTEL IS UNMISTAKABLY the work of Louis Vigée, based on style, technique and colouring. The overall tonality, with its emphasis on so many shades of blue, is familiar Vigée territory, explored for example in the two portraits of gentlemen at Saint-Quentin.² The sitter, apparently an architect, is shown in a loose silk gown with blue and mauve stripes, holding in his left hand the elevation for a building on blue paper, inscribed (in a rather untidy hand, characteristic of Vigée's signatures from other works) “Façade du Côté de la Cour dant[...]”; unfortunately the last letters are indistinct. In his right hand is a chalk-holder, while on the table is a pair of dividers. The interior behind him, in a light greyish blue, reveals pairs of Ionic pilasters reminiscent of those in a similar large portrait which appeared on the London art market in 1991 as an unknown lady by Louis Vigée, signed and dated 1762 (fig. 1).³

It is natural to turn to the *livrets* of the Salons de l'Académie de Saint-Luc to see if any

¹ This article, slightly expanded, is the basis of this essay.

² Reproduced in C. Debric, *Maurice-Quentin de La Tour*, Saint-Quentin, 1991. The older sitter wears, inter alia, the order of the Phoenix, instituted in 1757 by Prince Ernest I of Hohenlohe-Waldenberg-Schillingsfurst as a remembrance for his children, and it remained closed to foreigners until 1770, after Vigée's death. The subject may well be Karl-Albrecht I, Ernest's successor.

³ Paris, Drouot, 17 December 1971, Lot 12; London, Christie's, 16 April 1991, Lot 201, 99.4x78.6 cm.

architects appear. In 1751 Vigée exhibited the portraits of “Mansart Architecte du Roi, amateur” and of “M. Blondelle Architecte”. Jacques Hardouin Mansart, comte de Sagonne (1703–1758) would have been 48 in 1751, and is too old for our sitter. If the picture is of “M. Blondelle Architecte”, it would have to be of Jacques-François Blondel (1705–1774) rather than of his uncle Jean-François Blondel (1683–1756). This identification is apparently reinforced by the



Figure 1

anonymous drawing of Blondel in the Musée Carnavalet.⁴ In 1751, Blondel was active in promoting the private architecture school which he had set up in 1742.⁵ Of Blondel’s actual buildings before 1751 however few examples are known, but it is tempting to imagine the elevation depicted as one of the proofs from Blondel’s seminal *L’Architecture française*, about to appear in 1752. In fact, however, the elevation does not correspond with any of the plates in that work, nor to any other known engraving⁶ by Blondel, which is somewhat surprising for an architect seeking to advance his name. Moreover, the sitter in the pastel (we do not know the date of the Carnavalet drawing) would not seem to be the 46 years of age required.

The following year, at the 1752 Salon of the Académie de Saint-Luc, Vigée exhibited (no. 155) *Le Portrait de M. le Marquis de Bonnac, en Robe de Chambre, tenant un porte-crayon* – a description which corresponds exactly to

the present pastel. We turn in vain however for any additional information from contemporary critics: only one report of the Salon seems to exist, that of Dandré Bardon in the *Journal oeconomique* for 1752,⁷ which, while providing an interesting account of the superiority of La Tour in the field of pastel portraiture, acknowledges the talents of other practitioners; among the works singled out as having best deserved the approval of the public are three of the 16 portraits by “M. Viné”, among them, that of “M. le marquis de Bonnac” [sic]. Unfortunately no further description is provided.

While there is some resemblance with the two known portraits of the marquis de Bonnac, the painting⁸ by Jacques-André-Joseph Aved (1702–1766), which has a pendant⁹ of the marquise, and an anonymous drawing (previously in the collection of Jean Masson as by Nattier),¹⁰ there

⁴ Musée Carnavalet, Inv. D. 2865 (formerly in the collection of the architect Destailleur); reproduced in Allan Braham, *The architecture of the French Enlightenment*, London, 1980, p. 37. Another drawing, of Blondel teaching in 1770, by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (Sedaine du Musée Condé, *Revue de l’Art ancien et moderne* xxxviii, 1920, p. 97), does not assist in identifying the subject.

⁵ L. Hauteceur, *Histoire de l’architecture classique en France*, Paris 1950, iii, p. 476.

⁶ See, for example, the list in M. Roux, *Bibliothèque Nationale, Inventaire du Fonds Français, Graveurs du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1934, iii. Blondel’s main works before the date of this picture were the Porte Saint-Martin (1745); the Archbishop’s palace, Cambrai (1748); work to Blondel’s house, rue de Croissant (1748); and decoration of the gallery, hôtel de Choiseul, rue de Richelieu (1748).

⁷ “Le pastel a paru dans ce Salon avec un avantage distingué; mais, quoique M. de la Tour, de l’Académie royale, ait porté ce genre de peinture à une telle perfection qu’il l’a rendu précieux, cependant, comme il laisse encore derrière lui ceux qui courent la même carrière, et que peu de personnes sont capables d’en mesurer les différentes distances, on peut dire que le règne du pastel, qui devient si fort en vogue, annonce la décadence de la peinture à l’huile. Ce triste présage ne nous empêchera pas de rendre la justice qui est due aux talens des artistes dans ce genre. Ceux qui ont le plus mérité les suffrages du public sont: M. Liotard...; M. Viné, qui a fait les portraits de M. le duc de Nivernois, de M. le marquis de Bonnac et de M. Natoire, directeur de l’Académie de France à Rome; M. Méréle...; M. Glain...; M. Bernard...; M. Alais...”, “Exposition des tableaux de l’Académie de Saint-Luc commencé le 15 mai dans les salles de l’Arsenal”, *Journal oeconomique*, 1752.

⁸ Oil on canvas, 0.65x0.54, reproduced in G. Wildenstein, *Le Peintre Aved: Sa vie et son oeuvre 1702–1766*, Paris, 1922, no. 13. The Aved portraits were with the comte de Luppé at the château d’Ausson in 1922, having descended by inheritance from Bonnac’s son-in-law, the marquis d’Angosse. It is likely that these images owe something to the portraits of Besenval and his wife attributed to Tocqué (Doria, *Louis Tocqué*, Paris, 1929, nos. 20, 21).

⁹ Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, no. 14; oil on canvas, 0.65x0.54; same location.

¹⁰ Sanguine drawing, inscribed “Le Marquis de Bonnac”, in the Masson sale (Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 7–8 May 1923, Lot 158) as by Jean-Marc Nattier; see Xavier Salmon, “The drawings of Jean-Marc Nattier”, in *Apollo*, November 1997, pp. 3–11, n. 11. M. Salmon (private communication) thinks the drawing probably belongs to the 1730s.

are (as we shall see) some confusions about these portraits which need to be resolved. Apart from the question of identification, we also ask why this soldier and diplomat should have appeared in the guise of an architect.

* * *

François-Armand d'Usson, third marquis de Bonnac (1716–1778),¹¹ was born in Constantinople into an ancient house from the Ariège, tracing its nobility back to Bernard d'Alion,¹² baron d'Usson, who appears in a feudal document of 1177. His son, Bernard d'Alion, swore allegiance to Simon de Montfort, but married the Cathar Esclarmonde de Foix, and supported the Cathar rebels; he was burned at the stake at Perpignan in 1258. Noble of the sixteenth generation, François-Armand was grandson of Salomon d'Usson (1638–1698), the friend of the philosopher Pierre Bayle; d'Usson converted from Protestantism at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and was made first marquis de Bonnac as a reward. In 1672, Salomon d'Usson married Esther de Jaussaud, of whom a portrait by Rigaud exists.¹³



Figure 2

Their son Jean-Louis, second marquis de Bonnac (1672–1738, fig. 2), had a distinguished military career before becoming the French ambassador to Sweden, Poland, Spain, Constantinople and Switzerland.¹⁴ When Louis XIV died shortly after Bonnac had been appointed to Constantinople, there was much debate as to whether the nomination should be withdrawn or changed to Berlin. Bonnac married Madeleine-Françoise de Gontaut-Biron (1692–1739), one of numerous children of the duc de Biron,¹⁵ who could afford no dowry but through whose influence (combined with that of Bonnac's uncle) the lucrative appointment to Constantinople was confirmed, not least because the difficult political situation there required immediate attention. Bonnac wrote an account of previous French embassies to Constantinople.¹⁶ The comte de Caylus (1692–1765) travelled there at the same time, collecting antiquities. The journey must have been particularly arduous for the young marquise de Bonnac, who arrived in Constantinople in October 1716, only two months before the birth of her eldest son. Bonnac was particularly impressed by the strange figure of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,¹⁷ wife of the new English ambassador; while their husbands competed to be the first to present

¹¹ *Lieutenant du roi au pays de Foix*, 1738, *capitaine d'infanterie, régiment de Touraine*, 1739; *ordre de Saint-André*, 1739; *lieutenant et commandant du roi pour le comté de Foix, Ariège*, 1739–1756; *gouverneur des châteaux d'Usson et de Quérigut, en Ariège, conseiller, chevalier d'honneur au parlement de Toulouse*, 1739; *colonel du régiment de Bonnac*, 1743–1748; *maréchal des camps et armées, chevalier de Saint-Louis*, before 1747, *ambassadeur du roi auprès des provinces réunies*, 1751–1756; *lieutenant général des armées du roi*, 1762; *gouverneur de Brouage*, 1765. The basic biographical details are set out in Roman d'Amat's article in *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, Paris, 1933–; the military career is listed in Pinard, *Chronologie Historique-Militaire*, Paris, 1760, vi, x. There is an extensive, but inaccurate, genealogical article in La Chesnaye des Bois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse*, Paris, 1872; see also D. de Maynard, *La descendance de Jean-Paul, marquis d'Angosse (1732–1798)*, Paris, 1998.

¹² This title was retained by Bonnac's cousin Pierre-Louis, comte d'Alion (1705–1783), also a diplomat, and was secretary to La Chétardie in St Petersburg.

¹³ In the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas; reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Mastery & Elegance*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 156, fig. 3. According to Rigaud's *Livre de Raison* published by J. Roman, Paris, 1919, Rigaud charged 8 livres in 1706 for the "Ebauché l'habit du portrait de la mère de M^r de Bonnac"; the following year, 500 livres for the portrait of "Mad^e la marquise d'Usson de Bonnac". In 1714, he charged 75 livres for a copy of "M^r Usson" for his nephew; this picture is unknown.

¹⁴ *Mousquetaire*, 1692; *maréchal de camp, capitaine au régiment de dragons de Gevaudan*, 1694, *chevalier de Saint-Louis* 1694, cashiered in 1695 for "an affair of honour", presumably fighting a duel against the king's command, *lieutenant général des armées du roi*, 1696, *commandeur de Saint-Louis* 1699.

¹⁵ The Regent's protégé, Charles-Armand de Gontaut, duc de Biron (1663–1756), of whom there is a portrait attributed to Rigaud in Brussels. François-Armand was no doubt named after his uncle François-Armand, duc de Biron, whose portrait by Largillier is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

¹⁶ C. Schéfer, ed., *Mémoire historique sur l'ambassade de France à Constantinople*, Paris, 1894.

¹⁷ See R. Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Oxford, 1956, p. 69f; I. Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 12, 141f, 147f, 153, 157, 160, 162, 175, 181.

their credentials to the sultan (Bonnac winning by five days, on 13 April 1717), the wives toured the city together, visiting harems and presenting the remarkable sight of “2 young Christian Ambassadors” to the astonished multitude. Lady Mary defied western convention by wearing Turkish costume, and the marquise presumably did the same. Bonnac was happy for his wife to follow the good counsels he saw Lady Mary followed, although he drew the line at her learning Latin. The Bonnacs became godparents to Lady Mary’s daughter, the future Countess of Bute. The well-known image of Lady Mary in Turkish costume with her son¹⁸ is by the French painter Jean-Baptiste Vanmour (1671–1737), who travelled to Constantinople with Bonnac’s predecessor, the marquis de Ferriol, and remained; in 1725, under Bonnac’s recommendation, he was named *peintre ordinaire du Roi en Levant*.¹⁹

Bonnac’s successes included the reconstruction of the ruined dome of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, previously prohibited under Islam. Ahmed III sent Mehmed Efendi to Paris in 1721 in gratitude.²⁰ Bonnac’s mediation between the Turks and the Russians led to the important second treaty of Constantinople, signed in June 1724; the sultan gave Bonnac a sable robe, while the czar made him a member of the order of Saint-André (an order founded in Russia by Peter the Great in 1698), to which the French monarch associated the Saint-Esprit.²¹ He was thus entitled to wear the *cordons bleu* of both orders;²² it is probably the star of the Saint-André which is sewn onto the fur cloak in the anonymous miniature²³ of Jean-Louis.

In 1727, he became ambassador to Switzerland at Soleure, where Jean-Jacques Rousseau visited him in April 1731, together with a Greek “archimandrite”. Bonnac had the sense to separate Rousseau from the Greek impostor and persuade Rousseau to go to Paris. In the meantime, he arranged for him to stay in the room recently occupied by the poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau:

M. de la Martinière, secrétaire d’ambassade, fut en quelque façon chargé de moi. En me conduisant dans la chambre qui m’était destinée, il me dit: Cette chambre a été occupée sous le comte du Luc par un homme célèbre du même nom que vous: il ne tient qu’à vous de le remplacer de toutes manières, et de faire dire un jour, Rousseau premier, Rousseau second. Cette conformité, qu’alors je n’espérais guère, eût moins flatté mes désirs si j’avais pu prévoir à quel prix je l’achèterais un jour.²⁴

The comte du Luc,²⁵ the previous French ambassador, was the great patron of the painter Aved and had introduced him to Jean-Baptiste Rousseau,²⁶ whom Aved portrayed in 1738,

¹⁸ Reproduced in Halsband, *op. cit.*, as by an unknown artist; now in the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 3924). Vanmour also painted her as a single figure, displaying her costume in great detail, in a painting formerly owned by Robert Halsband; see Grundy, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 163.

¹⁹ Two paintings by Van Mour, *L’audience de l’ambassadeur de Bonnac chez le Sultan Ahmed III, le 24 octobre 1724* and *Fête donnée à Constantinople par ordre du Grand Seigneur à Madame la marquise de Bonnac* were sold in Paris, Hôtel Drouot, Gros-Delettrez, 17 December 2001, Lots 385, 386; they descended through Mgr de Bonnac, évêque d’Agen.

²⁰ Portraits of Tchelebi Mehmet Efendi (or Mehemed Effendi) and his son Saïd Efendi (who was to return to Paris in 1742) were made by Coypel; see Lefrançois, *Charles Coypel, peintre du roi*, Paris, 1994, and Galerie Coatalem, *Oeuvres sur papier*, March–April 2000.

²¹ The Saint-André was announced in a letter of 28 March 1724 from the czar to Bonnac; the order was then sent to Bonnac in Constantinople on 10 September and presented on 11 January 1725 by Alexander Ivanovich Rummyantsev, Russia’s envoy to the Porte. The Saint-Esprit is mentioned in Pinard and La Chesnaye des Bois, *op. cit.*: “le Roi lui permit d’accepter & de porter [l’Ordre de St-André]. . . S.M. l’honora aussi d’une Lettre, par laquelle elle l’associe à son ordre du St-Esprit”. It is not clear if this is a reference to the letter of 2 November 1726, in which Louis XV writes “j’ai résolu de vous associer à mon ordre et milice du Saint-Esprit dans la première nomination que j’en feray, et vous pouvez garder cette lettre comme un témoignage assuré de mon volonté” (reproduced Schéfer, *op. cit.*, p. LX); a copy of the letter is in the Chérin file (BnF 201). The actual admission is not recorded in L. de Colleville & F. Saint-Christo, *Les Ordres du Roi*, Paris, n.d., nor in the Almanachs royaux for the period, although promotions were made on 2 February 1728 and on later occasions. Almanachs for later periods record “chevaliers admis et non encore reçus”. It was surely Jean-Louis rather than his son who wrote the *Histoire intéressante, ou, Relation des guerres du Nord et de Hongrie au commencement de ce siècle* published in Hamburg in 1756 with the assistance of Fréron.

²² It is not clear that his son had Louis XV’s permission to wear the Saint-André.

²³ Schéfer, *op. cit.*, frontispiece; the original miniature was in the comte de Luppé’s collection in 1894. It would appear to be an enamel of around 1730, but it is not possible to identify the artist. Another plate in Schéfer reproduces a painting by Martin le jeune of the reception of Bonnac by the sultan in Adrinople in 1717, but the portrait of Bonnac is too small to be of assistance.

²⁴ *Confessions*, livre IV.

²⁵ Charles-François de Vintimille, marquis des Arcs, comte du Luc (1653–1746), brother of the archbishop of Paris. He attended the baptism of Aved’s first child in 1728.

²⁶ Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, I, p. 31, n. 2, citing a letter from Aved to Rousseau of 15 June 1739.

probably at the same time as he portrayed the marquise de Bonnac's brother-in-law, the celebrated "comte-pacha" Claude-Alexandre, comte de Bonneval (1675–1747).²⁷

Jean-Louis de Bonnac returned to Paris in 1736 and died two years later. For Saint-Simon, "[Bonnac] avait de l'esprit", while the duc de Luynes was more concerned with the considerable profits from his embassies to Constantinople and Switzerland, including the numerous presents and personal benefits from various financial irregularities.²⁸

François-Armand, initially known as the marquis d'Usson, was the eldest of at least fifteen siblings of whom a number achieved prominence; the profusion of their courtesy titles has resulted in significant confusions.²⁹ Antoine-Théodore (1719–1761), comte de Bonnac, was a soldier. Pierre-Chrysostome (1724–82) was known as M. de Donnezan, abbé de Bonnac, chevalier de Bonnac and comte d'Usson in the successive periods of his life. It was as the comte d'Usson that he accompanied the comtesse de Boufflers on her famous trip to England in 1763.³⁰ He was soon sent to Poland and afterwards was envoy to Sweden (1774–82), where he did not particularly shine; baron Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd wrote in his *Journal*:³¹ "In the Comte d'Usson one looks in vain for the *politesse*, the courtesy, the wit and fire which otherwise characterize the French nation. Neither his figure nor his way of living are typically French. One would rather believe him to be a sullen Dutch or a travelled German." There is a portrait of him by Carmontelle at Chantilly,³² while one by Duplessis was shown in the 1775 Salon.³³ Antoine-Urs (1728–1778), comte de Donnezan, was also a soldier. Charles-Armand (c.1731–1811), marquis de Donnezan, was known as an amateur actor in the highest social circles, and followed Pierre to Sweden.³⁴ Jean-Louis (1734–1821), Monseigneur de Bonnac, became bishop of Agen, but was known less for his devoutness than for his enthusiasm for the construction of the magnificent episcopal palace at Agen;³⁵ he is also reputed to have been Mme du Barry's first lover, to which association his appointment to Agen was no doubt due. Bonnac's sister Françoise-Agnès (1720–1748) was the Mlle de Bonnac whose bust by Lemoyne appeared in the 1748 Salon.³⁶ Another sister, Louise-Sophie (1721 – after 1761), married in 1748 Marie-Victor-Nicolas Ysoré d'Hervault, marquis de Pleumartin, the notorious brigand of the Poitou,

²⁷ Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, nos. 15; 86; see also i, p. 39, citing Titon du Tillet's description of the poet's stay in Paris.

²⁸ L. de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, ed. Y. Coirault, Paris, 1983–1988, v, p. 812; C.-P. d'Albert, duc de Luynes, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1860–65, II, p. 238f.

²⁹ See R. de Laportalière, "Un Ambassadeur Ariégeois auprès du Roi de Suède Gustave III: Le Comte d'Usson – 1724–1782", in *Bulletin de la Société Ariégeoise Sciences, Lettres et Arts* (1981), pp. 89–110, which contains a family tree; "Monseigneur de Bonnac dernier évêque d'Agen avant la Révolution (1734–1821)", *Bulletin de la Société Ariégeoise Sciences, Lettres et Arts* (1989), pp. 51–74; "Le Marquis d'Usson, député de la noblesse du comté de Foix aux États généraux (1740–1794)", *Bulletin de la Société Ariégeoise Sciences, Lettres et Arts* (1992), pp. 85–111. These three papers contain much of the biographical material about the family summarised in this article. I am greatly indebted to M. de Laportalière for his assistance.

³⁰ It was the comtesse d'Usson who accompanied Mme de Boufflers to Strawberry Hill, and received Walpole's poetic tribute set in type in his printing-press (H. Walpole, *Letters*, ed. W. S. Lewis, New Haven, 1937–83, to Sir George Montagu, 17 May 1763).

³¹ Translation from *Dagboksanteckningar förda vid Gustaf III: hof af friherre Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd*, ed. E. U. Montan, Stockholm, 1877, i, p. 103, quoted in P. Grate, *French Paintings II: Eighteenth Century, Swedish National Art Museums*, Stockholm, 1994, no. 139.

³² See F. A. Gruyer, *Les Portraits de Carmontelle*, Paris, 1902, no. 199, not reproduced. Gruyer dates the picture later than the 1764 inscribed at the bottom of the drawing, on the basis of the sitter's apparent age, and argues that comte d'Usson must have met Carmontelle through the duc d'Orléans before his departure to Sweden.

³³ No. 124; see J. Belleudy, *J. S. Duplessis*, Chartres, 1913, no. 135. A copy at Gripsholm, given by the sitter to the comtesse Löwenhielm, née Augusta von Fersen, is reproduced in Laportalière, *op. cit.* 1981, p. 80, as well as in Grate, *op. cit.*, no. 139; the original may have been that at Ulriksdal in an inventory of 1802–1804.

³⁴ He mixed with the ducs d'Orléans, Choiseul, Guines and Gontaut etc.; he also appears in Dufort de Cheverny's *Mémoires*, Paris, 1909, vol. 1, p. 91, as the lover of Henriette Brissart, as well as in the correspondence of Mme du Deffand (who describes his attendance at Choiseul's dinner for Mme de Luxembourg in her letter to Walpole of 12 February 1777). For Mme de Genlis, he was "homme parfaitement aimable, et le seul *conteur* toujours amusant que j'aie connu" – *Mémoires*, London, 1825, i, p. 308.

³⁵ "Ce prélat peu zélé se signala surtout par les restaurations qu'il fit subir à sa cathédrale", R. d'Amat, *op. cit.* In fact, it was the episcopal palace which he built in 1775, using the architect Étienne Le Roy, a pupil of Soufflot and the director of works at the Louvre, to produce a masterpiece of Louis XVI architecture with an imposing 100 metre façade. The building is now the prefecture in Agen, and was partly destroyed by fire in 1904. Since Le Roy was born in 1737, however, he would have been too young to have produced the elevation in the present pastel. A print of him after Moreau is reproduced in Laportalière, *op. cit.* 1989; and in *Notices et portraits des Députés de 1789, Assemblée nationale*, Paris, 1989.

³⁶ No. 113. The bust was discovered in the château de Fulvy, the property of the Rautlin family, in 1940; it reappeared at the Heim Gallery London, winter exhibition, 1968 (reproduced), where it is erroneously stated that she married M. de Rautlin de La Roy in 1751; in fact, she married the marquis de Vesc (*v. infra*) in 1747 and died the following year.

condemned to death for murder, rape and armed rebellion.³⁷

François-Armand joined the Touraine infantry regiment as ensign in 1733. On the death of his father in 1738, he inherited the position of *lieutenant du roi* in the Foix territories (the modern Ariège *département*) which his father had purchased for 40,000 livres, as well as that of *conseiller-chevalier d'honneur* to the *parlement* of Toulouse, and Catherine the Great conferred on him the Saint-André in memory of his father's services. Within six months, his mother had died, so that the new marquis also became responsible for his many younger brothers and sisters. He married, on 24 February 1740, Marie-Pétronille-Louise Bidé de La Grandville, from a family of the *noblesse de robe* in the *parlement* of Rennes;³⁸ the king and the royal family signed the marriage contract. Presented to the court by her husband's grandmother, the duchesse de Biron, the marquise became *Dame pour accompagner Madame*. A son, Louis-Armand-Mathieu (1740–1794), known as the marquis d'Usson, was baptised on 28 December 1740, ten months after the marriage.³⁹

The month before, in November 1740, the marquis de Bonnac was surprised in “overly gallant” conversation with Marie-Antoinette Petit, a dancer at the Opéra, in her dressing room, an incident which led to a protracted series of anonymous pamphlets.⁴⁰ The crime of the ballerina was judged mainly to have been that she had left the door ajar; but the matter having been publicised by the witness, her seventeen-year-old rival Louise Jacquet, Mlle Petit was unable to appear on stage without both the chorus and the audience subsiding into giggles. She was banished from the Opéra for five years; the official records for 1740 show that she was “remerciée pour avoir manqué de respect au directeur”. Mlle Jacquet continued to appear at the Opéra until 1758, and had the distinction of having her portrait by Liotard exhibited at the Salon de Saint-Luc in 1752.

Bonnac is reputed to be the author of a roman à clef, *Le mandarin Kinchifuu, histoire chinoise; Par M. de *** Gentilhomme de la Chambre du Preste-Jean*,⁴¹ one wonders if he was assisted by his secretary, Charles-Louis de La Fontaine (1718–1754), grandson of the celebrated author. This tiny work is cast as a fairy-tale in which the mandarin, who has led a misspent youth, is shrunk to the size of a figurine and ends up on the mantelpiece of a lady in Paris; its composition, and dedication to his wife Mme de La Grandville, are, one assumes, by way of apology for his affair with Mlle Petit. However, the extent of his reformation may be judged from police reports showing that he lavished gifts on the notorious courtesan Mlle d'Étoile in 1764; the following year, he kept Mlle Jourdalay for 10 louis a month; and turned his attentions shortly afterwards to La Genescourt. His brother, the comte d'Usson, figures even more often in these reports, sharing La d'Étoile, and carrying on the family tradition by presenting a certain Mme Mars with

³⁷ “[I]l a mérité d'avoir la tête tranchée pour plusieurs meurtres et rébellions à justice”, *Journal et mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 9 December 1756; see also Laportalière, *op. cit.* 1989, p. 56.

³⁸ Her father, Julien-Louis Bidé de La Grandville (1688–1760), was *maître des requêtes* from 1715, and became *intendant* of various areas including Lille; a protégé of the comtesse de Toulouse, he became chancellor to the duc d'Orléans in 1748, but was abruptly dismissed. He became *conseiller d'État* in 1750, and subsequently played a major role in the quarrels between the Church, the *parlements* and the king.

³⁹ After a military career (*chevalier de Saint-Louis*, 1771), he became *commissaire du roi* for the Foix territories in 1774. See Laportalière, *op. cit.*, 1992; ; *Notices et portraits des Députés de 1789, Assemblée nationale*, Paris, 1989; E. H. Lemay, *Dictionnaire des Constituants 1789–1791*, Oxford, 1991, p. 910f. A daughter, Louise-Pétronille, was born some 9 years later.

⁴⁰ *Factum pour mademoiselle Petit, danseuse de l'Opéra, révoquée, complaignante au public*, 1740, cited in *Journal de Barbier*, December 1740 (Paris, 1885), p. 242 (“Une autre fille de l'Opéra a été accusée par plusieurs de ses compagnes d'avoir *** dans sa loge, en s'habillant, par le marquis de Bonnac, jeune seigneur. En conséquence, suivant les règles de police de cette congrégation, elle a été chassée de l'Opéra. Pour se justifier dans le public de cette calomnie, elle a fait courir un petit mémoire imprimé fait par une bonne plume, que je n'ai pas pu avoir. Il a été couru, parce qu'à propos de rien, elle fait un parallèle entre les filles d'Opéra et les fermiers généraux. Ils entrent également dans le monde sans bien et en gagnent, les uns d'un coup de plume, les autres ***. Ils sont détestés de ceux aux dépens de qui ils s'enrichissent, les filles sont adorées de ceux me qu'elles ruinent, etc.” See also A. Jullien, *Amours de l'Opéra*, Paris, 1908, pp. 89–150. Another source (*Seconde Requête*, p. 40) reported that “La Petit a été prise en flagrant délit sous le théâtre avec M. de Bonnac.” The pamphlets are thought to have been written by the abbé de La Mare (1708–1742) (Mlle Petit's *Factum*) and Anne-Gabriel Meusbier de Querlon (1702–1780) (Jacquet's *Réponse au factum*). A satirical judgement by the “Commission de Mssieursles Députés du Public” appeared in *Le Perroquet*, 1, 1741, pp. 65–67, ordering “que les accusations respectives d'indécence & de calomnie seront nulles & comme non-avenues, toutes choses demeurantes en état, défendons en outre de parler desdites Parties en bien ni en mal, sauf à les siffler si le cas y échoit.”

⁴¹ Printed at Dieppe, veuve de Lormois, n.d. (Bibliothèque nationale de France Y250437). See Cardinal Georges Grente, *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises, Le XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1960.

“une robe de musulmane bleue pour avoir couché avec elle” in 1772.⁴²

With the outbreak of the war of the Austrian Succession in 1741, the marquis pursued his military career, initially as captain in the Touraine regiment, but forming his own *régiment de Bonnac* in 1743, and serving under the prince de Conti on the Rhine. His brothers, the comte de Bonnac and the comte de Donnezan, served in the duc de Biron’s *régiment du roi*. It was the comte de Stainville (1719–1785), however, that Conti chose to bring news of the taking of Charleroi to Versailles in 1746. Stainville’s resulting promotion to brigadier led to Bonnac complaining to the comte d’Argenson, since the future duc de Choiseul was three years his junior.⁴³ François-Armand lost a leg⁴⁴ (and as a result acquired the soubriquet of “Jambe de Bois”) at the battle of Lawfeldt on 2 July 1747. The French under Maurice de Saxe (and in the presence of Louis XV) expensively defeated the Allied troops led by the Duke of Cumberland: de Saxe’s tactics of cavalry charges against defending artillery left some 14,000 French killed and wounded. Bonnac was immediately recognised as a hero, and promoted to brigadier a few days later, but the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle the following year led to the dissolution of his regiment and slowed the opportunities for his military career. Nevertheless, the marquis became *maréchal de camp* in 1749.

In 1747, the marquis de Bonnac was present at the wedding of his sister, Mlle de Bonnac, to Joseph-Gabriel, marquis de Vesc-Bécone. The marriage contract⁴⁵ was signed by, among others, Louis XV, Marie Leszczyńska, Marie-Josèphe, Mme Adélaïde and the comte d’Argenson); he appears as “très haut et très puissant Seigneur M^{re} François Armand Dusson Chevalier Marquis de Bonnac Seigneur du pays Souverain de Donnezan des villes de Varilheux, Montaudt, et autres places, gouverneur des Châteaux Dusson et de Quevignac Lieutenant Commandant pour le Roy dans la province et Comté de Foix colonel du Regiment de son nom Infanterie, Chevalier d’honneur au parlement de Toulouse Chevalier de l’Ordre royale et militaire de St Louis et de l’Ordre imperial de St André de Russie.”

Back in the Foix territory, Bonnac played a liberal role in relation to the religious persecutions which were then taking place. In this he carried on the family tradition: it is said that his father left him “une belle fortune, de nombreux titres honorifiques, un certain scepticisme, une solide antipathie pour les dévôts et une réelle sympathie pour les n.c. masdaziliens [les Huguenots du Mas d’Azil] parmi lesquels il comptait ses parents.”⁴⁶ In this he came into conflict with Mgr de Lévis-Léran, évêque de Pamiers, with whom Bonnac had carried on a feud as to who should take precedence; the bishop belonged to an older, but less well connected family.

He was named ambassador to Switzerland in October 1751, but in the following month he was instead nominated to The Hague;⁴⁷ both of these appointments, while largely a reward for his military conduct, reflected the family’s influence at court. A commemorative medal was struck in 1751. On 18 March 1752, the genealogist Chérin presented the marquis and his wife with the proofs of nobility required for “les entrées et les carrosses du Roi, qu’ils ont obtenus...”; on 16 April 1752, the marquis received the king’s *brevet* entitling him to wear the appropriate uniform – “...un habit bleu, garni de galons, parement, dentelles d’argent...”

The Vigée pastel was presumably executed at this time, but our portrait shows the subject in an unusual striped silk gown rather than the uniform described in the *brevet*.⁴⁸ Loose informal gowns like it were worn throughout the century by professional men while at work in the mornings before they received visitors.⁴⁹ It is the specific attributes of the elevation, dividers and

⁴² Reports of the police inspector Marais to the king, reprinted in C. Piton, *Paris sous Louis XV*, Paris, 1906, p. 84; 2^e série, 1908, pp. 87, 147, 155.

⁴³ Letter of 8 August 1746, Archives de la Guerre, Archives Historiques, Correspondance, 3140, no. 48.

⁴⁴ Duc de Luynes, *op. cit.*, viii, p. 260.

⁴⁵ AN ET LXV-303, 23.vi.1747. Bonnac’s signature is reproduced below.

⁴⁶ Alice Wemyss, *Les Protestants du Mas-d’Azil: histoire d’une résistance, 1680–1830*, Toulouse, 1961, p. 166f.

⁴⁷ François-Dominique, marquis de Saint-Contest (1701–1754) had been brought back to replace the marquis de Puyzieulx as secretary of state for foreign affairs in September 1751.

⁴⁸ A similar gown appears in an unsigned pastel sold in London, Sotheby’s, 3 July 1989, Lot 127, now attributed to Mme Labille-Guiard (see Colnaghi Drawings, New York 1990, no. 40).

⁴⁹ A. Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in France and England, 1750–1820*, London, 1995, p. 52.

columns which identify this as a portrait of an architect in eighteenth century iconography. This is a tradition dating back at least to Rigaud's influential portraits of Robert de Cotte⁵⁰ and Jules Hardouin Mansart⁵¹ of the 1690s, and developed continuously from these powerful baroque images, with an almost overwhelming level of referential detail, to the intimate portrait of Mme du Barry's favourite architect Ledoux with his daughter⁵² of 1782, attributed to Callet. An outstanding example is Louis-Michel van Loo's 1767 portrait of Jacques-Germain Soufflot, shown at work on an early design for Ste-Geneviève;⁵³ the picture is reminiscent of the artist's famous portrait (of the same year) of Diderot, who is portrayed in the informal gown of the writer at work.⁵⁴ The frequency of portraits of architects at the Salons indicates that these icons were of importance, possibly for winning commissions as much as for the advertisement of social arrival for which they continued to be employed by the aristocracy.

By the early 1750s, it was possible for Perronneau to portray M. Chevotet⁵⁵ with only a portfolio under his arm as an indication of his profession, although Valade equips the architect Jacques Gondoin in his portrait⁵⁶ of 1755 at the Musée Carnavalet with dividers, column and bound folio. For Vigée, it was clearly important to include enough of the stock attributes to leave one in no doubt that the sitter was being shown as an architect, precisely because in fact he was no such thing. Vigée nevertheless manages to do so with some deftness, employing Ionic pilasters found in the grand Salon of the sitter's own home, the château de Bonnac,⁵⁷ rather than the free-standing column of Valade's work. There are few other examples of amateurs shown in the guise of professional artists, if one excludes pictures such as La Tour's pastel of La Pompadour of 1755, whose accomplishments included the engraving of which a proof appears in this extraordinary portrait.⁵⁸ Her brother's portrait⁵⁹ by Roslin, holding a plan of the Louvre colonnade, does not really count, since of course he had commissioned the work as *surintendant des bâtiments du roi*.

In almost all of these portraits, however, the plans refer to a specific building on which the architect wishes to base his claim to immortality.⁶⁰ The fact that the building depicted in the elevation in the present pastel has not yet been identified supports the idea that the portrait is of



Figure 3

⁵⁰ Musée du Louvre, MI 232.

⁵¹ Musée du Louvre, Inv. 7510.

⁵² Musée Carnavalet, Inv. P117; reproduced in *Madame du Barry, De Versailles à Louveciennes*, exhibition catalogue, ed. M.-A. Denis et al., Paris, 1992, p. 10.

⁵³ Musée du Louvre, RF 263.

⁵⁴ Musée du Louvre, RF 1958. Was this the old *robe de chambre* whose loss he bemoaned to Mme Geoffrin in *Regrets sur ma vieille robe de chambre* when she presented him with a new one in 1772?

⁵⁵ Musée des Beaux-Arts, Orléans.

⁵⁶ Musée Carnavalet, Inv. D. 9049; see B. de Montgolfier, *Les Catalogues d'Art et d'Histoire du Musée Carnavalet: III Pastels*, Paris, 1982, no. 83. M.-H. Trope, *Jean Valade: Peintre ordinaire du Roi 1770–1787*, exhibition catalogue, Poitiers, 1993, no. 1, disputes the identification of Gondoin, but I find the medallion relief by Houdon (*École de Chirurgie*, Paris, reproduced Braham, *op. cit.*, p. 137) much more persuasive than the portrait of Chaussard (R3 in Trope).

⁵⁷ R. de Laportalière, private communication. Similar pilasters appear, for example, in the salon of the hôtel de Bourbon-Condé by Brongniart (1781), illustrated in Braham, *op. cit.*, p. 215. Drawings by Nicolas Pineau for the interior of the hôtel de Bonnac are conserved in the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris; one is reproduced in K. Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, New Haven & London, 1995, p. 156; the decoration is quite different from the neoclassical interior depicted in the Vigée pastel.

⁵⁸ Musée du Louvre, Inv. 27.614; see G. Monnier, *Musée du Louvre – Cabinet des Dessins, Pastels du XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, 1972, no. 74; Elise Goodman, *The portraits of Madame de Pompadour*, Berkeley, 2000.

⁵⁹ Musée national du château de Versailles, MV 4447.

⁶⁰ Other examples include Servandoni, with the second version of his winning design for Saint-Sulpice (Versailles; reproduced Braham, *op. cit.*, p. 24).

Bonnac rather than of Blondel or another professional architect. While the elevation is not of the château de Bonnac,⁶¹ which is a low building, it may well relate to the project for a new château at Bonnac which we know the marquis undertook from surviving plans for an ambitious building with three floors and eleven bays; the project itself was abandoned for lack of funds.⁶² Vigée may have simplified the elevation, or worked from preliminary sketches. Alternatively, they could relate to a restoration project for the hôtel de Bonnac in Paris (120 rue de Grenelle) which the marquis had inherited from his father in 1738.⁶³

Bonnac was the dedicatee of Claude Duflos's engraving (fig. 3) of Boucher's 1747 painting *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*,⁶⁴ announced in the *Mercure* in December 1752. The circumstances of the dedication are obscure: Bonnac may have owned the studio replica from which the engraving was made (it was found in the 1769 sale of the wine merchant Prousteau, along with twenty unframed copies of the print, but we do not know if the merchant commissioned the engraving or accepted the items from Bonnac in settlement of a debt). Duflos's littoral subject may have been intended as an oblique reference to Bonnac's fame as a shell collector (see below), but it seems more likely that the dedication arose out of Bonnac's activities as an amateur artist and engraver.⁶⁵ The only extant work is a rather curious engraving (fig. 4) depicting a figure captioned *Casimo Maranessi* [sic].⁶⁶ Cosimo, or Cassimo, Maranesi (born c.1736) was an Italian dancer who appeared with Elizabetta Bugiani in ballets and pantomimes brought on to add interest to rather dull plays at the Comédie française: for Grimm, "[ils] ont de l'expression et une force surprenante dans les jarets... Je ne sait si les sauts et les gargouillades... pourront nous engager à venir voir jouer *Cinna* et *le Misanthrope*."⁶⁷ They were both very young when they first appeared on the Paris stage, around 1752, providing a *terminus post quem* for this work. Bonnac's engraving echoes the suite of 17 plates of *costumes du Théâtre italien*, etched by his father's friend and great amateur, the comte de Caylus, after Charles Coypel, included in Luigi Riccoboni's *Histoire du theatre italien...* (Paris 1728);⁶⁸ but it must be admitted that, despite a contemporary report that Maranesi displayed an "amazing Variety of Comic Gestures", Bonnac's plate lacks the expressive character captured by Coypel.

The marquis de Bonnac arrived in The Hague on 14 December 1752 (a year after his



Figure 4

⁶¹ A photograph appears in D. de Maynard, *op. cit.*

⁶² Archives nationales T 10421², v 332.

⁶³ Bonnac's parents acquired the hôtel in 1709 (see exhibition catalogue, *La Rue de Grenelle*, Paris, Galerie de la SEITA, 1980, p. 30). On 30 August 1752, the marquis settled his accounts for the hôtel with his sister, the marquise de Pleumartin, who had collected the rents until then (R. de Laportalière, private communication). In 1761, Bonnac took legal action against his neighbours, the Couvent des Carmélites, over a "fosse d'aisance" (AN MC LVII 446, 22 July 1761).

⁶⁴ See A. Laing, *François Boucher 1703–1770*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 1986, pp. 238, 240; P. Jean-Richard, *L'Oeuvre gravé de François Boucher*, Paris, 1978, nos. 923, 924.

⁶⁵ A marquis de Bonnac is listed in É. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, et graveurs*, Paris, 1976, as an amateur draughtsman and engraver at the beginning of the eighteenth century; according to Heineken, *Dictionnaire des Artistes dont nous avons des Estampes*, Leipzig, 1789, III, the engraver was the French ambassador to the court of St Petersburg (which neither father nor son was); Saur, *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, Munich, 1996–, concludes that this is Jean-Louis, the father, while R. de Laportalière, private communication, attributes the work to the son. The date of Maranesi's appearance in Paris confirms the son as author.

⁶⁶ M. Roux, *op. cit.*, "Casimo Maranessi", en pied, debout, de profil à gauche. En bas, au dessus du trait carré: "Le M^{rs} de Bonnac f. & inv.", 0.165x0.075, Inv. No. Ad. 5 rés. Amateurs."

⁶⁷ F. M. Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, 15 July 1753. See also P. H. Highfill et al., *A biographical dictionary of actors... in London, 1660–1800*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1984.

⁶⁸ Reproduced in T. Lefrançois, *Charles Coypel*, Paris, 1994, pp. 437ff.

nomination, a rather lengthy delay even by the leisurely standards of the day), with his wife and brother, Pierre-Chrysostome, chevalier de Bonnac, later comte d'Usson.⁶⁹ The marquise had it seems made a full recovery from the mastectomy carried out the previous year by Sauverin-François Morand (1697–1773), surgeon at les Invalides.⁷⁰ According to a contemporary letter, she had attended the opera the night before the operation. After three years Mme de Bonnac returned to France in 1755, where she sold property to finance her son's entry into the regiment of *cheval-léger de la garde du roi*. She continued to exercise her influence at Court on her son's behalf.

Bonnac arrived in The Hague in the period between the end of the war of the Austrian succession and the start of the Seven Years' War, a period which might have been expected to present ample scope for the skilled diplomat. The marquis did not however show the same talents as his father. D'Argenson cites Bonnac as a poor choice to replace M. de Saint-Contest "dans un circonstance où le plus habile homme ne le serait pas trop".⁷¹ His instructions were essentially the same as his predecessor's, his main task being to attempt to conclude a perpetual peace treaty between France and Holland analogous to that which had existed with Switzerland for 250 years. There was considerable Dutch enthusiasm for this, many tired of the inflexible approach from Vienna, and Bonnac and his wife received a warm welcome on their arrival. Bonnac's proposal to Louis XV to extend trade concessions to the Dutch was however vetoed by Mme de Pompadour, who disliked them. The result was that the negotiations on the peace treaty made no progress.

The marquis showed commendable loyalty in advancing his brother at every opportunity, but took matters a little far in the strange affair of his brother's marriage to a rich Dutch widow, Mme Munter.⁷² The chevalier went to Versailles in September 1754 to obtain the king's permission to marry this Protestant who would bring him an income of 100,000 florins; but the brothers had omitted to obtain the necessary permission from the bride's father, M. van de Poll, which led to a major diplomatic incident. The marquis proceeded to implement a rash plan to force M. van de Poll's hand: he installed Mme Munter at his wife's country house near The Hague, published the banns and sent off his brother to ask for the consent. M. van de Poll was

furious at the idea of his daughter marrying this penniless French Catholic; he evaded the chevalier, and tried in vain to reason with his daughter, threatening her with excommunication. He then persuaded the Dutch authorities to pass a retrospective act forbidding marriages between different religions.

The marquis responded by claiming that Louis XV's consent made Mme Munter French and thus under his protection, and he proceeded to order the Jesuit priests in the Embassy to carry out the marriage ceremony. Alerted by the Dutch ambassador in Paris and by his own Jesuit confessor, Louis XV was furious; he reprimanded Bonnac severely, ordering him to extricate himself from the affair and to leave it to the Dutch courts to resolve; he never wanted to hear more of this story, which impugned the character, dignity and



Figure 5

⁶⁹ Reported in the *Nouvelles d'Amsterdam*, 19 December 1752. For Bonnac's activities in Holland, see P. Coquelle, Henri Welschinger, *L'Alliance franco-hollandaise contre l'Angleterre, 1735–1788: d'après les documents inédits des archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères*, Paris, 1902, pp. 48–60.

⁷⁰ Jan Hendrik Berg, *Divided existence and complex society*, New York, 1974, pp. 222, 294.

⁷¹ R.-L. de Voyer, marquis d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires d'Argenson*, ed. E. J. B. Rathery, Paris, 1859–1867, vii, p. 181.

⁷² Margarethe Cornelia van de Poll (1726–1793), widow of Cornelis Munter (1716–1750), figures subsequently in the correspondence of Belle de Zuylen (Mme de Charrière), who also contemplated a mixed marriage. The d'Usson couple are also mentioned in the correspondence of Mme du Deffand and Walpole as well as in memoirs such as those of Fersen and Mme de Genlis.

credit of his representative. The marquis obeyed contritely, and matters were sufficiently patched up that the wedding took place on 25 November 1754. The French gossip-mongers of course had a field day, describing the trick played by the “coq gaullois” on the “grasse volaille hollandaise” (she was generally reported as pretty despite her weight, as may be judged from the 1750 portrait of her by Jean Fournier, fig. 5).

An even more bizarre sequel was the annulment of the marriage by the Pope one year later, on procedural grounds; the marriage then had to be repeated. The king had withdrawn his consent, and refused to recognise Mme Munter. The marquis had lost all credibility by his bungling of the affair. He wrote to Louis XV requesting transfer to Constantinople, but received no reply.

Bonnac endeavoured to maintain his links with Mme de Pompadour, aware of her influence at court. He is mentioned briefly in a letter⁷³ from Voltaire in 1753 to a Jean Rigail, asking the latter to transmit a packet to Bonnac for him to give to M. de La Reynière for Mme de Pompadour. Bonnac wrote directly to the favourite sending his condolences on the death of her daughter, acknowledged in an unpublished letter written from Compiègne, 13 July 1754.⁷⁴ The following year he sent her an exotic bird, a “cardinal des Indes”, with a supply of grain, to keep her in mind of him, and to offer his assistance in suppressing the flood of Dutch libels against Mme de Pompadour or her mother. In this however he was ineffective. One example concerned a certain Tancred de Hauteville, author of certain anti-French pamphlets, who had fled from French justice to Maastricht. Bonnac tried to have him extradited but the result was that the Dutch magistrates not only released him but ordered that he be paid compensation of 16,000 livres for wrongful arrest.

A study published by the vicomtesse de Croÿ in 1923⁷⁵ has uncovered the labyrinthine complexities of another case, which arose out of the publication of an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Mellota Ossonpi, histoire africaine*, in which Mme de Pompadour’s mother, Mme Poisson, née de la Motte, is accused of being the mother of an illegitimate daughter by Prestre Jean. (It is unlikely that there was any conscious link with Bonnac’s own pamphlet.) The work, published in Amsterdam, was discovered by the président de Lévis around 1750; he drew Mme de Pompadour’s attention to the work, and, although her mother had died five years previously, she was determined to have the author found and punished. This proved to be difficult; and it was not until a different pamphlet appeared that any progress was made. *La Voix des Persécutés*, published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1753, was a more innocent publication, but its author, La Roche-Gérault, was accused of murder and rape – although whether these charges were well founded is doubtful. Bonnac seized all copies of the pamphlet, and had the culprit arrested in August 1753, writing in a letter “L’exemple que l’on fait sur les auteurs, est si nouveau dans ce pays-ci que je ne doute pas que M. Vandepoole ne soit blâmé”. It was now necessary to persuade the Dutch authorities to extradite La Roche-Gérault, and this required some delicacy as the Dutch valued free speech. Saint-Contest wrote from Versailles to Bonnac: “Vous pouvez dire aux MM. d’Amsterdam que si par l’événement du procès qui luy sera fait, il se trouve convaincu de ce crime capital (assassinat), Sa Majesté lui fera grâce de la vie en leur considération”. The extradition vote was carried by



Figure 6

⁷³ Voltaire, *Correspondance*, ed. Théodore Besterman, Paris, 1975, III, p. 882.

⁷⁴ No doubt Bonnac’s connection with Mme de Pompadour arose through his uncle Charles-Antoine-Armand, duc de Gontaud (1708–1800), who was closely allied also with Choiseul.

⁷⁵ Geneviève Aclocque, ... vicomtesse de Croÿ, *Un Épisode sur la presse clandestine au temps de Madame de Pompadour*, Paris, 1923.

a majority, and La Roche-Gérault delivered to Bonnac in October, who wrote to Mme de Pompadour “Il faut espérer que cet exemple fera peur aux autres écrivains de cette espèce.”⁷⁶ Mme de Pompadour responded gratefully: “Le sieur de Saint-Sauveur ne m’avoit pas laissé ignorer, Monsieur, tous les soins que vous vous donniez pour découvrir l’auteur de cet infâme libelle. Le respect que les Etats-Généraux ont marqué au Roy en vous remettant le coupable, est en effet un exemple très rare et qui vous fait beaucoup d’honneur. J’espère qu’il arrêtera un peu les plumes empoisonnées des habitans de ce pays.”⁷⁷ La Roche-Gérault admitted being the author of the *La Voix des Persécutés*, but vigorously denied any involvement with *Mellota Ossonpi*. However, Lévis managed to track down Marie-Charlotte Huguenin, La Roche-Gérault’s “fiancée” who by now was pregnant and desparate. Under direction from the French magistrates, she wrote to La Roche-Gérault implicating him in the earlier libel, and the authorities were convinced of his guilt. He languished in prison until 1784 and died in obscurity.

By early 1755, Louis XV’s exasperation with Bonnac was unconcealed as war with England loomed. In a letter of 13 February 1755 he wrote: “il est fort singulier que les ministres de la République continuent à garder le silence avec vous sur les armements qu’on prépare en France et en Angleterre. Vous devez pénétrer la pensée et les sentiments des États généraux sur la position des affaires générales. Vous devez être l’ami du ministre de Prusse, qu’il ne puisse que se louer des attentions et des égards que lui marquerez.” Bonnac’s subsequent memorandum misread the situation, believing that Holland could remain neutral. He found a needy deputy from Groningen whom he thought would inform him of the deliberations of the Estates General; he required 4000 florins and a gold box per annum, to which the King reluctantly agreed, reminding Bonnac not to trust a man who had betrayed his own side.

Versailles’s distrust in the marquis could no longer be ignored. He was required to provide an extended report on the Dutch situation and his relations with the government, which was submitted on 3 September 1755. Louis XV’s response was to put in train a measure which had been planned for some time: a plenipotentiary minister, comte d’Affry, was appointed to handle all substantive matters, while the marquis remained ambassador in name only. Louis-Auguste-Augustin d’Affry (1713–1793) officially succeeded Bonnac as ambassador in 1759. He was subsequently *administrateur général des Suisses et Grisons* at Versailles, and was the only Swiss recipient of the Saint-Esprit (1784). He was an honorary member of the royal academy of architecture, as well as that of painting (see fig. 6).⁷⁸

Following the appointment of d’Affry, and after the recall of the French ambassador to London, the duc de Mirepoix, Bonnac was given the additional duty⁷⁹ of recruiting French correspondants (i.e. spies) in London, for which he was provided with a budget of 180,000 livres per annum. His first attempt was with a man called Maubert, whom he believed to be a Swiss refugee, and whom he agreed to pay £200 a year. In fact Maubert was a defrocked priest from Normandie who had spent four years in prison in Saxony and was only released on the intervention of the Vatican. Although he returned to holy orders and travelled to Rome, he shortly fled to Switzerland and soon after to The Hague. With Bonnac’s support, he established himself in London society under the name of Botteman. He then devised a scheme intended to break the Bank of England by printing forged bank notes. Bonnac supported the plan, but Louis XV reacted with horror and indignation at such an underhand and ungentlemanly strategem. Bonnac’s other recruits were no more successful: a certain Robinson, paid 20 guineas a month, was arrested and imprisoned, while a physician called Hensey sold the same information to the Austrian and Spanish ambassadors, while the letters to Bonnac, who retained Hensey, were intercepted.

⁷⁶ AN KK1400.

⁷⁷ *L’amateur d’autographes*, v, 1866, p. 247; *Correspondance de Madame de Pompadour*, éd. Poulet-Malassis, Paris, 1878. The letter is also cited in Goncourt, *Madame de Pompadour*, p. 171, but the context is not explained in any of these sources.

⁷⁸ A portrait by Bapst is in the château de Penthes.

⁷⁹ P. Coquelle, “L’espionnage en Angleterre pendant la guerre de sept ans, d’après des documents inédits”, *Revue d’histoire diplomatique*, XIV, 1900, pp. 508–33; see also J. W. Thompson & S. K. Padover, *Secret diplomacy: a record of espionage and double-dealing: 1500–1815*, London, 1937, pp. 158ff.

Ignoring the growing crisis, he continued to enjoy an active social life. His *jambe de bois* did not prevent him from dancing, according to his letter of 17 December 1754: “Le comte Golovskin [sic], ambassadeur de Russie, donna hier une grande fête à l’occasion de la naissance du prince de Russie; et ce que vous surprendra, c’est que j’ai dansé le premier menuet avec Mme de Golovskin, n’ayant pu résister aux instances réitérées qui m’ont été faites”; Louis had the grace to congratulate him on his bravery in doing so. Meanwhile Bonnac grumbled about his position, his pay being inadequate for the lifestyle he wished to maintain, and he even applied to the government at Schlestadt for compensation for his war wound.

Bonnac figures only incidentally in the leading memoirs of the day; he was mentioned briefly in a letter⁸⁰ by d’Argenson and in a letter from Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann of 25 January 1756 as having passed on a memorandum (effectively declaring war) from Rouillé, the French foreign minister, to the British representative Colonel Yorke. The duc de Luynes reported more positively on Bonnac’s performance: on 15 November 1755, the king awarded him a pension of 6000 livres;⁸¹ while, on 3 November 1756, Bonnac was received favourably by the king at Fontainebleau as having successfully carried out his missions in Holland and in particular for his dealings with Charles, duc de Lorraine concerning the latter’s passage over the Austrian Netherlands.⁸² In fact, he had been abruptly recalled. Although there was talk of an appointment to Poland, nothing came of this.

It is likely that the marquis’s financial problems were greatly exacerbated by his dismissal: his important collection of sea-shells was sold in 672 lots at an auction in Paris on 21 November 1757; the catalogue was decorated with a frontispice engraved after a drawing by Augustin de Saint-Aubin (fig. 7).⁸³ The marquis built up his collection in The Hague, since many shells came from the East Indies through Holland. Gersaint, the patron of Boucher and Watteau, visited Holland in the first half of the eighteenth century and noted the great interest in shell collecting; he subsequently conducted many auctions in Paris. The connoisseurs Dezallier d’Argenville, La Live de Jully, d’Angivilliers and Calonne were other noted shell collectors of the period. Bonnac himself made drawings of his shells; one is preserved in the *album amicorum* of Arnout Vosmaer.⁸⁴ The Bonnac collection included a large, white Pourpre, with bands of close-fitting small black plates, known as the “Radis à feuillages noirs” (*Muricanthus radix* Gmelin), and an important specimen, more than two inches long, of *Epitonium scalare*, the Precious Wentletrap, formerly in the collection of Johan Bernard de la Faille, the most famous Dutch collector. These sold for the enormous sums of 1700 and 1611 livres respectively – prices matching those for



Figure 7

⁸⁰ D’Argenson, *op. cit.*, ix; H. Walpole, *op. cit.*, xx, p. 524; see also Cardinal de Bernis, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1986, p. 159.

⁸¹ Duc de Luynes, *op. cit.*, XIII, p. 111.

⁸² Duc de Luynes, *op. cit.*, xv, p. 267.

⁸³ The shells came from the “cabinet d’un personne d’un grand nom; le rang distingué qu’elle occupait dans un País où se trouvent les plus beaux Cabinets dans ce genre, & où on rassemble les Coquilles de toutes les Parties du Monde, l’avoit mis à portée de satisfaire son goût.” *Catalogue raisonné d’une collection considérable de Coquilles rares et choisies, du Cabinet de M. Le ***, par les sieurs Helle & Remy*, Paris, 1757. The Saint-Aubin drawing appeared in the 1925 Saint-Aubin exhibition, no. 149, and the engraving subsequently graced the duc de Sully, Galloys, Mme de Bure and Savalette de Buchelay sales. See also d’Argenville, *L’histoire naturelle éclaircie dans une de ses parties principales, la conchyliologie*, Paris, 1757, pp. 147–48; E. Lamy, “Note sur une collection conchyliologique du XVIII^e siècle”, *Journal de conchyliologie*, LXXIII/2, pp. 68–70; S. P. Dance, *Rare Shells*, London, 1969, p. 87; S. P. Dance, *Shell Collecting*, London, 1966, pp. 66, 89f, 201ff, 228, 230; S. P. Dance, *Natural History Auctions 1700–1972*, ed. J. M. Chalmers-Hunt, London, 1976; Hendrik Engel’s *Alphabetical List of Dutch Zoological Cabinets and Menageries*, 1986, p. 38; J. C., Cailliez, *Notice sur les collections malacologiques du Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Genève*, Geneva, 1995, p. 12; Bettina Dietz, “Mobile objects: the space of shells in eighteenth-century Europe”, *British journal for the history of science*, XXXIX/3, September 2006, pp. 363–82.

⁸⁴ Dutch private collection, on deposit with the Rijksprentenkabinet (see Madeleine Pinault Sørensen, “Élie-Catherine Fréron et le dessin”, in *Élie Fréron, polémiste et critique d’art*, Rennes, 2001, pp. 227–61).

paintings by Van Dyck or Poussin,⁸⁵ and the whole collection fetched 22,500 livres. The sale was organised by Helle and Remy, but it was they rather than Bonnac who profited from the spectacular result (exceeding even that of the abbé de Fleury sale the previous year) as they had bought the collection from Bonnac for a mere 6000 livres. Among the purchasers were La Live de July and Mme la présidente de Bandeville, née Marie-Anne-Catherine Bigot de Graveron (– 1787), the leading female collector of the era, whose collection was praised by d’Argenville. Acting through intermediaries, she bought the Pourpre and Wentletrap together with five other specimens. Her collection was later acquired by the abbé Gruel and subsequently by the baron Benjamin Delessert (1773–1847) of Lyon, whose collection of over 150,000 specimens was ultimately presented to the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle, Geneva. The prices for shells dropped sharply after the Bonnac sale, which may be said to have marked the end of an era in shell collecting.

Bonnac was not yet completely ruined financially. He was able to replace a cup at the luxury jewellers Lazare Duvaux (“une tasse couverte pour assortir une soucoupe”, 10 livres) in September 1758⁸⁶ – expenditure on an altogether different scale to his former reputation: “le marquis de Bonnac, qui, recherchant d’ailleurs toutes les choses rares, cultivoit plus spécialement l’histoire naturelle”.⁸⁷

In 1756, the marquis ceded to his brother, the comte de Donnezan, his position of *lieutenant du roi* in the Foix territories (Donnezan subsequently transmitted it to the marquis’s son in 1771). At the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War in 1756, the *régiment de Bonnac* was reactivated, but under the duc de Brissac, to whom the marquis had transferred charge. He presumably returned to his military career, nevertheless, since he is recorded as having been promoted to *lieutenant général* on 25 July 1762, just as the Seven Years’ War was ending. Finally, in 1765, at the instigation of the duc de Choiseul (in whose regiment his brothers had fought), he became *gouverneur* of Brouage, the principal salt-mining area. Choiseul himself fell from grace in 1770.⁸⁸

By 1768, Bonnac was completely ruined; harassed by his creditors, he sold his Paris hôtel⁸⁹ and retired to end his days in solitude and bitterness at the château de Bonnac, near Pamiers. Here he returned to his interests in art, becoming in 1773 an *associé honoraire* of the Académie de Toulouse. At the Toulouse Salon that year, he presented (no. 8) several architectural drawings and a “modèle d’un Pont de bois, en assemblage, par parties détachées inventé par M. le Marquis de Bonnac”, together with (no. 114) his *morceau de réception*, a pastel (fig. 8) entitled “Le Plaisir du Sage, la Lecture et la Retraite”. According to M. Pin’s presentation to the Académie on 27 December 1772, this picture shows “un vieillard assis sur un rocher occupé d’un lecture; il le crut copié d’après Rimbrant ou d’après Benedette.”⁹⁰ The pastel has recently been rediscovered in Toulouse, in the musée des Augustins, where it has been listed as



Figure 8

⁸⁵ Dietz, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

⁸⁶ *Livre-journal de Lazare Duvaux, marchand-bijoutier, 1748–1758*, ed. J. Courajod, Paris, 1873, II, p. 374, no. 3216.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I, xli.

⁸⁸ Dufort de Cheverny, *op. cit.*, found the marquis de Donnezan among Choiseul’s house party at Chanteloup where he was exiled.

⁸⁹ The valuation carried out in 1768 prior to the auction is preserved in the Archives nationales and summarised in the exhibition catalogue, *La Rue de Grenelle, op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁹⁰ See R. Mesuret, *Les Expositions de l’Académie royale de Toulouse*, Toulouse, 1972; Pierre Sanchez, *Dictionnaire des artistes exposant dans les salons...*, Dijon, 2004, I, p. 208. In this respect Toulouse was ahead of Paris: it was not until 1787 that works by honoraires were exhibited at the Académie royale (see Catherine Guichard, *Les Amateurs d’art à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 2008, p. 50).

anonymous in every catalogue of the collection.⁹¹ It is a copy of a painting in the Louvre formerly thought to be by Rembrandt but now attributed to Adrien Van Ostade.⁹² The *Avertissement* to the *livret* of the 1773 Salon de Toulouse (where the pastel appeared as no. 114) was extravagant in its praise of its new patron:

L'exposition présente cette année, un de ces traits éclatans de l'amour des Arts, dont la mémoire doit se conserver dans leurs fastes. La haute naissance, les titres, le rang et les grades les plus éminents se voient entrelacés, s'il est permis de s'exprimer ainsi, avec les crayons et les pinceaux, pour élever un Trophée aux Muses et au Dieu du Goût. M. le Marquis de Bonnac qui réunit au génie et aux connoissances les plus étendues dans les Sciences, le talent de dessiner et de peindre, a désiré d'être reçu parmi les Citoyens qui cultivent en société le Dessin et la Peinture. Son Tableau de réception est digne des plus grands Maîtres. La même main qui a soutenu dans les champs de Fontenoi l'honneur de la Nation, est assuré ses intérêts dans les Négociations de la Haye, trace des modèles dans le plus beau et le plus difficile des Arts.

Bonnac also donated a prize, awarded to the artist Lapenne for an academy after Vassé's *L'Amitié et la Franchise*, no. 3 in the Salon de Toulouse of 1773.⁹³

How much help did Bonnac have in preparing his *morceau de réception*? Intriguingly, the year before the present pastel was exhibited, Louis Vigée showed (Salon de Saint-Luc 1751, no. 126) a lost pastel, *Un vieux Hermite, lisant dans un livre*. Was this another version of the same picture; did Vigée teach Bonnac?

Despite his financial position, Bonnac nevertheless managed to marry his daughter Louise-Pétronille to Jean-Paul, marquis d'Angosse (1732–1798), *maréchal des camps et armées du roi, Gouverneur du pays d'Armagnac* at Bonnac in 1768. The marquis did not attend the wedding of his son, the marquis d'Usson, to Mlle du Romain⁹⁴ in 1771; it was hosted by the groom's uncles, the comte de Donnezan and the bishop of Agen, with his mother and grandmother, Mme Bidé de la Grandville.⁹⁵ The marquise de Bonnac ceded her title of *Dame pour accompagner Madame* to her daughter-in-law. The princesse de Guéménée, who had succeeded Mme de Marsan as *gouvernante des Enfants de France*, was however keen to replace the old circle who she thought were responsible “d'avoir formé la princesse Élisabeth pour la pauvreté du couvent, au lieu de l'avoir élevée pour occuper un des trônes de l'Europe”. Maurepas advised the marquise d'Usson to seek an audience with the queen, but before this could take place, Madame Élisabeth pressed her into disclosing Mme de Guéménée's scheme, which did not meet with royal approval; revealing the young lady-in-waiting as her source, Madame Élisabeth allowed Mme de Guéménée to attack the marquise d'Usson as a “...personne dangereuse et intrigante, voulant détourner la princesse de l'obéissance qu'elle devait au Roi...”, with the inevitable consequence that the unfortunate marquise was immediately expelled from court. Terrified of the reaction of her family, the marquise stayed with her mother in Paris without daring to confess the crime to her husband or



Figure 9

⁹¹ Catalogue Roschach, no. 629. See also David Fiozzi, *Les Tableaux hollandais: des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles du musée des Augustins: catalogue raisonné*, Toulouse, 2004, pp. 92ff.

⁹² Louvre RF1518. Prince de Conti 1777; abbé Renouard 1780; Helfinger. Don Albert Kaempfen 1904. See Marcel Nicolle, “Les récentes acquisitions du musée du Louvre”, *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, xvii, 1905, pp. 355–58 reproduced One notes also the similarity with Rembrandt's *Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem*, now in the Rijksmuseum. Duncan Bull (private communication, 2003) has suggested that it may relate to a 1768 print by G. F. Schmidt, or indeed that Pin's suggestion of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1616–1670) may be correct.

⁹³ See Sanchez, *Dictionnaire...*, pp. 973, 1664.

⁹⁴ Née Constance-Paule-Flore-Émilie-Gabrielle Le Vicomte du Romain (1750–1790), the daughter of the marquis de Coetanfao, she appears, about three years before her marriage to the marquis d'Usson, in another Carmontelle drawing, that of *La comtesse de Romain, la comtesse de Polignac et Mlle du Romain* (Chantilly; Gruyer, *op. cit.*, no. 322 reproduced; a version appeared in New York, Sotheby's, 26 January 2000, Lot 91 reproduced); she is the girl playing the harpsichord. Her mother had wanted her to marry M. Castéra, who jilted her, forfeiting the diamond engagement present.

⁹⁵ Bibliothèque nationale de France, cabinet des manuscrits, pièces originales, 2904.

mother-in-law, who were at the château de Bonnac, looking after the marquis de Bonnac, who lay gravely ill. The marquis d'Usson forgave his wife, but the marquise de Bonnac never pardoned the mistake which destroyed her painstaking work to restore the reputation and credit of the family at court.

The marquis d'Usson had no greater financial acumen than his father; he resorted to a series of unsuccessful business enterprises, including a plan to find gold in the Ariège, and later a tin-mine. François-Armand became enthusiastic about the project, mentioning it in all his letters, but it failed completely and was abandoned at his death (significant gold deposits have subsequently been found at Bonnac). The third marquis's funeral in December 1778 was ironically presided over by his old adversary Mgr de Lévis-Léran, bishop of Pamiers. An oration given by one of the protestants he had supported, the pastor Jean-Paul Rosselloty, praised "toi qui dans le champ de Mars as cueilli les lauriers de la main de la Victoire, illustre chef qui nous commande à tous...à jamais cette patrie s'honore d'avoir été le berceau de la race qui te fit naître."⁹⁶

The marquis de Bonnac left numerous debts, so that the title was disclaimed; the château de Bonnac was sold, and the contents were moved to the château d'Usson, but were later destroyed.⁹⁷ Four years after the marquis's death his widow and her children inherited 1,440,000 livres from the Bidé family.⁹⁸ During the Revolution, the marquise de Bonnac was a refugee in the hôtel des Incurables, where she was joined by her younger granddaughter Élisabeth; they left for Tournai, in Belgium, in 1791 but returned to France to rejoin her son; the marquise died in Paris in March 1794. The marquis d'Usson, who had been deputy for the nobility to the États généraux in 1789, was arrested as a royalist, imprisoned at Saint-Lazare (with André Chénier, the poet, who had served in his regiment), and guillotined on 26 July 1794, the day before Robespierre. His elder daughter Clotilde, who married the vicomte de Preissac, emigrated to England, but died on arrival.

* * *



Figures 10, 11

⁹⁶ *Sermons*, cited Wemyss, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁹⁷ The château d'Usson, which Bernard d'Alion used to shelter Cathars in the thirteenth century (and where subsequently la reine Margot was exiled for 20 years), had been restored by Louis XIV to Salomon d'Usson in 1711; François-Armand had become its *gouverneur* on the death of Jean-Louis; it was again confiscated and destroyed during the Revolution (Laportalière, *op. cit.* 1992, p. 108). The collection included numerous letters from La Fontaine and Rousseau.

⁹⁸ Jean Meyer, *La Noblesse bretonne au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1966, p. 988.



Figure 12



Figure 13

To provide a reference point for the Vigée image, we turn to the known portraits of the marquis de Bonnac, including the Masson drawing (fig. 9), and the painting by Aved showing the sitter wearing the *cordons bleus* either of the Saint-Esprit or of the Saint-André (fig. 10). Its pendant (fig. 11) depicts the marquise *en costume levantin*. The pictures are dated (in old writing on the backs) “Peint par Aved, 1740”, which causes some difficulties.⁹⁹ Georges Wildenstein argues that the marquise’s costume was likely to have been inspired by the visit to Paris of Saïd Pasha, the Turkish ambassador, whom Aved depicted in 1742,¹⁰⁰ and he therefore dates the pictures to 1742 or later. There was of course no need for the marquise to wait till then for costume inspiration: she is following the Lady Mary Wortley Montagu fashion that fascinated her father-in-law during his embassy. However the real difficulty with the date on the paintings is that the sitters cannot I believe be as young as 24 and 19. Do they belong to the period of Aved’s trip to The Hague in 1753 where Bonnac was ambassador (when Bonnac was 37, his wife 32)?

It is tempting to consider another possibility – that the 1740 date refers to the execution of replicas of images created a few years earlier, so that the Aved portraits are in fact of the second marquis Jean-Louis and his wife.¹⁰¹ We have seen Aved’s connection with Soleure, and the face of his sitter is very similar to the miniature of Jean-Louis. Although the Masson drawing is clearly of the same sitter as Aved’s, it provides no help as it is undated and the inscription is ambiguous. What about the Aved portrait of the marquise – is this of the third marquise, née Marie-Pétronille-Louise Bidé de La Grandville (1721–1794) as labelled, or of her mother-in-law, née Madeleine-Françoise de Gontaut-Biron (1692–1739)? When presented at court in 1740, the third marquise was found “petite, mais assez bien, quoique moins jolie qu’annoncée”, and, as we have noted above, it is difficult to see the subject of the Aved painting as 19 years old. However the subject bears a striking resemblance to a *Dame en turque* in the pastel by Louis Vigée, and it is tempting to assume the subjects are the same. But the Vigée lady, clearly dated 1762, cannot easily be the 41 years that even the third marquise would have been, and this similarity may simply be coincidence.¹⁰²

Another point of reference suggesting that the Aved pendants are of the second marquis and his wife is provided by a portrait supposedly of “Madeleine-Françoise, marquise de

⁹⁹ Their oval format is unusual in Aved’s oeuvre, and the frames (with their labels identifying the sitters as “François-Armand d’Usson, M^s de Bonnac/Lieut^{nt} Général Ambassadeur à La Haye” and “Louise Pétronille Bidé de La Grandville/M^{se} de Bonnac”) do not appear to me to be original.

¹⁰⁰ The Aved painting (Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, no. 92) is now at Versailles (MV 3716); La Tour also depicted him in the same year. The Coppel portrait from his previous visit with his father is referred to above.

¹⁰¹ There is at least one other pair of replicas in the family. The later labels are then easily explained: when reframing the paintings, a textbook was consulted to establish the details of the marquis and marquise in 1740.

¹⁰² Of course one cannot exclude the possibility of a daughter. One looks in vain for genetic similarities to identify Aved’s marquise as a member of either the Gontaut or the Bidé families, or indeed to see if her features are repeated in those of the third marquis’s siblings.

Pleumartin”, traditionally attributed to Aved.¹⁰³ Here identified as by Pierre Gobert (1662–1744), the erroneous Christian names¹⁰⁴ and latest possible date make it more likely that this is a portrait of Mme de Pleumartin’s mother, Madeleine-Françoise, marquise de Bonnac. She could be Aved’s subject, but the resemblance is inconclusive. Tempting though it is to see the Aved sitters as the second marquis and his wife, the real difficulty is that, whatever the date of execution, the sitters’ ages do not appear to differ by 20 years.

Two pastel portraits of François-Armand and his wife (figs. 12, 13) have survived in later copies in the family collection.¹⁰⁵ These small oval pastels are copies by the comtesse Louis de Luppé (the wife of Bonnac’s great-grandson)¹⁰⁶ after unknown originals which are now lost. Despite an uncertain time interval, the marquise is quite unlike Aved’s subject. Her husband is shown in a blue *robe de chambre* similar to Vigée’s sitter,¹⁰⁷ and his features share distinctive elements with each of the Aved, Masson and Vigée portraits. However, while the Aved portrait has dark hair and eyes, the Luppé and Vigée sitters share fair colouring.

We turn now to one further puzzle: the watercolour (fig. 14)¹⁰⁸ by Louis Carrogis (1717–1806), known as Carmontelle, showing “Le Marquis d’Usson-Bonac” standing in profile, wearing the *habit rouge* which was the uniform of the duc d’Orléans’s guests at Saint-Cloud, over a white waistcoat embroidered with yellow flowers. While Gruyer (no doubt following the meticulous notes of Richard de Lédans at Chantilly) did not hesitate to identify the sitter as François-Armand, M. de Laportalière assumed it must be his son, the marquis d’Usson (none of the other courtesy titles in the family can easily be confused with the inscription); the absence of a wooden leg would seem conclusive. But, although Carmontelle’s merits are hardly in the forensic line, there are two problems with this: firstly, the man shown is clearly not young (Carmontelle’s image appears to belong to the same period as those of Bonnac’s brother and daughter-in-law, i.e. around 1768; Mathieu was born in 1740), and secondly, the 1789 profile¹⁰⁹ of Louis-Armand-Mathieu, marquis d’Usson by Labadye is evidently quite different. Although the marquis d’Usson was known in the Orléans circle, Bonnac’s connections were also extensive: for example, his maternal grandfather was *premier gentilhomme* to the duke, while his father-in-law was his *chancelier*. I think we must trust Lédans’s identification of this mature figure; and we must either credit the contemporary skill in prosthetics or the licence of Carmontelle’s art to have deprived *Jambe-de-bois* of his attribute.

* * *

Although it is tempting to challenge the identification of the Aved sitters as of the third marquis and his wife (to bypass the difficulties with the Carmontelle and Luppé images, if not with the

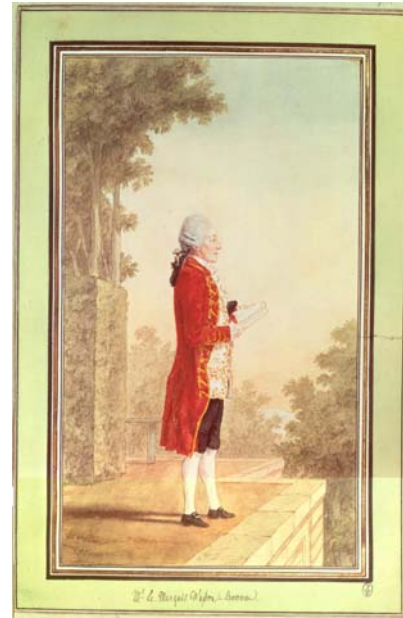


Figure 14

¹⁰³ Château de Pleumartin; see Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, no. 74. Wildenstein suggested that this portrait might be by Largillier or his school, but Xavier Salmon (private communication) attributes the painting to Gobert.

¹⁰⁴ Possibly following La Chesnaye des Bois, *op. cit.*; the correct names are found in a lease, AN MC LXV 333, 2 January 1761.

¹⁰⁵ I am most grateful to the comtesse Christian de Maynard for drawing these to my attention.

¹⁰⁶ Née Louise-Marie-Aldegonde de Rivière (1844–1897), her husband, comte Louis de Luppé (1837–1912), was the son of Louise-Charlotte-Armandine (1809–1853), daughter of Bonnac’s daughter Louise-Pétronille, marquise d’Angosse (D. de Maynard, *op. cit.*).

¹⁰⁷ The absence of a *porte-crayon* means that the original image cannot be Vigée’s 1752 portrait.

¹⁰⁸ “Le marquis d’Usson-Bonac”, watercolour, 0.30x0.16 (Chantilly, musée Condé, inv. 108, VIII, no. 21); Gruyer, *op. cit.*, no. 108, not reproduced; Laportalière, *op. cit.* 1992, reproduced.

¹⁰⁹ Black chalk portrait medallion by Charles-Toussaint Labadye, inscribed “Louis Mathieu Armand Dusson, député de la Senechaussée de Pamiers, Commissaire du Roy aux Etats de la Province de Foix”; made at the time of the États généraux in 1789 (Bibliothèque nationale de France).

Vigée), there is a danger in insisting on precise likenesses between faces portrayed by different artists in different media. Notwithstanding the difficulties, I think we must retain the four existing portraits of François-Armand: the Aved painting, the Masson drawing, the comtesse de Luppé's copy and the Carmontelle. And so, despite differences between the Vigée portrait and the Aved, the former's proximity to the other images provides reasonable support for the identification. Superficially, Vigée's portrait of this nobleman, soldier, diplomat, author, artist and collector – not perhaps a polymath, given his lack of success in many of these areas, but an amateur in every sense of the word – captures perfectly the spirit and grace of the dix-huitième. Vigée shows us the debonair young man who seduced Mlle Petit; he gives no indication of the soldier or the diplomat. In depicting the marquis de Bonnac as an architect, Vigée has developed the tradition of Largillierre and Nattier in their historiated representations of sitters with the attributes of deities; he has merely adapted the mythology of Parnassus to the Enlightenment, where artists, sculptors and above all architects had become the modern gods. Ironically, in portraying the marquis as an impostor, Vigée has (of course unconsciously) underlined the true nature of his sitter – and the lottery of art history has unexpectedly encrypted the result.

Neil Jeffares