

Pougin de Saint-Aubin, *La duchesse de Saulx-Tavannes*

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La duchesse de Saulx-Tavannes, née Marie-Éléonore-Eugénie de Lévis-Châteaumorand (1739–1793)

Pastel on paper, 56.5x45.5 cm [Zoomify](#)

Private collection

EXHIBITED: Salon de Toulouse 1770, no. 36 (“Portrait en Pastel en Bergère, par le même [St Aubin]”)

PROVENANCE: Louis-Marie-François-Gaston, marquis de Lévis-Léran et de Mirepoix (1724–1800), beau-frère du sujet, 1770; by descent within the Lévis-Châteaumorand family, at Châteaumorand –1864; château de Léran –1983; Pau, Espace Bourbon, 22 November 2008

LITERATURE: Robert Mesuret, *Les Expositions de l'Académie royale de Toulouse de 1751 à 1791*, Toulouse, 1972, p. 214; Pierre Sanchez, *Dictionnaire des artistes exposant dans les salons...*, Dijon, 2004, III, p. 1513; Perronneau 2017, fig. 42c; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [J.6.168](#)

GENEALOGY: [Lévis](#); [Saulx de Tavannes](#)

MARIE-ELEONORE-EUGENIE de Lévis-Châteaumorand (1739–1793), later duchesse de Saulx-Tavannes (although she never used the title, being known after her marriage as the comtesse de Tavannes), is shown *en bergère* or *en jardinière*. Formerly with a less successful pendant of her elder sister, the marquise de Clermont-Montoison, née Anne-Charlotte de Lévis-Châteaumorand, marquise de Valromey (c.1737–1772), *en vestale* (fig. 1), it came to the market in 2008 having previously been exhibited at some stage (according to incomplete printed labels) as by Ducreux, an attribution which was evidently impossible.¹ The location, in Pau, suggested the possible authorship of a member of the Loir family. But the discovery of Pougin’s signature, as “Saint-Aubin”, on the backs of two extremely similar historiated pastels of young sisters, the Lemoyne de Belle-Isle girls in the Fondation Zoubov, Geneva (figs. 2, 3, respectively Blanche and Geneviève), presenting such close parallels in composition and technique, provides us with a convincing attribution for this charming pastel.² The Lemoyne sisters are dated 1762: judging by the ages of the Châteaumorand girls (born c.1737 and 1739, and apparently only several years older), they must date to c.1755 – around the time of the elder sister’s marriage in 1755.³ Éléonore’s brother-in-law, the vicomte de Tavannes, married a Feydeau de Brou, whose aunt was the subject of a Pougin portrait exhibited in 1753. A number of other Pougin portraits listed in the livrets of the Académie de Saint-Luc showed similarly historiated subjects, such as “Mme de C*** en jardinière” (1752).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Technically the pastel is notable for its remarkable range of colours, including, in the bouquet on the left, a stable green pigment which is unusual for this period.

Éléonore and her sister were two of the four children, all daughters, of Charles-François

¹ The attribution to Ducreux was probably suggested by the fact that his work list included, in 1772, a “Mme de Tavane” [*sic*, perhaps Éléonore], and, in 1775, a “marquise de Clermont” (perhaps the other sitter, but probably not since Charlotte died in 1772). But the girls are young enough that the pastels cannot have been made much after their marriages (1755 and 1759), far earlier than the Ducreux entries.

² Frédéric Elsig, *Une question de goût: la collection Zoubov à Genève*, 2012, nos. 35/36. Apart from the general composition and handling, minute details such as the catchlight on the inner caruncle and the vertical brown shadow marking out the edge of mouth are shared by Blanche and Éléonore. A subsequent discovery was the pastel of the comtesse de Mory, exhibited at the Salon de Saint-Luc in 1753, and which depicts the sitter as a vestal with a brazier positioned exactly as in fig. 1.

³ Her depiction as a vestal virgin might logically establish 1755 as a *terminus ante quem* for these portraits, but one should not overconstrue their significance. Drouais portrayed an elderly Mme de Pompadour in this guise (but see Humphrey Wine’s entry in the exhibition catalogue, *Madame de Pompadour et les arts*, 2002, no. 37). Aileen Ribeiro (private communication, 9 July 2013) considers that the hairstyle is closer to 1759, but examples such as Valade’s Mme Pinson de Méneville (1751) indicate how early this style can be found.

de Lévis, marquis de Lévis-Châteaumorand (1698–1751), colonel du régiment de Charlus, cavalerie, and Philiberte Languet de Rochefort, from a wealthy family of less exalted social status than her husband, her father being a conseiller in the parlement at Dijon. All four daughters married well: as the historian of the family put it, “L’éclat de ces titres et de ces alliances suffirait à montrer en quelle estime était tenue la maison de Châteaumorand.”⁴ In 1751, the eldest, Catherine-Agnès (1736–1783), married her cousin Louis-Marie-François-Gaston, marquis de Lévis-Léran et de Mirepoix (1724–1800), thus keeping in the family the Châteaumorand property (fig. 4) which had once been occupied by their ancestor, Honoré d’Urfé, author of the novel *L’Astrée* (1607). The marquis de Mirepoix was heir to the duc de Mirepoix’s estates, but not the dukedom.



Figure 4

Mirepoix and his wife were portrayed by Perronneau in two pastels shown at the Salon de Toulouse in 1758. In 1770 he again lent a number of pastels to the Salon de Toulouse: one of the Perronneau portraits, two by Antoine Renou, several more by Saint-Michel, and two portraits, identified simply as “au vestale” and “en bergère” by “St Aubin” – an artist whose identity was uncertain

when the 2006 edition of the *Dictionary of pastellists* appeared, but who can now be identified as Claude Pougin de Saint-Aubin. Mesuret 1972 conflated the vestale with another pastel by “Saint-Aubin”, whom Mesuret improbably identified as Augustin (he was 16 at the time), lent to the Salon de Toulouse of 1752 by Antoine-Joseph de Niquet (1701–1794), premier président au parlement de Toulouse. This is surely a different picture, although quite probably by Pougin too, and possibly the inspiration for the commission by a different toulousain family. Almost certainly this came from the girls’ mother, the marquise de Lévis-Châteaumorand, née Philiberte de Languet de Robelin de Rochefort, soon after she was widowed; and when she died, in 1756, they passed with her estate to her eldest child, the marquise de Mirepoix.

The youngest of the sisters, Marie-Odette (1740–1766), married (in 1760) another distant relative, the marquis de Lignerac, later duc de Caylus, a cousin and heir of the comte de Caylus, a figure at the heart of the art world who was quite possibly consulted on the selection of artist for these family portraits.

The second daughter, Anne-Charlotte (c.1737–1772), who was marquise de Valromeys in her own right, married, in 1755, Louis-Claude de Clermont, marquis de Montoisson (1722–1765), brigadier des armées du roi, a member of a branch of the Clermont-Tonnerre family (to which his first wife belonged), and the subject of a pastel by Allais. Their daughter was to marry the marquis de Guiche, whose mother, Mademoiselle de Verneuil, was a legitimated daughter of the prince de Condé.

While beyond the éclat of titles and alliances the lives of her sisters (as indeed of many women in eighteenth century portraiture) remain obscure, Éléonore’s was more colourful. She was born on 12 February 1739. At the age of 13, she was woken one night at Châteaumorand by a piercing cry from her mother’s bedroom. She hid in terror; in the morning nothing was found but Mme de Lévis’s handkerchief and one of her slippers on the staircase, and, at the bottom of the stairs, the marks of an intense fire. The official explanation was that she was the victim of

⁴ Odon-Claude Reure, *Histoire du château et des seigneurs de Châteaumorand*, 1888, p. 62.

spontaneous combustion.⁵



Figure 5

On 15 April 1759, Éléonore married Charles-François-Casimir de Saulx, comte de Tavannes, marquis d'Arc-sur-Tille, comte de Beaumont et Champagne, baron d'Aunay (1739–1792), bringing a dowry of 400,000 livres. Tavannes had been a mousquetaire in 1753, enseigne in an infantry regiment in 1756 and capitaine in the Vienne cavalry regiment two years later, when he was made *menin* to the dauphin Louis. His portrait by Carmontelle is at Chantilly (fig. 5). Subsequently he became *maréchal des camps et armées du roi* (1780), *lieutenant-général en Bourgogne*, *gouverneur du château du Taureau, en Bretagne*. In 1779 he was appointed *chevalier d'honneur de Marie-Antoinette*. Elevation to the rank of *commandeur* of the order of the *Saint-Esprit* followed in 1784 (he had been a *chevalier* since 1764) and, two years later, he was made a *brevet duc*. He died as an *émigré* in 1792. At the time of her marriage, Éléonore was appointed *dame du palais de la reine Marie Leszczyńska* in succession to her cousin, the *duchesse de Mirepoix*. She was awarded the *entrée des carrosses du roi* on 18 May 1761. Her first son died in infancy; two

daughters followed, Gabrielle, who became *vicomtesse de Castellane*, and Catherine, *comtesse de Kercado*, while her son Charles, born in 1769, would inherit his father's title of *brevet duc* and later become *duc héréditaire* and *pair de France* during the *Restauration*. Following the death of Marie Leszczyńska, Éléonore was appointed *dame pour accompagner la dauphine* (1770). She was separated from her husband in 1772 after an "aventure" which was the subject of much gossip, as Mme du Deffand confirmed in a letter to the *duchesse de Choiseul* of 5 April 1772: she was to receive 22,000 livres⁶ but would not be allowed to keep her children. The news astonished Mme du Deffand, who believed her to be "une dame *honestâ*" (she continued to receive her at her salon, where Walpole encountered her, sending her tea from London in 1775). Mme de Choiseul replied (14 April) admonishing her correspondent for assuming that she already knew the details, which she had only been able partly to glean from the baron de Talleyrand; but she too provides only a cryptic allusion: "A propose de madame de Tavannes, il est pourtant très-vrai que le vicomte Adolphe [du Barry] épouse mademoiselle de Lévis⁷ et qu'il est premier écuyer: quelle infamie!" She retained her position at court, "ce qui déplait fort à son mari" according to du Deffand. Tavannes went so far as to advertise in the newspapers, "comme un simple bourgeois", that "à l'avenir il ne paierait plus la moindre dette de la comtesse, d'autant que toutes ces jolies choses n'étaient pas toujours choisies à son intention et qu'il passait pour l'un des maris les plus trompés à la Cour et à la ville."⁸ It appears that her allowance of 10,000 livres was insufficient for her purchases, some idea of which may be gleaned from her surviving accounts⁹ from around 1770. These provide delightful detail on the expenditure of a "grande

⁵ *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 1911, LXIII, col. 308. The editor of the marquis d'Aubais's *Pièces fugitives* (1759, III, p. 109) gives her death as December 1756. Curiously Père Anselme (9II, p. 198) states that her sister, Catherine-Agnès, also died in a fire at the château of Châteaumorand, in 1776.

⁶ The comte de Tavannes's income was a mere 90,000 livres, far less than most of the ducs (see Robert Forster, *The house of Saulx-Tavannes*, 1972).

⁷ In fact this plan did not succeed, and he married a Mlle de Tournon.

⁸ Cited René Maizeroy, "Coquetteries lointaines", *Le Gaulois*, 16 March 1898, p. 1, without source.

⁹ Anatole Huguenin, *La Toilette d'une grande dame bourguignonne au XVIII^e siècle*, Dijon, 1894 (privately published in an edition of 105 copies); see also *Mémoires de la Société bourguignonne de géographie et d'histoire*, XXV, 1909, p. xv. Huguenin basis his article on the Saulx-

dame” at court. One, with the celebrated couturière of the rue de la Monnaie, Mlle Alexandre, confirms her continuing predilection for the silver and pink colours in the costume in the pastel:

Une robe fond d’argent et nuances, la polonaise en larges réseaux d’argent à lames, façonnées en mosaïque à gros bouillons avec une grosse guirlande en blonde d’argent et fleurs de ruban et agréments, festonnés aux deux côtés de la polonaise, les engageantes, le jupon avec un pied et un grand volant et agréments, le compère, les nœuds de manche en rubans brochés à bouquets et garnis de petite blonde d’argent: 440 livres.

Avoir garni un domino de taffetas blanc en gaze et ruban rose et des glands à la frivolité, les amadis garnis de blonde: 144 livres.

Un chapeau de plumes roses et blanches: 25 livres.

Pour un grand habit de Cour en taffetas blanc, la chamarrure de la jupe façonnée avec un pied et un grand volant festonné, six quilles à la jupe, le tout en gaze blanche, fond de crème broché à petits bouquets, bordé de petits agréments blancs et noirs avec une guirlande d’agréments et petites fleurs noires et blanches, festonnée et semée sur toute la chamarrure. La garniture du corset de même gaze et guirlande. Le bas de robe garni de même, les glands à quatre ganses pour relever le bas de la robe. La mantille en gaze brochée, brodée de petits agréments bouillonnés et entrelacés d’une guirlande: 300 livres.

There were similar accounts at la veuve Gallebois, Mlle du Ban, Laranzo, Gibert, Nau père et fils, Mlle Lhuillier, Ribert and Foulet. At Boursot frères, *Au Lion d’argent*, the account was for 13,700 livres, including 14 aunes of “étoffe fond d’argent” for 1960 livres alone. Nor was her expenditure confined to dresses. She spent 1839 livres at the coiffeur-parfumeur Philidor. Her jewellers included Germain, de La Frenaise, Gibert, Jacquin and Lamotte. She appears in the accounts of the manufacture de Sèvres.¹⁰ Antoine d’Auvergne, surintendant de la musique de Sa Majesté et directeur général de son Académie royale de musique, provided her with a box at the Opéra at a cost of 1750 livres per annum.

When Marie-Antoinette became queen in 1774, Éléonore resumed the position of her dame du palais. Her duties included being present at the birth of Louis-Joseph, the new dauphin, in 1781, and she is thought to be one of the ladies on the left shown in a contemporary print by Boulogne (fig. 6).

Apparently the queen had resisted her appointment¹¹ as one of her dames du palais on the basis that she supported the Italian composer Piccini, while Marie-Antoinette was a

fierce partisan for his rival Gluck; she relented however when Éléonore claimed that she enjoyed Gluck’s music more and more each time she heard it. Alexandre de Tilly, who describes her around this time (“Mme de Tavannes avait un reste de beauté, de l’embonpoint, et encore de la fraîcheur”), implies that there was an affair with her cousin, M. de Montmorency,¹² but this seems to have been long after the separation from M. de Tavannes. However her husband’s continuing antipathy was no doubt the real reason for the queen’s enmity, and some years later



Figure 6

Tavannes papers in the archives de la Côte-d’Or, E1698–1736, but he draws also from the wholly unreliable *Souvenirs* said to be by Mme de Créquy but which refer to an earlier comtesse de Tavannes.

¹⁰ Henry Havard & Marius Vachon, *Les Manufactures nationales. Les Gobelins, la Savonnerie, Sèvres, Beauvais*, Paris, 1889, p. 435.

¹¹ The anecdote, no doubt apocryphal, is found in the anonymous *Mémoires de Louis XVIII*, Brussels, 1832 I, p. 170.

¹² *Mémoires du comte Alexandre de Tilly*, 1986, p. 201.

he evidently prevailed upon Marie-Antoinette to have her removed from her position as dame du palais, which she surrendered to her daughter in 1785. The following year she saw her son marry the wealthy Aglaé-Louise de Choiseul Gouffier,¹³ the contract being signed by king and queen.

Éléonore fled to Fontainebleau in June 1792, her husband having already died as an émigré.¹⁴ She was arrested on 21 September 1793. According to the reports, before the Revolution she had had an income of some 28–30,000 livres, but this had been confiscated and, at the age of 54 (58 in the report), she was reduced to living “sur son mobilier”; the note adds “esprit aliéné”. Her daughter Gabrielle, vicomtesse de Castellane prudently described herself as a widow; her husband and brother were also émigrés. The authorities in Fontainebleau were much less militant than those in Paris, and few of their prisoners were executed; but by the time they ordered her release in 1793 Éléonore was dead – perhaps from natural causes, but the dramatic change in her circumstances brought about by the Revolution must have caused many such premature deaths or suicides.

The survival of these pendant pastels of the two sisters suggested that the portraits



Figure 7

remained in the Lévis-Châteaumorand family. It is possible that they were among the seized from the family hôtel at 19 rue Ninau, Toulouse, during the Revolution, but restituted by decree of 21 pluviôse an IV, which referred to “huits portraits de famille dont six au pastel, places sous verre, et deux à l’huile dans leur cadre doré.”¹⁵ This is confirmed by the discovery of a photograph of the salon de musique in the château de Lérans, c.1950 (fig. 7), where the two Pougin

pastels appear with a pastel by Perronneau¹⁶ and pendant pastels of the duc d’Orléans and Mme de Montesson by Vigée Le Brun.¹⁷ Châteaumorand was sold by the comtesse du Hamel in 1864, after 680 years of continuous occupation by the family; the château de Lérans was abandoned in 1983.

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¹³ Her memoirs of her emigration contain no reference to her mother-in-law’s fate.

¹⁴ See Félix Herbet, “Fontainebleau révolutionnaire”, *Annales de la Société historique et archéologique du Gâtinais*, xxv, 1907, p. 17. According to Maizeroy, *loc. cit.*, she was guillotined on the eve of Thermidor, but this is a misreading of Huguenin. In a popular novel of 1863 by Marcellin La Garde, *L’Enfant du carrefour maudit*, the comtesse de Tavannes is rescued from the guillotine by Théroigne de Méricourt.

¹⁵ See *Archives du château de Lérans. Inventaire...des documents des branches latérales de la maison de Lévis*, Toulouse, 1912, iv, p. 591.

¹⁶ Number 187 Pa in Dominique d’Arnoult, *Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, ca. 1715–1783*, Paris, 2014, where the photograph is reproduced.

¹⁷ The pendants were offered for sale in Versailles in 2013 as anonymes, but withdrawn when I drew attention to them. Represented, correctly catalogued, they were pre-empted by the Louvre. They were originally given to the marquis de Roncherolles, premier gentilhomme du duc d’Orléans, and descended to his daughter-in-law Delphine de Lévis-Mirepoix, marquise de Roncherolles, who owned Châteaumorand.