

DIDIER AARON & CIE
Tableaux-Dessins-Sculptures

JEAN III CARAVAQUE or GARAVAQUE
(Marseille, 1673- Marseille, 1754)



Portrait of Nicolas de Ranché, Commissaire Général des Galères

Oval medallion in white marble high relief

Total height: 77 cm; total width: 63 cm.

Medallion height: 63 cm; medallion width: 50 cm.

Inscription in gold letter on the edge of the medallion: *Nicolas de Ranché commissaire général des galères de France.*

Frame in carved and gilded wood held in place by a metal armature and wooden tenons.
Inscription in ink on the back, at the top of the frame: *H. r* ; at the bottom of the frame: *Bas du port*

Dated: 1st quarter of the 18th century

HISTORY: Collection of Marie-Anne de Ranché, daughter of the model --- Aix-en-Provence, collection of M. de La Lauzière --- Aix-en-Provence, collection of Ambroise Thomas Roux-Alphéran (1776-1858), Greffier à la Cour and historian, then by his descendants: his daughter, Fanny Gautier de La Lauzière, Madame Ferdinand Taconet, née Marie-Alexandrine Gautier de La Lauzière, Madame Hippolyte Guillibert, née Marie Taconet de La Lauzière, Baron René Guillibert de La Lauzière (1879-1964), Baron Jean Guillibert de La Lauzière (1907-2003)

EXHIBITIONS: *L'Art provençal à l'exposition coloniale*, Grand Palais de l'Exposition Coloniale, Marseille, 1906 --- *Pierre Puget, son oeuvre à Marseille*, Marseille, Palais de Longchamp, 1908, no. 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: D. M. J. Henry, "Sur la vie et les oeuvres de P. Puget," *Bulletin trimestriel de la Société des Sciences, Belles lettres et arts du dépt. du Var*, 20^e année, no. 2, Toulon, 1853, p. 132 --- P. Magry, "Documents sur Pierre Puget et sur les sculpteurs et peintres employés à l'arsenal de Toulon de 1762 à 1682, provenant des archives du ministère de la Marine," *AAF*, 1^{re} série, vol.4, 1855-1856, p. 265 --- L. Lagrange, *Pierre Puget, Peintre, sculpteur, architecte, décorateur de vaisseaux*, Paris, 1868, p. 14, no. 81 --- Ph. Auquier, *Pierre Puget son oeuvre à Marseille*, cat. expo., Marseille, Palais de Longchamp, 1908, p. 83, no. 16 --- S. Lami, *Dictionnaire des Sculpteurs de l'Ecole française sous le règne de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1906, p. 423 --- J. Billioud, "Une dynastie d'artistes provençaux, les Garavaque," *Marseille*, 1958, no. 36, pp. 3-14 --- K. Herding, *Pierre Puget, das bildnerische Werk*, Berlin, 1970, no. 80 --- *Pierre Puget. Peintre, sculpteur, architecte, 1620-1694*, exhib. cat. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille, 1994, pp. 340-343 --- G. Bresc-Bautier, *Revue du Louvre. La revue des Musées de France*, no. 3, Juin 2002, pp. 86-87 (about the bust of Marie-Louise de Savoie by Caravaque) --- G. Bresc-Bautier, "L'importation du marbre de Carrare à la cour de Louis XIV. Rivalité des marchands et échecs des compagnies," dans *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles*, symposium du 22-24 May 2003 --- A. Zysberg, "l'Arsenal, cité des galères à Marseille au siècle de Louis XIV," *Dix-septième siècle*, 2011/4, no. 253, pp. 639-656 --- M. Boudon-Machuel, Fabienne Sartre, "Le combat n'est point douteux, voici un bloc qui s'offre à vous servir," *Bulletin du centre de recherches du château de Versailles*, 2016.

"...The artistic merit of this portrait is of the first order; the head is perfectly sculpted, full of Life, the drapery is of the finest style and of remarkable taste..." wrote J. Henry in 1853 on the subject of this portrait of Nicolas de Ranché, at that time attributed to the greatest of French baroque sculptors, Pierre Puget. Catalogued afterwards as being by someone from the master's "circle," it took the acquisition by the Musée du Louvre in 2002 of the *Sculpted Portrait of Marie-Louise de Savoie* (marble. H. 95 cm; width 48 cm. Signed: J. Caravaque; circa 1714. Inv.: RF 4669) (fig. 1) with its very personal, characteristic style, to bring the career of the Marseille sculptor Jean III Caravaque out of the shadow and into the light, for it is to him that we owe this spectacular portrait, done at the end of France's Grand Siècle.

The dynasty of the Caravaque, or Garavaque, family includes several generations of artists. Louis (evidence from 1640 to 1665) and his son Jean I, (evidence from 1642 to 1675). The latter moved to Toulon, attracted by the royal workshops of the arsenal like Pierre Puget

(1620-1694) with whom they worked several times on religious décors which have not survived. The son of Jean I Caravaque, François (died, 1698), trained in Paris from 1671 to 1674, when he came in second for the Prix de Sculpture at the Académie. When he returned to Toulon, he went to work at the arsenal before moving to Marseille where he became the director of the sculpture workshops of a second arsenal allocated to royal galleys. In 1694, he served as a witness to Puget's last will and testament, proof of the closeness of the two sculptors. In 1669, the family ties were reinforced when François's half-brother, Jean-Baptiste (died 1709), married a Puget niece. Three sons were born of this union: Louis (1681-1754), Painter to the Court of Peter the Great; Joseph (1680-1758), Inspector of Carpentry at the arsenal; and finally, Jean III Caravaque (1673-1754), in 1709 named Head of Sculptures at the Marseille Arsenal, a sought-after title, rather comparable in status to that conferred by the Académie Royale, since it came with a royal stipend.

In response to the importance accorded by Colbert to the decoration of ships and his desire to make of it an instrument of royal munificence, more than eighty sculptors and fifty-five painters rubbed elbows the arsenal in Toulon between 1670 and 1680, giving the town the largest population of painters and sculptors per inhabitant in France. Far from being exclusively limited to the strict decoration of ships, Jean III Caravaque was polyvalent, working with not only in wood, but also in stone, plaster and bronze.

In charge of inspecting marble, in 1713-1714, during a war with Spain, he was given an important mission to Carrara to supply the King of France with the marble that was becoming rare because of the hostilities in Italy and at sea. Caravaque became so busy inspecting quarries that he seemed to almost have changed professions, from sculptor to inspector of marble for the king. His knowledge of sculpture was the primary and indispensable condition for the exercise of his second function, as testified by Contrôleur Général Jean Tarlé: "He is a sculptor and connoisseur, I see no one but he who could fill the job of inspector with full knowledge of all the facts on whether various marbles should be accepted or refused, from Provence or Italy." More than any other sculptor, Caravaque's knowledge of the quarries was perfect: already in November 1712, he had a meeting with Tarlé, "involving knowledge and the nature of marbles in general and principally those of Italy," and, a month later, he proposed no less than the complete reorganization of the way Italian quarries were exploited. The reports that he wrote and his abundant correspondence allow us to appreciate his expertise in detail, whether concerning a block of marble, a section of it or the whole of a quarry. Caravaque knew that marble must be soft enough to be worked, but also solid enough to allow the sculpting of "ornamental details that one is often obliged to make in the adjustment of figures." He was more than willing to use his chisel to test quality either in the quarry itself, or as he did at the port of Marseille, with the blocks stored there for the *Marly Horses*.

While his career in the decoration of ships is well known, the time-consuming nature of his inspection activity in the field explains the paucity of marble sculptures by Caravaque that have come down to us: the *Tombe of Ludovic Habert de Montmort*, Bishop of Perpignan, in 1687-1701 (fig. a), a relief for the Hôtel de Ville for Marseille and a statue of Diane, signed, in the Château de Pontchartrain; and finally—especially—the splendid *Portrait of Marie-Louise de Savoie*, (fig. b) dating from the years 1708-1714, which needs to be considered in relation to the sculptor's mission to Carrara, coinciding with the return of the supply of marble and the end of the war with Spain.



a.



b.

The boundaries between royal and—very steady—private—commissions were unclear, as evidenced by libel denouncing the number of works done for private citizens at the expense of work for the king in the workshops of Marseille and Toulon. This undoubtedly explains why Caravaque left us this portrait of Nicolas de Ranché, whose name and function are spelled out in gold letters around the edge of the medallion. On p. 133 of Tome 3 of *L'Etat de la France*, published in 1722, at a date completely contemporary with the dating of this portrait, we find “Remove Blondel de Jouvencourt, Commissaire Général des Galères, replace him with M. Ranché.” Named Commissaire Général des Galères de France in Marseille, Ranché was put in charge of the human and material resources needed for the different military construction sites of the arsenal. Most probably he was the son of another Nicolas Ranché, named Contrôleur de la Marine et des Fortifications des Iles Françaises de l’Amérique by order of the King in 1687, then Commissaire Général des Galères de France in 1704 at a period when his title and duties could not yet be inherited.

Shown “à la Française” (bewigged and in contemporary dress), wearing a jabot with many layers of fine fabric, Ranché is positioned frontally, thrust out from the frame like a mast head, expressive and lively and of an astonishing sensitivity. The artist’s mastery of his chisel is total, caressing the marble into rendering the softness of the skin as well as the delicacy of the wig by playing on the effects of light on the material—sometimes flat, sometimes jutting, smooth and shiny or matte. This skillful chiseling of the marble demonstrates the heights which Caravaque was able to carry portraiture as the Grand Siècle drew to a close and a new era began, that of the Enlightenment.



His personality shows through especially in his ability to translate in a very personal way the majesty of the entirely royal position of his recently ennobled model, using the monumentality of his cloak, its folds billowing beyond the oval to give the trompe l’oeil effect of high baroque, one which mixed French style with the influence of great Italian portraiture. While—as so rightly underlined by Geneviève Bresc-Bautier—the artistic style was influenced by the Genoa models of French artists trained by his uncle, Pierre Puget, such as Honoré Pellé. (Gap, 1641 - Genoa 1718), Caravaque nevertheless retains a unique style, delightful, and perfectly

recognizable in the two busts known at present to be by him, to which can now be added this very exceptional portrait of Nicolas de Ranché, a masterpiece by the artist for whom it constitutes a brilliant emblem.

Condition report:

The reverse of the medallion shows an earlier restoration intended to consolidate its upper part, made fragile by a defect or crack mended by staples, traces of rust testifying to their presence. Another tantalizing detail is the presence of reference marks in the form of the letters A, B, C, D, written in ink on the wood and graphite on the marble, to facilitate the correct placement of the relief in the frame. Uniting marble and the Berain-style frame in gilded wood that had already been used for another relief attributed to him (*Equestrian Portrait of Philippe de France, Duc d'Anjou and King of Spain*, bas relief in marble. 76.5 x 46 cm, or 99 x 65 cm with frame. Sale Sotheby's Paris, 15 June 2017, no. 85 (fig. c)), it is easy to imagine that it is the work of one of the specialists at the arsenal, the carpenters and gilders with whom Caravaque worked.

The care given to the rough hewing of the block of marble in order to eliminate surplus material and reduce weight must be noted, as should the ingeniousness of the reinforcing metal armature consisting of two bars crowned by a ring for hanging (fixed by two screws in wooden tenons embedded in the marble and held there with mortar to avoid corrosion between the marble and the metal). This system of fixation, intended as much to solidify the whole of the relief as to compensate for the imbalance of the masses intended by the sculptor and demanding consummate skill, constitutes an exploit demanding such singular competences that the question of whether the artist's brother, Joseph Caravaque (1680-1758) Inspecteur de la Menuiserie de l'Arsenal, participated in its elaboration is one that need to be asked.