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Madame d'Aulnoy and Monsieur le Premier
Volker Schröder

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Madame d'Aulnoy and Monsieur le Premier

VS

As biographers have occasionally pointed out, Madame d'Aulnoy was related on the maternal side to one of the most prominent families at the French royal court, the Beringhens. Her mother Judic-Angélique was the daughter of Judith Le Coutelier, *née* de Beringhen, whose father Pierre, of obscure Dutch or German origins, had one day caught the attention of Henri IV and had become the king's *premier valet de chambre*. Pierre de Beringhen's sister-in-law was Marie Bruneau, known as Madame des Loges, a famous Protestant *salonnière* and letter writer.¹ Whereas several other members of the Beringhen clan remained stubbornly Protestant, preferring prison and exile to abjuration, Pierre's eldest son Henry converted to Catholicism and gained the favor and confidence of king Louis XIII and queen Anne of Austria. In 1645, he was rewarded with a crucial position in the royal household, that of *Premier Écuyer* (first equerry) in charge of the *Petite Écurie*, the "small stables" where the horses and carriages for the monarchy's daily operations were kept. Over the course of the next five decades, "Monsieur le Premier," as the officeholder was customarily called, garnered additional appointments and distinctions, married the daughter of a marquis, and came to be regarded as "the wisest man of his time."²

Information

This entry was posted on November 7, 2021 by VS in [Archives](#), [Autographs](#), [Biography](#) and tagged [courtiers](#), [cousins](#), [lawsuits](#).

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Benoît I Audran after Robert Nanteuil, Portrait of Henry de Beringhen
(Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet)

Hispanist Raymond Foulché-Delbos, after summarizing the failed plot orchestrated in 1669 by Mme d'Aulnoy and her mother against Marie-Catherine's husband, mentioned the family relationship to Henry de Beringhen and wondered whether his "protection" may have helped limit the punishment incurred by the two women.³ The aftermath of this scandal remains murky, but it does indeed appear that Judic-Angélique did not have to leave France until late 1673 and that her uncle continued to support her, morally and financially, for another two years at least.⁴ In the meantime his eldest son, also named Henry, was killed by a cannon-ball at the siege of Besançon. In her two-volume chronicle of the Franco-Dutch War, published in 1693, Mme d'Aulnoy pays a personal tribute to her deceased cousin:

I dare say that the Marquis de Beringhen was one of the bravest men in the world, and that there are hardly any who at his age are as accomplished as he was. The King expressed his regrets in a manner that consoled his family in some way about this loss.⁵

Henry de Beringhen's second son Jacques-Louis (born in October 1651, one year before Marie-Catherine) became his principal heir, married the niece of the powerful minister Louvois, and took over the duties and titles of his father, who gradually retired from court and died on March 30, 1692. As the new "Monsieur le Premier," Jacques-Louis de Beringhen enjoyed unequalled access to Louis XIV, often riding tête-à-tête with the king in his coach or subbing for him at the gambling table. A highly esteemed adviser and administrator, he was also a noted connoisseur of the arts and assembled an outstanding [print collection](#), which was acquired by the Royal Library after his death in 1723.

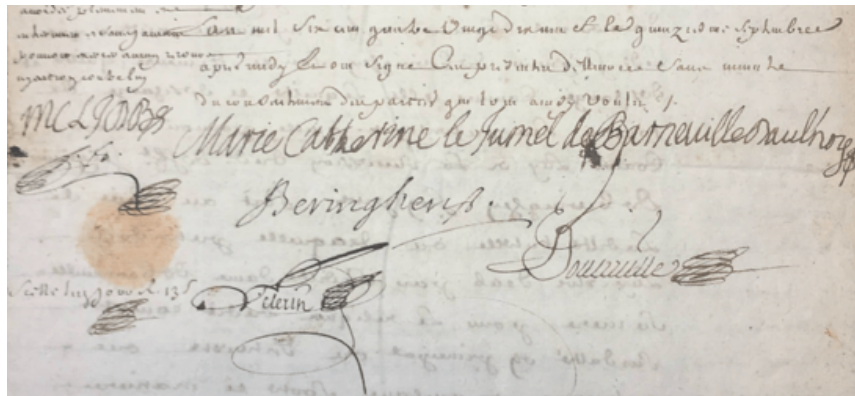


Jean-Louis Rouillet after Pierre Mignard, Portrait of Jacques-Louis de Beringhen
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Given the stature of Beringhen and Mme d'Aulnoy's own precarious situation, it is quite baffling to see that, in the 1690s, Marie-Catherine took Jacques-Louis to court over money matters. Judicial records of the Paris Châtelet as well as several notarized documents show that on August 5, 1692, a civil lawsuit was filed on behalf of Mme d'Aulnoy against Beringhen (and another of her relatives), leading to a first ruling in her favor on October 22. The lawsuit revolved around what had occurred three decades

earlier, between the death of Marie-Catherine's father and her marriage to François de La Motte. On March 13, 1662, fifteen of her closest male relatives, including Henry de Beringhen, had convened in Barneville (some in person, others by proxy) to appoint the widowed Judic-Angélique as the child's guardian (*tutrice*), entrusted not only with guiding her conduct but also with managing and preserving her inheritance. The guardianship ended with the marriage in March 1666; seven months later, Judic-Angélique submitted an account (*compte de tutelle*) of her administration of Marie-Catherine's property. The lawsuit alleged that she had mishandled this process and deprived her daughter of substantial assets, amounting to no less than 37,129 *livres* and 10 *sols*. Judic-Angélique herself could not be sued over this debt, for she was now living in Madrid and had lost all her French possessions; in fact, the court records refer to her as deceased (*feu* and *deffunte*), which may indicate that she had been sentenced to a banishment resulting in civil death. The buck was thus passed to the relatives who had appointed and vouched for her as guardian, or rather to their heirs – first and foremost, the illustrious and wealthy Jacques-Louis de Beringhen.

The lawsuit dragged on for seven years. In May 1693, the court granted Beringhen's request that additional documents, such as the marriage contract of Mme d'Aulnoy's parents, be provided for examination. In February 1695, the two parties signed a *compromis* and agreed to appoint arbitrators whose verdict they promised to accept; in December, this agreement was extended by six months. Finally, on September 15, 1699, a *transaction* was filed to put an end to the dispute: Mme d'Aulnoy dropped her suit against Beringhen, while reserving the right to continue proceedings against other relatives.



Archives nationales

What on earth had pushed Marie-Catherine to pursue such reckless, and ultimately fruitless, legal action against one of the king's intimates? Was it greed, despair, resentment, or sheer foolhardiness? Fortunately, she herself made sure that a fuller, truer story, written in her own hand, could come to light and correct the impression created by the official documents. To do so, however, she waited until after the death of her husband. Five and a half months later, on February 8, 1701, Mme d'Aulnoy penned a five-page "declaration" which she deposited with her notary on March 31. It is one of just a handful of autograph pieces that have come down to us from this prolific writer; a complete transcription is given below. She begins by explaining that at the time of her marriage, it was agreed by all that her mother would not have to prepare a *compte de tutelle* and would instead give her dower (i.e. her own inheritance as widow) to Marie-Catherine. Later that year, some of Judic-Angélique's assets were seized in connection with the debt of a man for whom she was a guarantor, and she was advised to make it appear as if she owed her daughter a lot of money – in other words, the account drawn up in October 1666 was a fake, a sham devised to avoid paying someone else's debt:

But things did not turn out as my mother had planned, and the guardianship was no longer on anyone's mind from 1666 until 1675 when Monsieur D'Aulnoy, having come across those papers again, thought that this was a sure means for extracting money from my relatives. God is witness to the tears I shed and the pleas I made begging him not to try to enrich himself by a means so removed from justice. He did not want to believe me, this was more than once the subject of our disagreements.

Regrettably but understandably, Mme d'Aulnoy glosses over the eventful period between 1666 and 1675, when certain things indeed "did not turn out as planned" and led to her mother's exile. She goes on to state that her husband carried out his scheme by fabricating a false inventory of the property that the family had owned in Paris – so the lawsuits were based on not one but two fraudulent documents:

It is thus on this inventory and this trumped-up account that Mr D'Aulnoy pursued my relatives, using the proxies that it was always necessary to give him, he even coerced me into signing deeds with him where I gave him I don't know how much of the possible payout, but my firm intention has always been not to take advantage as long as I live of property that is not my due. That's what obliges me to deposit this paper to be given in the case of my death to my relatives so that they can use it.

The list of relatives to be alerted begins with "Monsieur de Beringhen premier escuyer du Roy." Mme d'Aulnoy then adds further financial details and concludes:

I beg my children and my heirs, if I cannot prevent the papers of this wretched affair from falling into their hands, to consider how little profit and honor they would have in pursuing a debt which is false and which could only give them remorse of conscience, protesting before God my creator that I am declaring here the truth of a matter the secret of which I would never have kept without Monsieur D'Aulnoy whose fits of rage always frightened me and made me give in to what he wanted.

Did Beringhen ever learn the truth about the lawsuit brought against him by Marie-Catherine? And if he did, did he understand and forgive her? I can only speculate but doubt that the two cousins went on to become great friends. Monsieur le Premier would have been an ideal dedicatee for Mme d'Aulnoy's last novel, *Le Comte de Warwick*, published in 1703. But the book is dedicated to the marquis de Pirou, another of the relatives concerned by the affair of the false debt (he appears in fourth position on the list). In the opening epistle, Mme d'Aulnoy addresses him emphatically as "my dear Cousin," praises his "beautiful Château" and his "lovely family," and asks him to accept this work, dedicated to "my best Friend and my closest Relative" (*à mon meilleur Amy, & à mon plus proche Parent*). The marquis' name was Claude de Vassy, grandson of Jacques de Vassy whose sister Elisabeth was Mme d'Aulnoy's paternal grandmother. It was Claude's father Gabriel who, through his marriage, had acquired the château of Pirou and who was one of the signers of the 1662 guardianship appointment, alongside Henry de Beringhen. Genealogically, Claude de Vassy was not any "closer" to Marie-

Catherine than Jacques-Louis de Beringhen. Considering the strikingly personal and familial tone of the dedicatory epistle (quite different from those of her earlier books, all addressed to princes or princesses), one may wonder whether Mme d’Aulnoy perhaps intended to dedicate her final publication to Beringhen but did not receive his permission to do so, prompting her to turn instead to another of her cousins, less prestigious but more favorably disposed toward the author. This will have to remain conjecture, unless other neglected papers are noticed one day and add further facets to this inexhaustible story.

Volker Schröder

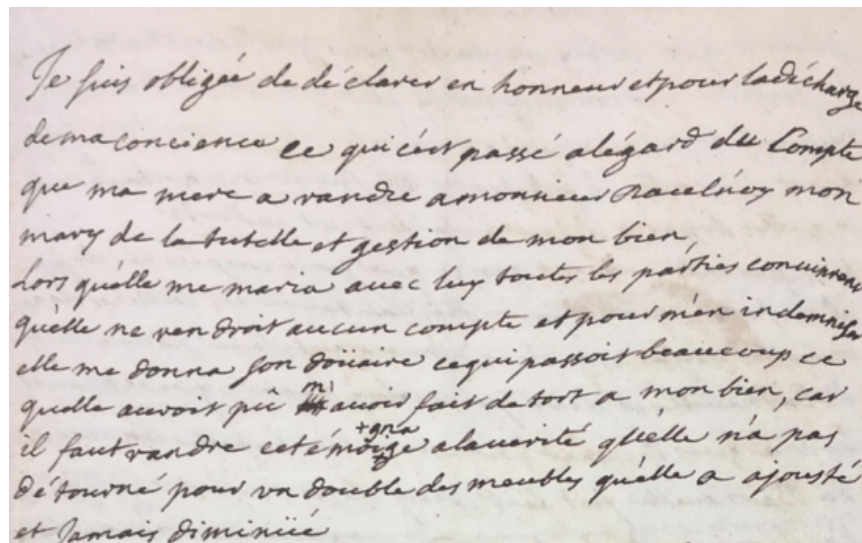
November 7, 2021

Footnotes

1. On Mme des Loges and her relation to the Beringhens, see especially the *Historiettes* of Tallemant des Réaux. In his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Pierre Bayle notes the genealogical link between Mme des Loges and Mme d’Aulnoy but skips one generation (presenting the latter as the former’s grandniece when she was actually her great-grandniece), an error repeated by some later writers. In any case, Mme d’Aulnoy could not have personally known Mme des Loges, who died in 1641, but must have been aware of her through family tradition and other sources.
2. “le bonhomme Beringhen étoit le plus sage homme de son temps” (*Mémoires du marquis de Sourches sur le règne de Louis XIV*, ed. Gabriel-Jules comte de Cosnac and Arthur Bertrand, vol. I, Paris: Hachette, 1882, p. 167). Many more references to Henry de Beringhen and his family can be found in the *Journal* of Dangeau, the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon, the letters of Mme de Sévigné, etc. For a brief account of the Beringhen dynasty and its role at court, see François Bluche, “Beringhen (Famille de),” in *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, ed. F. Bluche, Paris: Fayard, 1990, p. 188.
3. Raymond Foulché-Delbosq, introduction to his edition of the *Relation du voyage d’Espagne*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1926, p. 13. In her book *En marge de l’“Oiseau bleu”* (Paris: L’Artisan du Livre, 1930), Jeanne Roche-Mazon also highlights the Beringhen connection (p. 7-8, 131, 137) but does not specifically cite Henry in the context of the 1669 affair: “Nous ignorons jusqu’à ce jour quelles influences, certainement hautes, s’exercèrent en faveur de Catherine de Barneville” (p. 121).
4. See Émile Laloy, *La Révolte de Messine: l’expédition de Sicile et la politique française en Italie (1674-1678)*, vol. II, Paris: Klincksieck, 1930, p. 644.
5. *Nouvelles ou mémoires historiques... Par Madame D***, Paris: Barbin, 1693, vol. I, p. 102.

Transcription

[N.B.: This transcription respects for the most part Mme d’Aulnoy’s original spelling. For easier reading, however, I have modernized the use of *u/v* and added some apostrophes, capitalization, and punctuation.]



Je suis obligée de déclarer en honneur et pour la décharge
de ma conscience ce qui est passé à l'égard du Compte
que ma mere a rendu a Monsieur D'Aulnoy mon
mary de la tutelle et gestion de mon bien,
lors qu'elle me maria avec luy toutes les parties convinrent
qu'elle ne rendroit aucun compte et pour m'en indemniser
elle me donna son doüaire ce qui passoit beaucoup ce
qu'elle auroit pü ^{m'}avoir fait de tort a mon bien, car
il faut rendre ce témoignage a la verité qu'elle n'a pas
de tourné pour un double des meubles qu'elle a ajoüsté
et jamais diminüé

Archives nationales

Je suis obligée de déclarer en honneur et pour la décharge de ma conscience ce qui c'est passé a l'égard du Compte que ma mere a rendu a Monsieur D'Aulnoy mon mary de la tutelle et gestion de mon bien. Lors qu'elle me maria avec luy toutes les parties convinrent qu'elle ne rendroit aucun compte et pour m'en indemniser elle me donna son doüaire ce qui passoit beaucoup ce qu'elle auroit pü m'avoir fait de tort a mon bien, car il faut rendre ce témoignage a la verité qu'elle n'a pas détourné pour un double des meubles qu'elle a ajoüsté et jamais diminüé.

Quelque tems apres mon mariage Mr de Villeromare tresorier extraordinaire des guerres saisit une rente de mille livre a elle appartenant, parce qu'elle luy avoit repondu pour un homme qui luy devoit. Elle prit la-dessus conseil, on luy dit qu'ayant esté ma tutrice elle pouvoit faire paroistre d'intelligence avec nous qu'elle nous devoit beaucoup et qu'estant comme j'estois sa premiere creanciere je m'oposerois au decret qu'on faisoit de sa rente de mille livre : mais la chose ne tourna pas comme ma mere l'avoit consertée, et l'on ne songea plus a la tutelle depuis l'année 1666 jusqu'en 1675 que Monsieur D'Aulnoy ayant retrouvé ces papiers pensa que c'estoit un moyen seur de tirer de l'argent de mes parents. Dieu m'est témoins des larmes que j'ay versées et des prieres que je luy ay faites pour qu'il ne tentat jamais de s'enrichir par un moyen sy esloigné de la justice. Il ne voulut pas m'en croire ç'a esté plus d'une fois le sujet de nos diferents. Il fit faire un faux inventaire des meubles de Paris, il faut éclaircir cet endroit.

Mes parents avoient pensé que pour empescher les frais il ne falloit point faire d'inventaire en justice de nos meubles, de sorte qu'ils en nommerent deux pour celuy de Barneville et deux pour celuy de Paris qui estoient les marquis du Gast et du Moulin Chapelle. L'inventaire de Barneville fut fait, celuy de Paris fut négligé et n'a jamais esté fait. Comme ma mere vint a dresser le compte d'intelligence dont j'ay deja parlé, elle dit au hasard la somme qu'elle voulut et cette somme est cinq ou six fois plus grosse qu'il ne faut pour la mettre dans la verité de sorte que Mr D'Aulnoy faisant faire un faux inventaire il le fit monter a la somme portée par le compte. Si cet inventaire n'estoit pas supposé il auroit esté signé par le marquis du Gast et le marquis de Moulin Chapelle mais c'est une piece entierement faulce. C'est donc sur cet inventaire et sur ce compte fait a plaisir que Mr D'Aulnoy a poursuivy mes parents sur mes procurations qu'il a toujours falu luy donner, il m'a meme violentée a faire des actes avec luy ou je luy donnais je ne sçay combien de ce qui en reviendroit mais mon dessein fixe a toujours esté de ne profiter en ma vie d'un bien qui ne m'est point dû. C'est ce qui m'oblige de déposer ce papier pour estre donné en cas que je meure a mes parents pour qu'ils s'en servent et des

a presant je brulerois les papiers s'ils n'estoient pas au pouvoir du procureur de Mr D'Aulnoy nommé Diart qui les retient pour des frais ou autres choses que Mr D'Aulnoy luy devoit. Pour moy je cherche a mettre ma consscience en repos et je prie au nom de Dieu ceux qui auront cette déclaration d'en donner la connoissance a

Monsieur de Beringhen premier escuyer du Roy

a Monsieur de Thiou de Vaucieux la Luzerne proche de Bayeux

a Mr de Mauroy colonel d'un regiment, neveu de Mr Bazin maitre des requestes

au marquis de Pirou a Pirou proche Coutance

a Messieurs Destimauville proche Touque et le Pont Levesque

a Mrs du Menil St Germain proche de Touque

afin qu'ils ne payent pas et que les uns avertissent les autres et que mon nom ne serve pas de pretexte pour avoir du bien mal acquis.

De plus sy la déclaration que je fais n'estoit pas assez forte, ce que Dieu ne veuille permettre, mes parents pourroient trouver le moyen d'aneantir la depte ou peu s'en faudroit.

Il faut remarquer que par mon contrat de mariage passé le six fevrier 1666 chez Enceau notaire au Chatelet Mr D'Aulnoy reconnoist avoir reçu seize mille livre comptant de ma mere et la quitance en est passée au tabelionnage de Honfleur par devant Tirebarbe et Lecourt. On peut voir par ma sentence de séparation passée au Chatelet au mois de juin ou juillet 1668 qu'il est fait mention des dits 16000 ^l de sorte qu'il faut les rabattre tout d'abord sur la somme de 37000 ^l a quoy se monte le compte de ma tutelle. Reste 21 mille livre a payer avec les interets. Ma mere m'a remis son doüaire. Elle ne peut me donner quand elle me doit et le douaire monte plus haut que les interets. L'inventaire fait a Barneville est absolument perdu, il peut monter a cinq mille livre. Reste pour 16. La-dessus chacun n'est tenu que pour sa cotte part. Il y a 14 ou 15 parents qui ont signé et beaucoup qui sont ruinez depuis ce tems là en sorte qu'on mangeroit trois fois la depte avant de rien tirer. Je prie mes enfants et mes heritiers sy je ne puis empescher que les papiers de cette malheureuse affaire tombe entre leurs mains de conciderer le peu de profit et d'honneur qu'ils auroient a poursuivre une depte qui est fausse et qui ne pourroit que leur donner des remorts de concience, protestant devant Dieu mon createur que je déclare icy la verité d'une chose dont je n'aurois jamais gardé le secret sans Monsieur D'Aulnoy dont les fureurs m'ont toujours effrayées et fait donner les mains a ce qu'il a voulu.

Fait a Paris le huitieme de fevrier mil sept cent un

Marie Le Jumel de Barneville D'Aulnoy

[AN MC/ET/XXXV/491]