



Jean Daniel Welper (1729 - 1780)

Portrait miniature of Louis, duc de Bourgogne, dauphin of France (1729–1765), wearing brown coat with gold brocade, blue sash and red ribbon of the Saint-Esprit; circa 1760

Circa: Circa 1760

Circa 1760

Watercolour on vellum

Later rectangular, ormolu frame, surmounted by an openwork palmette, the reverse with details of provenance

Oval, 5cm (2in) high

Born in Versailles, Louis was the fourth child but much anticipated eldest son of Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska. This portrait of the Dauphin appears to have been largely based on Maurice Quentin de La Tour's depiction of the dauphin, showing him as stouter than in his earlier portraits. Here the face is turned slightly further around to face the viewer and the artist has included drapery in the background.

It is clear that portraits of Louis by La Tour were copied, as letters survive to evidence this. In 1761, a letter from Duc d'Aumont to Papillon de Fontpertuis suggests that pastels were sent to the artist Anne Nivelon to copy. Noting the exact colouration of this miniature compared to the original oil portrait suggests that Welper had access to the original portrait.

Louis was married twice – firstly a very short-lived marriage due to the death of his wife, Marie-Therese d'Espagne, a year after their wedding – secondly to Marie-Joseph de Saxe, with whom he had eight children. Three of his children with Marie-Joseph became kings of France, but his early death (probably from pneumonia) at Fontainebleau in 1765 prevented him from ever becoming king.

The artist Quentin de la Tour enjoyed his closest patronage at court with Louis, who was said to have had a lively and tempestuous nature. Louis fought at the Battle of Fontenoy but the king restrained any further military activity. His relationship with his father, Louis XV, was far from cordial – they clashed over Choiseul's policies as well as over the unshakeable hold that Madame de Pompadour exercised over the king.

The court artist Jean Daniel Welper was miniature painter to Louis XV and drawing master to his daughters. His miniatures were often set on tortoiseshell boxes and given as presents. Other works by Welper show him copying from larger works, such as La Tour's.[1]

The provenance for this work suggests that the dauphin presented it to Jean-François de Rochedragon (Marquis de Rochedragon) (1744-1816). Born on March 6, 1744 in Montluçon, Allier, in 1756, at the age of 12, he was admitted to the Court as a page of the Small Stable (Petite écurie). He began military service in 1760 as part of the Royal Bodyguards. He took part in the fighting of the Seven Years' War in Germany, and after a long military service, he became commander of the infantry regiment of Marshal Turenne in 1784, finally retiring in 1801. In 1789, he was elected as a delegate of the Estates General from the nobility of the Bailliage de Bourges. During the first Restoration, on August 23, 1814, King Louis XVIII awarded him the rank of honorary lieutenant general. He died on January 2, 1816 in Paris at the age of 71, and was buried in the Père-Lachaise cemetery. It is not known when this portrait might have been received by Rochedragon, but he was clearly a loyal servant to the French royal family both on the domestic and military front.[2]

[1] The Parisien art dealer Thierry Jaegy has for sale a portrait of the Marquise de Sesmaisons, née Marie-Louise Gabrielle de La Fontaine Solare de La Boissière (1722-?) by Jean Daniel Welper, after the famous pastel by Maurice Quentin DELATOUR from 1738.

[2] An image of Rochedragon or his son, by Louis Hersent (1777-1860) was exhibited at the Salon de Paris in 1822, and now sadly lost, entitled 'Portrait of the Marquis de R. receiving orders from HRH the late Monseigneur, the Duc de Berry.' Another known sketch, showing variations from the present painting, is in the Musée Bertrand in Châteauroux.