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Louis de Marillac's Genealogy of 1625: The Importance of Lineage in Seventeenth-Century France (and in Twenty-First-Century Academia)

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On November 23, 1625, King Louis XIII ordered the Maréchal de Schomberg to oversee the verification of Louis de Marillac's nobility.¹ Louis de Marillac was aspiring to be inducted into the *Ordre du Saint-Esprit*. This was a chivalric order created by King Henri III in 1578 to emphasize the religious and mystical nature of faithful service to the king. Induction into the order was a high honor, restricted to one hundred noblemen who held the king's favor.² However, before this prestigious appointment could proceed, Louis needed to prove his noble descent.³ Commissioned by King Louis XIII to oversee the process, the Maréchal de Schomberg signed off on Louis's nobility on May 11, 1626, after an examination at the Palace of Fontainebleau.⁴

Despite Schomberg's acceptance, this genealogy does not stand up to modern scrutiny.⁵ The Parisian-based, seventeenth-century Marillacs, in an attempt to extend and glorify their ancestry, falsely claimed *chevaleresque* ancestors going back to the fourteenth century. They did this because lineage was as much a form of social capital as were marriage alliances, political offices, and lands. Thus, this genealogy and the lineage it represents form an important part of our understanding of the Marillacs' social position, and their ambitions, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in a process of "perpetual becoming."⁶ It is reflective of how the Marillacs conceived of themselves, at the very moment that the family rose to the highest echelons of French noble society, and it reflects their priorities and family strategies – the advancement of family ties through marriages, an emphasis on religion, and a steadfast loyalty to the monarchy. While it affirms these values through a family history at odds with the historical record, it also erases real

¹ This genealogy is BnF MsFr 20235. Other genealogies are contained in BnF MsFr 20229 and the *dossiers bleus* in the *cabinet des titres*.

² Bernard Barbiche, *Les institutions de la monarchie française à l'époque moderne (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2016), 43.

³ A. Tuelet, "Liste chronologique des Chevaliers de l'Ordre du Saint-Esprit depuis son origine jusqu'à son extinction, 1578–1830," *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* 1, no. 2 (1863): 32–34.

⁴ BnF, MsFr 20235.

⁵ Anne-Valérie Solignat, "Les généalogies imaginaires des Marillac ou comment faire des siens des gentilshommes de noblesse immémoriale," *Les Dossiers du Grihl* [En ligne], Hors-série n° 6, 2022, originally online 24 November 2011, Accessed 20 November 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.4000/dossiersgrihl.4838>

⁶ Jonathan Dewald, *Status, Power, and Identity in Early Modern France: The Rohan Family, 1550-1715* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 12.

members of their family who don't reflect the values of 1625. It is an example of how genealogies were reflective less of historical facts than of the fabrication of lineage and self-fashioning at the family level in the early seventeenth century.

Nevertheless, it is important for me to underline the importance of lineage in my own academic journey, and it is only appropriate that I present this research on the social capital of lineage as part of the H-France Salon Forum in honor of my own academic advisor, et *néanmoins ami*, Jim Farr. Academic lineage is important for historians, allowing us to situate a colleague in the context of their training and their influences as a young scholar. While historians reflect to varying degrees their advisor's work, I'm very pleased to say how much influence Jim has had on my career – it is evident that, like Jim, my research here is interested in social capital, self-narratives, and identity, but his influence is more fundamental than research interests. Above all, it is Jim's boundless pursuit of knowledge, and his cultivation of curiosity in his students, that had a tremendous influence on myself and my career. This is something that I cherish as I now find myself working in European research infrastructures for digital humanities – perhaps far away from my initial interest in seventeenth-century family strategy, but isn't an early nineteenth-century autobiography quite far from artisans in seventeenth-century Dijon?

Louis de Marillac's genealogy claimed a family lineage that stretched back into the fourteenth century, with Bertrand de Marillac, who married Suzanne de Lastic in 1382. Bertrand, loyal to the King of France in an Auvergne that was riven by the Hundred Years' War, was captured in battle by the English. His ransom was so large it bankrupted the family, forcing the Marillacs to sell the seigneurie bearing their name – and thus “explaining” why the Marillacs no longer held this land in 1625. Despite the loss of the seigneurie, the Marillacs were able to work their way back into respectability, thanks to Suzanne de Lastic and her family connections. This would not be the last time that this mythic genealogy would show the importance of women in creating family networks; as under Bertrand's grandson Pierre, who was able to help re-establish the family with his marriage to Marguerite de la Richardie, who brought the seigneurie of Saint-Genes-de-Retz into the family. Even today, one can still see traces of the Marillacs' coat of arms over the entry to the castle of Saint-Genes – the coat of arms itself, depicting six blackbirds was hammered off during the Revolution.

This is where the “real” Marillacs in the genealogy begins to appear. Saint-Genes-de-Retz is important, as it moved the Marillacs from the Haute Auvergne, more or less today's Cantal, to the Limagne of the northern Puy-de-Dome, in what was then the Bourbonnais. Indeed, the Marillacs made their fortune working with, and against, the Bourbon dynasty, particularly the Bourbon Montpensier. Pierre de Marillac's son, Gilbert de Marillac, worked with Duke Charles III, the famous “Connétable” de Bourbon as his *secrétaire*.⁷ When the Connétable de Bourbon left the service of François I for Charles V, following a dispute over the inheritance of his late wife and cousin Suzanne de Bourbon, Gilbert and his son Guillaume I sided with the monarchy against their

⁷ For more on the Bourbon administration, see Olivier Mattéoni, *Servir le Prince: Les officiers des ducs de bourbon à la fin du Moyen Âge (1356–1523)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998); and Olivier Mattéoni, “Office, pouvoir ducal et société politique dans la principauté bourbonnaise à la fin du Moyen Âge,” in *Le duché de Bourbon: des origines au Connétable: actes du colloque des 5 et 6 octobre 2000* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2001), 35–46.

former patron. This was a particularly valuable coup for François I, as the Marillacs were the officers that administered these lands, and so they were appropriately rewarded. With royal patronage secured, the way was open for the children of Guillaume I to move into the Parisian civil service, with several members becoming involved in the Parlement de Paris across the sixteenth century. Guillaume II de Marillac, Louis de Marillac's father, was a *surintendant des finances* under Charles IX. Bertrand, Sebastien, Pierre, Gilbert, Guillaume, Guillaume II, and Louis – thus was presented the lineage that tied Louis de Marillac, son of *robin* civil servants back to the *chevalresque* ancestors of the fourteenth century.

Louis de Marillac's genealogy should be understood as a declaration of the Marillac family's self-proclaimed identity in 1625, which is seen through devotion to family, religion, and loyalty. Genealogies, of course, documented marriages; those indispensable unions of alliances of power. Louis de Marillac, himself, married a distant cousin of Marie de Médicis, Catherine. This importance is reflected throughout his 1625 genealogy. Without Bertrand's marriage to Suzanne de Lastic, the Marillac family would have been ruined by the ransom and subsequent loss of their seigneurie of Marillac. Pierre's marriage to Marguerite de la Richardière later gave the Marillac family the seigneurie of Saint-Genès-du-Retz.

Louis de Marillac's genealogy stressed how deeply the family was tied to religion. Sébastien de Marillac's son Hugues was supposedly a prior in the la Voute abbey, and Sébastien himself had been destined for a religious career until the death of his brother Henry. If, in the fourteenth century, the family could claim a prior, they could also claim to be important nobles worthy of respect and coveted positions. Not only did these medieval religious appointments show that the family had sufficiently high status to merit respect, but they also show that part of their family strategy was to earn this respect and power through religious devotion. Given that the seventeenth-century Marillacs were deeply religious, it is not surprising that religious commitment shows up in their genealogy.

Finally, the genealogy demonstrates the Marillacs' deep loyalty to the King of France, manifested in military service. This was a loyalty that cost the family dearly when Bertrand was captured and ransomed. Through their (falsified) genealogy, the Marillacs 'proved' their deep and abiding fidelity to the monarchy. Louis himself would be elevated to the rank of *Maréchal de France* in 1629, a further sign of Louis XIII's confidence. Military command was a symbolically powerful function, as these men were perceived as acting in a vice-regal role for one of the king's most fundamental duties: war-making.⁸ This was a result of a heritage of "chivalric imagination" from the Middle Ages, in which the monarch and knights cooperated and interacted to give each other legitimacy and influence.⁹ The most elite circles of French society were in large part closed to those nobles who did not engage in military service, and Louis's military successes and promotions augured well for the future of the Marillac clan. Advantageous marriages, religious devotion, and dedicated military service were prominent characteristics of the Marillacs in the seventeenth

⁸ David Parrott, *Richelieu's Army: War Government and Society in France, 1624–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 491–501.

⁹ Benjamin Deruelle, *De papier, de fer et de sang: Chevaliers et chevalerie à l'épreuve de la modernité (ca 1460–ca 1620)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015).

century and they used the genealogy to validate them in history, a history that the family craftily fashioned.

Roberto Bizzocchi argues that genealogies are not about truth or falsehood, but rather, credibility.¹⁰ The believability of the Marillacs' falsified history lies in three factors: first, that the Marillacs came from the Auvergne, far away from Paris. Secondly, the myth is credible because it does not make outrageous claims. The Marillacs claimed merely to be ordinary knights, to be sure, a step above their *robin* milieu, but hardly outrageous or overbearing. Finally, their genealogy fit the *zeitgeist* of the time. It was eminently believable that the Marillacs, who came from the robe and boasted several members of Parlement, *maîtres des requêtes* and bishops, were descended from this *chevalresque* family from the Auvergne. There was simply no reason for Parisians to journey all the way to the countryside to verify what they already took to be true – early modern society, with its emphasis on continuity, relied on a myth of a stable society. In sum, even if we now know today that this genealogy was invented, the Marillacs and their contemporaries held it as the truth, for it fit the social discourse upon which early modern society was constructed.

Additionally, the modesty and therefore believability of these claims most likely had something to do with the shifting nature of genealogies which were well under way in the seventeenth century, transitioning from fantastic glorifications of a family's roots to demonstrable proof of the family's noble credentials. As more and more of the older *marques de noblesse* (such as hunting, clothes, owning fiefs) became available to non-nobles, the nobility became more acutely aware of the need to differentiate themselves from commoners, and to root out imposters.¹¹ In this light, it is not surprising that twenty-seven documentary "proofs," attested by notaries, were submitted with the genealogy in 1625. In the 1660s, under Colbert, rigorous enforcement of proofs of nobility and genealogy were the norm. The 1625 genealogy finds itself at the very beginning of this change, but later decades would see more rigorous enforcement of proofs of nobility and genealogy. The restraint exercised in the fabrication of their family history, along with the twenty-seven additional proofs is reflective of the newer, more rigorous style of genealogies, as described by Schalk.¹²

The genealogy allows us an intriguing window into the family's self-representation during this key period and demonstrates that representation was central to family strategies for social advancement. In the 1620s, the Marillacs were well on their way to becoming one of the most consequential families in the kingdom. They were well connected at court, especially in the devoutly Catholic orbit of Marie de Médicis and Richelieu. Louis's reception of the baton of a *Maréchal de France* was perhaps, socially, even more significant than his half-brother's time as *Garde des Sceaux*. The heavy emphasis placed on arms and military participation in Louis's genealogy is thus a deliberate choice. While there was indeed a shift from a focus on "valor" to "pedigree," this genealogy demonstrates that military service remained a key component of noble identity in the 1620s, and indeed, the entry point into the highest echelons of elite society. Rather

¹⁰ Olivier Rouchon, ed., *L'opération généalogique: Cultures et pratiques européennes, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 16.

¹¹ James R. Farr, *Authority and Sexuality in Early Modern Burgundy (1550–1730)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

¹² Ellery Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

than the obsolescence of virtue, honor, and military professions, as Schalk argues, the case of Louis de Marillac demonstrates that noble self-conception privileged pedigree, yet maintained respect for traditional notions of valor.¹³ In a society that was deeply conscious of nuances of social status and the hierarchy that status engendered, Louis's military advancement opened up an even brighter future for the Marillacs, advancing the family into the highest echelons of French society. It is not surprising that the Marillacs would have a genealogy produced during this period of rising fortunes.¹⁴

This genealogy is not just instructive for the knightly ancestors that were added to it, but also for the family members that disappear from the record. One of Louis's uncles, Pierre de Marillac, is not listed in the 1625 genealogy. Pierre was a monk who converted to Calvinism and moved to Geneva. This was shameful enough, especially for such an ardently Catholic family in the 1620s, but Pierre had nothing on the infamy of Jean de Marillac.

Born in 1539, Jean was completely erased from the record of the family. I have, so far, been unable to find any archival trace of Jean, except for the royal decree that condemned him to life on the Mediterranean galley fleet.¹⁵ Jean de Marillac, in the fall of 1564, rented a room from Jean Le Blanc, an artisan tailor. The 28-year-old Marillac was not, however, prompt in paying his rent. On November 2, 1565, as Marillac was preparing to eat his meal, the enraged landlord threw his meal on the ground, apparently outraged that the young renter had money enough to pay for meat, but not to pay him the 40 sous that he owed him. Marillac, livid, launched at Le Blanc with his dagger, though no permanent damage was seemingly done. After the dispute, Le Blanc asked Marillac to leave within a few days, leaving him time to put his affairs in order and settle his debts.

Four days later, affairs worsened when Le Blanc's wife pushed Marillac out of the house, slamming the door violently on his leg under a barrage of insults. The next day, Jean de Marillac returned to the house on the rue Saint-Jacques to pay the rest of his rent, collect his affairs, and put an end to the dispute. Le Blanc, furious upon seeing Marillac, began to insult him. The noise drew in LeBlanc's wife, who continued the previous day's barrage, going so far even as to call him a vagabond. Marillac, according to the record, was "surprised by anger, seeing himself insulted and scorned by such lowly, working people," (we can't have a discussion related to Jim Farr's work without reference to social hierarchy and measurable differences) "and the rudeness and incivility with which they treated him. He could not help himself to put his hand on his dagger... and sought to stab the aforementioned Leblanc in the arm, but by misfortune hit him in the chest" which led to the latter's quick death.¹⁶ Misfortune indeed, for Jean de Marillac was arrested and condemned to death. He would have been executed in front of a Parisian crowd were it not for the efforts his family undertook in order to free him. While Farr's Claude Giroux was unable to mobilize his

¹³ Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, 144.

¹⁴ Stéphane Jettot & Marie Lezowski, "Les Ressorts de l'Entreprise Généalogique," in Jettot & Lezowski, eds., *L'entreprise généalogique*, 18–19.

¹⁵ Archives Nationales JJ/264/47, fol 23.

¹⁶ Archives nationales JJ/264/47 fol 23v.

connections and patronage ties to avoid a shameful public execution, the Marillac clan was able to push within their network in Parlement to save the family's honor, if not this troublesome scion.¹⁷

Indeed, it is instructive that the night between being thrown out by LeBlanc's wife and the day of the murder, Jean de Marillac "went to the house of master Jean Amariton" a *parlementaire* situated nearby, in order to borrow clothes so that Jean – who was thrown into the cold November weather with no coat – could go to "the house of his cousin, also a member of our Parlement."¹⁸ The Marillac are thus unnamed, out of prudence or deference, but their fingerprints are on this case. Embarrassingly, the proof that Jean de Marillac submitted to Parlement to prove his good faith in the "accidental" death of Leblanc turned out to be dubious, and the chancellery made note of this. Nevertheless, after the advocacy from "some of our loyal *serviteurs*" – aka, the Marillac family and their network – the Chancellery commuted the death sentence to a perpetual sentence to the Mediterranean galley fleet.¹⁹ Jean de Marillac would then disappear from history – and the Marillac's genealogy. This absence can be explained by the scandalous, shameful conduct of Jean de Marillac – a murder committed in an act of rage recompensed with an ignominious sentence to the Mediterranean galley fleet. Indeed, this shows once again that the 1625 genealogy was not an act of historical research so much as a piece that reaffirmed the identity of the rising Marillacs, and thus, shameful cousin Jean was written out of their family history.

Louis de Marillac's genealogy can and should be read as a proclamation of the Marillac family's conception of and aspiration for its own identity in 1625. The seventeenth-century Marillacs took their own values and painted them onto their ancestors, in this process of "perpetual becoming," to simultaneously justify their current status and their current activities. With this genealogy, the Marillacs boldly affirmed their priorities while at the same time concealing their less than glorious origins. Early modern French society conceived nobility as a perpetual condition, extending backward into the past and forward into the future, even if this conception was at odds with reality. Lineage, as we have seen, was a form of social capital valued alongside marriages and royal offices. In an age when innovation was viewed as a foul practice, and everyone looked to the past for their future, the 1625 genealogy represents a crucial piece of evidence of their self-conception. They were justifying their present, and planning their future, by their invented past.

I didn't choose to write about lineage simply for its importance for our historical subjects, but because it is important for us today. Academia places a lot of focus on lineage as well, and one of the most important pieces of identity for a scholar is their advisor. Much like the artisans that Jim researched, we've taken part in the transmission of knowledge from an older master to younger apprentices. We've become, thanks to Jim Farr, artisans of history. I think it's really fitting that we are able to honor and celebrate Jim's long career. We're all known, and always will be known, as Jim Farr students. And that's something I wouldn't trade for the world.

¹⁷ Farr, *A Tale of Two Murders: Passion and Power in Seventeenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Farr, "The Death of a Judge: Performance, Honor, and Legitimacy in Seventeenth-Century France," *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 1–22.

¹⁸ Archives nationales JJ/264/47 fol 23v.

¹⁹ Archives nationales JJ/264/47 fol 23v.

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