

# Mesmerism meets prophecy. The circle of the Duchess of Bourbon

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## ***MESMERISM MEETS PROPHECY. THE CIRCLE OF THE DUCHESS OF BOURBON<sup>1</sup>***

Francisco Javier RAMÓN SOLANS

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This article offers a reflection on the relationship between illuminism, mesmerism, and mysticism within the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon in the last third of the Eighteenth Century. An analysis of the circle of the Petit Bourg reveals the changing relationship among these groups. The French Revolution was to stimulate the cross-fertilization among these different groups. The Duchess of Bourbon welcomed to her home many members of the constitutional clergy, as well as the prophetess Suzette Labrousse. This revolutionary mysticism embraced the notion of animal magnetism and even contributed to spreading it. The international network that formed around illuminism, prophesy, and animal magnetism will also be examined in this article. The circle of Labrousse, itself, invites reflection about the religious dimension of contemporary thought among the second generation of Enlightenment thinkers.

**Keywords :** Animal Magnetism, Prophecy, Illuminism, constitutional Church

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In the late 18th century everything seemed possible, there were no longer any limits and the future was open to all possibilities. "At the start of 89 – as magnificently stated by Albert Mathiez – it seemed that the French people, prey to a feverish enthusiasm, lived in expectation of a miracle that would change the face of the earth"<sup>2</sup>. Prophecy, illuminism and mesmerism joined together in this belief to try to penetrate and understand

(1) This article has been written as part of the HAR2012-32604 and HAR2012-31926 research projects under the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness. I would like to thank Marie Salgues for her invaluable help in proofreading the French version of this text.

(2) Albert MATHIEZ, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789-1792)*, Paris, Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition, 1904, p. 20.

this fascinating and dynamic future at the end of the century. The French Revolution contributed to reinforcing the cross-fertilization between these religious, political and scientific discourses. This convergence was fed by growing dissatisfaction with the establishment – whether religious, political or scientific – which was seen by the followers of these different currents of thought as an obstacle to the realization of their dreams.

In his study that has since become a classic, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (1968), Robert Darnton highlighted the importance of the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, the most noteworthy centre of mysticism in Paris during the revolutionary period<sup>3</sup>. Her Élysée and Petit-Bourg homes therefore became a meeting place for mesmerism, illuminism and prophecy. In them could be found followers of animal magnetism, such as Nicolas Bergasse, Quévremont de Lamotte, the Marquis de Puységur and the Comte de Chastenot-Puységur, illuminists such as Louis Claude Saint-Martin, constitutional priests such as Dom Gerle and Pierre Pontard, as well as the prophetesses Suzette Labrousse and Catherine Théot. Despite its importance, little remains known about the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon<sup>4</sup>. In the following pages, we will study the relations between animal magnetism and prophecy in order to analyze them.

### Mesmerism and religion

The Age of Reason was also that of the supernatural, of prophecy and the fascination with occult elements supposed to explain how the world works. The second generation of the Enlightenment was interested in the mysterious origins of religions and in the relations between nature and social form. These new "Enlightenment prophets" thus began to search for

(3) Robert DARNTON, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard UP, 1968, p. 70, 128-130.

(4) Although scattered with prejudices and value judgements, the biography of the Comte Ducos remains an essential reference. Comte DUCOS, *La mère du duc d'Enghien, 1750-1822*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1900. For other biographical entries, see Jacques LONGUET, *Un destin révolutionnaire à Evry. Madame de Bourbon, Citoyenne Vérité, suivi de La Garde nationale d'Evry-sur-Seine sous la Révolution*, Paris, ADEF, 1989. For the importance of this mystic network, see Albert MATHIEZ, "Catherine Théot et le mysticisme chrétien révolutionnaire", *La Revue de Paris*, 8, 1901, p. 857-878; August VIATTE, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme. Illuminisme, théosophie (1770-1820)*, vol. 1, *Le Prénomantisme*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 1969, p. 238-251; Renzo DE FELICE, *Note e ricerche sugli «Illuminati» e il misticismo rivoluzionario (1789-1800)*, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960; Clarke GARRETT, *Respectable Folly. Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and in England*, Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 1975; Nicole EDELMAN, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France. 1785-1914*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1995, p. 61.

holistic interpretations<sup>5</sup>. These often took on religious forms. By exceeding mere allegorical uses, they became genuine civil religions leading to the sanctification of nature and society. According to Albert Mathiez, this particular way of conjugating a variety of religious, classical, philosophical and scientific elements could even have led to the creation of a revolutionary religion<sup>6</sup>.

In the study of mesmerism, the religious implications represent one of the least known aspects. David Armando recently studied one of the facets of the complex relationship between animal magnetism and religion, that of the hostile attitude of a considerable section of the Catholic church, from the demonological interpretation of the phenomenon (closely linked to the theory of a conspiracy against religion and monarchy), from the work of the Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Fiard, to the negative judgement of the Roman Inquisition and the official condemnation of mesmerism by the Holy See in 1856, as part of a Vatican offensive to regain control over prophetic and miraculous phenomena<sup>7</sup>.

However, two partially unexplored areas require further investigation: the religious formulation of mesmerism and its cross-fertilization with Christian mysticism<sup>8</sup>. In an unpublished part of his thesis, Darnton focused on the religious mysticism that characterized the work of Nicolas de Bergasse and Jacques Pierre Brissot. The former drafted a theory of "enthusiasm", a kind of mystic inspiration from a sixth sense, which would combine the sensations of the other senses with movements of the magnetic fluid. He outlined a theory of intuitions, "presentiments" and other spiritual experiences, which was developed in turn by Brissot in his *Examen critique des voyages dans l'Amérique septentrionale de M. le Marquis de Chastellux* (1786), analyzing the religious ecstasy of the Quakers<sup>9</sup>.

(5) Vincenzo FERRONE, *I profeti dell'illuminismo. Le metamorfosi della ragione nel tardo Settecento italiano*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1989.

(6) On the approach used by Albert Mathiez, see Francisco Javier RAMÓN SOLANS, "Estudio preliminar", in Albert MATHIEZ, *Los orígenes de los cultos revolucionarios (1789-1792)*, Zaragoza, Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2012, p. XXI-XLI.

(7) David ARMANDO, "Des sorciers au mesmérisme: l'abbé Jean-Baptiste Fiard (1736-1818) et la théorie du complot", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 126, 2014, No. 1, p. 43-58 and "Le Saint-Office romain face au magnétisme animal", in Bruno BELHOSTE and Nicole EDELMAN (dir.), *Mesmer et mesmérismes. Le magnétisme animal en contexte*, Paris, Omniscience, 2015, p. 211-224.

(8) See Marina CAFFIERO, *La Repubblica nella città del Papa. Roma 1798*, Rome, Donzelli, 2005, p. 141-177.

(9) Robert DARNTON, *Trends in Radical Propaganda on the Eve of the French Revolution (1782-1788)*, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1964, vol. 1, p. 76-83.



The condemnation by the Royal Commissions in 1784 and the demedicalization of mesmerist knowledge that followed played a central role in the evolution of animal magnetism, from naturalist interpretations by doctors to the spiritualist theories of the prophets<sup>10</sup>. It was in the phenomenon of magnetic somnambulism that mesmerism developed this religious aspect, as well as its cross-fertilization with other mystic traditions. The visions of the somnambulists bore witness to a notable eclecticism, combining elements from Catholicism and Illuminism. Finally, the development of magnetic somnambulism involved a dual message: the quasi-religious one from the magnetized patient and that of the women who were able to make their voices heard in a man's world<sup>11</sup>.

### The discovery of magnetism

Born on 5 July 1750 in the House of Orléans, Bathilde was raised in the convent of La Magdeleine de Tresnel and at the Abbey of Penthémont. In 1770 she married her cousin Louis Henri de Bourbon-Condé (1756-1830), Duke of Bourbon, son of the Prince of Condé, who was then sixteen years of age. When she became Duchess of Bourbon, she enjoyed the use of the splendid library and the rich natural history, mineralogy and physics cabinets at the Chateau of Chantilly to give free reign to her curiosity. As a result of her marriage she gave birth to Louis Antoine de Bourbon-Condé (1772-1804), Duke of Enghien, the mythical hero of the Counter-revolution, who was shot on the orders of Napoleon.

Like her sister-in-law, the Duchess of Chartres, Bathilde d'Orléans joined the lodge of the *Chevaliers et nymphes de la Rose*, founded by her brother Philippe d'Orléans, Grand Master of all the lodges of France, at her little house of La Folie-Triton. She became Grand Mistress of all the lodges of France in 1775 and, under this title, presided with great pomp over a party given by her lodge of adoption, the *Candeur*, in 1777<sup>12</sup>.

After multiple crises and infidelities, the King authorized the separation of property and body between the spouses in 1781. Bathilde d'Orléans received an annual pension and her father, the Duke of Orléans, gave her

(10) Bruno BELHOSTE, "Mesmer et la diffusion du magnétisme animal à Paris (1778-1785)", in Bruno BELHOSTE and Nicole EDELMAN (dir.), *Mesmer et mesmérismes*, op. cit., p. 21-62.

(11) Nicole EDELMAN, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France*, op. cit., p. 15-49 and Jean-Pierre PETER, "De Mesmer à Puységur. Magnétisme animal et transe somnambulique, à l'origine des thérapies psychiques", *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38, 2009, p. 19-40.

(12) Étienne-François BAZOT, "Origines et progrès en France de la maçonnerie des Dames", *L'Univers maçonnique*, 1, 1837, p. 70-71.

two residences: the Chateau of Petit-Bourg and the Hôtel de Clermont (in 1787, she went to live in the Élysée Palace). In her famous memoirs of the court of Louis XVI, the Baroness of Oberkirch described the Duchess's open mind as well as the ambience of freedom that reigned in her salon:

"She took an interest in Lavater's hypotheses and Mesmer's discoveries; all in all, she has a lively and *curious* mind. She wants to know, but she has little patience for learning. She is not in any way exclusive and does not have any favourites. She often attaches herself to people with strongly opposed tastes, principles and customs. She lives in the middle of all of this, and leaves everyone to their opinion while reserving her own"<sup>13</sup>.

This independence enabled her to freely organize her salon and to set up an illuminist and mesmerist circle around her, illustrating in an exemplary manner the hybrid nature of animal magnetism after the demedicalization of mesmerist knowledge, as well as the religious aspect of this phenomenon. The Duchess of Bourbon "believed not only in magnetism, but in empathy and presentiment"<sup>14</sup>, theories which, as we have seen previously, came from the thinking of Bergasse.

Although she became passionate about mesmerism at a very early stage, we do not know exactly when she became aware of it. Several people in her entourage had become actively involved in it. Thus, for example, with the Duke of Bourbon, we find the surgeon Brillhouet, involved in the defence of Mesmer, who applied magnetism to cure the sick<sup>15</sup>. Quévremont de Lamotte, physician to the House of Orléans, then to the Duchess of Bourbon, was one of Mesmer's first students and probably initiated Bathilde<sup>16</sup>. In 1784, according to the account from the Baroness of Oberkirch, the Duchess "often spoke of Martines de Pasqually" and, she added, she "receives M de Saint-Martin, who was accepted as a member of the Société de l'Harmonie universelle in the same year, in her private rooms very often"<sup>17</sup>. Accompanied by the Baroness, on 11 June 1784 Bathilde d'Orléans visited Mesmer, who "promised us special sessions and supplied them to us continuously. We left there excited and we did not stop talking

(13) *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch sur la Cour de Louis XVI et la société française avant 1789*, vol. 2, Bruxelles, Meline, 1854, p. 15.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 76.

(15) "Letter from the Surgeon of His Grace the Duke of Bourbon to Mr Mesmer, dated 9 July 1784, Chateau de Chantilly" in *Recueil des pièces les plus intéressantes sur le magnétisme animal*, Paris, Gastelier, 1784, p. 401-403.

(16) The lover of Bathilde d'Orléans, Lieutenant Alexandre Aimable de Roquefeuil, was also a member of the Société de l'Harmonie universelle.

(17) *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch, op. cit.*, p. 76.



about it all through dinner"<sup>18</sup>. However, these sessions did not continue because Mesmer left Paris for Lyon.

The Duchess of Bourbon herself became a magnetizer and she was one of the pioneers in the practice of magnetic somnambulism, discovered by the Marquis de Puységur in 1784. The Baroness of Oberkirch attended a magnetism session at the home of the Duchess of Bourbon with the Marquis de Puységur and his brother Maxime: they "obtain from subjects whom they put to sleep not only knowledge of the present in far-off places, but also foreknowledge of the future"<sup>19</sup>. In 1786, Bathilde d'Orléans entrusted the physician Varnier with the installation and management of a magnetic treatment room for the "relief of her vassals"<sup>20</sup>.

On 15 May 1786, Bathilde began treatment on Madame Gérôme which kept her busy for several days, as well as magnetic sessions in Petit-Bourg and Paris. After a strict diet that made her faint, Madame Gérôme went into a somnambulist state and foretold what was going to happen to her body, announcing her convulsions. She experienced joy, excitement, fatigue and even dread and fear in the face of imagined persecution. After some days, emotional links were established between Bathilde and the somnambulist. The Duchess continued to experiment with somnambulism and to treat other members of her circle: a nun, her lady's maid and the somnambulist Valois, etc. Among the participants in the sessions, we also find Madame de Longuejume, Comtesse Julie, the Chevalier de Virieu, the doctor Antoine Biscarat, and the botanist and doctor Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu, the only member of the Royal Commissions to have recognized the existence of the phenomena of animal magnetism<sup>21</sup>.

### Mesmerism and revolutionary mysticism

The French Revolution caused upheaval in mesmerist circles. The reaction to events was not unequivocal: while a considerable portion of the main figures of animal magnetism, such as the Marquis de La Fayette, Jacques Pierre Brissot and Nicolas Bergasse, were involved in the Revolution, others enrolled in the Counter-revolution or remained

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 77.

(19) *Ibid.*, p. 159.

(20) "Observations on magnetism made by Mr Varnier, and communicated by this doctor to the Société magnétique, session held in 1786", *L'Hermès. Journal du magnétisme animal*, vol. IV, 1829, No. 1, p. 7.

(21) "Cure of a complicated neurosis, carried out in Petit-Bourg in 1786, by her Grace the Duchess of Bourbon, née L.M.T.B. d'Orléans", *L'Hermès. Journal du magnétisme animal*, vol. III, 1828, No. 20 and Comte DUCOS, *La mère du duc d'Enghien, op. cit.*, p. 245.

indifferent<sup>22</sup>. The Duchess of Bourbon herself favourably welcomed the Revolution, which she saw as an instrument of God for the good of the people and to which she demonstrated an unflinching commitment, even in the harshest moments of the revolutionary process. Right from the start of the Revolution, the Duchess of Bourbon was also held in high esteem by the population. She was praised as a benefactress in the registers of grievances of the Essonne. Shortly after the fall of the Bastille, she donated 1,200 francs to the directory of the district of Capucins Saint-Honoré. On 14 July 1790, she opened the gates of Petit-Bourg and offered a picnic to celebrate the festival of the Federation with the people of Evry<sup>23</sup>.

In spring 1790, the Duchess of Bourbon began to take an interest in a matter that was attracting the attention of the public at the time: that of Suzette Labrousse and her prophecies about the calling of the Estates General, the appointment of Christophe-Antoine Gerle to this Assembly and the regeneration of the Church. These prophecies, which dated from a time long before the Revolution, took on meaning in the context of spring 1789, while the calling of the Estates General was perceived as the start of a time of happiness when "ordinary people" were finally going to be heard<sup>24</sup>.

It was thus that the vague predictions of a young woman from the Périgord who had wished to follow the path of holiness were reinterpreted in the light of new political changes. Dom Gerle himself admitted, in talking about the prediction that he would be made a deputy, that Labrousse "had never used this expression, but that she had often told me that I would serve in the examination of great matters, that I would cooperate in this and that I would be in position to give an account of it"<sup>25</sup>. The prophecies found their greatest strength in their partial confirmation, as well as in "the desire that everyone naturally had to know the outcome of the revolution"<sup>26</sup>.

The Duchess of Bourbon asked for information about this prophetess. The parish priest of Saint-Rémy de Bordeaux wrote to the Duchess to

(22) See the articles by David Armando and Karine Rance in this issue.

(23) Jacques LONGUET, *Un destin révolutionnaire à Evry*, op. cit., p. 35-43 and Serge BIANCHI, "Engagements et destins des nobles de l'Essonne dans la décennie révolutionnaire : essai de bilan", in Philippe BOURDIN (dir.), *Les noblesses françaises dans l'Europe de la Révolution*, Rennes, PUR, 2010, p. 234.

(24) Philippe GRATEAU, *Les cahiers de doléances. Une relecture culturelle*, Rennes, PUR, 2001, p. 175.

(25) *Renseignements donnés au Public par Dom Gerle, Prieur de la Chartreuse du port Sainte-Marie : Sur des faits relatifs à mademoiselle La Brousse, de Vanxains en Périgord*, Paris, l'imprimerie de Devaux, s.d., p. 6.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 5.



inform her about the visit he had made to her in March 1790 at her home in Vanxains, accompanied by the Prior of Chartreuse de Vauclaire, Dom Gerle. He had been very touched at the time by her modesty, her piety and, above all, by "the greatest tranquillity" with which she made her prophecies, announcing "the happiest future for the kingdom in general and for the King in particular"<sup>27</sup>.

In the memoirs that she wrote in 1813 in La Rochelle, Labrousse claimed to be in contact with Dom Gerle about going to Paris on his election as a deputy of the Constituent Assembly. She was also approached by several other deputies. According to her, the Duchess of Bourbon, Mirabeau and the king himself were interested in her prophecies. The bishops wanted to take her away in secret to the outskirts of Paris to discuss the details of her mission, but this plan was abandoned because some of them wished first of all examine to her work<sup>28</sup>. It was probably after this failure that Dom Gerle made a final attempt with the Constituent Assembly. On 13 June 1790, he took the floor to talk about her prophecies:

"There is a person in the Périgord named Suzanne la Bouze; she foretold this revolution to a large number of people; she sent me, eleven years ago, a work in which she predicted the calling of the National Assembly, the end of monastic vows, the reform of abuses, the recalling of the clergy to their primitive purity, and the federation of all the peoples of the earth to form a single people of brothers. These predictions were made known at the time to the Bishop of Périgueux. The National Assembly has taken place, the curtailing of vows has taken place..."<sup>29</sup>.

Some murmurs were raised in the Assembly, which then decided to move on to the next item on the agenda. Dom Gerle also wished by means of this intervention "to stabilize public opinion about the pamphlets that were circulating in Paris"<sup>30</sup>. This case of prophecy had in fact aroused a certain amount of interest in the capital, leading to the publication of a number of satirical texts<sup>31</sup>. It is likely that Gerle was referring in particular to the *Prophéties de Mlle De la Brousse*, a work incorrectly attributed

(27) Archives of the Company of priests of Saint Sulpice, Emery Collection, volume II, document 3, "Copy of a letter written to Her Grace the Duchess of Bourbon, 14 April 1790".

(28) BM La Rochelle, CGM 363, vol. 3513, *Précis de ma vie et de moi, Suzanne Clotilde Courcelle Labrousse*, f<sup>o</sup> 38r<sup>o</sup>-39r<sup>o</sup>.

(29) *Archives parlementaires*, 13 June 1790, vol. XVI, p. 205.

(30) *Ibidem*.

(31) Among the satirical texts, see "Les amours de Dom Gerle", *Chronique du manège*, 9 and 10, 1790, *La dinde aux truffes, ou le don patriotique des périgourdins. L'Assemblée nationale*, s.l.n., [1790] and *Le pucelage ou la France sauvée*, [Paris], Imprimerie de L. L. Girard, [1790].

to the abbé Fauchet<sup>32</sup> and which seemed to express the condemnation of Labrousse's prophecies by the constitutional Church<sup>33</sup>.

For Dom Gerle, and for some of the constitutional clergy, the Revolution was the opportunity for the messianic accomplishment of the regeneration of religion and society. Churchmen such as the abbé Grégoire, abbé Fauchet and André Lamourette saw in fact in the events of the revolution the promise of the coming of the kingdom of God. As pointed out by Rita Hermon-Belot, this prophetic interpretation can help us to understand the revolutionary commitment of a portion of the clergy in 1789<sup>34</sup>. However, such an interpretation of revolutionary events remained, in most cases, within the context of figurist theology<sup>35</sup>. This is why the official representatives of the constitutional Church were hostile to the wave of prophetesses. They saw their pretension to act as equals of the priests as a danger, both from the gender point of view and the institutional point of view<sup>36</sup>.

As his intervention at the Assembly was largely ignored, Gerle had a text printed about Labrousse with the support of "several very respectable people", including most likely the Duchess of Bourbon. It relied on the witness account of a churchman who was a cousin of Labrousse, and on others, who could "provide proof that Mademoiselle la Brousse predicted the current revolution eleven or twelve years ago" with "the assembly of the Estates General, the abolition of the orders, equality of conditions and the renewal of France"<sup>37</sup>. It was the "plan for the setting-up of a new society" with "the greatest reform in the church, the return of decency, the obliteration of prejudices, the eradication of abuses and the humbling of the great people of the earth"<sup>38</sup>. With the conversion of the Gentiles, but especially of the Jews, appearing in several prophetic speeches of the time, "the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion will end up as the religion

(32) The abbé Fauchet himself denied this in the *Journal de Paris*, 87, 28 March 1790, p. 348.

(33) *Prophéties de Mlle De la Brousse, sur la révolution, pour le mois de mai*, Paris, Imprimerie de Bonnefoi, [1790], p. 7.

(34) Rita HERMON-BELOT, "God's Will in History: the Abbé Grégoire, the Revolution and the Jews", in Karl A. KOTTMAN (dir.), *Millenarism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture. Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarola to the Abbé Grégoire*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2001, p. 91-100.

(35) Catherine MAIRE, "Les jansénistes et le millénarisme. Du refus à la conversion", *Annales HSS*, 63, 2008, No. 1, p. 7-36.

(36) Catherine MAIRE, "L'abbé Grégoire devant les prophétesses", *Rivista di storia del Cristianesimo*, IV, 2007, No. 2, p. 411-429.

(37) *Renseignements donnés au Public par Dom Gerle, op. cit.*, p. 1-2.

(38) *Ibid.*, p. 3.



of the whole of the earth, and will bring happiness to all nations which, coming together by these means, will form one single family"<sup>39</sup>.

The Duchess of Bourbon later referred to the discussions that were held at her home about the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the division that this caused: "I therefore assembled several priests at my home to hear them discuss the controversial points on which I found that they were not in agreement". The Duchess finally took the side of the constitutional clergy, on which she found, as she said "the strongest proof". She replaced her confessor, the unyielding émigré, the abbé Dugarric, with another priest whose principles she knew already "who seemed to me to have the virtues of his condition", Pierre Pontard<sup>40</sup>.

Elected to the Legislative Assembly in September 1791, Constitutional Bishop of the Dordogne and a regular member of the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, Pontard, took up the baton from Dom Gerle regarding Labrousse the prophetess. According to Labrousse, Dom Gerle "had exhausted all the means to have me taken to Paris". Before leaving Périgueux for the capital, Pontard met her in turn to talk about her prophecies. Satisfied with the answers that she gave, he assured her that "he would talk to his colleagues", but, she added, "whether they were for or against" she would nonetheless go to the capital<sup>41</sup>. On his arrival in Paris, Pontard addressed the constitutional prelates to rally them to the cause of the prophetess. He added to his address a hagiographic summary of the life of Labrousse. In this text, he talked about the impression that the meeting had made on him:

"I had never spoken to her [...]. I was so much more affected after seeing her and after conversing with her [...]. I therefore believed that I should lend myself to her views, by placing her in a position to be able to consult an assembly of bishops. It was I who called her to Paris"<sup>42</sup>.

Apart from Pierre Pontard and Dom Gerle, the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon was frequented by another member of the Constitutional

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 4.

(40) *Opuscules ou pensées d'une âme de foi sur la religion chrétienne pratiquée en esprit et en vérité*, vol. 1, Barcelona, s.n., 1812, p. VIII-IX and *Journal de P. Pontard*, 1<sup>ère</sup> et 2<sup>ème</sup> quinzaine de mai [1793], p. 134-135.

(41) *Précis de ma vie...*, *op. cit.*, f° 41<sup>r</sup>°-41<sup>v</sup>°.

(42) *Address by P. Pontard, évêque constitutionnel du département de la Dordogne, à ses collègues des quatre-vingt-deux départements, par forme de consultation, sur le cas qui est ici proposé*, s.l.n., [1791], p. 43.

Church, the Bishop *in partibus* of Baghdad, Jean Baptiste Miroudot du Bourg<sup>43</sup>.

On her arrival in Paris at the end of 1791, Labrousse stayed with the Duchess of Bourbon. The two women got on very well. While the majority of the circle of the Duchess gave the prophetess a warm welcome, some, such as Saint-Martin, were sceptical or even hostile. After a stay in Lyon and Strasbourg, the "unknown philosopher" had in 1791 fixed his residence between his father's house in Amboise and Petit-Bourg, where he wrote his famous poem in 102 verses *Le Crocodile*. Saint-Martin had changed a lot after his departure from Paris in 1785 and especially after the disappointment experienced regarding the prophecies of the "unknown agent" in the circle of Willermoz in Lyon. This was what led him to develop a hostile attitude to somnambulists, visionaries and prophetesses<sup>44</sup>. This hostility was fed by a growing misogyny. The unknown philosopher distrusted women. They, except for rare exceptions like the Duchess, were "like children who look at everything, who scream at the slightest contradiction, but who do not have the strength for anything else other than to scream"<sup>45</sup>. Despite his admiration for Bathilde d'Orléans, with whom he shared a providential interpretation of the Revolution, Saint-Martin criticized in her "the penchant for all the marvels of lower order, such as the somnambulists and prophets of the day"<sup>46</sup>.

Although Saint-Martin had a strong influence over Bathilde d'Orléans and vice versa, the Duchess of Bourbon's support for Suzette Labrousse did not lessen. She reprimanded the philosopher for the criticism that he levelled at Pontard<sup>47</sup>. The Duchess thus described the advice of Saint-Martin:

"I had in my society a wise man, profoundly learned about religion and all the sciences, who advised me to cease all my investigations and to

(43) After the death of his niece, Miroudot stayed with the Duchess of Bourbon to whom he became very close. Tutor of the illegitimate daughter of Bathilde d'Orléans, Adélaïde Victoire Damassy, he was a witness at her marriage in 1791 to the secretary of the orders of the Duchess of Bourbon, Joseph-Antoine Gros. Jacques LONGUET, *Un destin révolutionnaire à Evry, op. cit.*, p. 44.

(44) Robert AMADOU, *Trésor Martiniste*, Paris, Villain et Belhomme, 1969, p. 83-132 and Christine BERGÉ, "Le corps et la plume. Écritures mystiques de l'Agent inconnu", *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38, 2009, p. 41-59.

(45) Louis Claude de SAINT-MARTIN, *Mon portrait historique et philosophique (1789-1803)*, Paris, René Julliard, 1961, p. 82.

(46) *Correspondance inédite de Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin dit le Philosophe inconnu et Kirchberger, baron de Liebistorf, Membre du Conseil souverain de la République de Berne. Du 22 mai 1792 jusqu'au 7 novembre 1797*, Paris, Dentu, 1862, p. 41.

(47) Louis Claude de SAINT-MARTIN, *Mon portrait...*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.



dedicate myself only to worship, prayer and to reading the Holy Scriptures, while doing good works"<sup>48</sup>.

On 19 February 1792, in Labrousse's apartment at the home of the Duchess of Bourbon, a meeting of seven constitutional bishops was held – at which we only know that Miroudot (Baghdad), Pontard (Périgord), Claude Fauchet (Calvados) and Éléonore-Marie Desbois de Rochefort (Amiens) were present –, as well as Dom Gerle, Saint-Martin, the Commander of the National Guard Pescheloche and his wife. Despite the firm opposition of the Bishops of Calvados and Amiens, those present supported Labrousse's proposal to travel to Rome to convince the Pope of the joys of the Revolution. The importance given to Labrousse's mission was such that, from January 1792, the Abbé de Salamon regularly informed Cardinal Secretary of State Zelada about it through an agent that he had introduced into the Duchess of Bourbon's household<sup>49</sup>.

On the day of her departure, 19 February 1792, Suzanne Labrousse attended mass in the church of the daughters of Saint Thomas accompanied by the Duchess of Bourbon. They both received communion from the hand of Pierre Pontard. After breakfasting together, the Duchess and Pontard accompanied Labrousse to the stage coach for Bordeaux<sup>50</sup>. The prophetess spent a few days in Vanxains, Lyon and Grenoble, and then headed for the Papal States. Meanwhile, on 10 March 1792, Zelada had written to the Governors of Ancona, Civitavecchia and Viterbo to warn them of the arrival of Labrousse, who was arrested in Montefiascone, taken during the night to Rome and immediately locked up in the Château de Saint-Ange<sup>51</sup>.

While the mission and voyage of Suzette Labrousse were being prepared, a genuine battle had broken out as a result of the pamphlets that were circulating. Her prophecies were criticized by both the counter-revolutionary clergy and the constitutional clergy. The abbé Maury treated with irony the intended mission of Labrousse, but also the circle of the

(48) *Opuscules ou pensées...*, *op. cit.*, p. IX.

(49) *Précis de ma vie...*, *op. cit.*, f° 41r°-41v° and 43v°-44r°; *Journal prophétique*, 1<sup>ère</sup> Semaine de mars [1792]; Vicomte de RICHEMONT, *Correspondance secrète de l'abbé de Salamon chargé des Affaires du Saint-Siège pendant la Révolution avec le cardinal de Zelada (1791-1792)*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1898, p. 363-364; Louis Claude de SAINT-MARTIN, *Mon portrait...*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

(50) P.-J. CRÉDOT, *Pierre Pontard. Évêque constitutionnel de la Dordogne*, Paris, Delhomme and Briguët, 1893, p. 519. For her journey, see Camille DAUX, "Une voyante révolutionnaire à Montauban", *Bulletin archéologique et historique de la société archéologique de Tarn-et-Garonne*, XVIII, 1900, p. 189-204.

(51) Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, Vescovi, vol. 370, f° 70v°-71v° and 297v°-298v°.

Duchess of Bourbon, taking advantage of this to combat the constitutional church and the Revolution<sup>52</sup>. The abbé Fauchet published an article in the *Journal des Amis*, in which he reproached Bishop Pontard for assimilating "the oracles of the Prophets to the daydreams of this young woman and to the visions of another devotee called Brounh [Brohon]"<sup>53</sup>.

To disseminate the prophecies of Labrousse and inform public opinion about her mission to Rome, Pontard founded the *Journal prophétique* (January-October 1792) and the *Journal de Pierre Pontard* (January-October 1793), with financial support from the Duchess of Bourbon. The *Journal prophétique* was conceived in Petit-Bourg by Pontard, the Duchess of Bourbon and Labrousse during winter 1791. It was there too that Pontard composed the news-sheets. The Duchess herself did "the proofreading and sent it to several places"<sup>54</sup>. The originality of the periodical lay in the fact that it was the first one to deal with prophecy as a theme. As its creators declared, the *Journal prophétique*, "instead of talking about the present and the past, like ordinary newspapers, has the future as its subject"<sup>55</sup>.

Although focused on the future, the *Journal prophétique* had an ongoing dialogue with the present. In it, Pierre Pontard defended the cause of the Revolution, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the marriage of priests, and he vehemently argued against ultramontanism, papal infallibility and the refractory clergy. In addition to the prophecies of Labrousse, the periodical concentrated more particularly on the texts of the mystic Jacqueline-Aimée Brohon, who died in 1778, which it re-interpreted in the light of the aspirations of the new constitutional church<sup>56</sup>. The *Journal prophétique* was all in all a good example of the cross-fertilization of mystic discourse during the revolutionary period. In its pages, we find a jumble of biblical references, figurist interpretations, speeches in defence of the revolution, Gallican arguments and mesmerist elements.

(52) *Lettre de l'Abbé Maury à l'incomparable demoiselle Suzette Labrousse, Prophétesse Périgourdine, résidante à Paris, chez Madame la Duchesse de Bourbon*, Paris, Crapart, [1792]. The text was a reply to the criticism expressed by Labrousse in 1791, *Réponse de Melle Labrousse à l'opinion de M. Maury, sur la constitution civile du clergé, donnée à l'impression par un militaire qui en prit copie chez elle à Vanxain, district de Ribeirac en Périgord*, Libourne, chez Puynesge, [1791].

(53) P.-J. CRÉDOT, *Pierre Pontard*, op. cit., p. 524-525.

(54) *Journal de P. Pontard*, 1<sup>ère</sup> et 2<sup>ème</sup> quinzaine de mai 1793, p. 133-136 and *Précis de ma vie...*, op. cit., f<sup>o</sup> 45 v<sup>o</sup>.

(55) *Journal prophétique*, 1st week of January 1792, p. 1.

(56) Nicolas BRUCKER, "Fictionnalisation du moi et figurisme prophétique dans les *Réflexions édifiantes* de Jacqueline-Aimée Brohon", in Fabrice PREYAT (dir.), *Femmes des anti-lumières, femmes apologistes*, Bruxelles, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2016, p. 71-85 and Frank Paul BOWMAN, *Le Christ romantique*, Geneva, Droz, 1973, p. 35-38.



## Prophecy meets mesmerism

After seeing how the mesmerists joined the revolutionary prophetesses, we are now going to take the opposite path, that of the influence exercised by mesmerism on the prophetic discourses of Labrousse and Pontard. For Darnton, Labrousse represented "the most extreme political version of mesmerism"<sup>57</sup>. The informer of the abbé de Salamon in the Duchess of Bourbon's household agreed with this description of Labrousse: "this girl has a little about her of the *illuminati*, of which the cult is increasing considerably, throughout the country, and she meddles in mesmerism"<sup>58</sup>.

The conversion of the prophetess from the Périgord to animal magnetism was the result of the democratization and even the popular re-appropriation of this practice after the division within the Société de l'Harmonie universelle. Suzette Labrousse in turn wished to democratize access to a practice of care that in her opinion constituted a public good:

"The one who taught me magnetism also wanted me to make it into a mystery for everyone and I answered him, huh! Why make a mystery out of something so simple, and so beneficial, it should be quite the contrary, wanting everyone to be instructed in it so that they could magnetize one another [...]. So what I say is, down with any secret, any mystery about what could be for the public and general good"<sup>59</sup>.

While waiting to be called to Paris, Labrousse had begun to magnetize in Vanxains. We do not know how she became aware of this practice, but it was probably at the time of one of the many visits that she received in spring 1790: either someone who had come from a city near Vanxains with a strong presence of followers of magnetism, such as Bordeaux; or a friend of the Duchess of Bourbon, which is suggested by the account of her first experience with a female magnetic somnambulist. Labrousse had asked her if she would go to Paris when the Princess of Bourbon came to find her. "To that she replied that I would only go within a year and that came true to the letter"<sup>60</sup>.

(57) Robert DARNTON, *Mesmerism*, *op. cit.*, p. 129; see Marina CAFFIERO, *La Repubblica...*, *op. cit.*, p. 155-163.

(58) Vicomte de RICHEMONT, *Correspondance secrète*, *op. cit.*, p. 242-243.

(59) *Discours prononcés par la citoyenne Courcelle Labrousse au club de Rome dans le mois Floréal de l'an VI. Faits et revus par elle-même*, Rome, Puccinelli, 1798, p. 68- 70.

(60) *Précis de ma vie...*, *op. cit.*, f° 39r°.

In the information given after he spoke at the Assembly, Dom Gerle said that Labrousse had become famous through "the fortunate art that she has of curing the sick" and that she "makes use of magnetism, which she considers to be a gift common to all men"<sup>61</sup>. Regarding Labrousse, another clergyman confirmed this fame:

"I think that she could do good, but I fear she may do a lot of harm, people come to see her from very far away and even people of quality. The magnetism that she uses with success, so she says, attracts a lot of sick people"<sup>62</sup>.

In the household of the Duchess of Bourbon, Labrousse continued, in all likelihood, to practise magnetism. We know that during her journey to Rome, she still offered "relief through magnetism"<sup>63</sup>.

Labrousse even tried to magnetize Niccolò Paccanari, a member of the church who was trying to re-found the Society of Jesus and who had been imprisoned in the Château de Saint-Ange by the republicans. Although the account of this meeting given by Paccanari was highly critical, and even caricatural, he admitted that Labrousse had correctly diagnosed a problem in the nerve of a finger that was not visible. He described how Labrousse had applied her fingers to his temples and had made "some superstitious gestures". Labrousse had told him that she had learned this practice by means "of a pact with her God" and that she was preparing a book in which she would explain "the principles and rules of this art about which she boasted of the effects it had had on the Princess of Santa Croce", to whom Labrousse had become very close<sup>64</sup>.

Shortly after the proclamation of the first Roman Republic on 15 February 1798, Suzette Labrousse defined magnetism, in her first speech at the Constitutional Club of Rome, as the "transmission of fluid, from a being, who is filled with it like a basin full of water to such an extent that it overflows on all sides, and which is therefore transmitted from this being to another; who lacks it". The speech is also interesting because

(61) *Renseignements donnés au Public par Dom Gerle*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

(62) Archives de la Compagnie des prêtres de Saint Sulpice, Emery Collection, vol. II, document 5, *Copie d'une lettre d'un ecclésiastique qui a eu plusieurs conférences avec Mademoiselle Labrousse*.

(63) *Journal prophétique*, 1st week of May 1792, p. 232.

(64) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Paccanaristi, vol. II, "Relazione dell'incontro avuto dal P. Gle con Madama Labrusse nelle carceri di Castel S. Angelo in Roma e con un altro giovane ossesso in Padova", p. 8-9. Regarding this text, see Marina CAFFIERO, *La Repubblica...*, *op. cit.*, p. 155-163.



Labrousse mentions her authors of reference, Mesmer and the Marquis de Puységur, and because she offers us a more romantic view of animal magnetism. After criticizing the use of the tub and defending water as the best conductor of the magnetic fluid, Labrousse stated that the cure came "sooner or later depending on the greater or lesser sensitivity of the one who is being magnetized", before adding: "and this is one of the main reasons that makes me of the opinion that all families should magnetize one another", or that it should be done among friends<sup>65</sup>.

We can also distinguish mesmerist reminiscences in the theory of presentiments that Pontard developed in his *Journal prophétique*. Although the Bishop of the Dordogne did not meet Bergasse in Petit-Bourg, he was able to get to know his theory of presentiments through the intermediary of the Duchess of Bourbon. However, when talking about "presentiments", Pontard kept a certain distance from magnetism:

"Do not think that I am talking about somnambulism. However worthy of attention this phenomenon is, I have the means to demonstrate that if we did not have a second existence that is artificial to some extent, we would participate in our natural state in a portion of the immensity of God, for which he is neither future nor past. We would be no more surprised to see our fellows predict future events than we are in reading the prediction of eclipses announced long before they happen by good astronomers. Nature is harmony, every being that does not dismiss it feels its slightest movements; the future affects and concerns it as much as the present does, because in fact, to it, everything is the present"<sup>66</sup>.

### Meeting place of the mystic international

The Suzette Labrousse case revealed the extraordinary vitality of the mystic networks and the numerous national and international contacts that were developed between these networks. The prophecies of Labrousse thus attracted the attention of members of prophetic circles in Lyon and Avignon who spent time with the entourage of the Duchess of Bourbon. Among these contacts, the Treasurer of the Guard of Paris Louis Michel de Gombault, who had been Treasurer of the Société de l'Harmonie

(65) *Ibid.*, p. 32-40, p. 38. Regarding the Constitutional Club, see Maria Pia DONATO, "I repubblicani. Per un profilo sociale e politico", in David ARMANDO, Massimo CATTANEO and Maria Pia DONATO, *Una rivoluzione difficile. La Repubblica romana del 1798-1799*, Pise-Rome, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000, p. 136-143.

(66) *Journal prophétique*, 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March 1792, p. 107-108.

in 1785<sup>67</sup>, played the role of mediator between the different groups of illuminist thinkers. A member of the movement led by Antoine Pernety in Avignon, the ramifications of which reached as far as Rome with the prophet Ottavio Cappelli, Gombault maintained correspondence with the printer and national deputy from Lyon, Jean André Périsset Duluc, who was in turn a member of the Lyon group run by the illuminist Freemason Jean Baptiste Willermoz, also an animal magnetism enthusiast<sup>68</sup>.

Gombault frequently visited the Duchess of Bourbon and he forged friendships with members of her circle such as the Marquis de Puységur, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, Pierre Pontard and Quévremont de Lamotte. He informed the Lyon group about the arrival of Labrousse through Périsset Duluc, at the time a deputy in the Constituent Assembly, who was a regular visitor to the home of the Duchess of Bourbon from 1789. Gombault sent him a report on Labrousse's activities, written by Dom Gerle. In March 1790, Périsset Duluc wrote to Willermoz to inform him thus:

"The events predicted have happened in part and to the letter. She announced the Estates General, that all men should be placed in the same rank there, the clergy humiliated and punished, the revolution should be general, and France will be at the centre of it. The Pope will be linked to the revolution there"<sup>69</sup>.

However, Périsset was sceptical, asking: "what of all that should we believe, we who have seen so many of these marvellous announcements to end up without any results?"<sup>70</sup>. This distrust towards the new prophetesses was understood all the more due to the fact that the failure of the predictions made by the "unknown agent" in the Lyon group was still very recent.

However, interest did not cease in the circle of Avignon, as shown by the correspondence discovered after the arrest of Gombault and the mesmerist Marie Daniel Bourrée de Corberon, a member of this society and an enthusiast for Illuminism<sup>71</sup>. They talked familiarly of Bishops

(67) Record "Gombault, Louis Michel", in <https://harmoniauniversalis.univ-paris1.fr/doi/10.19267/hubd01>.

(68) René LE FORESTIER, *La Franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 2nd edition, Paris, la Table d'Emeraude, 1987, vol. 2, p. 826-827 and 878-880.

(69) Cited in Anissa ROUSSE, *Un imprimeur-libraire à l'Assemblée Nationale : Jean-André Périsset Duluc (d'après la correspondance Périsset/Willermoz conservée à la bibliothèque municipale de Lyon)*, Mémoire de recherche, Université de Lyon, 2012, p. 56.

(70) Alice JOLY, *Un mystique Lyonnais et les secrets de la Franc-Maçonnerie. Jean-Baptiste Willermoz. 1730-1824*, Mâcon, Protat, 1938, p. 280.

(71) AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4613, dr. 3, Bourrée de Corberon, and F<sup>7</sup> 4728, Gombault. Regarding Bourrée de Corberon, see Antoine FAVRE, "Un familier des sociétés ésotériques au dix-huitième siècle: Bourrée de



Pontard and Miroudot, of Dom Gerle, Suzette Labrousse and the Duchess of Bourbon. In 1791, Gombault wrote to Bourrée de Corberon to inform him about what was happening in the capital, particularly regarding the success of "our good Bishop [Miroudot]", who attended, "with the Bishop [*in partibus*] of Lydda, the consecration of two new bishops performed by the Bishop of Autun", and who was expected to be appointed Bishop of Paris. On 16 March 1792, Gombault announced Labrousse's departure to him and reflected on the general spread of miraculous events:

"We are in a time when miracles have to be taking place everywhere [...]. You would not believe, my good friend, without looking for them, how many people and even societies I have seen that had been announcing the new reign for many years with similar circumstances to those that we know; everything should not start from just one point"<sup>72</sup>.

Their beliefs therefore coincided perfectly with numerous prophetic manifestations that predicted the arrival of a new kingdom of God. Gombault received a letter from Lyon, dated 25 December 1792, most likely from a member of Willermoz's circle, announcing that he had welcomed Labrousse during her journey to Rome and that Joseph Chinard, released from the Château de Saint-Ange, had informed him that she was a prisoner there<sup>73</sup>. The writer of the letter pointed out that her situation "excites the pity of all those of us who saw her in Lyon" and proposed to intervene through the action of the "Diplomatic Committee" and through Vitel, "one of our deputies at the Convention"<sup>74</sup>. It is possible that these attempts exercised a great influence over the campaign carried out by the Convention, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the commune of Vanxains to free Suzette Labrousse<sup>75</sup>. The interest in the fate of Labrousse expressed by Gombault, Bourrée de Corberon and the circle of Avignon also shows that membership of a specific illuminist group was not exclusive: these men could show inclinations towards other prophetic phenomena and interpret them as complementary, and even as consolidating their own beliefs.

Corberon", *Revue des sciences humaines*, 126, 1967, p. 259-287 and Pierre-Yves Beaupaire, *L'espace des francs-maçons. Une sociabilité européenne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Rennes, PUR, 2003.

(72) AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4728, Gombault.

(73) Regarding the matter of the captivity and release of Chinard, see Massimo CATTANEO, "Eresia e libertinismo nella Roma di fine Settecento. Il caso Chinard-Rater", *Roma moderna e contemporanea*, IX, 2001, p. 159-192.

(74) AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4728, Gombault.

(75) *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public*, vol. 2, 31 January 1793, p. 29; MAE, Political correspondence, Rome, 916, f. 130 and 186; Rome, 926, f. 370; AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4396, Labrousse. Thanks to Virginie Martin for informing me about the existence of these dossiers.

At the same time, the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon was also frequented by Magdalene Schweizer, a close friend and correspondent of Swiss theologian and father of physiognomy Johann Caspar Lavater. She had settled in Paris in 1786 with her husband, Swiss banker Johann Caspar Schweizer. Through the intermediary of Bergasse, Magdalene Schweizer discovered magnetic somnambulism and joined the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, whom she deeply admired<sup>76</sup>. Filled with enthusiasm, she related everything to Lavater who, for his part, already knew about somnambulism, having been in contact with the Marquis de Puységur to magnetize his sick wife. She informed him about the interest that his theories had aroused in Bergasse and Saint-Martin<sup>77</sup>. These letters – and this is where their value for us lies – show us that the Duchess of Bourbon continued to magnetize during the early years of the Revolution and that Bergasse took an active part in this<sup>78</sup>.

Like the majority of the members of the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, Magdalene Schweizer was fascinated by Labrousse's prophecies. On 21 April 1792, she announced to Lavater that Labrousse "is in Rome, where she walked on a pilgrimage to convert the Pope, and I will see her again on her return". And she added: "What a consolation it is in this Sodom and Gomorrah to be connected with incorruptible individuals". Because, unlike the rest of the group, Magdalene Schweizer considered the Revolution to be the "despotism of all scoundrels"<sup>79</sup>.

### A brief epilogue

After Labrousse's departure for Rome, the Duchess of Bourbon spent the summer of 1792 in her château of Petit-Bourg. Her support for the Revolution remained unwavering despite the September massacres and the trial of Louis XVI. It was during this time that she wrote *La Chimère en fait de gouvernement*, where she defended the plan for a Christian state with a social vocation, placed under the management of a meritocratic

(76) David HESS, *Joh. Caspar Schweizer. Ein Charakterbild aus dem Zeitalter der französischen Révolution*, Berlin, Wilhelm Herz, 1884, p. 83.

(77) Lavater admired Saint-Martin and had heard "very positive things" about the Duchess of Bourbon. Regarding "La Brousse", he showed great scepticism. Georg FINSLER, *Lavaters Beziehungen zu Paris in den Revolutionsjahren 1789-1795*, Zürich, Buchdruckerei Berichthaus, 1898, p. 27, 29-30 and 33-34. For relations between the Marquis de Puységur and Lavater, see Amand Marc Jacques CHASTENET DE PUYSEGUER, *Du Magnétisme Animal, considéré dans ses rapports avec diverses branches de la Physique générale*, Paris, Chez Desenne, 1807, p. 241-253.

(78) See also AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4959, Bergasse, and the article by David Armando in this issue.

(79) Georg FINSLER, *Lavaters Beziehungen...*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

government, which would guarantee the subsistence and education of its citizens<sup>80</sup>. Her attitude was rewarded by the support of the Champs-Élysées section at the time of the first attempt to expel all the Bourbons from France in December 1792. After the defection of Dumouriez and his aide de camp, the Duke of Chartres, nephew of the Duchess of Bourbon, the Convention decreed the imprisonment of all the Bourbons. The Duchess was arrested in April 1793 and transferred to Marseille, where she was imprisoned with the entire Orléans family in Fort Saint Jean.

Some of the members of the Duchess's circle continued to frequent Petit-Bourg during this first period of detention. On 1 August 1793, while "the mistress of the house was still in Marseille", Saint-Martin decided to return because he knew that he would find there "a part of society"<sup>81</sup>. This was also the first period during which the prophetess Catherine Théot made a sudden entrance into life at the château<sup>82</sup>. In the questioning that followed the arrest of the followers of Théot, citizen Lauriston acknowledged that she had gone once to Petit-Bourg with Catherine Théot. This "society" was frequented at the time by Quévremont de Lamotte, Miroudot and Pescheloche. She also stated that she only knew "the smallest part [of the society]" and that she did not share the beliefs of Théot about the new doctrine<sup>83</sup>. As in the case of Labrousse, support for Théot was nonetheless greater than the opposition. Quévremont de Lamotte, Dom Gerle and Magdalene Schweizer<sup>84</sup> believed in her mission and they actively participated in the assemblies that gathered around her. Once again, Saint-Martin was the most critical with respect to a prophetess who interested him "due to her virtues", but who did not convince him "in any way at all due to her doctrine about her mission, the new Gospel, the reign still to come, the nullity of the past, and non-mortality, etc."<sup>85</sup>.

The Théot affair was the swansong of prophetic sociability at Petit-Bourg. Under the Thermidorian Convention, the Duchess of Bourbon was briefly given her freedom on 15 August 1795. After a stay in Moulins under house arrest, she once again settled in Petit-Bourg with Saint-Martin and Julie de Sérent, her companion, aunt of the Comte de Sérent, a member

(80) Published in *Correspondance entre Mad.me de B... et M.r R... sur leurs opinions religieuses*, vol. 1, Barcelona, s.n., 1812, p. 64-67.

(81) Louis Claude de SAINT-MARTIN, *Mon portrait...*, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

(82) Regarding the Théot affair, see Francisco Javier RAMÓN SOLANS, "Être immortel à Paris : Violence et prophétie durant la Révolution française", *Annales HSS*, 71, 2016, No. 2, p. 347-378.

(83) AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4768, dr. 5.

(84) David HESS, *Joh. Caspar Schweizer*, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

(85) Louis Claude de SAINT-MARTIN, *Mon portrait...*, *op. cit.*, p. 220-221.

of the Société de l'Harmonie universelle and a deputy at the Constituent Assembly. After Fructidor, the Directory passed a law expelling the Bourbons from France and Duchess of Bourbon was exiled to Barcelona.

Known by the name of the *Solitària de Gràcia* (the Solitaire of Grace), Bathilde d'Orléans remained relatively isolated until the French occupation of Barcelona in 1808. This was when she opened a fairly well patronized pharmacy and struck up a friendship with Doctor Francisco Salvá i Campillo, to whom she sent part of her library on animal magnetism. These books formed part of the library of the *Real Academia de medicina* of Barcelona, thus contributing to the dissemination of magnetism in Spain<sup>86</sup>. Saint-Cyr, commander of the VII Corps of the Army in Catalonia, informed Napoleon that, despite the execution of her son and "apart from some acts and some illuminist ideas", the Duchess "regards the Emperor as her master" and "whenever it comes to the Revolution and the destiny of France, she views with firm and courageous piety everything that happened to her family, which she believed was appropriate for bringing happiness to the Country"<sup>87</sup>.

The Duchess remained loyal to her beliefs. In 1812 she published a small print run of two books of correspondence and a reflection on religion, intended for her closest friends. The volumes compiled the thoughts that she had already expressed in her correspondence with those friends. In these texts, we can see her own particular view of religion and society, based on theocracy and revolution, individual piety and charity, mysticism and magnetism<sup>88</sup>. Her *Opuscules ou pensées d'une âme de foi sur la religion chrétienne pratiquée en esprit et en vérité* (1812) thus offer a unique opportunity to understand her thought on magnetism. Commenting on the condemnation of magnetism in 1784, the Duchess acknowledged that it "is nothing other than effects produced by the imagination", but, she added, it is therefore "similar to the faith [that] works, so to speak, in favour of those who believe in it and are disposed to believe in it". It is precisely

(86) Regarding the Duchess of Bourbon's time in Spain, see Francisco Javier RAMÓN SOLANS, "De la Corte de Luis XVI a la Barcelona de principios del siglo XIX. La duquesa de Borbón y los orígenes del magnetismo en España", in Ignacio PEIRÓ and Carmen FRIAS (dir.), *Políticas del pasado y narrativas de la nación. Representaciones de la Historia en la España contemporánea*, Zaragoza, Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2016, p. 13-28.

(87) AN, F<sup>7</sup> 6527, No. 1573, Bourbons.

(88) *Correspondance entre Mad.me de B... et M.r R... sur leurs opinions religieuses. Deux tomes*, Barcelone, 1812 et *Opuscules ou pensées...*, *op. cit.* These three volumes were placed on the Index by the Spanish Inquisition in May 1819.



for this reason that she considered the report from the commissioners to be insufficient:

"Faith undoubtedly has solid foundations for those who believe, as Magnetism also has them for a person who is convinced by their own experience. However, to obtain faith, we have to learn and to search for everything that could give birth to it and strengthen it in our heart [...]. I was one of those who *believed*, and in fact *I have seen* and produced effects both surprising and varied, especially through somnambulism, about which the commissioners do not talk at all"<sup>89</sup>.

After the fall of Napoleon, the Duchess finally returned to France. She dedicated her last years to meditation, devotion and charity. Her "little society" was now only made up of members of the nobility, particularly the Chastenay and Puységur families, who visited her sometimes<sup>90</sup>.

The analysis of the circle constructed around the Duchess of Bourbon opens a window on the development of illuminism, magnetism and prophetism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Far from constituting fixed and autonomous doctrines, the philosophical, scientific and religious doctrines attached to them proved to have been in constant interaction, both with one another and with events. Studying them reveals the cross-references and mobility between the different circles, the solidarity that united them and even the respect that they showed one another, in short the density of the national and international networks.

All of these groups shared the search for a key that would enable them to decode their present and, above all, their future. The French Revolution galvanized this search and stimulated the cross-fertilization between the different doctrines and experiences. It was thus that the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, frequented by illuminists and somnambulists, opened up during the revolutionary period to the Constitutional Clergy and especially to the prophecies of Suzette Labrousse, Jacqueline-Aimée Brohon and Catherine Théot. In the same way, prophecy accommodated animal magnetism. From the start of the Revolution, Labrousse thus began to practise it and she continued to do so until the end of her days.

The study of this issue finally highlights the many political, social and religious ramifications of animal magnetism. Certain manifestations of

(89) *Ibid.*, p. 178-180.

(90) AN, 46<sup>AP</sup> 3, Papers of Théodore Ducos, dr. 2, Letters from the Duchess of Bourbon to the Countess of Chastenay, 1815-1819, letter dated 6 July 1816.

magnetic somnambulism and the theory of presentiments had an obvious religious dimension. For the Duchess of Bourbon, animal magnetism and, in particular, somnambulism became an article of faith, which she combined with elements taken from Christianity and illuminism. The classic question remains: were these genuine religious manifestations? The answer seems to be affirmative, at least for the players we have just studied.

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