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Bernard Allorent, *La Fortune de la Grande Mademoiselle: Anne Marie Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier (1627-1693); Un enjeu politique au XVIIIème siècle*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019. 282 pp. Appendices, bibliography, index, table of contents. €60.00 (cl). ISBN 9782745350046.

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Bernard Allorent's new biography of Anne Marie Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier—more commonly known as La Grande Mademoiselle—provides a new perspective on this compelling historical figure. Unlike a conventional biography, this book explores its subject through a close study of her finances using in-depth forensic accounting. That is to say, Allorent draws an intricate and finely detailed portrait of Montpensier, meticulously etched in lands, rents, debts, and profits, in order to uncover the spectacular scope of her inheritance and entitlements. In the process, he unearths new and fascinating details about the family fortune that subsequently give weight to and provide context for the central dramas of this noblewoman's life.

As Allorent remarks, Montpensier has been the subject of many biographies, popular with historians because of a life “riche en péripéties, dont la source est à trouver dans un caractère résolu et des contradictions assumées avec panache, plus rarement avec habileté” (p. 9). Most biographers focus their efforts on unraveling the three central dramas in Montpensier's adult life: her participation in the Fronde, the fight with her father over inheritance, and her romantic affair with the comte de Lauzun. Allorent's approach is markedly different. He spends little time examining either the events that comprised her life or her mercurial psychology. Instead, his goal is to fill the gap in our historical knowledge about Montpensier's fortune, its sources, and its specifics. In 2000, one of Montpensier's biographers, Vincent Pitts, wrote that the lack of financial records made it “impossible to do a detailed study of her fortune.”[1] Happily, Allorent has taken on this daunting task and succeeded by using not only the documents Montpensier received from father during the period of their conflict but also treasury reports, local property records, receipts, and notarial archives. Accordingly, Allorent is able to reconstruct Montpensier's fortune, forest by forest, castle by castle, and the reader comes to understand Montpensier not through her activities on the public stage but through the creation and management of her inheritance and patrimony.

From the outset of Montpensier's story, Allorent makes clear that the relationship between money and marriage was a critical one in her life. Marriage was the crucible through which this family fortune, like so many others in the period, was forged as well as a device for bolstering the family status and patrimony. Allorent notes, in particular, that this fortune was the work of three women who played pivotal roles in creating it over the span of three centuries: Marie, the

daughter of the duc de Berry, Louise de Bourbon-Montpensier, but especially of Marie de Montpensier, Montpensier's mother (p. 10).

The bulk of Montpensier's fortune came from her mother, who married Gaston, duc d'Orléans, son of Henri IV and Marie de Medici. Marie de Montpensier, who hailed from the Bourbon-Montpensier line, brought to the marriage several ducal titles, the principality of Dombes in southeast France (which had been given to Louis, duc de Montpensier in 1560 by royal grant), and a number of other titles, pensions, rents, and revenues. Montpensier never knew her mother, who died from complications related to childbirth, but she nevertheless benefitted from her legacy, inheriting an exceptionally large fortune that she worked hard throughout her life to protect.

Montpensier's most notable effort to protect this fortune involved an acrimonious dispute with her father over the management of her properties and assets. In 1650, when she was twenty-three years old, Montpensier came into her inheritance, only to discover that her father had taken great liberties in its management. Gaston had, while serving as guardian, appropriated funds from Montpensier's assets and revenues for his personal use, enriching his own coffers while attributing family debt and expenses to Montpensier. Remarkably, Montpensier did not back down when her father refused to turn over records or when he presented her with bills. Instead, she relied on her financial advisors to document the fraud and turned to her grandmother, Henriette Catherine de Joyeuse, Duchesse de Guise, to help broker a resolution. Unhappily for Montpensier, the duchesse was little help, as were Montpensier's allies at court, and she was never fully vindicated financially. Despite her failure to obtain the desired result, the tenacity with which Montpensier confronted her father and persisted in holding him to account was noteworthy. Perhaps to her detriment, as Allorent speculates, Montpensier had not realized how the end of the Fronde signaled a return of "l'autorité des pères sur les filles, et plus généralement celle des hommes sur les femmes" (p. 39).

As Allorent points out, Montpensier also defended her rights in the Guise inheritance: "Mademoiselle va defender ses droits en tant qu'héritière de sa grand-mère, de son oncle Henri, puis de sa tante Marie de Guise" (p. 179). Furthermore, she pursued several legal claims on behalf of her family and her patrimony. One such claim was against the Richelieu family for damage done to Champigny, an estate that the cardinal had illegally forced out of Gaston's hands and that Montpensier eventually reclaimed. Montpensier pursued another, similar claim against the Canillac family even if, as Allorent points out, she took a more indulgent attitude toward that matter than she did toward the Richelieu affair. Even when considering the prospect of her own marriage, safeguarding her fortune was foremost in her mind. The proposed alliance that came the closest to an actual betrothal was between Montpensier and the future English king Charles II, whose father Charles I had been dethroned and executed by Oliver Cromwell. Charles II was in exile during their courtship, and Montpensier was concerned that he would "dilapide[r] sa fortune pour reconquérir son royaume" (p. 36).

Not only did Montpensier pour extensive effort into defending her inheritance, she also spent substantial resources to enhance it. Her building and renovation projects started in the 1650s, when Montpensier was exiled from the court and took refuge at her property in Saint-Fargeau. In order to accommodate herself and her entourage, she undertook a major renovation of the old fortress into an attractive chateau. A decade or so later, Montpensier purchased the comté d'Eu from her Guise relatives and, once installed there, began another large project that included

finishing some of the old buildings that had never been completed, adding greatly to her income. Also during this period, Montpensier renovated her rooms in the Luxembourg palace at great cost, furnishing them richly according to her status at court. Finally, in the 1680s, Montpensier purchased land just outside of Paris, in Choisy-le-Roi, where she constructed a new, elegant residence that overlooked the Seine.

These purchases and projects all demonstrated, according to Allorent, that Montpensier “a clairement privilégié la ‘dignité’ conforme a à son rang et à son passé familial, plutôt que l’avantage économique” (p. 278), because these projects also required her to take on debt. Like most aristocrats of the period, she held her wealth in primarily in non-liquid forms. Allorent details the private credit markets that she entered into in order to make possible these construction projects and points out that she could have sold off smaller estates or pieces of land, but observes that “les conceptions de l’époque privilégiaient la possession de terres plutôt que celle d’actifs financiers plus liquides” (p. 279). In this sense, Montpensier was very much of her time and acting in line with her social station. As Allorent also underscores, however, Montpensier was very much ahead of her time in taking control of her finances, having a strong hand in their management, diversifying the holdings in her patrimony, and surrounding herself with sound and capable financial advisors (p. 276). In these ways, and in contrast to social norms for aristocratic women, Montpensier was a sophisticated financial player and independent economic actor.

The picture that Allorent paints of Montpensier is ultimately that of a money manager, a builder, a borrower, in short, an extremely competent and dedicated woman of property. While it is certainly different from the typical portrait of Montpensier as an actor on the public stage, it nevertheless chimes with Allorent’s argument that private life was something that Montpensier in fact cherished. He remarks that Montpensier regarded her fortune as “un refuge contre les aléas de la vie à la Cour. Elle préfère être riche et indépendante plutôt qu’obéissante et forcée d’épouser” (p. 281). Once the days of the Fronde were behind her, Allorent suggests that Montpensier had no interest in politics and instead focused on creating her own version of the court at Saint-Fargeau or wherever else she was living.

What Allorent does not tell us, perhaps because it is outside of the scope of his book, is the kind of person that Montpensier’s fortune allowed her to be. Montpensier’s fortune, coupled with her decision not to marry, offered the kind of independence and capacity for self-determination that were rare even for women of her status. At Saint-Fargeau, she brought together writers, salonnières, and other literary-minded friends, and she began her own writing projects, including *Divers Portraits*, a collection of fifty-nine short portraits of members of the court and her social circle. Montpensier wrote seventeen of these herself and approximately forty-five out of the fifty-nine were written by women, including a portrait of Mme. de Sévigné written by a young Mme. de Lafayette. Missing in all of the accountings of Montpensier’s fortune is the kind and quality of freedom that it allowed her to enjoy.

Allorent is also relatively silent on the subject of her liaison with Antoine Nompar de Caumont, duc de Lauzun, which is somewhat surprising given the impact that Montpensier’s relationship with him had on her fortune. Montpensier’s love for Lauzun stood out against a lifetime of refusing marriage proposals from royal suitors and against her deep concern for family rank and status. As Joan DeJean says: “In her case, love appears to have been even more than usually blind.”[2] Allorent does show that efforts first to attract Lauzun and then to purchase his

freedom ultimately cost Montpensier Saint-Fargeau, the barony of Thiers, and annual rents from Languedoc (pp. 210-11). Perhaps more importantly, the Lauzun affair cost Montpensier both Dombes and Eu, two of the choicest holdings in her portfolio. Montpensier deeded these properties over to the duc du Maine, the son of Louis XIV and his mistress Athénaïs de Montespan, in a negotiation between Montpensier and Montespan for Lauzun's release and reinstallation at court. The Lauzun affair and Montpensier's spending on Lauzun's behalf undermine, at the very least, Allorent's picture of a financially practical woman, and the affair merits significant attention from anyone studying Montpensier's financial life.

What ultimately happened to this extraordinary fortune? When Montpensier died in 1693 and her will was read, there were multiple, small bequests to family, friends, and staff. The bulk of her estate, however, went to Philippe de France, duc d'Orléans (p. 273). The immense fortune that Montpensier had inherited, curated, protected, restructured, and lost, to some degree through her attachment to Lauzun, all went to the king's brother in the absence of any descendants. Allorent does not discuss Montpensier's perspective on the fact that her patrimony would pass on in this way. What is clear, however, is that while the family fortune was in her hands, Montpensier took very seriously her stewardship of her assets, building a life outside the court and working to burnish a patrimony that was, even temporarily, hers. Montpensier was an extraordinarily independent woman whose fortune created for her both constraints and opportunity, a conclusion Allorent draws for the reader by thoroughly excavating this noblewoman's private, financial affairs and her role as an investor, debtor, builder, and money manager.

NOTES

[1] Vincent J. Pitts, *La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France, 1627-1693* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 264.

[2] Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, Duchesse de Montpensier, *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, ed. and trans. Joan DeJean (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 14.

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