H-France Salon
Volume 16, Issue 5, #4

Bourgeois Families and Their Survival Strategies

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How did bourgeois families weather the storms of the Revolution? What were the strategies they employed to survive and even thrive through the chaos and unpredictability of war and political upheaval? The families discussed here originated in Lyon and ended up elsewhere by the late 1790s. One of several "federalist" cities, Lyon was a particularly turbulent place during the Revolution and developed a reputation as a center of counterrevolutionary activity.[1] Besides local in-fighting between more moderate and radical factions going back to the early 1790s, thousands died there after a long siege and eventual takeover by troops sent to regain control over the city when it revolted against the Jacobin-dominated central government in the summer of 1793. Although Lyon and the Lyonnais bourgeoisie were unique in many ways, their survival strategies reflect larger trends. The characteristics we tend to associate with "Lyonnais-ness" – distrust of outsiders and conservative investment practices – magnify broader trends and practices associated with the French bourgeoisie during the Age of Revolution more generally.[2]

The members of the Arnaud-Tizon and Vitet families may have known each other before 1789 as they resided in the same parish – Saint-Nizier in central Lyon. It is certain that they interacted once the Revolution began, when the doctor and philanthropist Louis Vitet (1736–1809) served as mayor and Claude Arnaud-Tizon (1753–1834), son of a wealthy *négociant*, became an *officier municipal* during Vitet's term in office. The families' bonds solidified when Louis's son, Pierre (1772–1854), and Claude's daughter, Amélie (1785–1860), married in 1801. Soon after the

[1] Paul R. Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic Under Fire: The Federalist Revolt in the French Revolution* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). Other relevant studies include W.D. Edmonds, *Jacobinism and the Revolt of Lyon, 1789–1793* (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1990); Bruno Benoit, *L'identité politique de Lyon. Entre violences collectives et mémoires des élites (1786–1905)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); Julie Patricia Johnson, *The Candle and the Guillotine: Revolutionary Justice in Lyon* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2020); Côme Simien, *Les massacres de septembre 1792 à Lyon* (Lyon: Aléas, 2011).

[2] There is a huge literature on this topic. Most recent and relevant to my study is Christopher H. Johnson, *Becoming Bourgeois: Love, Kinship, and Power in Provincial France, 1670–1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). Others include Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary (1750–1850)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Christine Adams, *A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie, 1690–1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Robert Forster, *Merchants, Landlords, Magistrates: The Depont Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). The comparative study by Jerold Siegel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France, and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), draws attention to national distinctions while emphasizing the importance of networks and communication. Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1970), includes analysis of the city's social groups and their lifestyles and attitudes.

wedding, Amélie's mother, Catherine Arnaud-Tizon née Descheaux (1764–1832), began corresponding regularly with her son-in-law. Her letters to Pierre (over 600 of them dating from about 1805 to 1830) are at the heart of my forthcoming book, *Surviving Revolution: Bourgeois Lives and Letters*, which traces the lives and experiences of these two families, with a focus on bourgeois identity, networks, and emotions. In pulling together the various strands of these families' life stories, I have found that they employed four main survival strategies during the revolutionary decade and those that followed: (1) geographic mobility, both outside of and within France; (2) cultivating relationships with trusted friends and allies; (3) political savvy, especially knowing when *not* to take active roles in politics; and (4) a turn inward toward private, familial life. I explore here the implementation of these strategies and consider how they represent both continuities based on older practices, like patronage, and new approaches inspired by the postrevolutionary context.[3] I also reflect on how these families' choices reflected and shaped their sense of identity –both as bourgeois and as Lyonnais.

Before launching into these families' life choices, it seems worthwhile to consider the meaning of the word "survival." I am using the term literally and figuratively, to refer to both managing to stay alive at moments when their lives were at risk *and* maintaining their social positions and wealth – despite the upheavals of the period. So, "survival strategies" would include doing whatever was necessary to avoid imprisonment and death *and* rethinking how to approach major decisions such as where to live, buying and selling property, choosing spouses for children, and selecting business partners, all in the name of positioning one's family for success. Another important point to keep in mind about these strategies was that they often required intense collaboration between men and women and across the generations.

Movement proved essential for both the Vitet and Arnaud-Tizon families during and after the Revolutionary decade. After Louis Vitet appeared on the list of proscribed deputies from the National Convention in the summer of 1793, he and his son Pierre survived by fleeing their city as it was coming under Jacobin control and spending several months in exile in nearby Switzerland.[4] After Thermidor, they returned briefly to Lyon and then moved to Paris, leaving their wife and mother, Marguerite Vitet née Faulin (1745–1820), in Lyon to deal with the headaches of removing the seals on their sequestered apartments.[5] Like the Vitet father and son team, the Arnaud-Tizon brothers and their wives also left Lyon. Claude Arnaud-Tizon's older brother Pierre-Marie was married to a woman from Rouen, where they moved in January 1794 and settled with her parents, who were also *négociants*.[6] During that time, Claude was part of the Jacobin-led municipal government in Lyon, suggesting that the two brothers were hedging their

[3] Christine Adams's contribution to this Salon explores similar questions about continuity and change.

[4] Pierre Vitet later composed a memoir recounting their experiences during the Revolution. The manuscript is held in the Archives Municipales de Lyon (hereafter AML), Fonds Vitet 84II/08. It was published by a descendent as *Notes et souvenirs sur quelques-uns des principaux évènements de la Révolution, sur la vie politique de mon père, ses malheurs et son exile en Suisse après le siège de Lyon* (Paris: Imprimeries Renouard, 1932). A deputy to the Convention, Louis Vitet voted against the immediate execution of Louis XVI, and rather for a referendum on his fate.

[5] Details on the unsealing of their properties, which took place in Ventôse III (March 1795), are held in the Archives Départementales du Rhône (hereafter ADR) 1Q/827.

[6] Passeport for Pierre-Marie Arnaud-Tizon, place St. Nizier 42, to travel to Rouen with his wife Anne Françoise Adélaïde and their servant (*fille de confiance*), Claudine Valencot, AML 2I/70 No. 180, Pluviôse Year II (Jan. 22, 1794).

bets, with one taking an active role in politics while the other left Lyon and stayed out of public life. After Thermidor, Claude appeared on a list of *Robespierristes*, was arrested and sent to Paris, and then freed.[7] Around the same time, Catherine and her children joined Pierre-Marie and his wife in Rouen, with Claude dividing his time between the two cities until 1811, when he sold his business and properties in Lyon.[8] After all that they had lived through between 1789 and 1794, it seems that both families preferred to rebuild their lives elsewhere. They also took advantage of opportunities available to them in their new cities with the Arnaud-Tizon brothers engaged in Normandy's booming textile industry and Louis Vitet taking a seat in the Council of 500. Both families voted with their feet, as did many of their Lyonnais friends and acquaintances with whom they interacted in Paris.

A second strategy they deployed was what we might call networking. Here, they built on lessons learned during the eighteenth century when patronage networks were so vital. Of course, patronage did not stop with the Revolution; having the right people in the right places and marrying one's children into families that would reinforce and possibly expand those networks remained essential.[9] Socializing was the primary tool for building and maintaining networks. Seeing and being seen at the right gatherings and events, making sure that marriageable daughters attended the right balls, and hosting dinners and other kinds of soirées proved essential as these families sought to solidify their positions in postrevolutionary society. It is clear from the many letters they exchanged discussing these events that these families put huge effort into them. Such gatherings were about much more than amusing themselves, and women largely oversaw this vital work that bourgeois families depended upon for so much else.

A third strategy involved political savvy: following the evolving political situation, knowing when and how to voice their opinions, and perhaps more importantly, when *not* to voice them. Here, too, there was the possibility of voting with one's feet, as when Louis Vitet stepped away from politics following Brumaire. The depoliticization of public life during the Napoleonic period meant that these family members rarely discussed politics or public affairs in their letters except for war and economic matters, two important topics for a family trying to run a textile factory and needing to ship raw materials and finished goods. Politics became a much more prominent topic of discussion after 1820 when Pierre and Amélie attended debates in the legislature and their son, Ludovic Vitet, joined the liberal opposition.[10] Some of the women in the family, particularly Amélie Vitet's sister-in-law, wrote long, passionate letters about the

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[7] The arrest order, dated 13 Vendémiare Year III (Oct. 4, 1794), came from the Comité de Sureté Générale. Documents related to Claude's arrest and release are held in AML 12II/11. His home was sealed and searched on 2 Brumaire an III (Oct. 23, 1794), ADR 1Q 678.

[8] Documents are sparse for these years, but in 1821, while reflecting on her life there, Catherine referred to having lived in Rouen twenty-five years, which would date her arrival to 1796. Catherine Arnaud-Tizon to Pierre Vitet, Nov. 13, 1821, AML 84II/13. Her youngest daughter, Adèle, was born in Rouen in 1798. Serge Chassagne discusses the business partnership Claude launched with his son-in-law Jacques Juste Barbet in 1813 in *Le coton et ses patrons. France 1760-1840* (Paris: EHESS, 1991), 552–54.

[9] The literature on this topic is immense. One impressive recent example is Emma Rothschild, *An Infinite History: The Story of a Family in France over Three Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). Another valuable study is Laure Hennequin-Lecomte, *Le patriciat strasbourgeois (1789–1830). Destins croisés et voix intimes* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2011).

[10] Ludovic contributed articles to the liberal publication, *Le Globe*, and became a protégé and close friend of François Guizot. See Jacques Goblot, *La jeune France libérale.* Le Globe *et son group littéraire 1824–1830* (Paris: Plon, 1995) and Laurent Theis, *François Guizot* (Paris: Fayard, 2008).

political situation and followed legislative debates closely. In 1827, she expressed joy that Ludovic was fighting for liberal constitutionalism, even mentioning how proud his grandfather would have been.[11]

A fourth strategy relates to the choice *not* to engage in public affairs as many family members shifted their attention toward private, domestic concerns, something that could be true for men and women alike. In addition to appreciating the home as a refuge, they recognized the benefits of not appearing in the limelight, or to quote Pierre Vitet, of "*le bonheur de la médiocrité*," a phrase he used to contrast his life with that of his prominent friend and fellow Lyonnais, Marshal Louis-Gabriel Suchet, after he had returned to fight under Napoleon during the Hundred Days.[12] Although Pierre began medical training and served as an *officier de santé* in the late 1790s, he never held public office and never entered a profession.[13] He spent most of his life living as a *rentier* focused on managing his properties, raising and educating his son, corresponding with his extensive network of family and friends (virtually all from the Lyonnais), and socializing and otherwise enjoying the finer things in life, including his passion for landscape painting, something he shared with his lifelong friend and teacher, Alexandre-Hyacinthe Dunouy, a professional artist.

These survival strategies required the entire family's cooperation, across generations and genders, and collaboration with their close friends and allies. With businesses built upon marital alliances and run out of their homes, including housing their clerks, and the friends and family they socialized with also serving as their bankers and investors, public and private concerns necessarily overlapped. Two Lyonnais bankers who ran a business together in Paris, Jean Jacques Fournel and Vital Roux (who became a regent of the Banque de France in 1806), were particularly trusted friends and allies. They and other Lyonnais in Paris gathered regularly, creating a network of allies who supported each other in their public and private ventures.[14] These men, along with their wives and children who socialized together frequently, had ties that went back decades if not generations.

The overarching goals these strategies supported could also lead to tensions, as when the Arnaud-Tizon brothers-in-law had a falling out over the youngest Arnaud-Tizon daughter's dowry. The family's need for capital to support their business and lifestyle created relations of dependence and interdependence across the generations and among the different branches of the

[11] Amélie Arnaud-Tizon to Ludovic Vitet, Sept. 26, 1827, AML 84II/13.

[12] This phrase appears in a letter Pierre sent to his mother in July 1815, as recorded in his correspondence journal, AML 84II/08. Precisely what he meant by "mediocrity" is unclear as the term may carry negative implications, the opposite of excellence, or it can be more neutral, as a synonym for "moderation."

[13] In late 1799, Pierre received orders from General Joubert to report to the headquarters of the Army of Italy, AML 84II/7. In an April 1800 letter to his mother, Pierre described the difficulties he faced in finding a replacement, which he finally managed to do, thus avoiding military service. Correspondence journal, entry dated 30 Germinal VIII (April 20, 1800), AML 84II/08. On the practices and debates related to hiring replacements for military service, see Jennifer Ngaire Heuer, "Neither cowardly nor greedy? Buying and selling escape from conscription in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France," *French History* 36 (2022): 208–29.

[14] Note written by Marshal Suchet inviting Pierre to "a dinner at his home next Friday, the 17th, date of the meeting of old comrades of Lyon," April 11, [1818] AML 84II/11. Sarah Horowitz analyzes friendship and networking in *Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013). See also Louis Bergeron, *Banquiers, négociants et manufacturiers parisiens du Directoire* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1999), ch. 2.

family, with financial matters and emotions often overlapping. When those relations did not go smoothly, or when someone proved unreliable as in the case of Gabriel Suchet (the younger brother of the marshal), who had married into the Arnaud-Tizon family and faced financial ruin in 1817, the families went into crisis mode. Such breakdowns could have dire consequences, including the inability to ensure that future generations would have the financial wherewithal to marry well and continue to build the family's patrimony. That patrimony included both real wealth and more ephemeral and emotional forms of wealth and credibility, of honor and respect. No bourgeois family could hope to accomplish its goals if they could not maintain the foundation upon which all else depended: honor and credit.[15]

For the most part, the Arnaud-Tizon and Vitet families successfully navigated the transition to the new regime. Claude and Catherine could feel proud about their children's marriages and progeny, some of whom went on to illustrious careers. Pierre and Amélie's son Ludovic made it to the pinnacle of July Monarchy high society, marrying the daughter of Casimir Périer, holding a variety of public positions, and publishing several books. Amélie's sister Victoire married Jacques-Juste Barbet, the son of a wealthy Protestant *indienneur* from Rouen, who later bought the famous Oberkampf textile factory at Jouy. After that purchase, he began calling himself "Barbet de Jouy," reflecting the continued importance of aristocratic labels. Victoire and Jacques's son, Henry Barbet de Jouy became a curator of the Louvre in the mid-nineteenth century, gaining celebrity for his successful efforts to protect the Louvre's collections during the Commune. Claude and Catherine's only son, Ludovic Arnaud-Tizon, was less successful. Despite his best efforts, he struggled to make the family business profitable, and his sons sought their fortunes elsewhere, one dying in the Philippines in the 1860.[16] The families also remained very close, with multiple generations and branches living in new buildings constructed on the "rue Barbet de Jouy" in the 7th arrondissement starting in the late 1830s.

What do these stories tell us about the Revolution and the "bourgeoisie"? The Revolution did open doors for some wealthy non-nobles. Louis Vitet's properties included several *biens nationaux* he purchased in both the countryside outside of Lyon and in Paris, where he bought a former convent behind the *église* St. Roch in 1798 that served as their home for decades. These investments provided the financial foundation that permitted his son to live as a *rentier* and his grandson to arrive at the very top of the social and political hierarchy in the 1830s. But the Revolution did not produce unmitigated paths towards success, as suggested by the extent to which Claude and Catherine had to impoverish themselves to assure their children's future "happiness." Starting in the early 1820s, as they were reaching old age, they lived with one or another of their children, in part because they had insufficient resources to support themselves. (Catherine died of cholera in 1832 and her husband two years later.) Claude's brother, Pierre-Marie, who appears to have been the more financially successful of the two, struggled to establish his progeny because of the bad behavior of his son-in-law, Suchet.

As a microhistory, my study invites questions regarding representativeness, and I would like to conclude by reflecting on that issue. My answer is that these families are representative of the Lyonnais bourgeoisie, whose strong sense of local identity shaped their life choices, particularly

[15] On the continuing importance of honor in these years, see William M. Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Post-Revolutionary France, 1815–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[16] Jean Cottez, "Essai sur Marc Arnaudtizon," *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Océaniennes*, No. 121 (1957), 723–39.

the alliances they maintained, but perhaps less so of the French bourgeoisie more generally. Maintaining alliances with a small circle of close friends, mostly people whom they had known their entire lives, seems like a particularly Lyonnais, or more broadly provincial approach, one that reflects their distrust of outsiders.[17] Looking at these family members' cousins and other more distant relatives who did not leave Lyon, it seems that those who held more prominent positions during the Revolution and/or allied with more radical groups were more likely to move, while the more conservative ones and those who managed to stay out of politics, felt comfortable staying in their native city, or at least did not find other locations more appealing. Comparing these families' life choices with those from similar milieux from other cities would be a valuable exercise.

Finally, the turn inward toward private, domestic life seems quite generalizable, both during the First Empire, with its de-politicization of public life, and during the Restoration, when even beyond France, we see similar tendencies in Biedermeier culture with its emphasis on quiet domestic spaces.[18] That some men, particularly those who supported the Revolution, may have chosen to focus on caring for their families, managing their properties, and generally avoiding the limelight during the Empire and Restoration is certainly not surprising. Such tendencies also highlight the porous boundaries of the public and private spheres during this period and the absence of clearly defined, specialized gender norms. Many of the spaces and activities that structured these families' lives included both sexes and involved more shared responsibilities than would be the case later, when the ideology of "separate spheres" took hold in French society. This blurriness is especially visible in the life choices of the two people whose lives and words are at the center of my story: Catherine Arnaud-Tizon and Pierre Vitet. Catherine contributed to running the family business and spoke knowledgeably about financial matters, while Pierre devoted much of his time and energy to family matters. In addition, both were young adults in 1789: Pierre, born in 1772, and Catherine Arnaud-Tizon, born in 1764. Living through the Revolutionary era, both the sense of hope and possibility it created and the physical and human destruction it caused, must have left deep impressions. Their letters do not refer to those experiences explicitly; they never discuss the past, only the present and future. But those memories, along with their shared goals for the future, seem to have created strong ties between them as they collaborated to ensure their family's success.

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H-France Salon
ISSN 2150-4873

[17] See Catherine Pellissier, *Loisirs et sociabilités des Notables Lyonnais au XIXe siècle* (Lyon: Editions lyonnaises d'art et d'histoire and Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1996). Similar families in port cities such as Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Nantes may have been more open to outsiders, though in many cases, endogamous (even consanguineous) marriages remained common. See Johnson, *Becoming Bourgeois* 22–23.
[18] I am grateful to Beatrice de Graaf for mentioning these parallels.