

THE ORIGINS OF THE ALLEON FAMILY

Genesis

From an onomastic point of view, the meaning of the surname Alléon is uncertain. François Chomel, in his dictionary of surnames in the Haut-Vivarais¹, explains that it could contain a diminutive or familiar suffix, *-on* was moreover the most frequently used in this region. The other part of the name would then perhaps be related to the word *aloi* (the title of the currency, whose Latin translation is *Alleium*). In this case, we can imagine a nickname for a lender, or more simply for a miser. Or perhaps it is simply a nickname related to the ancient Occitan word *aleiar*, which meant to take an oath? Or simply to see in Alléon the ellipse of *Fils à Leon* (Léon's son)? Difficult to say nowadays. In any case, the Vivarais region is the cradle of the Alléon family. Indeed, as early as 1384, we met a certain Jean, who lived in the small village of Peyraud. It is then in Félines, in 1464, that we find traces of another member of this family: Claudius Aleonis. Let us finally mention, for these distant times, Jacques Alléon, parish priest of the church of Notre-Dame d'Annonay in 1522².

A century later, the Alléon family completely invaded the region. They founded homes in many villages on the right bank of the Rhône, in an area stretching from Sarras in the south to Serrières in the north, and in the large towns of Annonay, Saint-Etienne and Lyon. Families were so numerous at that time nicknames were often used to differentiate the many members of the family (grandclaude, verdillon, martel de Larin, mingeon...). These people practised honourable

¹ François Chomel: Dictionnaire des noms de famille du Haut-Vivarais, Annonay 1992, from whom we have borrowed this small etymological study.

² Philippe Chomel de Jarnieu: Un clan du Vivarais, les Chomel 1240 - 1977, page 41. Satillieu 1977.

trades, as merchants, surgeons or aldermen. Some were Catholics, others - most of them - Protestants. It is even noted, for the anecdote, that one of them went to try his luck in Parisian finance. A fairly representative sample, in short, of the petty bourgeoisie of our provinces in this Great Century of Louis XIV.

The Alléon family was so important at that time that it is difficult to draw up an exhaustive genealogy. In any case, this is not the object of the present study, which is devoted to the Constantinople branch. The filiation followed by the latter thus goes back to Claude François Alléon.

Chronicle of an apothecary from Ardèche,

CLAUDE FRANÇOIS ALLEON (1666-1736)

Born around 1666, he married at the age of twenty-eight, a young lady ten years his junior, Charlotte Rémy. It is interesting to note that the patronymic Rémy was very rare in the region at the time and that no trace of the birth or marriage of these two people has been found so far in the vicinity of Annonay. In any case, Claude François and his wife were present in Boulieu as early as 19 February 1695, the date of the baptism of their first son, Louis³. They did not leave this village, and ten other children followed them:

- *Enemonde* (baptized on the 5th of March 1696).
- *André* (baptized on the 24th of April 1697).
- *Joseph* (baptized on the 5th of December 1698, died in Boulieu on the 21st of April 1736).
- *Marianne* (baptized on the 23rd of May 1700, she died when she was 12).
- *Jean* (baptized on the 4th of August 1702).
- *Claire Françoise* (baptized on the 5th of October 1703).
- *Claude François* (baptized on the 19th of June 1704).
- ***Jean-François*** (baptized on the 4th of April 1707).
- *Théophile* (baptized on the 18th of October 1708).
- *Marie* (born and baptized on the 23rd of October 1710).

Claude François was a master apothecary. He died in Boulieu on 11 April 1736, at the age of seventy.

His wife survived him for exactly nineteen years, until April 10, 1755.

³ For all the proceedings on this page, see : Archives départementales de l'Ardèche, Microfilm E669.

From the Ardèche to the East,

JEAN-FRANÇOIS ALLEON (1707-1775)

Warning to the reader

Over the last two hundred and fifty years, many stories and anecdotes have been passed down from generation to generation about the life of Jean-François Alléon. How much of it is true? Where does the legend begin? The borderline is impossible to draw. However, we have chosen to present them here so as not to misplace this oral tradition, which is not without flavour and deserves to be perpetuated. Simply, these facts will be described in the conditional and we will try, when possible, to show their limits. Let us hope that further, more in-depth research will dispel any remaining doubts.

Birth and youth in France

The eighth child of Claude François, Jean-François Alléon was baptised on the 4th of April 1707 in the church of Sainte-Anne de Boulieu. He was given this name, quite dominant in the Ardèche since the passage of Saint Jean-François Régis, the apostle of Velay, in homage to his godfather, Jean-François Charvet.

We then find his trace only seventeen years later, on the deed of a notary of Boulieu, Mathieu Chomel⁴. He is described there as an apothecary's son, a very misleading name for the apprentice pharmacist he was with his father. Once this training was completed,

⁴ Ardèche Departmental Archives, microfilm 2E 15827.

Jean-François decided to leave his native region to settle in Constantinople.

The ladders of the Levant

Before evoking the departure and life of Jean-François Alléon in Constantinople, let us try to explain what the ladders of the Levant were. They were in fact trading posts established by the Christian nations in the ports and cities of the Ottoman Empire. The term owes its origin to the ladders hung from the piers of these ports, at the bottom of which ships came to unload passengers and goods. The Levant, i.e. the Eastern Mediterranean, thus had several ladders: Salonika, Smyrna, Aleppo, Beirut, Alexandria to name but a few. But the most important of these was undoubtedly Constantinople.

The French who came to settle in these centres were governed by very particular conventions, granted by Sultan Soliman the Magnificent in 1536. These conventions, called the Capitulations⁵, granted our citizens many privileges, including permission to travel and trade, exemption from taxes (except customs duties), freedom of religion and inviolability of the home. On the other hand the French, even in criminal matters, could only be tried by their consul.

For a long time the ladders were a kind of refuge for adventurers of all kinds, discredited and destitute people. Concerned about the representation of France on the territories of the Ottoman Sultan, Colbert decided to improve the quality and morality of the men who were expatriated to the ladders of the Levant. With the ordinance of 21 October 1685, it was: "*Fait très expresses inhibitions et défenses aux marchands français qui voudront passer en Levant pour s'y établir, de ne s'embarquer pour cet effet qu'après avoir été examinés et reçus par la Chambre de commerce établie à Marseille, et que leurs noms n'aient été transcrits dans un register*" ("made very express inhibition and defence for French merchants who wish to pass through the Levant to settle there, to embark for this purpose only after having been examined and received by the Chamber of Commerce established in Marseille, and their names have been transcribed in a register"). Thus our nationals could not be tolerated on the eastern shores without the agreement of the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille, a true auxiliary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This ordinance was in

⁵ Because divided into chapters, capitulated in Latin.

force until 1835. Strengthened by all the privileges granted by the Capitulations, and by the quality of the people authorised to expatriate, the French colonies, also called nations, would quickly prosper, managing their own interests away from Ottoman arbitrariness. The Constantinople ladder, for example, included several churches, two hospitals (one for the plague-stricken), a prison... Throughout the 18th century, it was made up of about two to three hundred people, divided into several classes of trades⁶:

- Diplomats, i.e. officers, interpreters, dragomans⁷ and, of course, the ambassador.

- The medical corps of surgeons, doctors and apothecaries.

- The traders and their clerks.

- Craftsmen of all kinds: jewellers, watchmakers, coopers, wigmakers...

In 1764, there were eight French doctors in Constantinople. They were listed as officers, in the same way as ambassadors, consuls, chancellors, secretaries, squires and dragomans⁸.

The departure

Apart from the attractions we have just mentioned, what could have incited a young apothecary from Ardèche in the 18th century to leave his family and roots to try such a risky adventure? The journey was unsafe, the country was endemically affected by the plague and cholera, and France was so far away...

To try to bring an element of an answer, it will be necessary to direct us towards the mysterious harem of the Topkapi seraglio⁹. Time has left us with a false image of this place as a garden of delights. The imperial harem was in fact a real gynaecium with drastic monastic and hierarchical rules. It was populated for this purpose by young women held captive and slaves of the sultan. However, the Koran forbids the abduction or sale of its faithful as slaves. The harem was therefore supplied from piracy with non-Muslim foreign women. One of them, of Provençal origin, would thus have become the favourite of the sovereign. As she only knew how to

⁶ Archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce and Industry, cote J59.

⁷ Interpreters. A little further on, we will have the opportunity to define the role of the drogmans more precisely.

⁸ Marie and Antoine Gautier: "Essay on Medicine in the Ottoman Empire". The newsletter of the Inalco Alumni Association of October 1999, page 80.

⁹ Palace of the Ottoman sultans from 1453 to 1839.

treat herself with herbal potions prepared by the apothecaries of her region, the young woman would have expressed the wish to have one of these pharmacists at her disposal¹⁰.

For his part, Jean-François Alléon was just learning the job. But he wasn't alone in doing it in the small village of Boulieu: his two older brothers Claude and Joseph received the same apprenticeship. Their father's cessation of activity was therefore going to cause a problem of succession. It is in this context that Jean-François left Boulieu to embark, in the company of a newly appointed French ambassador in Constantinople, on a boat from Marseille¹¹.

Context and family situation

Admitted to reside in Constantinople, Jean-François was now subject to many obligations, the hardest of which was to live without a wife. The deprivation of family life was indeed a tradition that circumstances had imposed: the presence of women would have multiplied the opportunities for advancement and unrest among our citizens. The small size of the khans¹² where the nation was housed made it impossible for families to settle there. Finally, the Kingdom of France, in order to avoid commercial monopolies, increasingly considered the ladders as a temporary stay for young traders. Thus, the royal decree of 21 March 1731 set the length of stay for French nationals at a maximum of ten years. Prior to this, the ordinance of 20 July 1726 had forbidden the wives and daughters of merchants to pass through the ladders, and the consuls to tolerate them under penalty of dismissal. As for the marriage of French residents, it was expressly forbidden, even with French women, on pain of immediate dismissal. Despite this, the consuls were often tolerant, and the parish priests of the eastern parishes refused to apply these laws, which went against Catholic principles. Without hesitation, they married Frenchmen who

¹⁰ This proven Provençal kadine was called Houmasah in Turkish. **She** was the favourite of Sultan Abdül-Hamîd I (1725-1789) and is said to have died the same year as him, at a young age. She does not seem to be of the generation of Jean-François.

¹¹ The Marquis de Villeneuve was appointed French ambassador to Constantinople in 1728. Jean-François was therefore twenty-one years old, whereas the legal age for expatriation was twenty-five. The next ambassador, the Count of Castellane, did not take up his duties until much later, in 1741. Jean-François already seems to have been in Constantinople at that time. This departure in the company of an ambassador, proposed in Labarre de Raillicourt's book "Les comtes du pape" (Volume I, page 2. Paris 1973) must therefore be taken with circumspection.

¹² In the East, the name given to the houses of foreigners and travellers.

wanted to make an alliance and baptised their children, in defiance of French law.

Breaking this rather difficult law, Jean-François got married on 3 May 1747, in the church of St Peter and St Paul in Galata, the Catholic district where he had settled upon his arrival. His wife, Thérèse Marchand, does not appear to be of French origin, but her filiation has not been established to this day¹³. The couple had four children, all born in Constantinople:

- Marie-Madeleine, born on September 11th 1749. She married Ange Rambaud on November 20, 1775, and we will have the opportunity to talk about her later. She died in Marseilles on March 18, 1847, at the advanced age of 98.

- **Jacques François**, born May 10, 1753.

- Catherine Claude. Born on 4 May 1757, she married Pierre Olive, a merchant from Marseille, on 2 June 1782. They had at least four children, including: Anastasie (1783) and Justinien (1784). Catherine died, like her sister, in Marseille, at the age of 97 (January 11, 1854).

- Claude François, born March 13, 1761. He died without posterity in Constantinople, at the age of twenty-three (September 18, 1784).

Context and professional situation

Once again, it seems necessary to reconstruct the context in which the small French nation lived at the time, in order to understand the social role played by Jean-François.

At the beginning of the 18th century, medicine and surgery were evolving considerably in the West. Research was progressing well, techniques were developing, universities were being structured, and everything was contributing to the advancement of medical science.

At the same time, Muslims were stagnating in this field. They still practised a rather limited traditional secular medicine, and refused any idea of innovation coming from a non-Muslim.

¹³ The only document we have found to date mentioning the presence of a Marchand family in Constantinople before 1747 is the following: Archives of the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille, file number J192, state of the various foreigners under the protection of France in Constantinople in March 1723. It is noted there :

- Jacob Marchand, watchmaker, married to Claudine Burdet, with two children, Constance and Jacob.
- Anne Marchand, wife of Jacques Alary, a silversmith.
- Jeanine Marchand, wife of Jean-Michel Hister, apothecary.

In fact, a gap had been created, to the point where a European traveller of the time would say: « *Leur médecine est moins composée que la nôtre, peut-être est-elle plus imparfaite; ce qu'il y a de sûr est qu'elle est si facile, qu'ordinairement on l'apprend toute entière avec la chirurgie et la pharmacie en six mois de temps* »¹⁴ (“Their medicine is less composed than ours, perhaps it is more imperfect; what is certain is that it is so easy, that one usually learns it all with surgery and pharmacy in six months.”).

However, while Muslim practitioners had some scruples about calling on their Christian colleagues, this was not the case for their patients. The latter, knowing the more competent European-trained doctors, did not hesitate to call on them and to use their services when their health was at stake. The Western doctor had acquired such a reputation among the Ottoman population that they were able to see a European doctor. An example of this is the anecdote of a German traveller passing through a bazaar in 1804: « *Lorsque nous traversâmes les bazars, plusieurs voix nous crièrent : frenk iatro! médecin franc! et implorèrent le secours de notre art. Quelques femmes allèrent même jusqu'à nous saisir par l'habit, et nous ne pûmes surtout persuader un couple de négresses, qu'on pouvait être franc et porter un chapeau, sans posséder de grandes connaissances en médecine. Je pense que mes lunettes les confirmaient encore dans cette opinion. Elles accouraient à nous les bras levés pour se faire tâter le pouls, et se montrèrent très irritées de notre refus, qu'elles s'obstinèrent à prendre pour de la mauvaise volonté* »¹⁵. (“As we walked through the bazaars, many voices shouted: frenk iatro! frank doctor! and begged for the help of our art. Some women even went so far as to grab us by our clothes, and we could not persuade a couple of negresses that one could be a Frank and wear a hat without having much knowledge of medicine. I think that my glasses still confirmed this opinion. They came running up to us with their arms raised to have their pulse tested, and were very irritated by our refusal, which they stubbornly took to be ill-will.”).

Such a situation naturally led to abuse and excesses on the part of Westerners. Indeed, it was common to see shameless and

¹⁴ Guer: "Moeurs et usages des Turcs", page 446. Paris 1746. Cited in the thesis of Frédéric Hitzel: "Relation interculturelles et scientifiques entre l'Empire ottoman et les pays de l'Europe occidentale, 1453-1839", page 375. Doctoral thesis, Paris 1994.

¹⁵ J.L.S. Bartholdy: "Voyage en Grèce dans les années 1803 et 1804", tome II, pages 226 and 227. Paris 1807. Cited in the thesis of Mr. Frédéric Hitzel: op. cit., page 383.

untitled charlatans embarking on a journey to the Levant to take advantage, thanks to the credulity of the natives, of a science that cost them little: all the precautions of the authorities could not help. To illustrate this phenomenon, let us quote the anecdote of an author of the time, whom time has made anonymous. He recounts how, entrusted with a topographical mission in the islands of the archipelago to correct the errors in Olivier and Berthelot's maps, and established in Samos, he was, in spite of himself, made the reputation of a great doctor. Very embarrassed at first, he got used to ordering and practising purges and bleeding, to imagine treatments as strange as they were harmless. Fortunately, he was lucky enough to extend his reputation far and wide and to earn a very nice nest egg¹⁶! No comment. In 1787, i.e. several years after Jean-François' death, the situation had hardly improved. Thus, the vice-consul of Rhodes wrote on the same subject: « *Le Levant abonde de prétendus médecins dont la mauvaise foi dépasse l'ignorance. Ces fléaux de l'humanité, plus occupés des soins d'augmenter leur pécule que du désir de sauver leurs victimes, achètent indifféremment toutes les drogues qu'on leur présente, pourvu que la modicité du prix s'accorde avec leur cupidité*¹⁷. » (“The Levant abounds in so-called doctors whose bad faith exceeds ignorance. These scourges of humanity, who are more concerned with increasing their income than with saving their victims, indiscriminately buy all the drugs they are presented with, as long as the low price is in keeping with their greed.”).

Although Jean-François was an apothecary by training and we have not found his titles, he is not to be classified among the individuals in the previous category. It is almost certain that he even had a medical degree¹⁸. There are two reasons for this:

The first reason is that he shared, in association with a certain Jean-Mike Paul, the office of official surgeon of the French nation of Constantinople¹⁹. He held this office at least from 1763 to 1766. His role was of course to assist the residents, but also to deliver the health certificates of the ships, to assist the military missions in the region, etc. He was also the chief surgeon of the French nation of Constantinople. In this capacity, he was directly paid by the Chamber

¹⁶ Paul Masson: "Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIII^e siècle", page 153. Paris 1911.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Diplomas were bachelor's, bachelor's and doctorate degrees. The licence allowed the practice of the profession.

¹⁹ National Archives: document AE/B III/294.

of Commerce of Marseille, which paid him 100 piasters per semester²⁰. Such a role could not be entrusted to the first charlatan who came along²¹!

The second reason is even more convincing. As the level of Muslim doctors had not improved, few still trusted them. For example, Baron de Dedem describes this in his memoirs²²: « *Et puisque j'en suis aux médecins du sultan, je veux dire comment cette partie du service est réglée dans le sérail. Le hekim bachi, ou premier médecin en titre, est toujours musulman, et, dans les cas graves, aucune médecine n'est ordonnée sans son consentement, du moins pour la forme; mais, comme les Turcs savent que l'art est plus perfectionné chez nous, ils donnent la préférence à nos médecins. C'est ainsi que, dans le sérail, on reçoit plus d'un Esculape chrétien.* ». (“And since I am one of the Sultan’s doctors, I want to say how this part of the service is regulated in the seraglio. The hekim bachi, or first doctor in title, is always Muslim, and in serious cases, no medicine is ordered without his consent, at least as a matter of form; but, as the Turks know that the art is more sophisticated here, they give preference to our doctors. Thus, in the seraglio, more than one Christian Aesculapius is received.”). Until the day when an accident ended the disavowal of the Ottoman doctors: on 3 June 1768, the chief of the eunuchs guarding the harem, the *kızlar aghası* (chief of the girls!), and therefore an important figure in the palace, died a brutal death due to the ignorance of his Ottoman doctor. The sultan of the time, Mustafa III, then promulgated an intimate edict that « *quiconque prétendrait, sans être muni du diplôme de docteur et de l'autorisation d'exercer la médecine, à sauver les jours d'autrui, s'exposerait à voir trancher le fil des siens par le glaive du bourreau* »²³. (“Anyone who claims, without a doctor’s degree and authorisation to practise medicine, to save the lives of others, would be liable to have the executioner’s sword cut through the threads of his own life.”). However, there was no school in the East that could issue a doctorate. The Sultan could not have been clearer in his choice between Western and Eastern

²⁰ National Archives: document AE/B III/294. Let us add to this that in 1787, the surgeons of Constantinople and Smyrna were paid 1500 pounds for the ladders, 1200 for the other ladders. Archives of the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille, file number J1561.

²¹ In 1740, Mr Clergne, a scale surgeon from Alexandria, was dismissed by the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille (at the request of the minister himself) for having proved insufficient in his functions! That is to say that the sending of the French to the East was strict and controlled.

²² Memoirs of General Baron de Dedem de Gelder 1774-1825, Page 55. Paris 1900.

²³ J. von Hammer (English translation by J. J. Hellert), History of the Ottoman Empire, volume XVI, pages 169-170. Paris 1835-1843. Cited in the thesis of Frédéric Hitzel: op. cit., page 380.

medicine. In fact, he attached the act to his writings, since he enlisted the services of two Italian doctors²⁴. His successor, Sultan Abdül-Hamîd I (1774-1789) did the same: he enlisted the services of two Italians, Gaubis and Beneveni, as well as two Frenchmen, Dominique Serre and... Jean-François Alléon.

This was the highest office that Jean-François could hope to attain, and it was an honourable one. It was also very lucrative. History has left us a very interesting account of the advantages enjoyed by a doctor in the service of the Sultan. In this case, it is Dr Gaubis, a colleague of Jean-François, who was previously also attached to Mustafâ III (1757-1774). General Baron de Dedem de Gelder explains in his memoirs that this Sultan : *« avait donné à M. Gaubis de quoi se faire bâtir une belle maison en face de l'hôtel des ambassadeurs de Hollande ; il lui avait en outre donné, à différentes reprises, des mouchoirs avec quelques centaines de ducats, et, pour les lui fourrer dans son habit, il choisissait l'instant ou il était sûr de n'être pas aperçu. Un jour le prince lui demanda si sa fortune était faite et s'il en avait fait passer une partie en Italie. Sur la réponse négative de M. Gaubis, le prince continua ainsi : vous avez tort ; je ne vivrai pas toujours. Je crois que vous serez bien vu de mon frère, qui me succédera ; mais, dans ce pays, les révolutions sont fréquentes ; il y règne beaucoup d'intrigues et de jalousie. Je vous donnerai de l'argent comptant. Croyez-moi, faites-en passer dans votre pays ou confiez-le à votre vis-à-vis (l'ambassade de Hollande). Quand on a des enfants, il ne faut pas seulement songer à soi et je vous recommande mon fils... »*²⁵ (“ had given Mr. Gaubis enough money to build a beautiful house opposite the Dutch ambassadors’ hotel; he had also given him, on several occasions, handkerchiefs with a few hundred ducats, and, to stuff them into his clothes, he chose the moment when he was sure he would not be seen. One day the prince asked him if his fortune had been made and if he had spent part of it in Italy. When Mr. Gaubis replied in the negative, the prince went on to say: you are wrong; I will not live forever. I think you will be well regarded by my brother, who will succeed me; but in this country revolutions are frequent; there is much intrigue and jealousy. I will give you cash. Believe me, pass it on to your country or entrust it to

²⁴ Mr Gaubis, from Trieste, and Dom Nicolas de Caro, from Naples, who passed himself off as his adviser and confidant.

²⁵ Memoirs of General Baron de Dedem de Gelder 1774-1825, Page 55. Paris 1900. Quoted in the article by Marie and Antoine Gautier: op. cit., page 74.

the other side (the Dutch Embassy). When you have children, you should not only think of yourself and I recommend my son to you...”)

An embarrassing disease for a hereditary ruler

Although he had four personal physicians, Sultan Abdul Hamid I suffered from an ailment on his accession to the throne that he could not show off, and which, moreover, is not mentioned in any book on the history of the Ottoman Empire: he was sterile. This is at least what emerges from the correspondence between the Count of Saint-Priest, French ambassador to Constantinople from 1768 to 1779, and the Count of Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the same time²⁶: « *Il est venu à ma connaissance un détail assés singulier de l'état phisique et corporel du grand Seigneur. Sultan Abdül-Hamîd est monté sur le thrône âgé de 49 ans. Un point bien essentiel pour l'Empire étant d'y voir naître des héritiers, ses sœurs se sont empressées de lui envoyer de belles esclaves Géorgiennes et Circassiennes qui n'assureront pas la succession au thrône, ce prince étant convenu lui-même de son impuissance actuelle* ». (“It has come to my knowledge a singularly assertive detail of the physical and corporeal state of the great Lord. Sultan Abdül-Hamîd ascended the throne at the age of 49. A very essential point for the Empire being to see the birth of heirs, his sisters hastened to send him beautiful Georgian and Circassian slaves who will not ensure the succession to the throne, this prince having accepted of his current impotence.”).

So the secret was jealously guarded, and only his sister Esmâ Sultan had the confidence. It was she who employed Jean-François, without the knowledge of the Turkish doctors and the sovereign's entourage, to treat his brother : « *Ce Prince, à l'instigation sans doute de sa sœur Esma Sultane, a pris le parti d'appeler ce chirurgien et de s'en faire visiter en présence d'un nommé Treves, médecin juif qui servait d'interprète, et d'une femme voilée qu'on sait être la même qu'avait le sultan dans sa prison*²⁷. Sa hauteesse essaya, confesse, son

²⁶ All quotations in italics in the next two paragraphs are taken from the three documents below:

. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Correspondence/ Turkey/ Volume 161/ folios 59 to 61 (recto/verso).

. Idem, political correspondence/ Turkey/ Supplement/ Volume 20/ folio 27 (recto/verso).

. Idem, memoirs and documents/ Turkey/ Volume 30/ folio 167 (recto).

²⁷ Potential successors at the head of the Ottoman Empire were held prisoner in the palace, in a gilded cage (in Turkish the kafes), pending their accession to the throne, to prevent any conspiracy against the sultan in place.

impuissance actuelle dont l'époque remonte un peu avant son avènement au trône, ayant eu jusqu'alors l'usage de ses facultés. Aléon a trouvé qu'il ne manquait rien à la conformation et a proposé quelques remèdes propres à rendre du ton aux solides, à quoi la femme voilée l'encourageait de paroles. Le grand seigneur lui a donné vingt-huit sequins²⁸ ». (“This Prince, no doubt at the instigation of his sister Esmâ Sultane, decided to call this surgeon and visit him in the presence of a man named Treves, a Jewish doctor who served as an interpreter, and a veiled woman who is known to be the same woman the Sultan had in his prison. His highness tried, confessed, his present impotence, which dates back to a time shortly before his accession to the throne, having until then had the use of his faculties. Aléon found that there was nothing lacking in the conformation and proposed some remedies to restore the tone to the solids, to which the veiled woman encouraged him with words. The great lord gave him twenty-eight chequins”). In another letter from Saint-Priest, the discourse is much the same: « *Le chirurgien donna des espérances à sa hauteur, et promit d'entreprendre sa guérison, [...] reste à savoir si la cure en question est possible à effectuer. Ce qu'il y eu de singulier dans cette visite est qu'une femme voilée y assista. On sait que c'est la même femme que le sultan avait dans sa prison. Le chirurgien a reconnu qu'elle n'est point vieille, quoiqu'il ait été prétendu qu'on n'en donnait pas d'autre aux princes renfermés²⁹.* » (“The surgeon gave hope to her high majesty, and promised to undertake her cure, [...] it remains to be seen whether the cure in question is possible to be carried out. What was peculiar about this visit was that it was attended by a veiled woman. It is known that it was the same woman the Sultan had in his prison. The surgeon acknowledged that she was not old, although it was claimed that no other woman was given to the imprisoned princes.”)

But Jean-François Alléon's visit to the Harem did not go unnoticed. Indeed, the very next day, he was summoned to the Topkapi palace: « *Le lendemain, le Hekim Bachi³⁰ l'a envoyé appeler.*

This is what happened to Abdül-Hamîd I at the time when his uncle Mustafâ III was in power. He was imprisoned there from the age of 6 years old in the company of a dwarf and two servants, and came out of it at the age of 49 years old!

²⁸ Gold coin then in use in the various Italian states and in the Levant.

²⁹ Legend and some authors (but not historians, it is true), claim that Josephine de Beauharnais' cousin, Aimée Dubuc de Rivery, was kidnapped by barbarian pirates. Offered to the sultan, she then became part of the harem of Topkapi, and became, under the name of Nakchidil, the favourite of Abdül-Hamîd I. If this beautiful story really existed, the veiled woman in question here could be Aimée Dubuc.

³⁰ The Hekîm bâchî, the chief physician of the palace.

Le médecin n'avait pas été prévenu de la visite de la veille et s'en est fait expliquer les circonstances par le sieur Aléon, qui lui en a rendu compte avec l'interprétation du drogman Roustant³¹. On avait annoncé à ce chirurgien qu'il serait appelé de nouveau et il est dans cette attente, mais on commence à soupçonner que la faculté du Sérail aura intrigué pour l'exclure ». (“The next day, Hekim Bachi sent him to call. The doctor had not been informed of the previous day's visit and had the circumstances explained to him by Mr Alléon, who gave him an account of them with the interpretation of the dragoman Roustant. This surgeon had been told that he would be called again and he is waiting for this, but one begins to suspect that the faculty of the Seraglio will have intrigued to exclude him.”).

At the heart of a political intrigue

Apart from the fact that the palace doctors must have harboured a certain resentment towards their western counterparts, what could be the reasons that motivated the Sultan's entourage not to recall Jean-François Alléon? Here again, it is Saint-Priest who enlightens us, by explaining to his supervisory minister that the sovereign was considered “*weak, apathetic, and even accused of imbecility*” by those close to him. Moreover, the policy he sought to implement at the beginning of his reign was badly perceived by the people: « *Cette instabilité du ministère ne tarda pas à diminuer de l'opinion fanatiquement favorable que le public turc avait mal à propos conçu du nouveau sultan³²* ». (“This instability in the Ministry soon diminished the fanatically favourable opinion that the Turkish public had misconceived for the new Sultan.”). Much less was needed to dethrone a sovereign at that time. Had not the predecessor of Abdul Hamid I, Mustafa III, been assassinated because the Turkish people « *faisait à son souverain le ridicule reproche de vouloir gouverner par lui-même au lieu de laisser agir ses désirs !* » (“made his sovereign the ridiculous reproach of wanting to govern by himself instead of letting his desires act!”) ?

³¹ Pierre Roustan, who died in office in 1779.

³² It is interesting to note that this sultan did not leave this image in history at all. Rather, he is seen as the true initiator of a new policy, prompted by a realistic vision of the situation of the Empire. He personally led this policy, which was moreover taken up by his successors.

The policy pursued by the Sultan was therefore not at all popular, and he was physically unable to give heirs to the throne. Eyes then turned to the other suitors of the moment. Unpleasant surprise, there was only one left, Selîm, the son of Mustaphâ III: « *Le seul et unique héritier de l'Empire, le fils du défunt sultan³³, nommé Selîm, âgé de 14 ans, est aujourd'hui renfermé dans un appartement composé d'une antichambre et une chambre en tout avec quatre eunuques et quelques femmes pour le servir, son oncle le fait appeler souvent pour souper avec lui. C'est la seule diversion du prisonnier lequel d'ailleurs est mieux traité dit-on qu'il ne se pratique ordinairement. Sa mère vient le voir fréquemment du vieux sérail ou elle habite et elle découche dans ces occasions. Sa circoncision a eu lieu dans les premiers mois du nouveau règne. Mais il reste à craindre pour lui les malheurs épidémiques, telle que la peste et la petite vérole³⁴. On ne peut s'empêcher de frémir lorsqu'on songe si on avait le malheur de le perdre, aux troubles dont l'Empire ottoman ne manquerait pas d'être déchiré pendant le reste du règne d'un prince aussi faible que le sultan régnant et surtout après sa mort. On assure que sa hauteesse a déjà fait proposer des femmes à son neveu, mais qu'il a répondu ne vouloir faire que des enfants de souverains [...] ce qui quoique imprudemment dit, est profondément pensé, car la nécessité d'avoir des héritiers de l'Empire obligera de le mettre sur le trône, au lieu que la succession assurée, on ne serait pas pressé de l'y placer* ». (“The one and only heir of the Empire, the son of the deceased Sultan, Selim, aged 14, is today confined to a flat consisting of an antechamber and a bedroom with four eunuchs and a few women to serve him, his uncle often calls him to have dinner with him. This is the only diversion for the prisoner, who, moreover, is said to be better treated than is usually the case. His mother frequently comes to see him from the old seraglio where she lives and sleeps on these occasions. His circumcision took place in the first months of the new reign. However, he still has to fear epidemic misfortunes such as the plague and smallpox. One cannot help but shudder when one thinks, if one had the misfortune of losing him, of the troubles that would inevitably tear the Ottoman Empire apart during the rest of the reign of a prince as weak as the reigning Sultan, and especially after his death. It is said that his highness had already proposed women to his nephew,

³³ Mustafâ III, Sultan from 30 October 1757 to 1774.

³⁴ Smallpox, a contagious, epidemic and fatal disease.

but that he replied that he only wanted to make children of sovereigns [...] which, although imprudently said, is deeply thought out, because the need to have heirs of the Empire will oblige him to be placed on the throne, instead of the succession being assured, there would be no hurry to place him there.”) The only potential progenitor of the Ottoman dynasty therefore refused to sire any heir if he did not take his uncle’s place. We thus better understand the intrigues made to prevent Jean-François Alléon from curing the impotent and unpopular Ottoman Sultan.

The Saint-Priest correspondence does not say what influence Jean-François Alléon had after these events, but Abdül-Hamîd I had a little girl in 1778, whom he called Esmâ, and a son Mahmûd in 1785 (the future Mahmûd II, sultan from 1808 to 1839). As for the young Selîm, he had to wait for the death of his uncle in 1789 to succeed him.

Doctor of the Sultan

To side with and care for a Caliph required a certain discretion and a lot of diplomacy. We have just seen that Jean-François Alléon had been placed in a very embarrassing imperial confidence, since both the Ottoman court and its ambassador had wanted to know why he had gone to the Sultan’s palace. This kind of revelation of professional secrecy could be very costly. A Florentine surgeon, Lorenzo, for example, paid for his indiscretions with his life: he was found murdered in the cemetery of the Small Fields of the Dead on 20 January 1815³⁵.

But through the services he rendered, Jean-François Alléon also enjoyed many prerogatives. In addition to being one of the most powerful men in the world, he was one of the rare Westerners to be admitted to the Topkapi seraglio. He therefore had the privilege of having access to the interior of the harem, a palace renowned throughout the West, yet unknown, a closed world where normally only sultans and eunuchs were admitted. It seems that his wife also had access to the imperial harem, as she gave birth there³⁶.

In such an environment, Jean-François quickly became a recognised and sought-after doctor on the ladder, and with the

³⁵ Frédéric Hitzel: opus cited, page 385.

³⁶ Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, political correspondence/ Turkey/ volume 161/ folios 59 to 61.

seraglio, which, let us not forget, would be at the origin of his coming to Turkey.

Oriental legend

It is said to have been in his capacity as the Sultan's doctor that he was called to the bedside of the seriously ill favourite one evening. Charged with treating her, which was a further testimony of trust and gratitude on the part of the sovereign, Jean-François would have cured her. The Sultan would then have decided to show his gratitude, to thank him with something significant. To do so, he would have taken him to a plain, not far from the forest of Belgrade³⁷, and would have told him that as far as he could see, the land would belong to him. Jean-François, daring, would then get back on his horse in order to extend his field of vision and thus acquire, at a glance, a few more hectares.

Death

Jean-François Alléon died in Constantinople on December 30, 1775, at the age of sixty-eight. He was buried in the crypt of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, for which he had contributed much during its reconstruction (the church had been completely destroyed by fire in 1731). A Latin epitaph was included. It is probably the one that can still be seen today in the Saint-Esprit Cathedral, and here is the translation of the epitaph:

« Sous cette pierre repose Jean-François Alléon, de nationalité française. Médecin réputé, pharmacien encore plus réputé. Homme de grand secours dans les moments difficiles, pour les femmes qui souffraient des douleurs de l'enfantement. Ami des pauvres, a laissé le souvenir d'un homme généreux - car il leur a donné des médicaments gratuits. S'est dépensé sans compter, s'est occupé d'eux gratuitement.

³⁷ Now in ruins, Belgrade (or Belgrat) was a village north of Constantinople, in the middle of the forest of the same name. It is not, of course, the present capital of Serbia.

S'en est allé en 1776, à l'âge de soixante-sept ans³⁸, a trouvé le salut éternel. Sa femme, qui l'aimait beaucoup, a laissé en souvenir de lui ce témoignage de son amour éternel.»

(“Under this stone lies Jean-François Alléon, a French national. Famous doctor, even more famous pharmacist. A man of great help in difficult times, for women who suffered the pains of childbirth. Friend of the poor, left the memory of a generous man - for he gave them free medicine. Spent a lot of money, took care of them for free. He left in 1776, at the age of sixty-seven, and found eternal salvation. His wife, who loved him very much, left this testimony of his eternal love in his memory”.)

Thérèse Marchand survived him until 1815.

Christophe ALLEON
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³⁸ This is false, since his baptismal and death certificates show that he died at the age of 68, on December 30, 1775.