

DRESSED TO SELL

Lesley Miller, V&A

THE SUBJECT

Name: Bonaventure Carret

Age : 42 (died in Liège on business trip)

Marital status : single

Home address: place des Terreaux, parish of St Pierre et St Saturnin, Lyon (i.e. the main commercial square), accommodation comprising, a salon, a room serving as a dining room on the 3rd floor, three sizeable closets, and a room on the 4th floor of a house belonging to Sr Chancey

Rent: 480 *livres* per annum

Landlady : Dame Grand, wife of neighbouring *caffetier*

Servant: Jean Francois Vernay (in his employ at the time of his death)

Current position (since 1776): travelling salesman (*marchand commissionaire*), partner of Jean Gardés and Jean François Laverrière, *négociants* ; their sleeping partner was Lemoine. The business specialised in supplying all sorts of silk goods from silk stockings and ribbons to pieces of fabric for dress and furnishings, from the simplest to the most lavish (Fig. 1).

Previous employment: salesman, partner of Jean David de Calon and Empaire Ferlat

Total value of movable possessions: 5527 *livres* 8 sols

Total value of clothing: 455 *livres* 10 sols

Value of clothing with which he travelled: 311 *livres* 10 sols

Value of clothing left behind in Lyon: 144 *livres* (24 *livres* worth with washerwoman, Jeanne Berard, femme d'Antoine Rey, rue Gentil to whom he owed 2# 17s)

Debts: 4231 *livres* 3 sols 3 *deniers* owed to his partners; 2800 *livres* owed to others, including small amounts to his laundress, the cleaner of his furnishings, his landlady.

Context: annual wages of a drawgirl in the Lyon silk industry were about 200-300 *livres* per annum; many merchant manufacturers drew about 1500 - 2000 *livres* per annum as income from their business partnership.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Bonaventure Carret died in his prime, far from home and probably unexpectedly. His inventory is a fascinating insight into the trappings (and probably aspirations) of a man who worked as a traveling salesman or traveling merchant over two decades.¹ Here I offer a brief overview of his lifestyle and the contents of his wardrobe. The only excellent article that analyses the papers that were seized when he died does not focus on the signs of his fashionable consumption in any detail, but rather on his business activities.²

The taking of the inventory was long and interrupted, beginning on 10 November 1779 and being completed on 27 July 1779. There was presumably no rush as Carret had no dependents, though he did have creditors. The bailiffs judged that the seals preventing entry to the apartment had not been broken, partly by the state of the dust that had settled in the house between visits. What is noteworthy in comparison with other Lyonnais inventories is how few items among Carret's furnishings were described as old or worn. Indeed, the freshness of his red damask suite of upholstered furniture with its grey painted frames, the large number of mirrors, and his fashionable *lit à la turque* are quite astonishing. It seems that he may not have been living within his means (see debts above, all incurred since 1776).

Carret spent a large amount of time on the road. The majority of his trips were four to six months in length, but he also made longer ones, his longest being 21 months (1776-78). He covered a great deal of ground, often going direct to Amsterdam via Paris and then returning by a circuit through Flanders and the north of France. In March 1767 he underlined the rigours of his lot: 'I have been up since six in the morning, I pounded the streets all day and I am writing to you at the moment at 2.26 am. I go out again at seven o'clock to deal with other orders...'³ Other letters, however, reveal that 'pounding the streets' did not prevent Carret from attending the theatre, reading widely and forming liaisons with desirable women. Of course, in the context of selling silks, some of these activities might well be construed as 'work' rather than purely pleasure.

Carret evidently left behind a servant who looked after his home while he was away. He took the opportunity to leave some furnishings (carpets) and some of his clothing to be cleaned during this time. In contrast to the state of his furnishings, very little of his clothing was not used or worn. Interestingly, it was some of the clothing that he left

¹ ADR BP2272 : 10 November 1779 Inventaire-après-décès Bonaventure Carret.

² Françoise Bayard, 'L'Europe de Bonaventure Carret et de ses associés, marchands lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle', in *Commerce, voyage et expérience religieuse XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. A. Burkardt, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, pp. 55-80. This article is based on analysis of documents in ADR 8B730.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

behind in Lyon that was apparently newest, and certainly its colours were those favoured in the 1770s, bright in comparison with earlier in the century (highlighted in red below). His wardrobe revealed a liking for smart clothing and also some of the accessories essential in polite society. He owned seven three-piece suits, two of silk, two of silk and wool mix, the rest of wool or worsted, as well as an array of two piece suits and coats, waistcoats and breeches that did not match each other, but could have been worn together. He also had three nightgowns with matching waistcoat and breeches, one in blue and white damask and two in printed cotton. His accessories included a lacquer and turtleshell tobacco box, two steel swords, silver buttons and buckles, and two rush canes with gold knobs. In addition, shoes, absent from most Lyonnais inventories, are present. All of them were in the luggage he carried with him to Liège, which is possibly why they are present – eight pairs in total. He apparently owned no wig, perhaps because he was fashionable enough already to rely on dressing his own hair.

Below I have itemized the clothing and where it was kept in his home, as it gives an interesting insight into the wardrobe of a man who devoted his time to selling the products of the Lyon silk industry in northern climes. Some of the lots valued included objects other than clothing and I retain them here as their value cannot be disaggregated. A fuller analysis is anticipated. The translation is my own, the French follows the English in italics after each group of clothing itemized. Where I still have not managed to unravel a word, I have left it highlighted. Modern day accents have been injected, but the inconsistent spelling has been retained.

THE WARDROBE: TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

Lyon. In Lyon, Carret's clothes were kept in the room that served as a dining room, in a closet off the dining room, and in cupboards off the corridors between rooms.

In the dining room in a chest of drawers in a large cupboard facing the windows.

A sword with a steel hilt in its steel sheath, its silk belt, a little hunting knife decorated in silver, a sword sheath in shagreen, a hunting knife belt of green velvet decorated with a gold galloon, with leather within, a pair of yellow slippers, eleven prints representing portraits of different children in a big tin-plate case. 15#

Une épée dans son fourreau acier, son ceinturon soye, ledit épée à poignée acier, un petit couteau de chasse garnie en argent, un fourreau d'épée en chagrin, un ceinturon de couteau de chasse velours vert garni d'un galon or, une ceinture de cuir ou peau de dedans, une paire pantoufle jaune, onze estampes en papier représentant portraits de différents enfants (?), dans un grand étui de fer blanc 15#

Twenty-three pairs of black, white and grey silk stockings, another pair of *fleuret* stockings,⁴ three pairs of leather stockings, four pairs of linen socks, two garlands of blue, white and red taffeta, another two drawn-threadwork garlands and artificial flowers in several colours. 66#

Vingt trois paires de bas de soie noirs, blancs et gris, un autre paire fleuret/fleurie, trois paire en cuir, quatre paires chaussette fil, deux guirlandes en taffetas bleu blanc et rouge, deux autres guirlandes en filoché et fleurs artificielles de plusieurs couleurs 66#

Four pairs of leather gloves, thirty table knives with bone handles, two forks for cutting, two other knives for cutting, also with bone handles, six other table knives with ebony handles with a little silver knife, in their leather cases, **three little ? to conceal** the knives? 18#

*Quatre paires de gants de peau, trente couteaux de table leurs manches os, deux fourchettes à découper, deux autres couteaux aussi à découper, leurs manches aussi os, six autres couteaux de table à manches de bois d'ébène avec un petit couteau argent, dans leurs étuis cuir, trois petits **furcles à eguiser** les couteaux* 18#

In another closet off the dining room, beside the window were found:

Four shaving cloths, twelve cotton night caps, forty cotton and linen pocket handkerchiefs, three more cloth handkerchiefs, a muslin cravat, twelve homespun shirts trimmed with muslin, some embroidered, four shirts **dyed in ?**, also in homespun cloth and trimmed with muslin 36#

*... quatre linges à barbe, douze bonnetes de coton, quarante mouchoirs de poche coton et lin, trois autres mouchoirs toile, une cravatte mousseline, douze chemises toile de ménage garnies en mousseline, en partie brodées et filet, quatre chemises de **tint à la matis** (?), aussi toile de ménage et aussi garnies en mousseline* 36#

Ninety-four stocks (collars) of muslin and homespun cloth, a muslin cravat, four English flannel shirts, eight linen drawers (underpants), two homespun *peignoirs* and five pounds of ordinary *fleuret* in the skein 24#

Quatre vingt quatorze cols, mousseline et toile, une cravatte mousseline, quatre chemisette flanelle d'Angleterre, huit calçons toile de ménage ; deux peignoirs même toile + cinq livres de fleuret commune en écheveaux 24#

In another cupboard in the hallway between the dining room and the salon on the right :

Five silk and taffeta handkerchiefs, five others the same, one in printed cotton with a white ground, another piece of the same length and quality, another piece of printed cotton with a copper-coloured ground 48#

⁴ A fabric made of silk waste which are spun together to form a yarn.

Cinq mouchoirs de soye et taffetas, cinq autres de meme, un autre indienne, fond blanc, une autre pièce de même longueur et qualité, un autre morceau d'indienne ou lambeau, à fond mordoré 48#

A pair of buckles and garters, a tea strainer 4# 10
Une paire boucles et jarretières, une passoire a the 4# 10

A rush cane with a gold top 144#
Un canne jonc a pomme or 144#

Another rush cane without a knob 10#
Un autre jonc sans garniture 10#]

In a cupboard in the corridor between apartments :

A coat of **calmouk** with its matching waistcoat,⁵ a knitted coat, red velvet breeches with gold buttons and buckles, black cloth breeches, a red satin waistcoat, a grey cloth coat, lined in crimson satin and with gold buttons, a camlet pelisse lined in fox fur 24#
Un habit calmouck avec sa veste, un autre habit de tricot, une culotte de velours rouge à boutons et jarretières or, un culotte drap noir, une veste satin cramoisi, un habit gris de drap, doublé de satin cramoisi et à boutons or, une pelisse camelot doublée de peau de renard 24#

A coat, waistcoat and two pairs of breeches in lilac satin, an embroidered green silk waistcoat, a coat, waistcoat and breeches of black camlet, lined in silk twill, two black velvets breeches 48#
Un habit, veste et deux paires culottes, satin lilla, une veste soie verte brodée, un habit, veste et culotte camelot noir, doublé en serge de soye, deux culotte velours noir 48#

A nightgown, waistcoat and breeches of blue and white damask, a coat and waistcoat of brocaded silk moiré, breeches to match, all with silver buttons, black velvet breeches, crimson satin breeches, a white dimity waistcoat, a nightgown, waistcoat and breeches of printed cotton with a white ground... all very worn 12#
Une robe de chambre avec sa veste et son culotte damas bleu et blanc, un habit et veste moire en soye brochée, une culotte de même, le tout à boutons argent, une culotte velours noir, une culotte satin cramoisi, une veste bazin blanc, une robe de chambre, sa veste et culotte indienne a fond blanc... le tout très uzé 12#

A waistcoat of brocaded cloth of gold, a grey cloth coat, waistcoat and breeches trimmed with gold braid, a pair of yellow cloth breeches, two pairs of linen drawers,

⁵ Probably a woollen cloth – still to be identified.

two pairs of wool waistcoat sleeves, a honey-coloured waistcoat with braid... all old and worn 36#

Une veste fond tissu or brochée, un habit, veste et culotte drap gris galonne en or, une paire culotte drap jaune, deux paires de caleçons toile, deux paires de manches de veste de drap, une veste drap biche galonne, le tout vieux et uze 36#

The laundress brought back:

Five linen shirts, trimmed in muslin of which one a nightshirt without trimming, ten handkerchiefs, one of cotton, three others white, eight muslin stocks, a homespun cravat, three pairs of homespun drawers, two shaving cloths, three cloths, a hemp handtowel, a cotton nightcap, two linen damask tablecloths, four patterned towels, a homespun peignoir 24#

cinq chemises toile de ménage garnie en mousseline dont une de nuit sans garniture, dix mouchoirs l'un en coton, trois autre blancs, huit cols mousseline, un cravatte trois caleçon toile de ménage, deux linges à barbe, trois torchons, une essuyemains toile cordat, un bonnet de coton, deux nappes toile façon à la Venize, quatre serviete toile damassées, un peignoir toile de ménage 24 #

Travelling wardrobe, brought back from Liège by the deceased's partner Gardés who apparently left two watches and two buckles left there (perhaps to pay off debts?):

A black camlet coat, waistcoat and breeches, a grey callimanco coat, waistcoat and breeches with steel buttons, a pigeon-breast-coloured camlet coat with silver buttons...⁶ old and worn 30#

Un habit, veste et culotte camelot poil noir, un habit, veste et culotte calemande grise a boutons acier, un habit, veste et culotte camelot couleur gorge de pigeon à boutons argent... vieux et uzés 30#

A royal blue and red coat and waistcoat with embroidered fastening (frogging) in the form of interlocking tassels 30#

Un habit, veste de drap bleu de Roy et rouge à boutonnieres et bordure brodé en brandebourg en forme de glands passé 30#

A blue WOOL coat, waistcoat and breeches with silver buttons, a poppy red coat with gold frogging... old and worn 18#

Un habit, veste et culotte drap bleu anglais à boutons argent, un habit de drap puce à brandebourgs en or... vieux et uzés 18#

⁶ Couleur gorge de pigeon referred to a shot fabric whose colours changed according to the light, the warp and weft being different colours – grayish purples in this case.

A waistcoat and breeches of égyptienne with a brocaded apricot-coloured ground, a pair of black velvet breeches, a waistcoat and breeches of nankin [heavy cotton] embroidered in silk, two waistcoats and a pair of breeches of white striped dimity	15#
<i>Une veste et culotte égyptienne fond abricot broché, une culotte velours noir, une veste, une culotte de nankin brodées en soie, deux vestes et une culotte bazin blanc rayé... uzés</i>	15#
A waistcoat of lightweight cotton embroidered in silk, a pair of striped drill breeches, sailor-style, six pairs of white homespun drawers, five lined cotton nightcaps... in a bad state	8#
<i>Une veste de baptiste brodée en soie à bordure, une culotte de coutil rayé à la matelotte, six paires caleçons toile blanche, cinq bonnets de coton doublés... en mauvais état</i>	8#
Twenty-four muslin stocks, twenty four pocket handkerchiefs... very worn	18#
<i>Vingt-quatre cols mousseline, vingt-quatre mouchoirs de poche... très usés</i>	18#
Eighteen pairs of silk stockings in different colours... worn and some pieced	54#
<i>Dix-huit paires bas de soie à différentes couleurs... usés... et en partie rapiécés</i>	54#
A crimson taffeta parasol	15#
<i>Un parasol taffetas cramoisi</i>	15#
A stock buckle, a pair of shoe buckles, a single garter buckle, all in silver	9#
<i>Une boucle de col, une paire de boucles à souliers, et une de jarretières, le tout argent</i>	9#
Three muslin cravats, two <i>peignoirs</i>	8#
<i>Trois cravattes de mousseline, deux peignoirs</i>	8#
Twelve homespun shirts, trimmed... worn	36#
<i>Douze chemises garnies, toile de ménage... usés</i>	36#
Two more night shirts of the same fabric	4#
<i>Deux autres chemises de nuit même toile</i>	4#
A case lined in turtleshell, a knife with a gold handle, a tobacco box lacquered and lined in turtleshell, a seal with a wooden handle, a little magnifying glass... poor	4#
<i>Un étui double d'écaille, un couteau à manche or, une tabatière vernie doublée d'écaille, un cachet d'envoi avec son manche bois, une petite lunette d'approche... mauvais</i>	4#
Four damask linen napkins, three pairs of linen stockings... worn	4# 10
<i>Quatre serviettes toile façon à la Venise, trois paires bas fil... usés</i>	4# 10
A poppy-red cloth coat with matching buttons, a <i>gros de tours</i> [heavy ribbed silk] waistcoat, a pair of breeches of silk twill (de Rome), a pair of black callimanco breeches... very poor	6#

Un habit drap puce a boutons de même, une veste gros de tours, une culotte serge de Romme en soye, une culotte calemandre noir... très mauvais 6#

A nightcap of homespun trimmed in muslin, a nightgown of brown printed cotton... worn 6#

Un bonnet toile garni en mousseline, une robe de chambre indienne brune... uzé 6#

A steel sword 4#

Une épée ascier 4#

Eight pairs of shoes, two black hats and one white hat with a gold trim, five purses... poor 12#

Huit paires de souliers + deux chapeaux noirs et un blanc avec un bordure or, cinq bourses... mauvaises 12#

A pair of silk garters with two silver buckles and two silver sleeve buttons, a white skin powder bag, a silk miser's purse for silver, a rush cane with a gold top... broken 30#

Une paire de jarretières soye avec deux boucles argent et deux boutons de manches aussi argent, un sac à poudre peau blanche, une filoche en soye pour argent, une canne jonc, son pommeau or rompus 30#

Fig. 1 Letter to Carret in Paris from his partner Lainé in Lyon, 14 July 1764, including samples of assortments of ribbons that Carret had requested. ADR 8B730.



Pour les papiers en robe par aget
que meurt l'année de la queue prest
car si chacun vous fait un cadeau
de la tresse soit un peu trop longue
vous saria que nous avons des aug. 301
p. 1. quelle en main brun, d'aron.
L'ouber couleur visée a les places.
et jout les est. Des ruban que nous
avons aussi en magasin. Leque nous
ete commander pour la nouvelle.
vous les places j'ecore faitement.
tache en rendre robe tresse un peu
profitable, nous vous rendant la future
devisé que en ce n'a pas fait
jout ferons l'emballe de l'écrite et
j'ate depuis 99 que pour pour la nouvelle.
Si je pourvois me parler de vous et de l'union
j'ecore moins impatient de p. l'avis en robe
vous sachant en bonne fante, tout avous
dans le moment j'ecore un tache
en M. l'écrite de pour que ne mangent
vous y avous holie.

