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Entrepreneurship and Control in Eighteenth Century Silk Manufacture: The Case of Philippe Lasalle, Lyonnais Silk Designer *Extraordinaire*

by

Lesley Ellis Miller

As early as 1787, the abbé Bertolon lauded the achievements of the Lyonnais designer and manufacturer Philippe de Lasalle (1723-1804). In the course of this now oft-cited eulogy, Bertolon called Lasalle variously designer, manufacturer, and businessman, three terms that Lasalle himself was happy to adopt from the late 1740s onwards. In the 1770s, Lasalle added to these social descriptors, those of inventor and *Chevalier de l'Ordre de Saint Michel*, having been rewarded for his improvements to the drawloom, one of a long list of services and inventions for which he sought State subsidies from the late 1750s. While Lasalle's prominence in the annals of the Lyon silk industry and in national archives of French inventors has intrigued a variety of historians for the past two centuries, most existing publications focus on Lasalle's designs and inventions to the exclusion of analysis of his business acumen. Although no single business archive records the day-to-day running of Lasalle's various manufacturing and marketing activities, it is, nonetheless, possible to speculate about his engagement in business from clues that exist in diverse documents that relate to his family life and to the broader commercial networks of 18th century silk manufacturing in Lyon. In this paper, through an evaluation of the existing fragments, I propose that it is impossible to understand Lasalle's achievements without appreciating his entrepreneurial zeal and his control of the environment within which he practised.