

Henry Sully's Life Story - Chapter 4 Germany and Austria

By Robert St-Louis, Ottawa, Canada, September 2022 – All rights reserved

SULLY IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA (1711 - 1715) - Draft

This is the fourth chapter in the life story of Henry Sully (1679 – 1728), and follows the previous chapter that saw the young clockmaker establish himself and raise a family in The Hague and Leiden, Netherlands. In this chapter, Sully relocates first to Germany (Frankfurt on Main) then to Vienna Austria, to further pursue his horological career. While in Vienna, Sully wrote his first major horological book, also in French.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Germany - Frankfurt (1711-13).

In 1711, a widower with 4 children, Sully relocated again, this time to Frankfurt on Main, in Germany. Sully recalled, writing in 1726¹:

Being in Franckfort on Meyhe [Frankfurt on Main] in the year 1711, I published a small brochure in French, entitled “Méthode pour régler les montres” [Method to regulate watches], with a dissertation on “l’excellence de l’horlogerie” [the excellence of horology]; in which I insinuated what could be expected of this Art for use in navigation; one can still find copies of it among the learned people of that country. The Reverend Jesuit Father Des Bosses², then living in Cologne, communicated this brochure to the journalists of Trévoux³; they speak of it in one of their journals in October 1712 or 1713, as I recall; I’ve seen this little brochure translated into German.

But no one has been more informed, either of my goals or of the progress I had accomplished, than my illustrious benefactor my lord the Duke of Arenberg⁴, who gave me the honour of keeping me at his side, solely to better allow me to carry out my views on how to perfect my Art. It was under the guise of this generous Prince that I enjoyed all the advantages that I could hope for during the years 1714 and 1715, that I had the

¹ Description abrégée d’une nouvelle horloge pour la juste mesure du temps en mer, Paris, 1726, pages 262-263.

² Barthélemy Des Bosses (1668-1738) was a Jesuit priest who taught philosophy and mathematics in Germany. He translated a work by Leibniz into latin, and the two exchanged a voluminous correspondence from 1705 until Leibniz’s death in 1716. (W)

³ The Journal de Trévoux, often called the Mémoires de Trévoux, was an influential academic journal that appeared monthly in France between January 1701 and December 1782. It published critical reviews of contemporary books and papers on a broad range of subjects, mostly non-fiction, and most of the authors were members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). (W)

⁴ Leopold Philippe of Arenberg (1690-1754) was the 4th Duke of Arenberg, an aristocrat and military officer. He fought in the War of Spanish Succession in 1706, and was a field commander on several other European conflicts. He moved to Paris in 1716, and Sully followed him there. Note that the name is often spelled “Aremberg” in contemporary documents.

honour of following him in his travels to Vienna and Paris. In this way I met and adopted the ways of the learned elite of the countries where I found myself.

Again, we see Sully gain reputation as a writer on horology. At some point in time, he met and befriended the wealthy aristocratic Duke of Arenberg, who was only 21 at the time, but had earned a reputation as an effective field commander, leading fighting men in some of the frequent European wars that took place in those years. Arenberg possibly fell under Sully's spell as a horology expert and raconteur and, likely in part out of sympathy to Henry's family circumstances (raising four young children without a wife, though possibly with the help of tutors), took him under his wing.

Arenberg financed Sully by providing him with a generous pension, and eventually asking him to accompany him on the theater of war, where Henry maintains and repairs not only his benefactor's watches, but those of other field commanders.⁵ His financial needs thus addressed, Sully found himself able to more freely pursue his ambitious horological research and writing projects. He followed his benefactor first to Vienna, where he was to make more influential acquaintances, and finally, he settled in Paris with Arenberg.

Austria - Vienna (1714-15).

As the earlier quote from Sully indicated, he found himself in Vienna during the years 1714 and 1715. This cosmopolitan city had just recovered from a serious plague epidemic in 1713, and was seeing extensive growth in population. At that time, Vienna was the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, and experienced great developments of baroque culture and architecture from 1711 to 1740, transforming it into an esteemed imperial city.

Sully (1726) continued his story:

While in Vienna I knew the famous Mister Leibnitz⁶: he perfectly understood my views [on marine clocks], continually urged me to pursue them and provided me with news; and he honoured me with his friendship and his correspondence by his letters until his death. If the mention of my name, that he gave me the honour of including in his letters that were printed, and in the hands of learned people, was not sufficient to prove it, I have as witnesses that I dare name, my lord the Prince Eugene of Savoye⁷, my lord the Duke of Arenberg, my lord the Count of Koningseck [Koenigsegg], then ambassador in France and now in Spain, my lord the Count of Mattuof, ambassador in Moscovie [Moscow], the Baron of Huldenberg, envoy of Hannover, Mr. Brunix, envoy of Holland, Mr. Clement, resident of the late Queen of Great Britain, and many other persons of the utmost

⁵ Julien Le Roy writing in *Règle artificielle du temps*, 1737, Paris, page 384.

⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) was a prominent German polymath and one of the most important logicians, mathematicians and natural philosophers of the Enlightenment. He made major contributions to physics and technology, and anticipated notions that surfaced much later in philosophy, probability theory, biology, medicine, geology, psychology, linguistics, and computer science. (W)

⁷ Prince Eugene Francis of Savoy-Carignano (1663-1736) was a Paris-born field marshal in the army of the Holy Roman Empire and of the Austrian Habsburg dynasty during the 17th and 18th centuries. He was one of the most successful military commanders of his time, and rose to the highest offices of state at the Imperial court in Vienna. (W)

distinction that I had the honour of knowing at the Court in Vienna in 1714, who also knew about my work [on marine clocks].



Figure 1 4th Duke of Arenberg (1690-1754)

Evidently, his friendship with Arenberg opened up many doors for Sully, and he made the best of the contacts that were offered to him. Initially it might have been only to repair their clocks and watches, but eventually Henry would have impressed them (as he had done with Wren, Newton and others in London) with his pleasant personality, his erudite knowledge of horology, and his own ambitious plans. Two notable acquaintances were the polymath Leibniz, and the very wealthy Parisian-born field commander and Vienna state official, Prince Eugene de Savoy. About the latter, Julien Le Roy wrote in 1737:

It was in the library of Prince Eugene, and before writing his “Règle artificielle du temps”, that [Sully] saw for the first time the Memoires de l’Académie [Memoirs of the Science Academy of Paris]; he developed such a fondness for these wise works, and felt so good at having learned enough French to read them, that he copied all the articles related to his art, and others that seemed to him most interesting and stimulating. (He gave me a copy of his manuscript).

Even though he was a military and political figure, Prince Eugene was one of the great collectors of art, antiques, and scientific objects the world had ever known. In 1705, he had the English masters Tompion and Graham build him a hand-driven planetarium⁸ and undoubtedly, he would have had many fine clocks and watches in his luxurious homes. His library was one of the most extensive at that time, by 1730 containing over 15,000 books, including folios, manuscripts,

⁸ Basserman-Jordan / Bertele, *The Book of Old Clocks and Watches*, London, 1964.

drawings by past masters, prints, etc. He kept most of his books in his winter palace of Himmelpfortgasse, and the rest outside the walls of Vienna, in his castle of Bas-Belvédère.



Figure 2 Prince Eugene de Savoy (1663-1736)

One can imagine Sully, frequently visiting one or both of the fine palaces, spending splendid hours perusing through the vast collection of books and manuscripts for horological texts, and in particular gleaning through, and making transcriptions from, the Prince's collection of the Paris Science Academy memoirs, which included descriptions of many of the French horological developments of the past decades. He and the Prince probably had long conversations about horology and other subjects of mutual interest, and Sully congenially entertained his host with his views and personal ideas on future horological developments.

In the correspondence between Leibniz and Mr. Rémond⁹, Henry Sully is mentioned several times by the German polymath. On 26 August 1714, Leibniz ended the letter with "I take the liberty to recommend to you Mr. Sully". In a lengthy letter of 11 February 1715, Leibniz discussed Sully in greater detail:

⁹ Nicolas Remond, chief counselor of the Duke of Orleans and brother of the mathematician Remond de Monmort, was a courtier of wide interests and attainments, whose correspondence with Leibniz, opened through the mediation of Pierre Coste in 1713, constitutes a critical and philosophical miscellany of considerable interest for the closing years of Leibniz's life. He seems to have looked to Remond in Paris, as to Eugene of Savoy in Vienna, for the propagation of his ideas in the circles of the powerful and influential.

“I imagine that Mr. Sully, the Englishman, is deeply involved in some mechanical object, and that he will be assiduous with the Gentlemen of the Academy¹⁰; because he applies himself seriously in his profession. I don’t know if he will have given you a little treatise on the way to better adjust pendulum clocks and watches with balance springs, that he had printed in Vienna.¹¹ It features a little letter on the invention of these things, which I wrote for him. He is assuredly capable of doing something good with it. And since he is young, hard-working and ingenious, I exhorted him to undertake a complete work on horology, which is something missing. There are a thousand lovely inventions that deserve to be described. Therefore, fungar vice cotis [be as a whetstone for others to be sharpened upon]. However, you would be advised, sir, to call for him: he seemed to me modest and obliging; he may have been afraid to bother you. I hope he hasn’t gone anywhere: in this case he would have been wrong not to take leave of you, and I hope even more that he hasn’t become ill.”

In another letter to Rémond dated 29 July 1715, Leibniz mentioned Sully again:

“The Duke of Arenberg had seen in Vienna the speech I had aimed at the Prince Eugène, and that I have also sent you by Mr. Sully. However, the Duke having recently asked me through Mr. Sully to have him take a copy, I don’t know sir, if I abuse your kindness in asking you to give him the speech, in case Mr. Sully should ask you”.



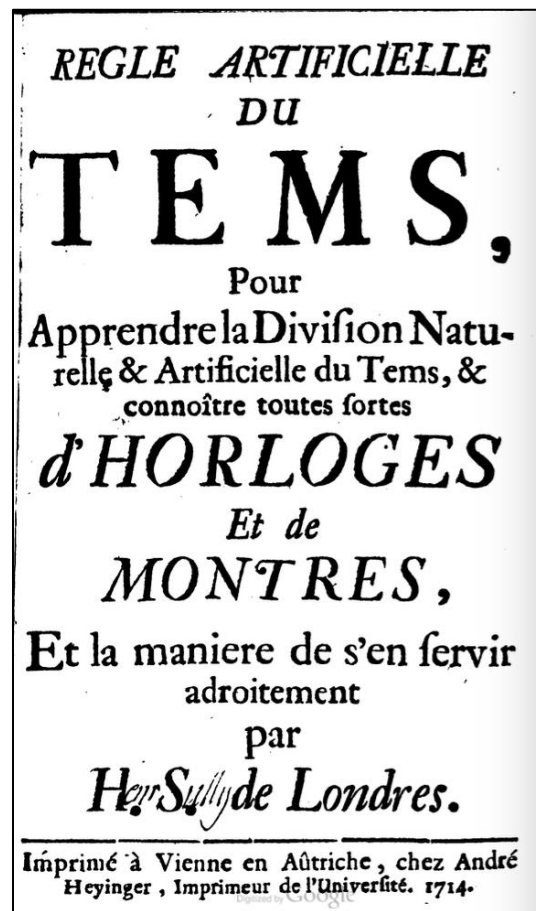
Figure 3 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716)

¹⁰ Leibniz had suggested earlier that Sully may be a good potential member for the Académie des Sciences de Paris.

¹¹ Règle artificielle du tems, printed in Vienna Austria by André Heydinger, University printer, 1714.

So clearly, in 1714-15 Sully had gotten to know Leibniz and impressed him with some of his qualities. Sully was also an intermediary or courier between Leibniz and Rémond, and also the Duke of Arenberg. Leibniz provided some useful insights on Sully's personality at the time, and the impression he gave him about his work ethics, his ingeniousness, and also his display of modesty and helpfulness. These few words from a respectable contemporary help us get a better sense of Henry Sully's qualities as a human being. Sully appears to have traveled occasionally between Vienna and Paris, as he was evidently delivering papers of Leibniz to Arenberg and or Rémond.

While living in Vienna, Sully had the luxury, through the patronage of rich and influential acquaintances, to put pen to paper again, and wrote the first edition of the work that he is most known for, namely *Règle artificielle du tem(p)s*.¹² It was published under the name of "*H.S. de Londres*", dedicated to his main benefactor, the Duke of Arenberg, and included a written note from Leibnitz, and observations from Father Kresa¹³.



¹² An article by this author, soon to be published in *Antiquarian Horology* (December 2022), describes all editions of Henry Sully's groundbreaking book.

¹³ Jakub Kresa (1648-1715) was a Czech born diplomat and mathematician.

This 1714 edition also featured, as a frontispiece, an engraving of a man supposed to be Sully himself, and Father Time. This is the only semblance of the horologist that has come down to us.



Figure 4 Detail from Frontispiece of 1714 Edition of *Règles...* depicting Henry Sully

Julien Le Roy recalled¹⁴ that “*peace having been reached between the Emperor and the King of France,*¹⁵ the duke of Aremberg decided to come to Paris; he decided to retain Mr. Sully by signs of generosity, and gave him a pension of six hundred livres, brought him to Paris and gave him an apartment at the Ansbac Hotel, facing Saint Benoit Street.¹⁶”

¹⁴ *Règle artificielle du temps*, 1737, pages 384-385

¹⁵ The peace treaty between France and Austria was concluded on 7 March 1714 in the Baden city of Rastatt, bringing to an end the War of the Spanish Succession between both countries. Prince Eugene had negotiated the treaty on behalf of Austria.

¹⁶ This luxurious house (hotel) was located near Saint Germain des Prés, on the left bank of the Seine, in Paris.



Figure 5 Rue Saint Benoit, Turgot Plan of Paris 1739

Sully thus found himself moving with his young family again (his four children then aged 6 to 9 years old), this time to the French capital of Paris, which was to become the central focus of his life until his death in 1728. The story of Sully's arrival and early accomplishments in Paris will be told in the next chapter.