

# La Pendulerie



**Robin - Schwerdfeger - Dubuisson**

**An Exceptional Mantel or Desk Clock “Regulator with Remontoir d’Egalité”, Directory-Consulate period**

Circa: circa 1795

Robert Robin

The Enamel Dial by Etienne Gobin, known as Dubuisson (1731-1815)

The Case Attributed to the Cabinetmaker Jean-Ferdinand-Joseph Schwerdfeger

An Exceptional Mantel or Desk Clock

“Regulator with Remontoir d’Egalité”

Paris, Directory-Consulate period, circa 1795

Height 44 cm; width 24.5 cm; depth 19.5 cm

Provenance:

- Probably the clock that was estimated at 500 francs in 1830 in the study of the wellknown porcelain manufacturer Christophe Dihl (1752-1830): “A regulator by Robin à Paris, with seconds and date, compensation balance with thermometer, in a glazed mahogany case”.

The enamel dial, signed “Robin”, also bears the mark “dub”, which is that of Etienne Gobin, known as Dubuisson (1731-1815), a celebrated Parisian enameler who was a contemporary and rival of Joseph Coteau. It indicates the Roman numeral hours, the minutes graduations, the seconds, and the annual calendar, with indication of the date and the months of the year, as well as the equation of time, which shows the difference between true time and mean time. Its remarkable movement with complications has a Graham escapement and a constant force remontoir d'égalité, a bimetallic gridiron pendulum with a pyrometer that bears information on the temperature of dilation of metal, and two weights for the going train. The mahogany or mahogany-veneered architectural case has a slightly protruding cornice and is glazed on all sides, which allows the remarkable and complex movement to be viewed. The clock is elegantly adorned with finely chased matte-gilded bronze mounts. The entablature of the cornice is decorated with a molding chased with water leaves and adorned with an egg-and-dart frieze. The glazed panels are framed by twisted cord and stylized leaf friezes. The top spandrels feature scrolls and vine leaves, and a magnificent fringed drapery and leafy garland highlight the curve of the dial. The molded protruding base is adorned with a frieze of parsley leaves. The clock is raised upon four quadrangular gilt bronze feet.

In addition to its highly precise movement with complications and its excellent craftsmanship, the present clock is noteworthy for its polished mahogany architectural case, whose sober design was intended to showcase the ingenious and extraordinary mechanism, as well as the beauty of the dial. One particular cabinetmaker specialized in creating such cases toward the end of the 18th century: Ferdinand Schwerdfeger (1734-1818). Schwerdfeger was mentioned several times as “Ferdinand” in several early 19th century auctions. Upon the death of his wife in 1803, his workshop was described as containing almost exclusively mahogany clock cases. It was Schwerdfeger who made the case for the geographic clock that Antide Janvier presented in 1791 to King Louis XVI, which is today in the Musée national du château de Fontainebleau (illustrated in M. Hayard, *Antide Janvier 1751-1835, Horloger des étoiles*, p. 1995, p. 79). It was very likely the same cabinetmaker – who also made luxury furniture for Marie-Antoinette – who was entrusted with the creation of the case of the present clock, whose design is particularly remarkable. Today only a few comparable clocks are known to exist. One example, signed Lepaute, whose design is less elegant, was delivered in 1804; it was intended for the bedchamber of Napoleon at Fontainebleau Palace (illustrated in J-P. Samoyault, *Pendules et bronzes d'ameublement entrés sous le Premier Empire*, Paris, 1989, p. 73). A second clock, signed “Robin”, is illustrated in Tardy, *La pendule française, 2ème partie: du Louis XVI à nos jours*, Paris, 1975, p. 325.

#### Ferdinand Schwerdfeger (1734-1818)

Was one of the most important cabinetmakers of the late 18th century; he made furniture for Queen Marie-Antoinette. After becoming a master in May 1786, he opened a workshop in Paris and quickly gained renown among important Parisian connoisseurs. Nevertheless, his work remains relatively obscure, due to the late date at which he became a master and the fact that he did not often mark his work. Among the pieces that may be confidently attributed to him, one should mention a luxurious group of furniture delivered to Marie-Antoinette, as well as several regulator and clock cases, whose dials bear the names of the greatest clockmakers of the period, including Jean-Simon Bourdier and Robert Robin, as well as Antide Janvier (see M-A Paulin, *Schwerdfeger, ébéniste de Marie-Antoinette*, in *L'Estampille/L'Objet d'art*, October 2003).

#### **Artist description:**

Robert Robin (1741-1799)

Is one of the most important Parisian clockmakers of the late 18th century. Having received the titles of Valet de Chambre-Horloger Ordinaire du Roi et de la Reine in 1783 and 1786, he had an extraordinary career, distinguished himself by his exceptional contribution to the progress of time measurement

during his lifetime.

In 1778 the French Académie des Sciences approved two of his inventions, one of which led to the construction of an astronomic clock representing a meridian drawn on a pyramid, which was acquired that year by the Menus Plaisirs on behalf of Louis XVI. Robin published a "Description historique et mécanique" of the clock. He constructed astronomic mantel regulators with compensation balance, which the Marquis de Courtanvaux, one of the period's most important connoisseurs of precision horology, was among the first to acquire. During the Terreur he made decimal watches and clocks. He is recorded successively at the Grande rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré (1772), rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois (1775), rue Saint-Honoré à l'Hôtel d'Aligre (1778) and in the Galeries du Louvre in 1786.

Robin housed his mantel regulators in sober, elegant cases that were remarkably modern in style. He worked with excellent artisans such as Robert and Jean Baptiste Osmond, Pierre Philippe Thomire, E. Roy, J.L. Beaucour, P. Delacroix, François Rémond, Claude Galle, Balthazar Lieutaud, E. Levasseur, J.H. Riesener, Jean-Ferdinand Schwerdfeger and Adam Weisweiler for his cases; Barbezat, Edmé-Portail Barbichon, Dubuisson, Cave, Merlet and Coteau for his dials, and the Richards and the Montginots for his springs.

Robin's sons, Nicolas Robert (1775-1812) and Jean-Joseph (1781-1856), were both fine clockmakers who continued their father's business.