

La Pendulerie



Robin - Coteau - Thomire

An Exceptional Desk Regulator with remontoir d'égalité "Royal Model", Louis XVI period

Circa: circa 1780-1785

Robert Robin (1741-1799)

Joseph Coteau (1740-1812)

Case Attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire

Probably Made under the Supervision of Dominique Daguerre

An Exceptional Desk Regulator with remontoir d'égalité

"Royal Model"

Paris, Louis XVI period, circa 1780-1785

Height 41.2 cm; width 22.4 cm; depth 17.5 cm.

This exceptional desk, or mantel, regulator is one of the most luxurious Parisian clocks of the latter part of the reign of Louis XVI. Its complex movement with complications has a Graham escapement and a constant force remontoir d'égalité, with a bimetallic gridiron pendulum signed "Robin"; it is driven by two weights, with instructions for winding indicated on the back of the front door: "Remonté à gauche faite passer le quantième" (Wind to the left, make the date advance). The magnificent neoclassical architectural case is made of finely chased matte gilt bronze. All four sides, as well as the top, are

glazed so that the complex movement may be admired. The case, which is raised on four quadrangular feet, is elaborately adorned with a molded frieze alternating with toothed and leaf friezes on the chapter, a bead frieze adorning the slightly protruding cornice and the bezel, with acanthus and laurel leaf spandrels, stylized leaves framing the front, a stylized leaf frieze adorning the base, and a magnificent chased drapery with fringe and a leafy garland under the dial.

The dial, signed “Robin à Paris”, is a true masterpiece; it also bears the signature of Joseph Coteau, the most famous enameler of the time. It indicates the Roman numeral hours, the Arabic numeral five minute intervals, the seconds, the date, the months, and the equation of time, showing the difference between real time and mean time. Along its outermost edge, it indicates the twelve signs of the zodiac painted in shades of gray within oval medallions framed by interlacing polychrome leaf and flower branches. There are four hands: one, made of pierced gilt bronze with a sun, indicates the equation of time. There are three other blued steel hands.

The present clock represents the quintessence of luxury Parisian horology of the Louis XVI period. This type of clock was intended for a small handful of connoisseurs, often individuals who were very close to the royal family. Certain contemporary documents give us information on the type of collector that might have owned such a masterpiece. One such clock was briefly mentioned in the probate inventory of Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de la Ferté, the director of the Menus Plaisirs du Roi, and was feature in the February 1797 sale of his collection: “305. A square shaped clock with glazed panels, half-second movement, with equation, remontoire and striking, made by Robin”. A second comparable clock was described a few years earlier, shortly after the Revolution, in an inventory of the horological collection of Queen Marie-Antoinette, which was maintained by Robin. It described a clock that was nearly identical to the present one: “28. A square clock with architectural case and glazed panels, in matte gilt bronze, with compensation pendulum, movement with hours, minutes, seconds, with striking, date, day of the week, the figures of the zodiac painted in miniature on the dial, by Robin” (see P. Verlet, *Les bronzes dorés français du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1999, p. 466).

Among the small number of similar regulators known today, most bear the signatures of the clockmaker Robin and the enameler Coteau, who probably worked on the model at the request of one of the great marchands-merciers of the time, such as Simon-Philippe Poirier and his associate Dominique Daguerre, the most important Parisian suppliers of luxury objects. One comparable example now in a private collection is illustrated in D. Roberts, *Precision Pendulum Clocks*, 2004, p. 32. Two other regulators by Robin, formerly in the Winthrop Kellogg Edey collection, are in the Frick Collection in New York; their cases have been attributed to the well-known bronzier Pierre-Philippe Thomire (Inv. 1999.5.150 and 1999.5.151) (respectively illustrated in dans Tardy, *La pendule française, 2ème Partie: du Louis XVI à nos jours*, Paris, 1975, and in C. Vignon, *The Frick Collection Decorative Arts Handbook*, New York, Scala, 2015).

Joseph Coteau (1740-1801)

Along with Joseph Gobin, known as “Dubuisson”, he was one of the most extraordinary enamellers of plaques and dials of his time. Originally from Geneva, he became a master enameller of the Academy de Saint Luc in 1766. Coteau mostly worked in Paris, where he became a master in 1778. From 1780 to 1784, he worked for the Royal Sèvres Porcelaine Factory. Throughout his career he supplied dials to the finest Parisian clockmakers, including Robert Robin and Ferdinand Berthoud, both clockmakers to King Louis XVI. His most exceptional dials were finely detailed and extremely delicate.

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1757-1853)

Having been made a master bronze caster on May 18, 1772, he was the most important Parisian bronzier of the last quarter of the 18th and the early years of the 19th centuries. He began his career by working for Pierre Gouthière, chaser-caster to the king. By the mid 1770's he had begun working with Louis Prieur. He then became one of the bronziers of the Royal Sèvres Factory, being responsible for the bronze mounts of most of the important creations of the day. After the Revolution, he purchased the stock of Martin-Eloi Lignereux, becoming the most important supplier of bronze furnishings for the imperial palaces and luxurious mansions. He also had a wealthy private clientele in France and abroad, including several Napoleonic Marshals. He retired in 1823.

Dominique Daguerre

Was the most important marchand-mercier, i.e., dealer in luxury objects, of the last quarter of the 18th century. While little is known about the early years of his career, he is thought to have begun his activity around 1772, the year he went into partnership with Philippe-Simon Poirier (1720-1785), another well-known marchand-mercier who made furniture adorned with porcelain plaques from the Royal Sèvres Manufactory. When Poirier retired, around 1777-1778, Daguerre began running the shop in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, retaining the name "La Couronne d'Or". He also conserved his predecessor's clientele, while considerably extending the business's activity in just a few years, and playing an important role in the renewal of Parisian decorative arts. He worked with the finest cabinetmakers of the time, including Adam Weisweiler, Martin Carlin and Claude-Charles Saunier, the cabinetmaker of the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne, Georges Jacob, les bronziers and chaser-gilders Pierre-Philippe Thomire and François Rémond, and the clockmakers Renacle-Nicolas Sotiau and Robert Robin. Having long been a standard-bearer for French luxury goods, Daguerre settled in England in the early 1780s, going into partnership with Martin-Eloi Lignereux, who remained in charge of the Paris shop. A visionary and an extraordinary businessman, in London Daguerre enjoyed the patronage of the Prince Regent - the future King George IV - and actively took part in the decoration and furnishing of Carlton House and the Brighton Pavilion, calling on his network of Parisian artisans and importing most of the furniture, seating, mantelpieces, bronze furnishings and objets d'art. For just the year 1787, his invoices amounted to 14500£ worth of furnishings. Several influential English aristocrats, impressed by his talent, also called on him. They included Count Spencer, for Althorp, where Daguerre collaborated with architect Henry Holland (1745-1806). In Paris he continued, through the intermediary of his associate Lignereux, to work for influential collectors; he delivered magnificent pieces of furniture to the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne. Probably upset by the events of the Revolution and the loss of many of his most important clients, he retired in 1793.

Exhibitions

Rive Droite

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.