

# *La Pendulerie*



## **Robin - Coteau - Schwerdfeger**

**Exceptional Regulator clock with Equation of Time and Remontoire d'Egalité, Louis XVI period**

Robert Robin

Case Attributed to Ferdinand Schwerdfeger

Dial Attributed to Joseph Coteau

Exceptional Regulator Clock with Equation of Time and Remontoire d'Egalité

Paris, late Louis XVI period, circa 1785-1788

Height 204.5 cm; width 56.5 cm; depth 32.5 cm

The enamel dial, signed "Robin aux Galeries du Louvre", indicates the hours in Roman numerals, the annual calendar including the months and the days, and the difference between solar time and mean time (the equation of time) with two minute hands; there is a central seconds hand. The gridiron balance features a pyrometer with double graduation, marked Froid, Tempéré and Chaud, indicating the expansion of the metals. The elegant glazed mahogany veneered case with dentilled cornice is surmounted by a sloping pediment. The bronze mounts are finely chased and gilt: the dial is framed by

scrolling motifs, drapery and beading; the base is embellished by leaf and flower friezes; beneath the entablature there are three pierced friezes made up of scrolling motifs.

This regulator, made by celebrated horologist Robert Robin (1742-1799) in the final years of the 18th century, is one of the finest of its kind. The attribution of the case to Schwerdfeger is based on a number of similarities with other works by this renowned cabinetmaker, as well as on information drawn from auction catalogues of the early 19th century, for example the following from a catalogue of 1823: "A very fine regulator by Robin the elder, clockmaker to Louis XVI, with equation and compensation; the solid mahogany case by Ferdinand". The enamel dial may confidently be attributed to Joseph Coteau, since an example with a nearly identical dial signed "Robin aux Galeries du Louvre" and "Coteau 1787", is in the Crijns collection in Breda (see ANCAHA, Winter 1997, n° 80, p. 41). Among the comparable known Robin regulators, one is in the Paris Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers (illustrated in ANCAHA, May 1977, n° 18, p. 86, fig. 23a); another is in the Musée Paul Dupuy in Toulouse (see R. Mühe and Horand M. Vogel, *Horloges anciennes*, Fribourg, 1978, p. 287, fig. 581); a further example, acquired by Louis-Philippe in 1837, is in the Petit Trianon in Versailles (see S. de Ricci, *Le style Louis XVI*, Paris, ill. 253).

#### Ferdinand Schwerdfeger (1734-1818)

Is one of the most important Parisian cabinetmakers of the late 18th century. After becoming a master in May 1786, he opened a workshop in Paris and quickly gained a following. His work, however, remains little known due to his becoming a master shortly before the Revolution, and to the fact that he rarely stamped his work. Among the pieces that may be attributed to him with certitude, one should mention an ensemble delivered to Marie-Antoinette, as well as several regulator and clock cases for some of the finest horologists of the day, including Antide Janvier, Jean-Simon Bourdier and Robert Robin (see M-A Paulin, *Schwerdfeger, ébéniste de Marie-Antoinette*, in *L'Estampille/L'Objet d'art*, October 2003).

Joseph Coteau (1740-1801) came from Geneva but worked in Paris, where he was established in the rue Poupée, St. André des Arts ; he became a maître in 1778. In 1780 he was appointed Peintre-émailleur du roi et de la Manufacture Royale de Porcelaine de Sèvres ; over the next few years he did piece-work there while working as an independent painter in Paris, specializing in enamel watchcases and clock dials. By 1784 he was no longer working for Sèvres and continued to supply fine dials, plaques and enamel cases to important Parisian clockmakers.

#### **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.