

La Pendulerie



Robin - Thomire

Rare Burnished and Matte Gilt Bronze and Green Granite Mantel Clock “The Triumphal Chariot of the Young Bacchus”, Directory period

Robert Robin (1741-1799) The Case Attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire Rare Burnished and Matte Gilt Bronze and Green Granite Mantel Clock “The Triumphal Chariot of the Young Bacchus” Paris, Directory period, circa 1795 Height 45.5 cm; width 60 cm; depth 15 cm

Provenance:

Undoubtedly from the former Russian Imperial collection (see Iouana Zek, “Bronzes d’ameublement et meubles français achetés par Paul Ier pour le château Saint-Michel de Saint-Pétersbourg en 1798-1799”, in *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français*, 1994, p. 141-168).

The round white enamel dial, signed “Robin”, indicates the Roman numeral hours and Arabic fifteen-minute intervals by means of two pierced gilt bronze hands. The movement is housed in drum case formed as a barrel, which is decorated with grape vines and is surmounted by a figure sitting on a pillow on a terrace, which represents the young Bacchus. He wears a grape leaf wreath on his head and holds a bunch of grapes in his right hand. A ewer decorated with a gadrooned belly and a ram’s head, is placed on his left. The chariot has four pierced wheels that are decorated with applied acanthus scrolls and grape leaves and is adorned with a panther eating a hanging bunch of grapes. Behind the chariot, a putto with panpipes slung across his shoulder, pushes the chariot. The chariot is drawn by two fine goats wearing harnesses, which are being coaxed forward by a triangle-playing cherub who is sitting on the front of the chariot. The group is supported on a quadrangular green granite base with rounded corners, which is adorned with applied Zodiac symbols. The clock is raised upon four flattened ball feet.

Chariots were rarely used in Parisian clock cases before the late 18th century. This was probably due to one of the principal problems of contemporary clockmakers: how to integrate their movements and dials into this type of composition. As of the last decade of the 18th century, certain artisans cleverly solved this problem by fitting their dials into the chariot wheels and the bodies of the vehicles. As concerns the present model, its highly rare and unusual design may be attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire, one of the most important bronze casters of the Empire period. To date, only one other identical clock model is known, on which the infant Bacchus is shown standing. It was offered at auction in Paris on May 30, 1922: “83. Clock in red marble and chased and gilt bronze representing the chariot of Bacchus, drawn by two goats led by a nude child. On the barrel containing the movement, with dial signed Lieutaud, sits the young Bacchus. Base adorned with applied motifs. Late 18th century. Width 64 cm”. Not illustrated at the time, it is the same piece that was offered for sale in Lille in April 2009. A clock of the same model, undoubtedly the present piece, was acquired in Paris circa 1798-1799 for the Château Saint-Michel in Saint Petersburg by Czar Paul I; at the time it was briefly described, with no mention of the clockmaker’s name: “A clock, the triumph of Bacchus, matte gilt, drawn by goats, 1200” (see I. Zek,

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.