

# *La Pendulerie*



**Thomire**

**Exceptional Pair of Monumental Matte and Burnished Gilt Bronze and Verde Antique  
“Serpentine” Porphyry Candelabra, Empire period**

Circa: circa 1805-1810

Attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire

Exceptional Pair of Monumental Matte and Burnished Gilt Bronze and Verde Antique “Serpentine”  
Porphyry Candelabra

- Candelabra:

Paris, Empire period, circa 1805-1810

Height 184 cm; width 60 cm; depth 35 cm

- Columns:

Paris, Restoration period, circa 1820-1840

Height 89.5 cm; diameter 47 cm

Provenance:

- Paris, Galerie Seligmann

- Purchased from the gallery by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in 1919

- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1919-1994 (Inv. 19.182.1-2).

- Sold Christie's, New York, April 26, 1994, lot 139.

Bibliography:

- MMA (Metropolitan Museum of Art) Bulletin, Volume XV, 1920, p. 40-41 (not illustrated).

This spectacular pair of candelabra features two magnificent running figures, one of which represents Apollo who is depicted with a serious expression, and who wears a laurel wreath, classical draperies, and sandals. The matching figure represents Diana with upswept hair, who is dressed in a tunic that is tied under her breasts and sandals with high-laced sandals. Apollo holds a shallow bowl in his left hand, while Diana brandishes a tazza in her right hand. Each figure holds aloft a torch with a quiver-form stem, from which branch fifteen candle sockets; the curved branches are adorned with stiff leaves, palmettes, scrolls and rosettes. The figures stand on plain polished plinths that are supported by cylindrical bases with molding adorned with alternating acanthus and stylized leaf friezes and capitals with stiff leaf, acanthus, and flower friezes, as well as an oval-bead frieze. The cylindrical columns are embellished with applied garlands that are suspended from beribboned roundels and scenes of chariot races featuring Apollo and Diana. The groups are supported on octagonal columns that are veneered with green marble and are adorned with friezes of double interlace motifs with flower heads and beribboned laurel leaf and seed toruses.

The unusual design and monumental proportions of the present pair of candelabra suggest that it was created by one of the finest Parisian bronze casters of the Napoleonic period, and perhaps the best among them. At the time, only two or three Parisian bronziers possessed the skill and equipment necessary to cast and assemble such large pieces. They include André-Antoine Ravrio, Claude Galle and Pierre-Philippe Thomire. The latter was the most talented and innovative bronze caster of the early 19th century, and it is to him that we attribute the present pair of candelabra. At the 1819 Paris Exhibition, Thomire & Compagnie presented "...a large candelabrum...very elaborately decorated." (L. Costaz, Rapport du jury central sur les produits de l'industrie française, présenté à S.E.M. le comte Decazes, Imprimerie royale, Paris, 1819, p. 213). Thomire regularly worked with the architects Percier and Fontaine, who produced the *Recueil de décorations intérieures* that contains the design that must have inspired the motifs representing Diana and Apollo in their chariots that decorate the bases of the present pair of candelabra (see the exhibition catalogue Charles Percier, *Architecture and Design in an Age of Revolutions*, Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau, 2017, p. 124, fig. 6.2).

At present, only five other identical pairs of candelabra are known to exist. Some feature variations, often as regards the gilding or patina of the Diana and Apollo figures. One pair, which was most likely purchased in Paris circa 1810 for Frederic III of Wurtemberg (1754-1816), is today in Ludwigsburg Palace in Baden-Wurtemberg, Germany (Inv. TRGT 5502-5503) (illustrated in H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen, Die Bronzearbeiten des Spatbarock und Klassizismus*, Munich, 1986, p. 330, figs. 5.2.5 and 5.2.6). A second pair, which was probably formerly in the Napoleonic Imperial collections, is now part of the Mobilier National and is on display in the salons of the Quai d'Orsay, now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (pictured in *Le Quai d'Orsay*, Paris, 1991, p. 107). Two pairs, with six light branches and without bases, are in the British Royal collections in Buckingham Palace (Inv. RCIN 2718). A fifth pair is in the Schwarzenberg Palace in Vienna.

The latter pair, known as the "Schwarzenberg pair", is the best documented. It affords much precious information about these spectacular candelabra. Count Schwarzenberg purchased the pair in Paris on January 17, 1805 from André Coquille, a dealer in furniture and curiosities. The invoice, which is preserved in the Schwarzenberg archives, indicates a purchase price of 14,000 francs, a huge sum at the time, and the name they were then known by: "les Camilles". Approximately a decade later, in 1819, the candelabra were shown at the *Exposition des Produits de l'Industrie française*. This is documented by an engraving from the *Recueil d'ornements* by the Parisian artist and engraver Charles-Pierre-Joseph Normand (1765-1840), now in the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art à Paris, formerly the

Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet (see H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen*, Band I, Munich, 1986, p. 390, fig. 5.17.1).

Concerning the provenance of the present pair of candelabra, they were long in the renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, subsequently reappeared on the New York art market in the mid-1990s when several important pieces from the museum were offered at auction. We know they were presented in the early 20th century at the Seligmann Gallery in Paris. Founded by Jacques Seligmann (1858-1923), within a few decades the gallery became the largest Parisian gallery presenting antique furniture and luxury art objects. It quickly acquired an international reputation, counting among its clientele the greatest European and American collectors including Count Moïse de Camondo, the banker Edmond de Rothschild, the industrialist Henry Clay Frick and the financier John Pierpont Morgan. Renowned for their ability to discover rare and exceptional objects, the Seligmans purchased only unusual pieces from the most prestigious international collections. They acquired the totality of the private portion of the Hertford-Wallace collection, the other half of which is today on display in London as part of the Wallace Collection.

#### **Artist description:**

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1757-1843)

Having become a master founder on May 18, 1772, he was the most important Parisian bronzier of the first quarter of the 18th century and the early years of the following century. Initially he worked for Pierre Gouthière, chaser-founder to the king, and as of the mid-1770s he worked with Louis Prieur. He later became one of the official bronziers of the Royal Sèvres Factory, creating bronze he bought the stock of Martin-Eloi Lignereux and became the main supplier of bronze furnishings for the imperial palaces. He also had a number of wealthy several of Napoleon's marshals. He retired in the mid-1820s and died in 1843.