

# La Pendulerie



**Thomire**

**Important Matte Gilt Bronze, Italian Red Griotte Marble, and Colored Paris Porcelain  
“Egyptiennes” Mantelpiece, early Empire period**

Circa: circa 1805

The Bronze Mounts attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire

The Bisque Porcelain Figures attributed to the Dagoty Manufactory and executed after a Drawing by  
Architects Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine

Important Matte Gilt Bronze, Italian Red Griotte Marble, and Colored Paris Porcelain “Egyptiennes”  
Mantelpiece

Paris, early Empire period, circa 1805

Height 108.5cm; width 145.5 cm; depth 41.2 cm

Created using three materials – Italian red griotte marble, colored Paris bisque porcelain, and finely chased matte gilt bronze, the present mantelpiece counts among the masterpieces of the category of the Parisian decorative arts that highlights motifs from ancient Egypt. This type of piece was part of the stylistic movement known today as Egyptian Revival or Egyptomania. The rectangular marble top rests on a lintel that is supported in back by two pilaster-form columns, the front being formed by two magnificent Egyptian women standing on stepped plinths. The women are wearing vulture headdresses and pectoral necklaces, with a figure-hugging dress that is tied under the breasts and features a vertical band that is adorned with hieroglyphs. In their hands they hold lotus or palm branches. The mantelpiece rests on two stepped quadrangular feet; it is elaborately embellished with applied chased gilt bronze motifs including griffons, lion’s masks, a framed scene of two lionesses drinking from a fountain flanked by half circles, flowers and stylized palmettes, flaming torches and foliage, scrolling, and palmettes, volutes and flower blossoms.

In 1798 and 1801, France sent expeditions to Egypt with the aim of thwarting Britain’s ambitions in the Orient, in the hopes of controlling the country and dominating the region politically and economically. Led first by then General Napoleon Bonaparte, then by his successors, this military operation, known as the “Egyptian Campaign”, was coupled with a veritable research mission manned by eminent scientists, historians and artists. The repercussions from the publication of their discoveries after their return to France were enormous, particularly so in the field of the decorative arts. In 1802, Baron Vivant-Denon published *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte*, which met with great success.

Subsequently, architects, painters and artisans began creating their own interpretations of Egyptian motifs and themes, which they integrated into their work. In the field of the decorative arts, candelabra, consoles, candlesticks, furniture, chairs, and mantelpieces began to be adorned with solemn female figures that were inspired by the monumental sculpture of the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

The present mantelpiece was created within this particular context. The Paris bisque porcelain figures that support it may be attributed to the Dagoty Manufactory, a porcelain factory that was active in Paris from 1798 to 1820, and specialized in Egyptian style pieces. One piece from a *surtout de table* of this kind is in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (see R. de Plinval de Guillebon, *Faïence et porcelaine de Paris XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, Editions Faton, Dijon, p. 342, fig. 325). These figures were inspired by a preparatory drawing done circa 1800 by the famous Napoleonic architects Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine (pictured in H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen, Die Bronzearbeiten des Spätbarock und Klassizismus, Band I*, Munich, 1986, p. 336, fig. 5.3.4). That watercolor sketch, which has remarkably survived and is now in the Louvre Museum in Paris, also inspired several other contemporary Parisian creations that included similar figures of Egyptian or Nubian Women. Among them, one console, which in 1807 stood in the *Salon doré* of the Parisian mansion belonging to arch-treasurer Lebrun, is now in the Grand Trianon in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles (pictured in P. Arizzoli-Clémentel and J-P. Samoyault, *Le mobilier de Versailles, Chefs-d'œuvre du XIXe siècle*, Editions Faton, Dijon, 2009, p. 95-97). A large candelabrum model created by Parisian bronzier Pierre-Philippe Thomire, one pair of which is today in a private collection, is pictured in S. Chadenet, *Les styles Empire et Restauration*, Edition Baschet et Cie, Paris, p. 71, fig. 1. A second is in the Hôtel de Salm, which houses the Grande Chancellerie de la Légion d'Honneur in Paris (see the exhibition catalogue *Egyptomania, L'Égypte dans l'art occidental 1730-1930*, RMN, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1994, p. 286-287, catalogue n° 167).

#### **Artist description:**

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1757-1853) was the most important Parisian bronzier of the last quarter of the 18th century and the first decades of the following century. Early on in his career he worked for Pierre Gouthière, *ciseleur-fondeur du roi*, and toward the mid-1770's began working with Louis Prieur. He later became one of the bronziers attached to the Manufacture Royale de Sèvres, creating the bronze mounts for most of the important creations of the day. After the Revolution, he purchased the stock of Martin-Eloi Lignereux, thus becoming the most important suppliers of furniture bronzes for châteaux and Imperial Palaces. In addition, he worked for a wealthy private clientele, both French and foreign, including several of Napoleon's Marshals. Thomire retired in 1823.