

La Pendulerie



Ragot

A Rare Matte and Burnished Gilt Bronze and White Carrara Marble Mantel Clock “The Chinese Pagoda”, Louis XVI period

Circa: circa 1785

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“The Chinese Pagoda”

Paris, Louis XVI period, circa 1785

Height 65 cm; width 33.5 cm; depth 22 cm

The round white enamel dial, signed “Ragot à Paris”, indicates the Roman numeral hours and the Arabic numeral five-minute intervals by means of two pierced gilt bronze hands. The movement is housed in a fine architectural case in the form of a Chinese pagoda, which is made of finely chased matte and burnished gilt bronze and white Carrara marble. The two-tiered pagoda has a lower level supported by four columns, which frame a sun pendulum. They are adorned with leaves and cube motifs that are decorated with engraved motifs. The entablature is composed of a tapering concave roof that is embellished with a pierced fish-scale pattern, with an interlace border adorned with bells and bead pendants; its corners are embellished with dragons that hold bead pendants in their mouths. The upper portion, which features openwork geometric circle friezes, and above them another geometric frieze, there are four columns that are decorated with foliage and spiral fluting. They frame the drum case that

houses the movement and support the roof, which is decorated with flowers, twisted cords, fringed draperies, bells, C-scrolls, and bead swags, and is surmounted by a Chinaman who is seated on a cushion and holds a parasol with bells. The plinth is bordered by a balustrade that is adorned with interlacing circles, crosses, and a bead frieze. In its center there is a group of porcelain figures from the Locré factory, depicting two Chinamen standing next to a stylized tree. The quadrangular base, with rounded corners, is raised upon four knurled toupie feet.

This rare mantel clock is among the French objets d'art created in the Chinoiserie style, which strongly influenced the French decorative arts during the 18th century due to the great enthusiasm of many influential Parisian collectors for objects made in the Orient, and particularly in China and Japan. This movement was influenced by French creations of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, largely as a result of the embassy sent to French King Louis XIV by the King of Siam in 1686, during which the Siamese ambassadors presented numerous gifts to Louis XIV. This immediately created a fashion for objects from the Orient, and resulted in the creation of objects decorated with Oriental motifs and figures. The present clock was created within this particular context. It may be compared to a model created around the same time, which features a pagoda supported by palm trees under which a Chinaman is sitting, one example of which is today in the Nissim de Camondo Museum in Paris. A second example is illustrated in P. Kjellberg, *Encyclopédie de la pendule française du Moyen Age au XXe siècle*, Paris, 1997, p. 282. The identity of the bronze caster who created the model is currently not known; however certain motifs, particularly the openwork geometric friezes decorated with beads and bells are reminiscent of the work of the renowned Parisian bronzier François Rémond, and in particular that of an exceptional Japanese lacquer writing case that Marie-Antoinette commissioned around 1785 (see the exhibition catalogue *Marie-Antoinette, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais*, Paris, 2008, p. 199, catalogue n° 140).

Today only a handful of clocks are known that are identical to the present one. Among them, one example is in the collection of Susan and John Gutfreund in New York (see E. Evans Eerdmans, *Henri Samuel, Master of the French Interior*, New York, 2018, p. 208). A second example, whose dial is signed "Gavelle l'aîné", which also features a hard bisque porcelain group from the Locré factory, is illustrated in G. and A. Wannenes, *Les plus belles pendules françaises, De Louis XIV à l'Empire*, Florence, 2013, p. 288. A third clock, whose dial is signed "Cousin Horloger du comte d'Artois", is illustrated in J-D. Augarde, *Les ouvriers du Temps, La pendule à Paris de Louis XIV à Napoléon Ier*, Genève, 1996, p. 301, fig. 227. One further "Chinese pagoda" clock is in the British Royal Collection, and was formerly in the collection of the Queen Mother (shown in C. Jagger, *Royal Clocks, The British Monarchy & its Timekeepers 1300-1900*, London, 1983, p. 138, fig. 188).

Artist description:

The signature "Ragot à Paris" is that of Claude Ragot, one of the most important Parisian clockmakers of the second half of the 18th century. After becoming a master on September 10, 1785, he opened a workshop in the rue Saint-Denis, quickly earning a reputation among important Parisian collectors of luxury horology. Several of his clocks are mentioned as belonging to influential collectors, including one example, which appears in the probate inventory of Anne-Gabriel-Henri Bernard, Marquis of Boullainvilliers. A second clock was mentioned in the minutes drawn up when the seals were affixed after the death of Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, the Duke d'Orléans. Another clock by Ragot was mentioned in the list of the clocks of the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne in the Château of Versailles during the Revolution; it had stood for several years in the apartments of the Duchess de Polignac, governess of the Enfants de France and a friend and confidante of Queen Marie-Antoinette.