

La Pendulerie



Robin - Coteau - Thomire

An Exceptional Desk Regulator with “remontoir d’égalité” “Royal Model”, Louis XVI period

Circa: circa 1783

Robert Robin (1741-1799)

Joseph Coteau (1740-1812)

Case attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire

Probably made under the Supervision of Dominique Daguerre

Paris, Louis XVI period, circa 1783

Height 38.2 cm; width 21.7 cm; depth 17.1 cm

This exceptional desk, or mantel regulator, is one of the most luxurious Parisian clocks of the latter part of the reign of Louis XVI. Its complex movement with complications has a Graham escapement and a constant force remontoir d’égalité, with a bimetallic gridiron pendulum and two weights, with instructions for winding indicated on the back of the front door: “Remonté à gauche” (Wind to the left). The magnificent neoclassical architectural case is made of finely chased gilt bronze with matte finishing. All four sides, as well as the top, are glazed so that the complex movement may be admired. The case, which is raised on four quadrangular feet, is elaborately adorned with molding on the chapter and the base, with a toothed frieze decorating the slightly protruding cornice, a bead frieze adorning the bezel, acanthus and laurel leaf spandrels, recessed molded matte frames, and a magnificent chased drapery with fringe and a leafy garland under the dial.

The dial, signed “Robin Hger du Roi”, is a true masterpiece; it also bears the signature of the most renowned enameller of the day, Joseph Coteau (the counter-enamel bears the name “Coteau” and the date “1783”. It indicates the Roman numeral hours, the Arabic five-minute intervals, the seconds, the date, the months, and the equation of time, which shows the difference between true time and mean time. Along its outermost border it features the twelve polychrome signs of the zodiac within oval medallions surrounded by delicate interlacing foliage embellished with flowers and cabochons within arabesque frames. The indications are given by five hands, two of which are made of pierced and gilt bronze. Three others, including the equation of time hand, are made of blued steel.

HISTORICAL

The present clock may be considered an example of the quintessence of Parisian luxury horology during the reign of Louis XVI. Such clocks were made for a handful of important connoisseurs, often people who were close to the royal family. Certain contemporary documents afford information about the collectors who owned such masterpieces. One such clock was mentioned in the probate inventory of Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de la Ferté, the director of the Menus Plaisirs du Roi; it was sold in February 1797: “305. A square clock, with glazed panels, a half-second movement, with equation, remontoire and striking, made by Robin”. A second clock was described several years previously, shortly before the Revolution, in the inventory of Queen Marie-Antoinette’s horological collection, which was maintained by Robin. In it one finds a model that appears to be nearly identical to the present clock: “28. A square clock with architectural case and glazed panels, in gilt and matte bronze, with a compensation pendulum, hours, minutes, seconds, striking, with date, day of the week, and the figures of the zodiac painted in miniature on the dial, with the name of Robin” (see P. Verlet, *Les bronzes dorés français du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1999, p. 466).

Only a few similar regulators are known to exist today; most bear the signatures of the clockmaker Robin and the enameller Coteau, who both collaborated on the clock, probably at the request of one of the great marchands-merciers of the time, such as Simon-Philippe Poirier and his associate Dominique Daguerre, the two most famous purveyors of Parisian luxury items. Among the rare models known today, one example now in a private collection is pictured in D. Roberts, *Precision Pendulum Clocks*, 2004, p. 32. Two regulators made by Robin, formerly in the Winthrop Kellogg Edey collection, are now in the Frick Collection in New York; their cases are attributed to the renowned bronzier Pierre-Philippe Thomire (Inv. 1999.5.150 and 1999.5.151) (illustrated respectively in Tardy, *La pendule française, 2ème Partie : Du Louis XVI à nos jours*, Paris, 1975, and in C. Vignon, *The Frick Collection Decorative Arts Handbook*, New York, Scala, 2015).

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.