

La Pendulerie



Mesnil - Ravrio

A Rare Gilt and Patinated Bronze and Red Griotte Marble Mantel Clock with Matte and Burnished Finishing The Egyptian, also known as the “Thomas Hope” model, Empire period

Circa: circa 1805

Mesnil

Case attributed to André-Antoine Ravrio (1759-1814)

Paris, Empire period, circa 1805

Height 53.5 cm; width 28 cm; depth 20 cm

The round white enamel dial, signed “Mesnil à Paris”, indicates the Roman numeral hours and the Arabic fifteen-minute intervals by means of two blued steel Breguet hands. The hour and half hour striking movement is housed in an architectural case with a mythological figure made of finely chased matte and burnished gilt bronze and red griotte marble. The bezel, which is adorned with knurled interlace friezes with cabochons and stylized flowers, is surrounded by a plate whose lower corners are decorated with two scarab spandrels. The case is held by a magnificent standing female figure depicting an Egyptian woman with nude torso, wearing long classical robes that are tied under the breasts; she wears a nemes headdress. Behind the figure there is a niche that is flanked by two rectangular pilasters that have elaborately decorated panels within reserves, which are adorned with low-relief hieroglyphics, including obelisks and the masks of Apis and Horus; they are surmounted by majestic sitting lions. The molded base, with rounded façade, is raised on four flattened ball feet.

HISTORICAL

In 1798 and 1801, France led expeditions into Egypt with the aim of frustrating Britain's ambitions in the Orient, hoping to gain control of the country and dominate the region politically and economically. Led by then General Bonaparte, and afterward by his successors, this military operation, known as the French Campaign in Egypt, was also a research mission made up of eminent scientists and historians, and renowned artists. After the expedition's return to France there were extraordinary repercussions, particularly in the field of the decorative arts. In 1802, Baron Vivant-Denon published his book *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte*, which was met with great success. Afterward, architects, painters and artisans began to give their own interpretations of Egyptian models, which they then included in their own creations. In the field of the decorative arts, candelabra, consoles, flambeaux, clocks, furniture, seating, and mantelpieces were adorned with solemn female figures that were directly inspired by the monumental sculpture of Egypt during the pharaonic period.

The present unusual clock was created in that context. Its remarkable design, featuring the figure of the standing Isis who holds the dial, was created by Thomas Hope (1769-1831), an Anglo-Dutch collector, writer and decorator who had settled in London in the early 19th century and lived in a lavish home in Duchess Street. A highly talented decorator, Hope created decorative settings for his collections, among them a famous "Egyptian Room" in which he placed a clock he had designed and had executed in Paris by the bronzier Ravrio and the clockmaker Mesnil; this was the "Egyptian" clock, the same model as the present example. Today the "Hope" clock is in the Royal Pavilion Art Gallery and Museum in Brighton (see the exhibition catalogue *Egyptomania, L'Egypte dans l'art occidental 1730-1930*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1994, p. 192-193). The clock encountered immediate success among influential collectors. Several clocks, some featuring variations in their decoration, were made. Among them, one example, signed "Ravrio bronzier" and "Mesnil Horloger", is illustrated in H. Ottomeyer and P. Pröschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen, Die Bronzearbeiten des Spätbarock und Klassizismus, Band I*, Munich, 1986, p. 336, fig. 5.3.2. A second example may be seen in an image of the famous Mancel collection, taken in the mid-20th century (see S. Chadenet, *Les grands styles, Les styles Empire et Restauration*, Editions Baschet et Cie, Paris, p. 25, fig. 2). A third, whose dial is signed "Ravrio bronzier" and "Raguet-Lépine", was offered at auction in Paris in 1991 (see J-D. Augarde, *Les ouvriers du Temps, La pendule à Paris de Louis XIV à Napoléon Ier*, Genève, 1996, p. 358, fig. 265). One further comparable clock, which does not feature the hieroglyphic-adorned pilasters, is illustrated in P. Kjellberg, *Encyclopédie de la pendule française du Moyen Age au XXe siècle*, Les éditions de l'Amateur, Paris, 1997, p. 381, fig. B.

Artist description:

Mesnil

This is evidently the signature of one of the members of the Dugrandmesnil or Dumesnil family, a dynasty of Parisian clockmakers that seems to have shortened its name during the Revolution to avoid any confusion with the aristocracy. The name Mesnil appears on many dials alongside that of Ravrio; the two regularly worked together during the Empire period. Many of these clocks were owned by important contemporary collectors; several were briefly described in the probate inventories of General Joseph-Félix Lazowski, Marquis Germain Garnier, Emmanuel-Marie-Louis, Marquis de Noailles, the French ambassador in Vienna, Louis-Alexandre Berthier, Prince of Wagram, and Napoleonic Marshal Michel Ney, Prince de la Moskowa.