

# La Pendulerie



**Baillon - Saint-Germain**

**An Exceptional Monumental Rococo Gilt Bronze Wall Cartel “The Chinese Astronomer” The “Prince de Soubise” Model, Louis XV period**

Circa: circa 1745-1749

Jean-Baptiste III Baillon

The Case Attributed to Jean-Joseph de Saint-Germain

Paris, Louis XV period, circa 1745-1749

Height 108 cm; width 60 cm; depth 17.5 cm

Provenance:

- May be the example described in February 1749 in the probate inventory of Hercule Mériadec de Rohan-Soubise, Duke de Rohan, Prince de Soubise: “In the en suite bedchamber of the salon where the said Prince de Rohan died, which also looks out onto the garden of the said hôtel de Soubise: An œil de boeuf clock by Jean-Baptiste Baillon in its case with a Chinese figure holding a sphere and two ormolu gilt bronze animals, 1000 livres”.

The round gilt bronze dial, engraved with scrolls, flowers and lambrequins, has twenty-five white enamel cartouches that indicate the Roman numeral hours and the Arabic five-minute intervals, by means of two

blued steel hands. In the centre is an enamel medallion signed “J. Baptiste Baillon”. The hour and half-hour striking movement is housed in a magnificent monumental rococo case that is made of finely chased gilt bronze. Surmounting the clock is the figure of a Chinaman dressed in Oriental style, and holding an armillary sphere. He is seated on a large rococo element featuring wave and shell motifs. To his right there is a dragon with an open mouth, undulating tail, and outstretched wings. The sides of the case are elaborately decorated with scrolls, flowering leafy branches, C-scrolls and pierced reserves with latticework centered with flowers and lined with burgundy-colored material. The lower portion is decorated with C-scrolls, interlace patterns centered by cabochons, sinuous reserves with matted grounds, palms, leafy branches, scrolls, sunflowers, and bat’s wings. In the center, a heron with outstretched wings looks upward; it holds a rock in the claws of its right foot.

This exceptional cartel, made in the pure rococo spirit of the mid 1740s, is one of the most exceptional masterpieces of the luxury Parisian horology of the time. Its monumental size, the quality of its casting, the precision of its chasing, its perfectly mastered mercury gilding, and its rare and unusual Orientalist theme, which illustrates the extent of contemporary interest in the Extreme Orient, allow us to attribute the present clock to Jean-Joseph de Saint Germain, one of the finest Parisian bronze casters of the time. To the best of our knowledge, there is only one other extant identical cartel. Also signed by Jean-Baptiste III Baillon, it differs from the present clock only in its dial, which is entirely enameled and bears the crowned C stamp, allowing the model to be dated circa 1745-1749. It is in the collection of the Earl and Countess of Rosebery in Dalmeny House, West Lothian (illustrated in J-D. Augarde, *Les ouvriers du Temps, La pendule à Paris de Louis XIV à Napoléon Ier*, Antiquorum Editions, Genève, 1996, p. 31, fig. 13, and in J. Whitehead, *The French Interior in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 2009, p. 151).

During the mid 18th century, either the present cartel or the identical example now in Dalmeny House, belonged to one of the most important collectors of the day, Hercule-Mériadec de Rohan-Soubise, Duke de Rohan, Prince de Soubise (1669-1749). After the prince’s death, an inventory of his collection was drawn up. It contained the following description: “In the en suite bedchamber of the salon where the said Prince de Rohan died, which also looks out onto the garden of the said hôtel de Soubise: An œil de boeuf clock by Jean-Baptiste Baillon in its case with a Chinese figure holding a sphere and two ormolu gilt bronze animals”. Estimated at the high price of 1000 livres, while the same inventory includes a pair of Boulle chests estimated at 900 livres, the cartel remained in the Hôtel de Soubise throughout the 18th century and was mentioned after the death of Charles de Rohan, Prince de Soubise (1715-1787), who had inherited the mansion and collections. The inventory of the prince’s bedchamber included: “A clock signed by Baptiste Baillon in its copper ormolu cartel 150 livres”. The significant difference between the 1749 and the 1787 estimates is no doubt due to a change in taste, as the neoclassical style became quite popular during the second half of the 18th century. Had the auctioneers described the dial with greater precision (rather than simply saying “the enamel dial” or “the copper dial with enamel hours”), it would be possible to determine which clock – the present example or the one in Dalmeny House – belonged to the Prince de Soubise.

#### Jean-Joseph de Saint-Germain (Paris 1719-1791)

Was probably the most famous Parisian bronze caster of the mid 18th century. Active as of 1742, he became a master caster in July 1748. Known particularly for his many fine clock and cartel cases, his numerous masterpieces include the “Diana the Huntress” cartel (an example is in the Louvre Museum), the clock supported by two Chinamen (a comparable model is in the Lyon Musée des Arts décoratifs), and several animal-themed clocks, predominantly elephants and rhinoceroses. In the late 1750s, he played an important role in the renewal of the Parisian decorative arts and the development of the neoclassical style. In addition to his horological creations, Saint-Germain also produced many bronze furnishings: fire dogs, cartels, candelabra, always displaying great creativity and exceptional skill as a bronze caster. He retired in the mid 1770s.

## HISTORICAL

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### Artist description:

Jean-Baptiste III Albert Baillon (d. 1772)

Was one of the most skilled and innovative clockmakers of his day. Baillon achieved almost unprecedented success to become, in the words of F.J. Britten, "the richest watchmaker in Europe". One of the most important clockmakers of the 18th century, he was no doubt the most famous member of an important horological dynasty. His success was largely due to his ability to organise a vast and thriving private factory in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which was unique in the history of 18th century horology.

Managed from 1748-57 by Jean Jodin (1715-61) it remained in activity until 1765 when Baillon closed it. Renowned horologist Ferdinand Berthoud was impressed by its scale and the quality of the pieces produced; in 1753 he noted: (Baillon's) "house is the finest and richest Clock Shop. Diamonds are used not only to decorate his Watches, but even Clocks. He has made some whose cases were small gold boxes, decorated with diamond flowers imitating nature. His house in Saint-Germain is a kind of factory. It is full of Workmen continually labouring for him...for he alone makes a large proportion of the Clocks and Watches [of Paris]". He supplied the most illustrious clientele, not least the French and Spanish royal family, the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne as well as distinguished members of Court and the cream of Parisian society.

Baillon's father, Jean-Baptiste II (d. 1757) a Parisian maître and his grandfather, Jean-Baptiste I from

Rouen were both clockmakers, as was his own son, Jean-Baptiste IV Baillon (1752 - c.1773). Baillon himself was received as a maître-horloger in 1727. In 1738 he secured his first important appointment as Valet de Chambre-Horloger Ordinaire de la Reine. Sometime before 1748 he was made Premier Valet de Chambre de la Reine and in 1770, Premier Valet de Chambre and Valet de Chambre-Horloger Ordinaire de la Dauphine Marie-Antoinette. By 1738 he was established, appropriately, in the Place Dauphine, and after 1751 in the rue Dauphine.

Baillon used only the finest cases and dials. The latter were supplied by Antoine-Nicolas Martinière and Chaillou while his cases were supplied by Jean-Baptiste Osmond, Balthazar Lieutaud, the Caffiérés, Vandernasse, Edmé Roy and especially Jean-Joseph de Saint-Germain (1719-91).

His success allowed Jean-Baptiste Baillon to amass a huge fortune, valued at the time of his death on April 8, 1772 at 384,000 livres. His collection of fine and decorative arts was auctioned on June 16, 1772, while his remaining stock, valued at 55,970 livres, was offered at sale on February 23, 1773. The sale included 126 finished watches, totalling 31,174 livres and 127 finished watch movements at 8,732 livres. His clocks, with a total value of 14,618 livres, included 86 clocks, 20 clock movements, seven marquetry clock cases, one porcelain clock case and eight bronze cases.

Today one can admire Baillon's work in some of the world's most prestigious collections, including the Louvre, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée National des Techniques, the Petit Palais and the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris; Versailles; the Musée Paul Dupuy in Toulouse; the Residenz Bamberg; the Neues Schloss in Bayreuth; the Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt; the Residenz in Munich and the Schleissheim Castle. Further museums include the Royal Art and History Museum in Brussels; the Spanish Patrimonio Nacional; the Metropolitan Museum in New York; the Newark Museum; the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and Dalmeny House in South Queensferry.