

N° 46

JACQUES NÈVE  
*Horloger d'Art*

+ 32 477 27 19 08 - jneve@horloger.net - www.horloger.net

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**CLAUDE GALLE (1759-1815)**  
**“RECLINING BACCHANTE”**  
**EXCEPTIONAL EMPIRE-PERIOD MANTLE CLOCK**



Paris, circa 1810

H. 20.4 in; W.19.3 in; D.7 in

Finely chased and gilded bronze  
*Vert de mer* marble base with circular feet  
Circular dial with Roman numerals, signed *à Paris*

**Provenance:** Private collection, Mulhouse









Lying on a daybed, a female bacchanal figure with a simple drape accentuating her hips holds aloft a cluster of grapes, bringing them voluptuously up to her lips. Arranged around her feet are a tambourine, thyrsus and two ewers – symbols of the Dionysian festivals. Rich ornamental bronze imagery – featuring two opposing lionesses on the façade, grape-filled baskets, a young goat on its hind legs, and musical trophies – occupies a significant part of the frieze décor. The dial signed *à Paris* is set into the frame of the daybed, the feet of which are in the form of hooves adorned with satyr masks.



Movement with round plates and 4 pillars, anchor recoil escapement, and silk-suspended pendulum. Countwheel strike for the hours and half hours on a silvered bell. Autonomy 2 weeks..



**Reference bibliography:** Michael Shapiro, 'Monsieur Galle, Bronzier et Doreur', *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*, Vol. 6/7 (1978/1979), pp. 57-74; Louna Zek, 'Bronzes d'ameublement et meubles français achetés par Paul Ier pour le château Saint-Michel de Saint-Pétersbourg en 1798-99', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1994; Jean-Dominique Augarde, 'Une nouvelle vision du bronze et des bronziers sous le Directoire et l'Empire', *L'Estampille-L'Objet d'art*, January 2005, no. 398, p. 62-85.



This semi-reclining nymph figure, surrounded by bacchic attributes, makes reference to the tragic love story of Bacchus and Erigone. In the *Metamorphosis*, Ovid tells the tale of a peasant named Ikarios who lived with his daughter Erigone (“born with the dawn”). Ikarios, unaware of his guest’s identity, plays host to Bacchus, who, in exchange, presents him with a grape vine and teaches him how to transform the fruit into wine.

Wanting to share this gift with the shepherds of Attica, Ikarios offers them a flask filled with wine, and not knowing its effects they proceed to drink without measure. Furious, and convinced that they have been poisoned, the shepherds club Ikarios to death, abandoning his corpse beneath a tree.

Concerned about her father who had been missing for so many days and months, Erigone goes in search of him only to find his dead body. Inconsolable, the young girl hangs herself from the tree which marks her father’s burial place.

Erigone is represented here under Love’s spell, in that one delightful moment when she succumbs to Bacchus, who, to seduce her transforms himself into a bunch of grapes. Characteristic of First Empire taste for moral themes of heroism and courage, this tragic subject is expressed here in all its beauty.



In its time the ‘reclining bacchante’ theme was considered a decorative-art icon, serving as a model to various master clockmakers who appropriated it to create additional depictions. Among other known versions are three models closely related to ours, the dials respectively signed ‘*Le Roy*’, ‘*Gérard à Paris*’, and ‘*Blanc fils palais Royal*’<sup>1</sup>. By virtue of its provenance, prestigious signature and quality of the bronze work, our clock figures among the rarest of comparable examples.

Modelled after Jacques-Louis David’s famous representation of *Madame Récamier* (Paris, 1800, Musée du Louvre), our clock’s design may have been inspired by a musical clock surmounted by a Clodion marble statuette. This late Louis XVI period clock, once housed at the Louvre (inv. OA 5510), then returned to Prince Napoleon in 1924, demonstrates a clear affinity with the composition of our clock (fig.1).

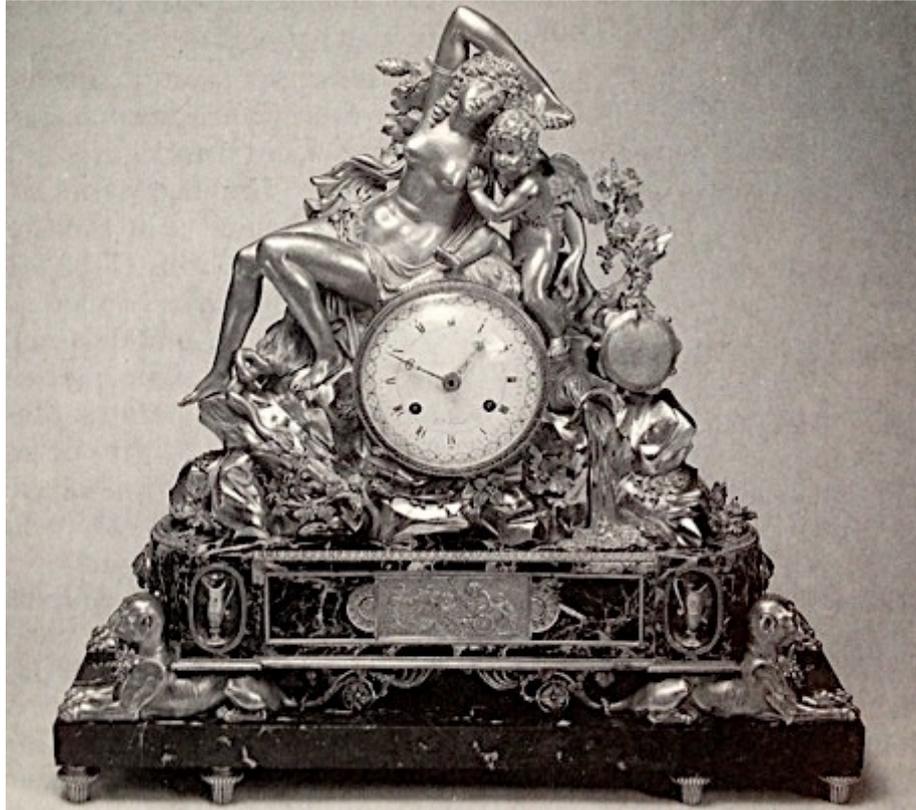


**Fig.1 Reclining Nymph Musical clock– marble sculpture by Clodion  
Late Louis XVI period (collection of Prince Napoleon, Brussels)**

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<sup>1</sup> - Sold at Christie’s, New York, 24 November 1998, lot 44 (dial signed *Le Roy*)  
- Sold at Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 15 December 1999, lot 92 (signed *Gérard à Paris*)  
- Sold at Christie’s, Amsterdam, 1 July 2009, lot 518 (signed *Blanc fils Palais Royal*)

Among related clocks featuring a similar subject matter, is a clock by Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751-1843) representing *Erigone inebriated by Love* (*Érigone enivrée par l'Amour*), today at the Pavlosk Palace near Saint Petersburg (fig. 2).



**Fig. 2 Pierre-Philippe Thomire, Clock representing *Erigone inebriated by Love*  
Pavlosk Palace**

The Pavlosk clock, referenced in an inventory drawn up by Ivan Belski, advisor to the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty, belonged to a group of 55 clocks purchased to decorate Saint Michael's Castle in Saint Petersburg: “(61) No. 16. *1 representing the so-called Erigone inebriated by Love, 24 inches high and the same dimensions in width, Italian griotte-marble base, bearing 4 panthers that support a fine, richly decorated vert de mer marble pedestal, the pedestal surmounted by a gilt-bronze boulder bears a tambourine, above two beautiful figures representing Erigone and Love, Bacchanalian attributes and a half-second movement.*”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Louna Zek, op. cit. supra, page 146, pl. 9.

Featuring a more sober interpretation is a musical clock, also by Thomire, at the Musée de La Chaux-de-Fonds – its simple classical tunic, wood base, and dial set into the incline of the daybed (fig.3) demonstrate a variation from our model.



**Fig.3. Courvoisier & Compagnie, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Pierre-Philippe Thomire, Paris (Inv. IV-693)**

The attribution to Thomire of the ‘reclining bacchante’ model is based upon the existence of a preparatory study now at the Stockholm National Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly the rarest and most beautiful of all existing versions, our clock was made and retailed by Claude Galle (1759-1815), Thomire’s major competitor. The refinement of the bronze chasing, the irreproachable gilding and the remarkable finesse of the modelling are the indisputable hallmark of Galle’s pieces – the quality of his bronze work attained a state of perfection that only the greatest bronze makers of the First Empire had the ability to achieve.

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<sup>3</sup> We were unable to access this drawing due to the Nationalmuseum being closed for renovation.

## CLAUDE GALLE (1759 – 1815)

*Galle, Fabricant de bronzes et dorures, Rue Colbert no. 1, et Rue Vivienne no. 9* (as stated on his letterhead), became a master in 1786; official supplier to the Emperor furnishing the Royal Palaces of Fontainebleau, Les Tuileries, Compiègne and Rambouillet, he also received commissions for palaces outside France including the Quirinale in Rome and the Stupinigi in Turin. Established at no. 9 Rue Vivienne from 1806 to 1827, Galle grew to become one of the most celebrated bronze makers under Napoleon I. Both maker and retailer, his workshop, which employed almost 400 workers in 1811, was one of the largest in Paris.

At the 1806 Exposition des Produits de l'Industrie, Claude Galle was awarded a bronze medal for his mantle clock *Friendship concealing Time* (*L'amitié couvrant les heures*), an example of which is now at the Musée du Château de Malmaison (fig. 4).



Fig.4. Claude Galle, *Friendship concealing Time* – Musée National du Château de Malmaison

Galle collaborated with Antoine-André Ravrio (1759-1814) and Jean Hauré (master in 1782) on several occasions – his connection with Hauré gave Galle the opportunity to create bronzes for some of Guillaume Benneman’s (1750-1811) cabinetry work intended for the Crown, like the commode with the Queen’s monogram, now housed at the Château de Compiègne (fig. 5).



**Fig. 5. Commode with the Queen’s monogram after Guillaume Benneman (1750-1811) Claude Galle bronzier, Jean Hauré (master in 1782); Apartment of the Queen, then of the King of Rome, Salon des Jeux de la Reine, Château of Compiègne**

In 1823 Galle received a gold medal for his final participation at the Exposition des Produits de l’Industrie: “Mr. Galle, from Paris, was judged worthy of the gold medal in 1823 for his presentation of a pair of matching figures, a *Gladiator* and an *Achilles*, flawlessly executed in bronze; a very beautiful *jaspe fleuri* (speckled jasp agate) clock, and a vase decorated with gilt bronze work, the mounting of which is affixed by clips which don’t pierce the vase.”

Certain works by Galle can be found today in numerous museum collections like those of the Musée National du Château de Malmaison and Musée Marmottan in Paris, the Munich Residenz, and the Victoria & Albert and the Wallace Collection in London. Claude Galle’s only son, Gérard-Jean Galle (1788 - 1846), took over the business.

## APPENDIX

### Excerpt from the 18 June 1948 auction catalogue

Sale M<sup>e</sup> Etienne Ader, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 18 June 1948, no. 121 reproduced.

**OBJETS D'AMEUBLEMENT**  
DU XVIII<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE

**TABLEAUX ANCIENS**  
PAR : C. COYPEL, F. DESPORTES, BARON GÉRARD, F. GUARDI, TAUNAY, ETC.  
AQUARELLE GOUACHÉE PAR HILAIRE  
MINIATURE PAR DUMONT  
PENDULES - TRUMEAUX

**CÉRAMIQUE CHINOISE**  
DES DYNASTIES SONG - MING - TSING

BISCUITS ET PORCELAINES DE LA FAMILLE VERTE  
VASE A FOND NOIR, ÉPOQUE KANG-HI

PORCELAINES DE LA FAMILLE ROSE  
ASSIETTES COQUILLE D'ŒUF, ÉPOQUE YUNG-CHING

PIERRES DURES - BRONZE DE FOUILLE DES TSIN  
TABLE EN LAQUE

**SIÈGES ET MEUBLES**  
ESTAMPILLÉS DES MAITRES ÉBÉNISTES :  
N. I. BAUDIN, A. M. CRIARD, M. CRIAERD, MARCHAND, F. MONDON, OHNEBERG, RIESENER, ETC.

**TAPISSERIES ANCIENNES**  
DES FLANDRES, DE BRUXELLES, DE BEAUVAIS ET DES GOBELINS  
TAPIS D'ORIENT ET D'AUBUSSON  
APPARTENANT A DIVERS AMATEURS

DONT LA VENTE AUX ENCHÈRES PUBLIQUES AURA LIEU A PARIS

**HOTEL DROUOT, SALLES N<sup>os</sup> 7 ET 8 RÉUNIES**  
*Le Vendredi 18 Juin 1948, à 14 heures*

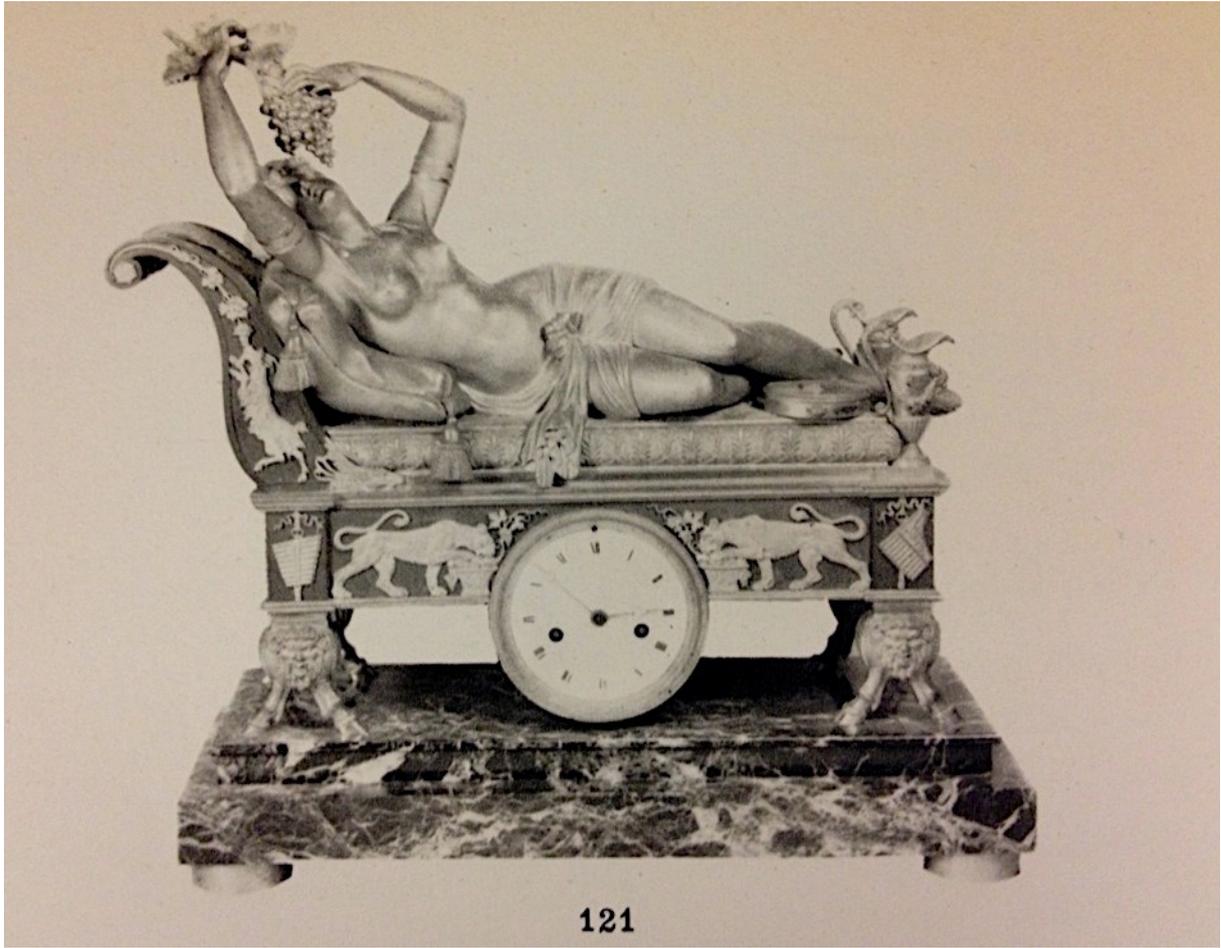
COMMISSAIRES-PRISEURS :

<b>M<sup>e</sup> ÉTIENNE ADER</b> Successeur de M <sup>ss</sup> MAURICE ADER et F. LAIR DUBREUIL 6, rue Favart	<b>M<sup>e</sup> PHILIPPE COUTURIER</b> SUCCESEUR DE SON PÈRE 56, rue de la Victoire
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ASSISTÉS  
*Pour les Tableaux de :*

<b>MM. C. et T. CATROUX</b> EXPERT PRÈS LE TRIBUNAL CIVIL DE LA SEINE 19, rue de Lille <i>Pour les Objets d'Extrême-Orient de :</i> <b>MM. ANDRÉ et GUY PORTIER</b> EXPERT PRÈS LE TRIBUNAL CIVIL DE LA SEINE 24, rue Chauchat	<b>M. F. MAX-KANN</b> EXPERT PRÈS LE TRIBUNAL CIVIL DE LA SEINE 78, avenue Mozart <i>Pour les Objets d'Ameublement de :</i> <b>M. BERNARD DILLÉE</b> EXPERT PRÈS LE TRIBUNAL CIVIL DE LA SEINE 54, Rue Taitbout
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**EXPOSITION PUBLIQUE**  
*Le Jeudi 17 Juin 1948, de 14 heures à 18 heures*



121 — PENDULE en bronze de deux patines, le cadran de Galle à Paris est supporté par un lit de repos sur lequel est étendue une bacchante à demi-nue buvant le jus d'une grappe de raisin, à ses pieds un tambourin et un thyrses, socle en marbre vert de mer. Époque Empire.

Haut., 0<sup>m</sup>50; Larg., 0<sup>m</sup>48.

*Voir la reproduction, pl. XII.*