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HUBERT SARTON (1748-1828)

MULTI-DIAL BRASS, ORMOLU AND BLACK MARBLE QUARTER-STRIKING SKELETON CLOCK

Circa 1810
Height : 24 in.

REFERENCE BIBLIOGRAPHY: L'Horlogerie et ses Artistes au Pays de Liége, Florent Pholien 1933; L'Age d'Or de l'Horlogerie Liégeoise, Ann Chevalier et André Thiry 2003; Les pendules d'Hubert Sarton, 1748-1828, Horloger-Mécanicien, Inventeur, mémoire présenté en 2009 à la Chambre Nationale des Experts Spécialisés en Meubles, Estampes, Livres, Objets d'Art et de Collection, Paris, Jacques Nève 2009.


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MULTI-DIAL BRASS, ORMOLU AND BLACK MARBLE

QUARTER-STRIKING SKELETON CLOCK BY HUBERT SARTON CIRCA 1810

Large diameter white enamel ring dial with concentric inner date ring framed within a foliate cast and beaded bezel, allowing for a good view of the front-mounted strike mechanism.

Roman numerals with Arabic fifteen-minute markers, finely cut and engraved gilt-brass minutes and hour hands.

Very fine center-sweeping seconds steel hand, three snake-shape steel calendar hands.
Subsidiary calendar rings below for days of week with their deities and months with their number of days, lunar dial above with phase and age of the moon, the movement with trapeze-shape plates joined by two back-pinned pillars, twin barrels with 60-pin wheel escapement inside.
Unique 2-rack strike mechanism on two bells mounted above, and striking the quarters in the Dutch fashion in a very unusual way: the count of hours on the large bell, one strike for the first quarter on the large bell, the count of hours ahead on the small bell for the half-hour, and three strikes on the small bell for the third quarter.

Gridiron pendulum steel-suspended from a pivoted knife-edge block, the whole raised on struts above two pillars on a black marble D-ended plinth with ormolu feet.
On the backplate, it is to be noted the very unusual rear-mounted steel click wheels, and the crossing-out of the two calendar wheels and all their transmission wheels are identical.

Although this clock bears all the hallmarks of Hubert Sarton's Workshop, it seems to be the only one of this type ever produced.

Height: 24 in

HUBERT SARTON (1748-1828)

Horologist to the court of princes

Hubert SARTON (1748-1828) lived during a momentous period in history. A product of the Enlightenment, he was also a precursor of the industrial age. Furthermore he was fortunate enough to grow up and live in Liège, which at the time was one of the most dynamic artisan and industrial centres in Europe.[1]

Very little has been written about him, yet his contribution to the art of horology is of great importance. He began learning the trade working for his uncle Dieudonné Sarton in 1762, where he demonstrated a remarkable talent for the mechanical sciences. After completing a four-year apprenticeship in Paris at the workshop of Pierre Leroy, eldest son of Julien and brother of Jean-Baptiste Leroy,[2] he returned to Liège in 1772 as Master Clockmaker.

1. Liège was a gunsmithing centre producing all kinds of firearms ranging from the smallest calibre to the heaviest piece of artillery. It was also a world-renowned centre for the production of mathematical and geometrical instruments.
2. Jean-Baptiste Leroy was Director of the Academy of Sciences in Paris at the time.

A few years later, in 1778, Jean-Baptiste sent him a portrait of his father, accompanied with a dedication which demonstrates the esteem in which he was held: *"To Mr. Sarton, clockmaker at Liége, in consideration of his zeal for horology, on behalf of M. Leroy fils, director of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, and 'garde du cabinet de physique du Roi' at Passy."*[3]

Soon after he was appointed 'Court Clockmaker' to Duke Charles Alexander of Lorraine, Governor General of Austrian Netherlands, then, as 'First Mechanic' to Prince Bishop François-Charles de Velbrück, he enjoyed the benefits of a privileged position which extended his reputation well beyond the Principality of Liège. He also played a civic role being appointed Commissioner and Treasurer of the city of Liège in 1783.

In a report published in 1789, the workshop of Hubert Sarton is described in terms that reflect the diversity and quality of his work, as well as his concern for innovation: *"At HUBERT SARTON in Liège and Spa, one finds a most comprehensive assortment of clocks and watches, in the latest styles, like gold and silver watches of all kinds […]. One also finds a beautiful assortment of clocks from the most simple to the most complex."* [4]

Eleven years later, the French Revolutionary troops stormed Liège putting an end to Austrian rule. It is hard to ascertain exactly what consequences this historic event had on Hubert Sarton's career. It appears from that time forward he concentrated on the production of skeleton clocks in a variety of models. The number of clocks produced suggests that Sarton certainly managed a large workshop with numerous employees – although no documentation has survived to either confirm or contradict this.[5]

Famous for inventing the automatic watch based on a rotor principle, for which he filed a patent at the French Academy of Sciences in 1778, Hubert Sarton created a variety of timepieces throughout his career – Louis XV cartels, Louis XVI mantle clocks, lyre mantle clocks, *pendules de compagnie* (company clock or waiting-room clock) skeleton clocks and regulators – all equally remarkable for their extraordinary quality and diversity.

3. Extract from the booklet 'Hommage de Hubert Sarton à ses concitoyens... Amis des Arts et des Sciences...' (Liège: J. A. Latour printers, 1822).

4. *Rapport à la Société d'Emulation*, 1789, by LF De Saive, F. Villette and Depaix Trefoncier.

5. All the city archives of Liège were destroyed when the townhall went up in flames after French revolutionary troops stormed the city in 1794. The archives of the Société d'Emulation were also destroyed when German soldiers sacked the city in 1914.

Among his major timepieces, we cite the exceptional skeleton clock dating from 1795 – an undisputed masterpiece of late eighteenth-century horology. Besides its aesthetic and technical qualities, this six-dial clock has a rather remarkable strike mechanism that is unusual in its complexity (fig.1).

Fig.1 Six-dial skeleton clock by Hubert Sarton, dated 1795

H. 81 cm (31.9 in)

The Liège Gazette of 9 December 1810 states that '*Hubert SARTON, clock and watch mechanic […] having left his trade as horologist, hereby gives notice that he will sell a nice assortment of his remaining stock for 20 per cent under current prices.*' This was followed by a list of various clocks and watches for sale. The announcement also states that Hubert Sarton intended to devote himself to mechanical projects, which had nevertheless always been part of his professional interests: '*The said mechanic being the owner of wool and cotton mills, successfully continues the construction of the aforesaid mechanisms & of which he will guarantee its effects to the buyers.*' It is more than likely that he continued to practice his trade as clockmaker, either as maker, or as consultant, in collaboration with his son François-Joseph (b. 1779) and his nephew Nicolas-Marie Lhoest (b. 1777). At once a devoted horologist, mechanic and inventor, Hubert Sarton was one of the major figures of horology in late eighteenth-century Liège. An enlightened man of his time, keen on progress and innovation, his considerable career unfolds as a long series of developments. Having successfully advanced all branches of his trade, this able mechanic dedicated to the art of horology became a master of his art, as witnessed in the exceptional quality and great refinement of his production.

OTHER MODEL OF HUBERT SARTON ON DISPLAY:

EMPIRE-PERIOD TWIN DIAL SKELETON CLOCK

H. 23" (57cm), W. 11" (28cm), D. 4 ½" (12cm)