Alexandre Pradère

FRENCH FURNITURE MAKERS

The Art of the Ébéniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution

Translated by Perran Wood

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Above: *Plate IV of the portfolio of engravings by Boulle published by Jean Mariette (1660–1742). The eight plates in this collection were included by Mariette in the second edition of* L'Architecture à la mode, *which is to be dated after 1707 (date of the death of Mariette's nephew, Nicolas II Langlois, who had printed the first edition and held the rights). In the second edition Mariette added plates by Pineau and Oppenordt with those by Boulle in order to illustrate the new style, which would date Boulle's engravings c. 1710–20*

Below: *Plate I of Mariette's portfolio of engravings by Boulle*

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Design for a porcelain jewel-cabinet made by Carlin for the dealer Daguerre; from the Saxe-Teschen album (see page 39) (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

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Above: *Plate V of the Boulle portfolio*
Below: *Plate II of the Boulle portfolio*

INTRODUCTION

THE CRAFT OF THE ÉBÉNISTE

The title of this work calls for preliminary comment. A good third of the French ébénistes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were first or second generation immigrants. A glance at the contents list of this book will bear this out. Ébénistes of the century of Louis XIV came from the Flemish Netherlands or from Holland. Boulle's family originated from Guelderland, Gole was born in Holland, as was Oppenordt, while Laurent Lelibon was born in Antwerp and Michel Camp in the duchy of Julliers. The great names of the rococo style also came from these regions, such as the Criards from Brussels and the Vanrisamburghs from Holland, and some also from Germany like Latz and Joseph Baumhauer. In the next generation, almost all the great ébénistes came from Germany, particularly from the Rhineland, such as Oeben, Riesener, Carlin, Benneman, Weisweiler, Schneider and Molitor. On coming to Paris these foreigners grouped themselves together in certain quarters such as the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where ancient privileges placed them outside the regulation of the Parisian Guild of Menuisiers, and so enabled them to work.

It was the aim of the guild system, as it operated in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, above all to protect the interests of a group of established craftsmen, and it did not welcome free competition or the establishment of newcomers. At a time when family or guild ties were fundamental to the organization of society, integration by strangers was difficult. In many cases integration took place only if the newcomer married into a family of Parisian ébénistes. From the outset, the network of family protection helped him to obtain his mastership and set up a workshop. In the majority of cases the newcomers were integrated into the heart of a Flemish or German community in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine closely bound together by family ties, and worked for the marchands-merciers or other ébénistes-marchands without having direct access to a private clientèle. The situation may be summarized as follows. The most lucrative side of the business, the retailing of furniture, was effectively reserved by the families of the Parisian ébénistes who were established in the commercial quarters in the centre of the city or in the Grand-Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine where they had access to private clients, whereas production was mostly carried on in the Fauboug Saint-Antoine by unknown foreign craftsmen. It is true that certain Germans such as Oeben or Riesener enjoyed a celebrity unique to the profession; but they were exceptional. Who in their life-time had heard of B. V. R. B., or of Latz, Joseph Baum-

Portrait of Riesener by Vestier; the ébéniste is here depicted holding the pen of a designer of furniture rather than a craftsman's plane: one senses the desire to affirm his status as an artist. (Musée de Versailles)

Detail of the armoire-chiffonnier stamped Bury and Tuart [296], showing decoration painted in oil on a ground of wavy sycamore, attributed to Jean-Louis Prevost. (Archives Galerie Gismondi, Paris)

hauer, R. V. L. C., Carlin or Weisweiler? Their names are not mentioned in any contemporary sale catalogue and the poverty of their probate inventories bears witness to their modest circumstances. On the other hand, certain ébénistes whose names are barely known to us were then highly sought-after, such as Lefèbvre who worked in the rue Saint-Denis during the reign of Louis XIV or Noël Gérard during the Régence and, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Tuart, Séverin, Macret and Héricourt. Reading old almanacs can be revealing in giving the addresses most in demand in Paris. In 1772 the *Tablettes royales de renommée* lists the following ébénistes:

– Dubois, rue de Charenton, owner of a manufactory and famous furniture shop, delivers to the country and abroad.
– Fromageot, Grand-Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, owner of a manufactory and shop for all kinds of high quality furniture and makes deliveries to the country and abroad.
– Garnier, rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, for ébénisterie.
– Hobenne [sic] owns a manufactory at the Gobelins and a large shop dealing in ébénisterie, delivers to the country and abroad.
– Widow Hobenne, at the Arsenal, owns a large furniture emporium.
– Joubert, butte Saint-Roch, 'Ébéniste ordinaire du roi', has just completed furniture of top quality for Mmes la Dauphine and la Comtesse de Provence.
– Leleu, Rue Royale, owner of a manufactory and shop dealing in ébénisterie, delivers to the country and abroad.
– Sevrin, rue Dauphine, ébéniste, holder of the secret of 'vernis d'Angleterre' to colour brass mounts.

The same almanac, however, says nothing about other important ébénistes who were active at the same time, such as Carlin, R. V. L. C., Dautriche, Kemp or Rübestuck. Material success and fame were enjoyed by the sellers, whilst the lot of the producers was precarious. Probate inventories reflect the prosperity of the former and the relative poverty of the latter, in whose scanty lodgings little if anything in the way of pictures or tapestries is usually to be found, a modest amount of plate and few pieces of furniture; cane chairs, walnut buffets and fruitwood commodes being the staple rudimentary furnishings. The marchands-ébénistes, on the other hand, owned large stocks of furniture; Pierre Roussel's inventory after his death in 1783 detailed no less than 244 pieces of furniture in the shop. Some of them had made large fortunes, such as Noël Gérard who during the Régence had become established in the former hôtel of Jabach the banker and now dealt in timber as well as furniture, objets d'art and pictures.

This hierarchy within the trade was observed by Roubo who wrote in 1769 in *L'Art du Menuisier*:

The menuisiers-ébénistes, for the most part, do not sell the finished work for the price that it would be worth if it were of good quality and well made. They cannot do otherwise, seeing as most of them work exclusively for the marchands who do not pay what the work is worth. The luxury in fashion today is also one of the causes of the lack of finish in ébénisterie, as everyone wishes to own it without having the means to pay for its true value.

Roubo adds, 'The menuisiers-ébénistes, for the most part, do not make the carcases themselves but have them made at rock-bottom prices by other menuisiers who do nothing else.'

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the division at the heart of the ébéniste's trade between producers and sellers became accentuated and led to extreme cases such as that of Nicolas Héricourt, who was both ébéniste and marchand-mercier and employed nearly a hundred workers. In 1790 his widow, Marie-Anne Kropper, was obliged to give a list of workers employed by her to the syndic of the marchands-merciers; amongst the fifty-four ébénistes in her employ, there were twenty-seven independent craftsmen, the same number as master ébénistes: [Louis-Claude] Pierre; [Jean-Baptiste] Vassou; [Joseph] Kochly; [Martin] Oehneberg; [Conrad] Mauter; [François-Claude] Menant; [Denis-Louis] Ancellet; [Pierre II] Roussel; Charière; [Denis] Jullienne; [Jean-Pierre] Dusautoy; [Jean-Frédéric] Birckel; Depaux; Guillard; Marchand; Lausanne; [Jean-Frédéric] Ratié; [Jacques] Lucien; [Charles] Topino; [Pascal] Coigniard; [Étienne] Avril l'Ainé; [Jean] Caumont; Kans; [Jean-Baptiste] Pignit; [Antoine-Simon] Mansion; Folemayere; Foulon. (Arch.Nat. F30/132.)

Besides these ébénistes, the widow Héricourt employed bronze workers (the caster Alain, the chaser Maurot), 'metal-guilders' (Bécard father and son; Martin), wood-gilders, chaser-mounters (Gendé), a locksmith, two clock-makers (Cronier and Le Guay), a 'caster-maker', a 'sconce-maker' and a wood-carver. It is clearly specified that all these craftsmen worked at home and no doubt had the right to work for other employers beside Héricourt. The craft infrastructure was thus perfectly secure, even if, with hindsight, it is clear that the foundations had already been laid for the industrialization of the nineteenth century.

The importance of foreign workmanship and the stratification of the trade into producers and sellers are two factors unique to Parisian ébénisterie, and intimately linked to its dynamism. This is evident if the ébénistes are compared to their fellow professionals the menuisiers. The latter, who were generally of French origin, were established in the centre of Paris. Their conservative nature and lack of innovatory urge mark the art of chair-making during the eighteenth century, in spite of individual successes. By contrast, in furnishing the enterprising and inventive merchants with able foreign workmanship, the system favoured the extraordinary rise of the Parisian ébéniste. A constant flow of innovations accompanied the progress of ébénisterie – in design and types of furniture, new combinations of materials, new techniques, etc. The guild system was active at the heart of all this. Aimed in theory at maintaining the trade in a craft framework, with the production and selling processes indivisible, it resulted in practice in the exclusion of a large section of foreign workers from the retailing of their products.

THE GUILD OF MENUISIERS

During the seventeenth century and even more so during the eighteenth, the trades involved in the making of articles of wood in France, the métiers du bois, were strictly regulated by the guilds. Originally craftsmen in wood were grouped together in one single guild, that of the menuisiers, which had broken away from the guild of carpenters during the Middle Ages. During the eighteenth century techniques of working with wood became more sophisticated, resulting in specialized groups of craftsmen. Two distinct trades existed under the umbrella of the same guild, as well as the menuisiers specializing in wall-panelling or in carriages, with their own methods of work and places of business. The menuisiers who made furniture in solid wood (beds, chairs and consoles) were mostly of French origin and lived in the area around the rue de Cléry. They were used to working with wood-carvers, painters and guilders who also grouped themselves together in neighbouring areas. The menuisiers en ébène, who were later to be called 'ébénistes', specialized in furniture in veneered wood or marquetry (cabinets, commodes and bureaux) and embellished their furniture with bronze mounts. It was no longer the custom in the eighteenth century to combine ébénisterie and the making of articles in carved gilt wood in France, as Gole and Cucci had done in the seventeenth century, and similarly, chairs in France were no longer embellished with marquetry or gilt-bronze, as had been some work by Boulle for the Grand Dauphin. It was a question of work practices rather than written rules. The delineation between the two specialities of ébéniste and menuisier was complicated by numerous exceptions. Many pieces of furniture in solid wood (walnut commodes, night-tables, dressing-tables) were made by ébénistes and not by menuisiers. The day-book of the Garde-Meuble Royal has many entries for commodes in walnut, bidets and dressing-tables delivered by Gaudreaus and later by Joubert and Riesener. Furthermore, a certain number of chairs are stamped by ébénistes such as Garnier, Cosson or L. Moreau. These were chairs dating from about 1778, made in mahogany in the latest fashion, and ébénistes had been commissioned to make them: mahogany, an ébéniste's wood, was used for veneering and called therefore for an ébéniste's technique. When, with Jacob, the use of mahogany for chairs became more widespread around 1785, the wheel could be said to have come full circle, with the menuisiers using the technique of veneering.

Design for a marquetry chair, to be compared to four armchairs made by Boulle for the Grand Dauphin in 1686. (Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris)

The guild of menuisiers gave itself new statutes in 1743, which were approved by the King; it was granted letters patent in 1744. These new statutes came into conflict with the interests of other guilds, such as the turners, upholsterers and marchands-merciers, from whom there was an immediate reaction. The various objections were countered by successive orders made in 1745, 1749 and 1751 and the definitive registration of the new statutes by the Parlement took place in 1751. A résumé follows.

Menuisiers and ébénistes formed a panel within the guild, annually electing a syndic or principal who sat for one year and three adjudicators who sat for two years. Thus at any one time there was one syndic and six adjudicators. The ébénistes who were newcomers to this ancient guild had a minority representation, one ébéniste being elected every two years. The panel was responsible for the collection of fees due when a master was admitted and for the redistribution of these monies, in part to the 'poor masters' or 'widows of poor masters', and in part to the Royal School of Design. Above all, the panel was responsible for preserving the privileges of the guild. The most important of these was the monopoly of production, which involved the exclusion of anyone not a master from working as an ébéniste in Paris or the Faubourgs or even owning a shop or working at home. In fact, a monopoly of production of this nature could be applied only at the point of sale, to ensure that the only furniture on the market was that of the master ébénistes. This led to the idea of a stamp. The master ébénistes were therefore obliged to stamp their work, and they would receive a visit four times a year from the adjudicators, who were charged with ensuring that their work conformed to the rules and showed no 'defects' or 'poor workmanship'. At the time of their visit the adjudicators would place next to the maker's stamp the official hall-mark, composed of the letters 'J.M.E.' (Jurande des Menuisiers-Ébénistes), and levy a modest charge.

Mastership could be obtained after three years work as an apprentice, followed by a further three years work as a journeyman to a master ébéniste. It was necessary to produce a *chef-d'oeuvre* in the workshop of an adjudicator, proving competence as an ébéniste. Finally, at the time of receipt of the letters of mastership, the ébéniste had to pay a fee to the panel of the guild. This varied considerably, depending on whether the new master was the son of a master or a stranger to the guild. So a son or a son-in-law of a master adjudicator or former adjudicator had to pay only about 120 livres, whereas the son or son-in-law of a plain master ébéniste had to pay 180 livres if he was born after the date of his father's mastership, and more than 280 livres if he was born before the date of his father's mastership. The fees for a simple apprentice who was neither son nor son-in-law of a master amounted to more than 380 livres, and for a worker who was a complete outsider to the guild, more than 530 livres. These fees must have seemed very high, particularly for a young foreign ébéniste (to give a point of comparison, the annual salary of a journeyman assistant would have been around 400 livres). In fact, many ébénistes, as we shall see, obtained their mastership fairly late in their career. Masterships were, further, reserved for Catholics and French or naturalized French craftsmen. Thus many young craftsmen originating from Germany or Holland had no other choice than to work either illegally or as journeyman to a master, or else to avoid the obligation of gaining the mastership by working in 'privileged areas'.

Certain areas in the neighbourhood of monasteries and convents had been placed under religious protection in the Middle Ages and had preserved their franchises. This was the case in the Enclos du Temple, Saint-Jean-de-Latran, Saint-Denis-de-la-Chartre and above all in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and ébénistes who worked there could not be harried by the guild. However, the guild of menuisiers hindered the sale of such craftsmen's work as much as possible, considering it to be illegal. Upholsterers were forbidden to sell the furniture of independent workers which was therefore not stamped. Master ébénistes were also forbidden to buy the production of independent workers or even to stamp it or to lend them their stamp, although there are many indications that some of them found it very convenient to do so. These prohibitions were rendered effective by the right of inspection and of confiscation by the guild adjudicators. The guild increased its inspections on the fringes of the privileged areas in order to seize the furniture which the independent craftsmen were trying to sell. The annual accounts of the guild for the year 1779 advised of

> visits made with the bailliff and several strong men, by night and day, in the neighbourhood of Porte Saint-Antoine, Saint-Jean-de-Latran, Saint-Denis-de-la-Chartre, the Temple and other privileged areas, in order to seize the miscreants and stop the contravention of the guild privileges, the said visits by night and day having been made many times and occasioned many seizures [. . .] and having besides produced the sum of 23,850L in masters' qualifying fees [. . .] the said masters would not have been received had they not been watched by the syndics and strong men who confiscated their works as soon as they were dispatched. [Arch. Nat. H2 2118, 1779.]

The only outlets for these independent artisans amounted to selling directly to individuals, on condition that the latter themselves arranged the collection of articles purchased from workshops. The statutes were precise on this point:

> When the citizens of Paris buy works from the said trade in the privileged areas, they are obliged to take and accompany them themselves, transporting them to their homes either themselves or having their children or servants do so, giving them a statement signed personally to the effect that they have ordered a certain piece from a certain worker or dealer living at [. . .] for their own use and not for that of others [. . .]

Another outlet for the independent makers was sale to the dealers, the marchands-merciers. This powerful guild had actually resisted the attempts of the guild of ébénistes and menuisiers to force them to sell only furniture made by masters. The statutes of 1751 maintained the marchands-merciers' right to 'do business in all works and pieces of furniture, stamped or unstamped, even to import it from outside the town or from abroad, in a finished or unfinished state'. The menuisiers and ébénistes had the right to stamp their furniture 'without the marchands-merciers being obliged to

sell only stamped work, neither may the said menuisiers inspect the marchands-merciers' premises nor make any seizure from them.'

It is easy to understand that without the facilities to market their products freely, the independent craftsmen depended almost entirely on the marchands-merciers or on their colleagues, the master ébénistes, even if in theory the latter could not touch their work. It should also be noted that the guild strove to constrain the trade of menuisier and ébéniste within the traditional craftsmen's confines; the statutes indicate that 'each master of the said profession may not have more than one single shop or workshop either in the town, or in the Faubourgs, or in the privileged areas, and is obliged to make his residence in the place and building of his shop.' They were permitted to have a yard or store of wood in a different place from their workshop on the condition that the door was kept locked and that it would not be used as a second workshop. The number of apprentices a master could employ was limited to two at any one time (engaging one every three years for a period of six years), but the master could employ as many journeymen as he wished, on condition that he made sure they were registered with the guild committee and declared them all at the annual inspection of the adjudicators.

Outside the privileged areas journeymen were forbidden to own tools or a workbench at home. 'Any journeyman in the said trade is expressly forbidden to carry out any work, business or function of a master for anyone in our aforesaid town [. . .] or to have at his place, in his room, house or inn or anywhere else, a workbench or strong table pierced with holes for a vice, on which he could work . . .' Those journeymen who were established as independent craftsmen in the privileged areas had to work alone ('Let us prevent all journeymen who may be in religious houses, colleges, communities or other areas, whether privileged or not, such as we have in our aforesaid town, faubourgs and suburbs of Paris, from keeping or having under them either journeyman or apprentice [. . .]').

The guild system, however rigid it seemed, could be manipulated in several ways. It never prevented foreign craftsmen from establishing themselves in Paris and sometimes even succeeding and founding veritable dynasties. As well as acting as a fund of support for the most needy, it had the advantage of keeping all the métiers du bois in a craft framework, ensuring quality and strength. The disappearance of the guild system at the beginning of the Revolution led to the end of the small ébénistes' workshops, which were now replaced by larger units, almost small factories. The workshop of Jacob employed 322 workers in 1808, and his successor Jeanselme also employed more than three hundred workers in 1850. The Revolution, from this point of view, marked the end of the golden age of French furniture. We can well believe Aimée de Coigny when she stated in her memoirs:

March 1791: The assembly dissolved the guilds which over the course of centuries have permitted the development of the best producers of all the

beautiful objects which the world used to buy from us at top prices. Furthermore, in grouping together people of the same trade, they were an intermediary body of the greatest use for the protection of the poor, henceforth delivered up as nonentities to the rapacity of the large entrepreneurs. [*Journal d'Aimée de Coigny*, p. 74.]

THE FRENCH CLIENTÈLE

The factors that made Paris the capital of commerce for luxury goods in the eighteenth century are well known. France was then the richest country in Europe, with the highest population, and its capital was a great city with a love of ostentation and novelty. The numerous contemporary descriptions of Paris bear witness to the sumptuousness of Parisian houses and the admiration which they evoked in foreign capitals. Shameless luxury was the order of the day. Voltaire's *L'Apologie du Luxe* (which was also entitled *La Défense du Mondain*), written in 1720, expressed a common sentiment rather than a new idea. The taste for luxury was a driving force in the economy, of which the authorities were well aware and which they sought to encourage. Thus in 1730 Louis XV gave an order for several large lengths of embroidered silk, even though he had no precise use for them, with the sole aim of encouraging the industry in Lyon. Not until 1785, with the advent of the 'moralists' and the obsession with the national debt, did luxury veil itself behind a feigned austerity and a ruinous simplicity. Later, Napoleon I, continuing the Bourbon tradition, made efforts to revive the furniture industry by giving orders to numerous Parisian ébénistes.

Furniture in the eighteenth century acquired an element of social prestige clearly reflected in contemporary portraits. Portrait of the Abbé de Breteuil by Louis-Michel Van Loo. (Private collection)

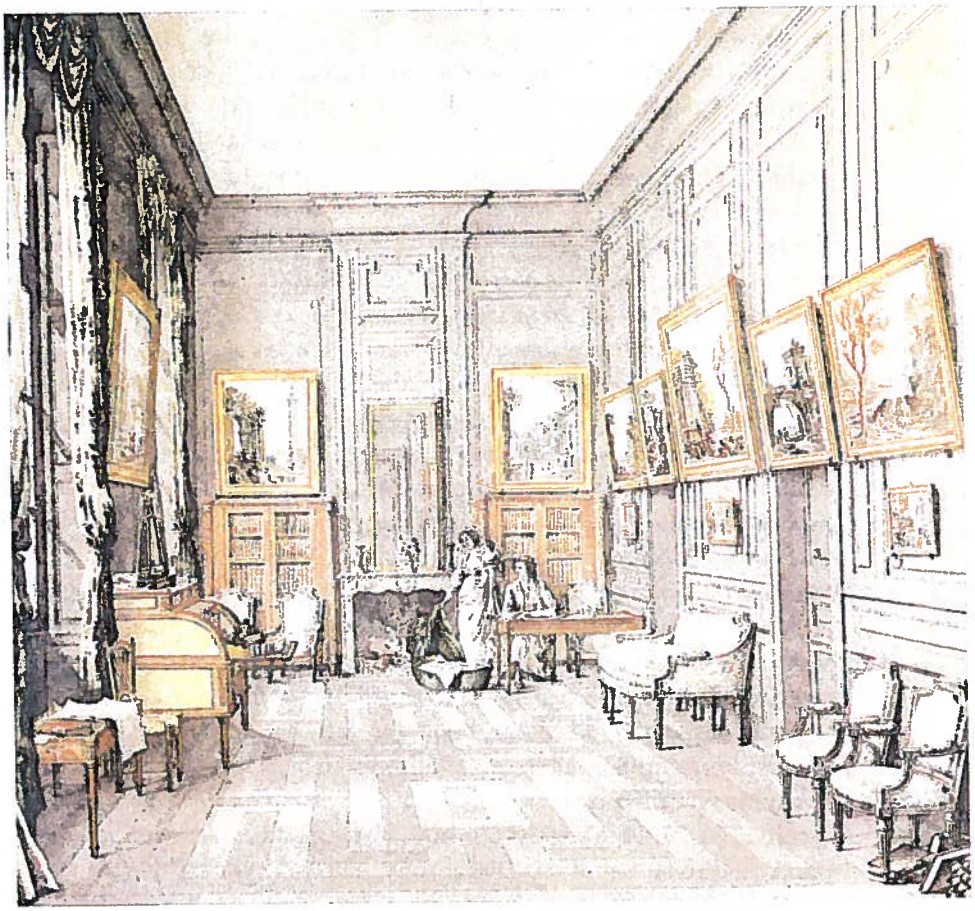
Royal orders play an essential rôle in the history of furniture-making during the period of our study. Whether for reasons of political expediency or personal taste, the royal family surrounded itself with sumptuous furnishings which were frequently replaced. Ébénistes in royal service were usually highly innovative; Pierre Verlet, in his four volumes on French royal furniture, has highlighted the originality of many of their creations. However, there were long breaks between royal orders, corresponding to the wars at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, which dried up Treasury funds from 1690, and the minority of Louis XV until 1735. For almost a half a century, Paris took over the lead from Versailles. The two great ébénistes of the period, Boulle and Cressent, completed few commissions for the Crown; they worked rather for Parisian financiers and noblemen. The royal family at Versailles by no means had a monopoly on ostentation; in Paris the princes of the blood, the ministers and financiers sought the same sumptuous furniture as did the king. Louvois ordered cabinets of pietra-dura [9] from Oppenordt comparable to those which Cucci was making at the same time for Louis XIV, while the Duc de Bourbon ordered furniture of a similar luxury from Boulle. In the same room in the Wal-

lace collection there are two commodes by Gaudreaus [117, 123], incontestably the finest examples of the Régence style; one belonged to Louis XV and the other to a financier, M. de Selle, who also owned sumptuous furniture by Cressent [88, 92].

The most interesting document on the clientèle and taste of the middle of the eighteenth century remains the *Livre Journal* of *Lazare Duvaux,* whose author supplied furniture to the King and the royal family, the Dauphin and especially the Dauphine. His principal client was Mme de Pompadour whose name occurs no less than 499 times in the ten years covered by the day-book. Ministers and members of the Parlement were also clients of Duvaux. He furnished the Château d'Asnières for the Marquis d'Argenson, the Hôtel de Roquelaure and the Château de Champlâtreux for President Molé. Amongst the ministers in the circle of Mme de Pompadour, the names of Choiseul and Bernis are mentioned. Some figures from the Court are among the important clients (the Comte du Luc, the Comtesse d'Egmont, the Duchesse de Lauraguais, the Marquis de Gontaut, the Duc de Bouillon, the Duchesse de Brancas and the Marquis de Brancas, the Duc d'Aumont and the Duc de la Vallière). Finally, the most numerous clients are certainly the financiers (M. de la Reynière, Pâris de Montmartel, Blondel d'Azincourt, Blondel de Gagny, MM. de Boulogne father and son, de Caze, Dangé, Fonspertuis, Fabus Roussel, Bouret de Villaumont and de Verdun). A well-known engraved portrait of Pâris de Montmartel before 1766 [270] helps to explain how the taste of the Fermiers Généraux could rival that of the royal family. The vanity of the Fermiers Généraux in this domain was unbridled: for example, the young Grimod d'Orsay had Riesener make a copy of the famous 'bureau du roi' even before Riesener had finished the piece for Louis XV.

Portrait of Mme de Pompadour by Drouais in 1764; the work-table in the foreground is certainly by J.-F. Oeben who was one of the favourite ébénistes of the King's mistress; it highlights the interest taken by Mme de Pompadour in the early Neo-classical style. (National Gallery, London)

At the end of the eighteenth century the houses of the financiers were amongst the finest in Paris and were described in accounts by foreign visitors. The Baronne d'Oberkirch who accompanied the Comtesse du Nord to Paris in 1782, returning in 1784, glowingly described the house of Grimod de la Reynière, and particularly that of Beaujon. ('The house is furnished magnificently, mostly old furniture and wonderful vernis Martin. They showed us a mahogany staircase and a dining-table in the same wood for thirty places. I will say nothing of the statues, the pictures, and amazing objects to be found at every step; one could do with a catalogue [. . .]'). At the end of the eighteenth century, besides the financiers and the noblemen, the ébéniste's clients included courtesans; they were noted at the time for the sumptuous décor of their surroundings, settling together in the new houses of the Chaussée d'Antin and the Faubourg du Roule and collecting the most precious furniture of Japanese lacquer and pietra-dura, with a predilection, it seems, for furniture with porcelain plaques. This taste was illustrated by the sale in 1782 of the furniture of Mlle Laguerre in which various pieces by Carlin were included, such as the small lacquer secrétaire [416] or the commode in pietra-dura now in the Brit-

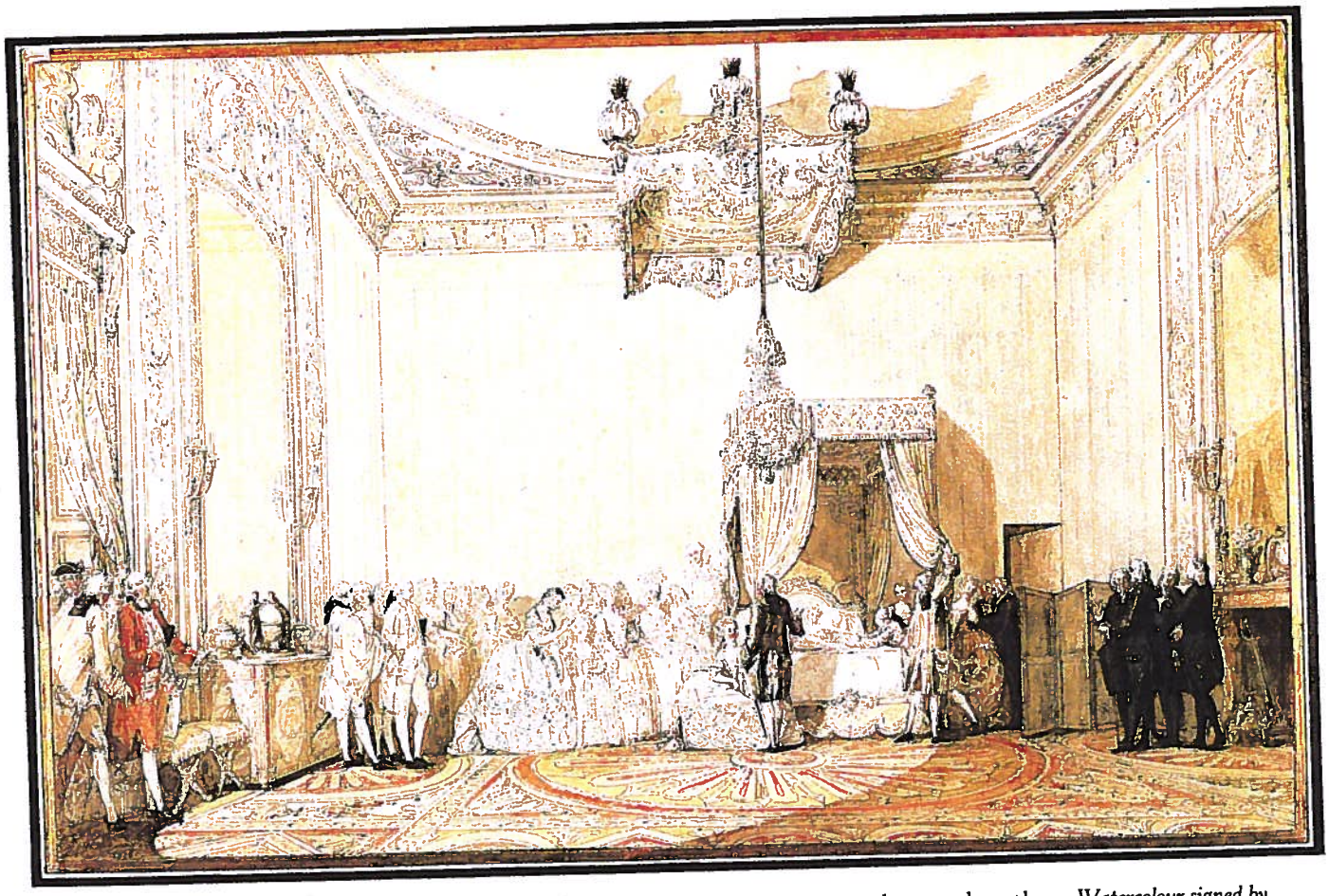


One of the very rare eighteenth-century illustrations showing contemporary furniture arrangement, this interior view can be dated c. 1795 on account of some of the paintings by Hubert Robert on the walls. (Private collection)

ish Royal Collection [415]. The Baronne d'Oberkirch once again recorded her impressions after a visit to another courtesan, Mlle Dervieux. 'On leaving the Palais-Royal, we went to see the little house and garden of Mlle Dervieux, the famous courtesan. It was a delicious confection! The furnishings are worth a king's ransom. The Court and the town have paid her tribute.' On the subject of Mlle Guimard she adds,

> this famous lady, in spite of the enormous sums of money that she has cost so many people of the Court and the town, finds herself in financial embarrassment [...] and wants to offer her house in a lottery. It is valued at 500,000L and it's really quite another matter from Mlle Dervieux's house. They talked of a Chinese cabinet which was worth crazy amounts [...] it was, people said, unique in Europe, even in Holland there isn't another one like it; we gazed at it as something out of this world.

However, fine furniture was not reserved for the élite. If the ambience of the Court and high finance set the tone, they were closely followed by the provincial and Parisian bourgeoisie. The middle classes were also benefiting from the prosperity currently enjoyed by the country and were developing a taste for luxury, described by Roubo and denounced by moralists such as Louis-Sébastien Mercier: 'When the house is built you haven't even started! That's only a quarter of the expense. Along comes the menuisier, the decorator,



Watercolour signed by Belanger (and with the effaced signature of Dugourc) depicting the birth of the Duc d'Angoulême at Versailles in 1775. Court ceremonial as well as the shape of women's dresses dictated that the centre of reception rooms was largely free of furniture, banishing all small tables and relegating furniture to a wall-side position. (Private collection)

the ébéniste, etc., and the interior takes three times longer than the construction of the building [...] the emphasis on magnificent furnishings is out of all proportion.' It is difficult to form an idea of an eighteenth-century middle-class interior; the only known pictorial representations show sumptuous interiors. In paintings by Chardin and Greuze old-fashioned furniture in natural wood may be seen; it is clear that the middle classes could not renew their furniture with the same frequency as the élite.

A study by Annik Pardailhe-Galabrun, *La Naissance de l'intime*, based on probate inventories of 3,000 Parisian households during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gives an accurate picture of bourgeois interiors of the period. Whereas in modest households the furniture mainly comprised beds, cane chairs and strictly utilitarian furniture, in the more affluent households there were pieces of furniture that were as much decorative as functional, and this survey indicates the large amount of storage furniture such as armoires and commodes that was to be found in all bourgeois houses. The taste for comfort and intimacy that had developed in well-to-do society during the eighteenth century was reflected in the furnishing of interiors by a progressive specialization in the use of space – the appearance of dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, bed-rooms, boudoirs etc. instead of the chambers or halls which made up seventeenth-

century houses. Parallel with this was a large increase in furniture made for a specific function: tables for writing or for dinner, dressing-tables, work-tables, tea-tables, games-tables, night-tables, etc. The quest for comfort by the middle classes was as much responsible for the development of Parisian ébénisterie of the period as the aristocratic taste for ostentation.

FOREIGN CLIENTÈLE

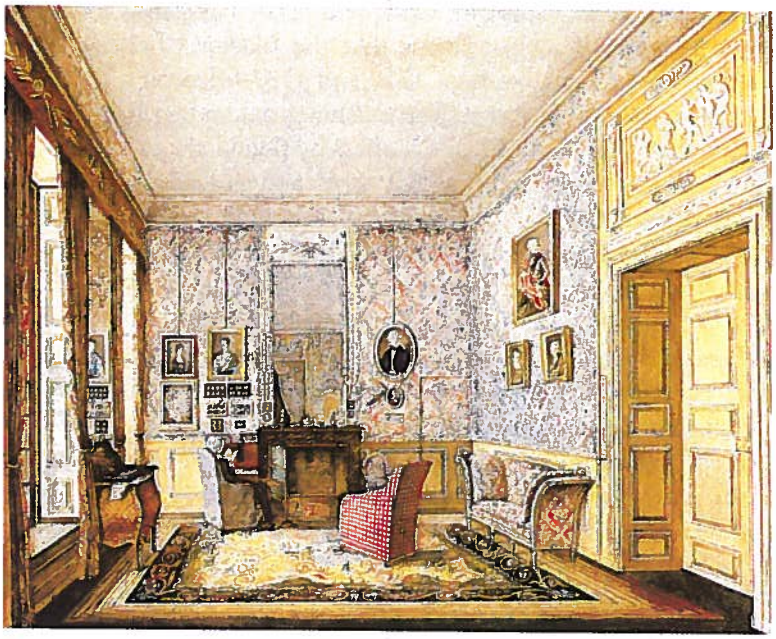
The supremacy of French furniture in our period was generally recognized throughout Europe, although perhaps to a lesser extent in Italy and England. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine exported some of its finest furniture, and advertisements by ébénistes are to be found in contemporary almanacs offering to make 'deliveries to the country and abroad'. Some furniture found today in Britain, Russia and Germany must have arrived there before the Revolution, sent from Paris by diplomats posted abroad, by travellers or commercial agents to foreign princes. It should be added that French ambassadors were accustomed to order a sumptuous suite of furniture from Paris for their new posting, and it would usually be sold locally, when the ambassador returned home.

The oldest examples of foreign purchases are Swedish, dating from the 1690s. Through Daniel Cronström, secretary to the Ambassador of Sweden in France, numerous pieces of furniture were ordered for the Swedish Court and for Swedish noblemen. The correspondence between Cronström and the architect of the King of Sweden, Nicodème Tessin le Jeune, the richest source of information on the decorative arts at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, is informative about some of these orders. Since 1693 Cronström had been recommending Berain and Cucci:

> The tables and guéridons that you want to have for the King are difficult to find ready made. If you want to have them made, it is best to order in good time but I do not know whom to choose for this. Cucci is excellent. On the other hand, Berain has admirable designs and good workers. Please decide between the two. Berain would like to do it. [Letter dated 22 May 1693.]

In 1695 Cronström purchased bureaux for Count Piper and also ordered a set of chairs for him. The following year he recommended to Tessin the purchase of a cabinet in pietra-dura, 7 to 8 pieds in width, which was coming up for sale on the death of Mlle de Guise. In 1699 he suggested a long-case clock made under the direction of Berain, as well as an organ case in tortoiseshell and ebony belonging to Perrault (letter dated 5 October 1699):

> Here is [...] a clock that Berain has made so perfectly, the most pleasing and rich workmanship that has ever been carried out in this style. It was intended for the Petite Galerie du Roi, but there has been some kind of misunderstanding which has meant that it is still with him [Berain]. It is, I suppose, 8 to 10 pieds in height with its base. It has cost him, I think,



Anonymous watercolour depicting the Duchesse d'Arenberg in the bedchamber of her palace in Brussels, c. 1795. (Private collection)

5,000 livres. [There is] an organ case suitable for an apartment, which Mr Perrault wants to sell. It is of tortoiseshell, ebony and bronze, made at the time when he was at the Bâtiments. Judge for yourself that it's by good craftsmen [...]

In 1702 he sent a bureau to M. Walrave, then in 1707 a commode to Mme Hermelin, which he hailed as the very latest in furniture: 'I am very impatient to know how and if the bureau of Mme Hermelin has been received. [...] For the rest, you have told me nothing of this latest design, they are called commodes, I don't know if you like them' (letter of 16 October 1707).

Of all the European countries, Germany was the most attracted by French art. The collections of French furniture still to be seen in the Munich Residenz, Schloss Moritzburg near Dresden, in Cassel, Ansbach, Bamberg and Berlin, are the remains of collections made by German princes in the eighteenth century. The rhythm of their purchases was influenced by the unsettled diplomatic relations between the two countries and it is notable that the two finest collections of French furniture, in Munich and Dresden, belonged to Catholic princes who were allied to France on several occasions. During the seventeenth century the constant warring between Louis XIV and the Empire hindered trade relations. After the treaty of Baden in 1714, which brought the War of the Spanish Succession to an end, foreigners returned to Paris. We have the account in *Le Mercure de France* of the visit made by the princes of Bavaria to Boulle's workshop in 1723. This was certainly not an isolated occurrence. For their part, various French architects in the service of German princes ordered furnishings from Paris for new apartments. We know that Robert de Cotte ordered two commodes from Boulle for the Elector of Cologne in 1718. The Munich Residenz has a fine

From the eighteenth century onwards, German princes tended to acquire their furnishings from Paris; this commode attributed to Cressent was bought, according to Feulner, at some time between 1730 and 1737 by Charles-Albert, Elector of Bavaria. (Residenzmuseum, Munich)

collection of furniture by Cressent, Carel and other Parisian ébénistes of the Régence, which it seems that the Elector Charles-Albert had bought in Paris between 1730 and 1737 (according to Feulner, 1926, p. 286). In Dresden the furnishings date rather from the years 1740–50; apart from a pair of coffers by Boulle, the collection mainly comprises commodes by B. V. R. B. and clocks by Latz of the rococo period. Most of the furniture was bought in Paris by the agent of the Elector of Saxony, M. Leleux, whose name is mentioned in an inventory after Latz's death in 1754. In Berlin the taste of the King of Prussia, in keeping with that of his neighbour the Elector of Saxony, also led him to order furniture from Latz, mainly long-case clocks through his agent M. Petit. The Seven Years War interrupted these purchases and Frederick II was forced to have his furniture made in Berlin by German cabinet-makers and bronze-workers such as Spindler and Kambly. However, the influence of Latz is still strongly noticeable in their work.

In Italy, where local traditions of furniture-making were strong, fondness for French furniture was found only in a few princely courts related to the French royal family. The chief collection of such furniture, now at the Quirinal in Rome, consists of pieces ordered in Paris in about 1748 by the daughter of Louis XV, Madame Infante, for her palace at Parma. These are pieces in rococo style by B.V.R.B., Latz and Dubois. In Naples, Queen Maria-Carolina, perhaps following the example of her sister Marie-Antoinette, ordered lavish lacquer furniture from Daguerre, today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [477], as well as a table with porcelain plaques by Carlin which had formerly belonged to Mme du Barry [401].

In Spain, the Bourbon kings adhered closely to the French taste. In 1715 Philip V, through the offices of Robert de Cotte, ordered a bureau and a commode from Boulle for the Alcazar Palace, Madrid (see p. 70). Charles III later made the purchase, no doubt through his French clock-maker Godon, of several pieces of furniture in Paris. This explains the presence in the Oriente Palace, Madrid of several important pieces by Carlin, Levasseur and Benneman. In 1799 the departure to Madrid of Dugourc, the former designer of the Garde-Meuble Royal, increased the influence of the French taste in Spain at the end of the century.

During the 1730s in Portugal, King Jão V ordered sumptuous furniture from Paris for his palace in Lisbon. Everything disappeared during the earthquake of 1755, and the only traces left of these orders are in archival documents. It is known that Cressent received an order for a cartel clock representing 'Love conquering Time' in 1733. From an unpublished document (Arch. Nat. Y 12398) we learn that the following year a Parisian caster and chaser, Pierre Lourdet, had a commode and two encoignures in his workshop, intended for the King of Portugal, valued at 7,000 livres. Finally, it is known that B.V.R.B. was working in Lisbon before 1738 (see p. 184).

In England, where there was a prosperous furniture-making trade and where there was a greater desire for comfort than for ostentation, the taste for French furniture developed very slowly. French furniture sent to England during the eighteenth century was often acquired by ambassadors in Paris or by travellers making the Grand Tour. The bureau plat by B. V. R. B. at Temple Newsam, Leeds [173] was acquired by Richard Arundale before 1746. Towards the end of the century interest deepened. The fame of the great dealer Poirier, and then of his successor Daguerre, won them many orders. In 1765 Lord Coventry bought a 'bureau à la grec', probably by René Dubois, from Poirier, which inspired a series of English tables made in 1772 for Osterley Park. At the same time Horace Walpole bought various pieces from Poirier, including a clock, a secrétaire, a coffer and a table with porcelain plaques, no doubt by B. V. R. B. or R. V. L. C. [181, 312], which were listed in an inventory of the contents of Strawberry Hill in 1798. Two bonheurs-du-jour with porcelain plaques by Carlin, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, came from Lord Spencer who very probably bought them from Poirier during a visit to Paris in 1773 or 1777. Later Daguerre also supplied numerous lacquer pieces to Lord Spencer which are today at Althorp. A consignment in 1791 comprised two commodes and two encoignures in lacquer by Saunier, as well as two secrétaires en cabinet by Weisweiler. Other English clients bought furniture from Daguerre. Baroness d'Oberkirch mentioned in her memoirs in 1784 'a sumptuous buffet' ordered by the Duke of Northumberland, which everyone was admiring at Daguerre's. Daguerre played an important part in the furnishing of Carlton House for the Prince Regent. Daguerre's English clientèle became so important after the Revolution that he decided to send some of his stock to London in 1791, and he opened a shop in Sloane Street in 1793.

Russia was interested in French furniture from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Shortly after the death of Louis XIV on 30 December 1715, the Tsar was offered the furniture from the King's bedchamber, the bed and chairs, by the First Gentleman of the Bedchamber who had been granted it according to prerogative. Rather than buy furniture from Paris, Peter the Great preferred to bring the decorator, Nicolas Pineau, to St Petersburg, together with a score of Parisian craftsmen. For their part, some Russian noblemen brought home sumptuous furniture from Paris. On return from his embassy to Paris in 1721, Baron de Scheulnitz brought back 'three commodes with marquetry in Japanese wood, one bureau in ebony, two large guéridons in gilt wood and two pairs of bellows with marquetry'. Royal gifts also fostered this taste. In 1745 Louis XV sent 'a bureau in kingwood with compartments decorated with bronze ornaments with serre-papiers and a clock in the middle' to the Empress Elizabeth. This piece was ordered from Hébert; it was in a 'new and dignified style'. Denis Roche described it thus:

1). A bureau de cabinet 6 pieds in length and 3 in width, of kingwood,

with compartments, cabriole legs, quart-de-rond, and other ornaments in gilt-bronze. 2). A small matching armoire, 3 pieds 4 pouces in width, to be placed at one end of the bureau. 3). A serre-papiers of about 3 pieds in height which is placed on the small armoire. 4). A clock treated in the same style to complete the serre-papiers. The ensemble belonging to the King and costing His Majesty the sum of 7,000 livres.

The registers of the *Présens du Roy* record this gift on 22 May 1745 and price it at 7,255 livres.

Other bureaux plats were ordered in Paris for Marshal Bestuzhev and Chancellor Vorontsov. The latter made a collection of fine furniture in his house at St Petersburg. In 1758 Louis XV presented him with several pieces, amongst which was 'a very fine commode of Japanese lacquer in relief decorated with its double cartel motif on the front and the sides with blue turquin marble, of $4^1/_2$ pieds in length . . .1,230L' and 'two very fine encoignures in Japanese lacquer, decorated with gilt mounts of a new shape, and bleu turquin marble . . .1,250L'.

The French ambassadors' sale of fine furniture in St Petersburg at the end of their postings enriched Russian collections. Soon the Russian enthusiasm for French furniture became so great, and imports so numerous, that the French commercial agent wrote in 1772: '[The Russians have decided to] engage workers in bronze and marquetry to make furniture which they are already copying very well and all kinds of other work in bronze in order to prevent the large consignments of this nature which are being sent from France.' This protectionist practice was instigated by Catherine II who seems to have preferred the furniture of Roentgen to that of the French ébénistes. The Tsarevich Paul and his wife Maria Fyodorovna, however, were passionately keen on Parisian objets d'art, and during their visit to Paris in 1782 under the names of the Comte and Comtesse du Nord, they placed orders with the marchands-merciers Daguerre and Granchez. Thus top-quality furniture with porcelain plaques by Carlin and Weisweiler was sent to Pavlovsk where it embellished the boudoir of Maria Fyodorovna.

It is evident that the popularity of French furniture abroad dates from well before the Revolution. And this explains the massive export of furniture to England, Germany and Russia that followed the sales after the Revolution and the fall of the Empire.

THE PRICE OF FURNITURE

The received notion that furniture was very expensive in the eighteenth century needs to be seriously reconsidered. First, new and second-hand furniture (called 'de hazard' in the language of the time) should be distinguished. Second-hand furniture was considerably cheaper, except for collectors' items such as Boulle furniture. At a time when the cost of the workmanship was a

less important factor than the price of raw materials, the price of a piece of furniture depended on the richness of its gilt-bronze mounts or the application of precious materials such as panels of pietra-dura, oriental lacquer or porcelain. Only this type of furniture fetched high prices, especially when the mounts were made to a new design. In fact, very little furniture had bronze decoration, besides the escutcheons and sabots, and usually bronze was varnished not gilded, and known as 'en couleur d'or'. The fashion for rich gilt mounts began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and led to a great increase in the price of furniture. Everyday furniture, with simple marquetry or veneering, always remained cheap.

There is no real standard by which to translate the livre of the Ancien Régime into modern francs. On the one hand, the monetary fluctuations (the livre contained 8.3 gm of silver during the seventeenth century and only 4.5 gm after 1726) and the constant increase in prices during the eighteenth century meant that on the eve of the Revolution the livre was worth only about half its pre-1690 value. On the other hand, average personal wealth during the period was much lower than it is today. Increase in personal wealth only got under way after 1830. This means that to translate old prices into modern francs at fixed rates would lead to absurd results. We could use, as the economists suggest, a worker's daily or annual salary as a comparison. During the seventeenth century the daily rate for a worker was about 15 sols (the livre had 20 sols), the annual salary about 300 livres. For example, that was the salary Boulle used to pay his sister and brother-in-law, Poitou, in 1674. During the eighteenth century daily wages varied between 1 and 3 livres, which amounted to an annual salary of about 500 livres. However, in a society such as that of the Ancien Régime, where there was an enormous differential between the resources of the rich and the poor, this is a yardstick of very limited use. At a time when labour was very poorly paid and when a large section of society did not have the means to acquire anything more than the basic necessities, this amounts to measuring luxury by poverty. It is better to diversify the means of comparison.

For the seventeenth century we have some interesting details in the *Livre commode des adresses de Paris*, published in 1692 by Abraham du Pradel, who gives, for example, the price of meals: 'You eat at an inn table [. . .], for 20, 30 or 40 sols [. . .] People who can afford only a very small sum can find small inns in any quarter of Paris where they can have soup, meat, bread and beer in plenty for five sols.' According to d'Argenson, it was possible to stay the night in these inns for one sou. At the same time, the salary of a captain in the King's army was 900 livres, while a grand lady such as the Princesse des Ursins lived on an allowance of 30,000 livres granted to her by Louis XIV. In 1700 the income and allowances of the Princesse Palatine amounted to 450,000 livres, which enabled her to pay the wages of 250 persons in her household. According to Annik Par-

dailhé-Galabrun (*La Naissance de l'intime*) the personal wealth revealed by probate inventories during the eighteenth century was less than 1,000 livres in 55 per cent of cases, between 1,000 and 3,000 livres in 24 per cent and above 3,000 livres in only 21 per cent of cases; and 35 per cent had less than 500 livres. Abraham du Pradel gives several prices for lodgings in Paris: 'A house [. . .] in the quarter of Saint-André-des-Arts, with three apartments, large poultry yard, coach-house, valued at about 40,000 livres, let at 1800 livres [. . .]' and 'a large house for sale with three apartments, two shops, 14 or 15 fireplaces, four stables for 30 horses, three cellars and a courtyard for 20,000 livres, rue Mouffetard'.

The current rate for furniture, as far as one can judge from Gole's inventory of 1684 (see pp. 50–51), ranged from 10 livres for tables in walnut or cedar and about 80 livres for walnut bureaux. Desks with marquetry of brass and pewter, which we now call 'bureaux Mazarin', fetched about 200 livres each and the most lavish furniture was priced at less than 1,000 livres. Boulle's prices were comparable, as recorded in the accounts of the Bâtiments du Roi. The coffer made for the Grand Dauphin in 1684 cost 700 livres. The seven tables supplied to the Ménagerie at Versailles in 1701 cost 6,400 livres in all. The famous commodes which he supplied for the King's Bedchamber at Trianon in 1708 cost 1,500 livres each and the other commodes which he supplied for the bedchamber of the King at Marly and Fontainebleau were valued at between 1,250 and 1,600 livres. By comparison with these prices the cost of furniture made by Cucci at the Gobelins was enormous: 30,500 livres for the cabinets of Apollo and Diana, 27,568 livres for lapis cabinets and 16,000 livres for the cabinets at Alnwick Castle [7]. These prices can be explained by the nature of the workmanship, but above all by the intrinsic value of the materials involved: lapis, jasper, agate, etc.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century prices rose considerably. Although the average annual salary was between 300 and 500 livres, it was also often lower. Amongst the domestic staff in the service of the Marquis de Marigny in Paris in 1778, the flunkeys and floor-polishers were paid 216 livres, whereas the 'chef d'offices' was paid the same as the concierge, 800 livres, and the chef 1,000 livres. The total annual wage bill for his Parisian household cost the Marquis de Marigny 4,800 livres. He also had to pay an annual allowance of 12,000 livres to his estranged wife. The annual income of a person of quality would have been in the region of 10,000 livres. Arthur Young puts the annual cost of living for a household with four servants, three horses and one carriage living in a country manor-house at 7,000 livres. In 1768 Marigny paid 700 livres for two paintings by Watteau, *L'Indifférent* and *La Finette* (Louvre), while two marine paintings by Vernet were bought by M. de la Borde for 5,000 livres at the La Live de Jully sale in 1770; Dutch paintings, then very fashionable, reached 20,000 livres in sales of the end of the century. The price of a bottle of Bordeaux was about 1½ livres.

Accommodation at this time was not a major expense for Parisians. However, if the rental for modest accommodation was about 100 livres, it reached 1,000 livres for a desirable place to live. In 1757 Joubert rented a whole house in the rue Saint-Anne for 1,250 livres and Necker paid the same amount in 1765 for a huge apartment in the Hôtel d'Halwyll in rue Michel-le-Comte. The range of disposable income was as wide as ever. If the lowest salaries were about 200 livres, the highest were several hundreds of thousands of livres. In 1772 the assets of Necker, one of the principal bankers in Paris, were estimated at seven million livres. When he became Comptroller General of Finance in 1786, his annual emolument was 220,000 livres. The range of salaries at the time was therefore at least a thousandfold. That of incomes was even wider. The income of the Court banker the Marquis de Laborde was 1,600,000 livres and that of the Duc d'Orléans 2,400,000 livres, according to Gouverneur Morris's Diary (2 October 1789). Choiseul, before his fall, lived on an income of one million, and the richest man in the country, the Prince de Conti, had an income of 3,700,000 livres in 1789.

Compared to these figures, prices of furniture in the 1770s and '80s look low: some tens of livres for walnut furniture and about 100 to 200 livres for veneered or marquetry furniture. In 1788 Bircklé invoiced the Garde-Meuble Royal for his walnut secrétaires at 60 livres, the tulipwood commodes at 96 livres, those in walnut at 125 livres, and those in bois satiné at 216 livres. These were simple pieces without mounts. The presence of gilt mounts could drastically increase the price. This is shown by the rates submitted by Riesener to the Garde-Meuble Royal in 1786. The same commodes were worth between 300 and 600 livres according to whether the mouldings were in mahogany or gilt-bronze (see p. 379). The sumptuous pieces were worth several thousand livres at that time, particularly pieces in Japanese lacquer, in pietra-dura or with porcelain plaques. We know the prices paid by Mme du Barry to the dealer Poirier for a series of pieces of furniture with porcelain plaques made by Carlin: 1,440 livres for a bonheur-du-jour in 1768, 1,800 livres for a jewel-cabinet in 1770 [423], 1,500 livres for a trictrac table in 1771; in the following year she paid 9,750 livres for a commode with porcelain plaques decorated with scenes after Watteau and Lancret, 5,500 livres for a small table decorated with a scene after Leprince [401], 2,400 livres for a small secrétaire and 2,640 livres in 1773 for another secrétaire, the plaques with a green ground of the same type [407]. Also in 1773 she bought a jardinière for 600 livres and a small table en chiffonnière of a popular type for 840 livres [428].

For certain finely detailed porcelain plaques the price could be very high: in 1780 the Comte d'Artois spent 6,000 livres on a guéridon which he gave to the Comtesse Grabowska in Warsaw. Lacquer furniture was sold for comparable prices: in 1766 Marigny bought a commode in a new style by Joseph Baumhauer from Poirier [240]. The price of 4,000 livres was high and Marigny took three years to

pay. The furniture that the Darnault brothers sold in 1785 to Madame Victoire for her Grand Cabinet at Bellevue was even more expensive: the commode made by Carlin [420] cost 6,500 livres and the pair of encoignures 5,400 livres. Marquetry furniture could, in certain instances, reach these price levels. Leleu's invoice for furniture made in 1772 and 1773 (see p. 338) includes some sumptuous commodes at between 2,500 and 10,000 livres. If we seek a comparison with modern prices, a commode by Leleu of a quality equal to those bought by the Prince de Condé sold in the late 1980s for 12,000,000 francs, which is the equivalent of at least ten times its price at the time when it was made. The difference between original prices and today's sale prices is not as extreme in the case of everyday furniture. In sum, the original range of prices was much narrower than today's range of antique furniture prices.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AUCTION SALES

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, auction catalogues did not categorize furniture as such. Only paintings, drawings, works of sculpture and intaglios were deemed worthy of coverage in a printed catalogue. In dispersals by executors, second-hand furniture, which was judged to be of little value, was sold by auction without a catalogue, or by the upholsterers. There was no catalogue in 1741, 1751 or 1752 when Louis XV sold in the Louvre and Tuileries the finest cabinets made for his great-grandfather Louis XIV. The situation changed half-way through the century: old pieces, particularly Boulle's, became collectors' items, eagerly sought after by enthusiasts. From then on catalogues included a chapter usually entitled 'Meubles curieux' or 'Meubles de Boulle'. Most of the sales were ordered by executors and followed probate inventories. Sometimes the catalogue even followed an inventory word for word. 'Inventory' became synonymous with the public auction sale: 'I bought these candelabra from M. Boucher's inventory,' wrote Marigny's agent with regard to two pieces bought at the sale that followed the death of the painter Boucher in 1771. Sales could be freely organized and numerous dealers had recourse to this procedure in order to shift their stock. Cressent was the first important marchand-ébéniste to make use of auctions. Three times, in 1749, 1757 and 1765, he tried to sell his stock of furniture and gilt-bronze mounts. In 1777 Julliot, the well-known specialist in Boulle furniture, put his stock up for auction after the death of his wife. Here we find, amongst genuine pieces by Boulle, pastiches made by Levasseur and Montigny on Julliot's initiative. The race was on. During the years that followed, numerous dealers put their businesses up for sale: Paillet in 1777, Lebrun in 1778 and in 1791, Dulac in 1778, Poismenu, a 'second-hand dealer' in 1779, Mme Lenglier in 1778, Dubois, a 'marchand-joaillier' in 1785 and again in 1788 following his bankruptcy, and Donjeux in 1793.

At the same time, several famous sales launched fine collections

of Boulle furniture onto the market: Jullienne in 1767, Blondel de Gagny in 1776, Randon de Boisset in 1777, the Comte du Luc in 1777, Vaudreuil in 1787, Calonne in 1788 and Choiseul-Praslin in 1793. During this period the price of Boulle furniture rose as much as that of Flemish paintings. The attitude towards old furniture had changed and the antique-furniture collector had been born. Presentation of catalogues was improved and descriptions were made more accurate. We can see from the catalogues of the 1780s, such as that for the Duc d'Aumont's sale, that all the modern auction house techniques were already in use: publicity, detailed descriptions, provenances, historical details, attributions to particular important ébénistes or bronziers, and even engraved illustrations of certain details. At the end of the eighteenth century the auction houses played a rôle in the art market comparable to that which they do today, even to the extent that dealers like Lebrun started their own salerooms alongside their galleries.

THE TRADE IN CURIOSITÉS

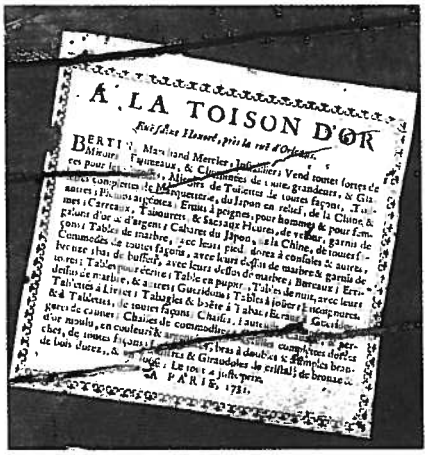
In the seventeenth century the furniture trade was divided between the ébénistes, the tapissiers (upholsterers) and the marchands-merciers. The marchands-merciers included furniture under the same general heading of 'curiosités' as shells, Chinese porcelain and scientific instruments. The 'curiosity' trade was located on the Île de la Cité near the Palais, and in the rue Saint-Honoré, near the Louvre:

> Here is a list of dealers who own shops, who buy, sell and trade in pictures, Chinese furniture, porcelain, crystal, shells and other decorative objects and jewellery: M. d'Hostel [Dotel], at the beginning of Quai de la Mégisserie; Malaferre and Varenne, quai de l'Horloge; La Fresnaye et Laisgu, rue Saint-Honoré [near the Fathers at the Oratory]; Quesnel, rue des Bourdonnais; Protais, rue des Assis; Fagnany, quai de l'Ecole [À la Descente de la Samaritaine']; Antheaume, behind the Hôtel de Bourgogne; Nancay at the Palais, etc.

These were noted by Abraham du Pradel in the *Livre commode des adresses de Paris* for 1692, where he also cites other addresses:

> M. Dorigny, rue Quinquempoix, M. Laittier and Mlle Le Brun at the Port of Paris also have fine pieces of porcelain and Chinese ware [i.e. oriental lacquer] [...] M. de Cauroy, rue Briboucher, has a shop for jewellery and English boxes, with pieces of porcelain, pierced terracotta pagodas and Chinese furniture [...] The Sieurs Langlois, father and eldest son, who copy and brilliantly restore Chinese lacquer furniture, are on the Grande-Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine near the Hôtel de Bel Air [...] They make exceptionally fine cabinets and screens in the Chinese style [...] Sieur Taboureux, who is on the quai de la Mégisserie near the Fort l'Evêque, makes very good copies of English coffers and locks.

It may be seen that the curiosity trade specialized in goods from the Far-East and from England. To buy everyday furniture, it was



Trade label of the marchand-mercier Bertin found on a bureau plat stamped Dubois. (Sotheby's Monaco, 24 November 1979, lot 146)

necessary to turn directly to the producers. Abraham du Pradel also wrote at the time: 'Cabinets, bureaux, bookcases and other furniture veneered in walnut, marquetry, ebony and cedar are made and sold along the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, at the Porte Saint-Victor, rue Neuve-Saint-Médéric, rue Grenier-Saint-Lazare, rue du Mail, etc.' Some of the production of the ébénistes was also sold by the upholsterers, a guild that was then very powerful (it was one of the principal suppliers of furniture, as fabrics played such an important rôle in furnishing in the seventeenth century). 'The tapissiers-fripiers [upholsterers and second-hand clothes dealers] are mostly grouped under the pillars of les Halles, rue de la Truanderie, Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, Descente du Pont-Marie and the rue du Grenier-sur-l'Eau.'

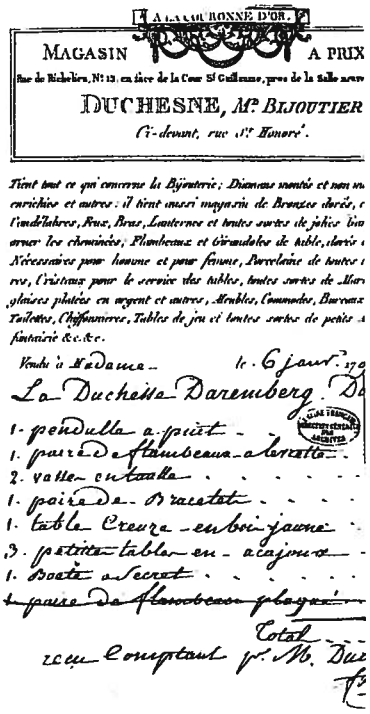
The fashion for silver furniture must not be ignored. This was apparently not only commissioned for royal palaces: 'Furniture in silver is beautifully made by M. Delaunay, silversmith to the King, in front of the Galeries du Louvre.' Finally, the reputation of the great ébénistes at the end of the century was such that the most important clients went directly to them: 'M. Cussy [sic] at the Gobelins, Boulle at the Galeries du Louvre, Lefebvre in the rue Saint-Denis at the 'Chêne-Vert' excel in furniture and other objects with marquetry.'

THE MARCHANDS-MERCIERS

In the eighteenth century ordinary furniture was sold directly by the ébénistes, whereas luxury furniture was sold increasingly through the dealers, then called the 'marchands-merciers'. The fashion begun by Boulle of decorating furniture with rich gilt-bronze mounts made its production very expensive. The ébénistes, who were always short of capital, gradually lost the initiative in the making of fine furniture, which eventually only marchands-merciers could afford to commission. The demands of a clientèle avid for luxury and novelty were such that the dealers scarcely knew what to dream up next. Some, like Hébert, dismantled Japanese chests in order to take out the lacquer panels and apply them to new pieces of furniture. Others, like Poirier, had porcelain plaques made at Sèvres to adorn certain small precious pieces. The rôle of the merciers was therefore essential as they were involved in the design of furniture as well as its sale, and they invented combinations of materials and techniques that would have been impossible for the ébénistes themselves to imagine, hampered as they were by the restrictions of their guild.

The definition of the marchand-mercier according to the *Encyclopédie*, 'dealers in everything – makers of nothing', is no mere sally. Their statutes allowed them to sell everything, including imported goods, but forbade them to make anything themselves. Thence comes the term 'marchand-mercier' – a deliberate use of tautology, since 'mercier' derives from the Latin 'mercator', which also means

'dealer'. This distinguished the marchands-merciers from the marchands-artisans (dealer-craftsmen). They handled a wide range of merchandise that included provisions, metalwork, fabrics and carpets, stationery, haberdashery (ribbons and braids), leather goods, jewellery and dressing-table accessories. Although not obliged under their statutes to do so, the merciers all specialized in certain goods. Three classes of merciers employed the ébénistes. The most important were the marchands d'objets d'art, who sold, according to Savary des Bruslons, 'paintings, prints, candelabras, brackets, girandoles of bronze and gilt-bronze, crystal chandeliers, figures in bronze, marble, wood and other materials, clocks, time-pieces and watches; cabinets, coffers, armoires, tables, shelves and guéridons with bois de raport veneers and gilt wood, marble tables, and other pieces suitable for furnishing apartments.' Most of the dealers mentioned hereafter belonged to this class. The marchands de miroirs specialized in toilet accessories and some, such as Delaroue, commissioned lavish pieces of furniture to match these articles (mirrors, chests and dressing-tables). The marchands-bijoutiers sold not only jewellery but porcelain and hard stones mounted in gilt-bronze, firedogs, candelabras and furniture. The word 'jewel' (bijou) was loosely used, and applied to anything precious whether furniture or object, so that the marchands-bijoutiers were generally synonymous with marchands d'objets d'art. Lazare Duvaux called himself 'bijoutier et joaillier'. Aubert, a former jeweller who had turned to dealing, sold furniture and porcelain as well as jewellery to the Comte d'Artois. Another marchand-bijoutier, Duchesne, who was established in 1791 in the rue de Richelieu at the sign 'A la Couronne d'Or', which he had taken over from Daguerre, sold bracelets as well as mahogany tables and clocks, as can be seen on a bill of purchase by the Duchesse d'Arenberg (see the illustration above right).


A LA COURONNE D'OR.
MAGASIN A PRIX
DUCHESNE, Mᵉ Bijoutier
Ci-devant, rue St Honoré.

Tient tout ce qui concerne la Bijouterie; Diamans montés et non mo
enrichie et autres: il tient aussi magasin de Bronzes dorés, c
l'imde'fabrics, Feux, Pelles, Lanternes et toutes sortes de jolies bin
orner les cheminées, Flambeaux et Girandoles de table, dorés
Nécessaires pour homme et pour femme, Porcelaine de toutes
ves, l'assortiment pour le service des tables, toutes sortes de Mar
glaces plattes en argent et autres, Meubles, Commodes, Bureaux
Toilettes, Chiffonnieres, Tables de jeu et toutes sortes de petits
fantaisie &c. &c.

Vendu à Madame — le 6 janv. 179
La Duchesse Darenberg. D
1. pendulle a pivot —
1. paire de flambeaux a torsade —
2. vases en tasse —
1. poire de Bracelets —
1. table Creuze en bois jaune —
2. petites tables en acajou —
1. boete a Secret —
1 paire de flambeaux plaqués —
Total —
reçu comptant pr. M. Duc

By the end of the eighteenth century, a marchand-bijoutier such as Duchesne, with a shop close to the Palais-Royal, could sell bracelets as well as furniture and gilt-bronze objects, as is confirmed by this invoice of 1791. (Arch. Nat. T/362)

Certain ébénistes who acted as dealers used trade labels in the same way as the marchands-merciers; this one for Séverin appears on a console made by Boulle. (Sotheby's Monaco, 22 May 1986, lot 554)


SÉVERIN,
MARCHAND ÉBÉNISTE,
A PARIS,
Connu pour la parfaite restauration des Meubles du célebre Brizet, a l'honneur de prévenir les amateurs français et étrangers, qu'il tient un Magasin desdits Meubles *rue des Prêtres-Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois*, N°. 22, *près le Louvre*, et que son Atelier est situé *rue de l'Abre-Sec*, N°. 50.
Il fait la Commission pour la France et les Pays Etrangers.

Les marchands-merciers were established not far from Les Halles, in the section of the rue Saint-Honoré between the Palais-Royal and the streets leading to the Pont-Neuf (rue du Roule and rue de la Monnaie). Hébert, Dulac, de la Hoguette, Julliot, Lebrun, Bertin, Tuart and the most famous of them all, Poirier, as well as his successor Daguerre, were all in the rue Saint-Honoré. Towards the Pont-Neuf, Lazare Duvaux, Calley and Darnault were in the rue de la Monnaie; Bazin was in the rue du Roule and Boileau on the Quai de la Mégisserie. Finally, the dealer Granchez's shop, at the sign of the 'Petit-Dunkerque', was by the exit from the Pont-Neuf, on the left bank of the Seine. Ébénistes who also wished to deal in furniture settled in the same quarter, between the Pont-Neuf and the Louvre, in order to attract the elegant clientèle of the marchands-merciers: Boudin was in the rue Froidmanteau and later in the Cloître Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois; Genty in the rue de l'Echelle; Joubert in the rue Sainte-Anne; Criard the Younger in the rue de Richelieu and later rue de Grenelle (now rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau), and in 1781 Roentgen chose to establish his furniture business in the same street. Antoine Héricourt, famous in the mid-1780s, was established

The superb wrought-iron balcony of this house situated on the corner of rue Saint-Honoré and rue des Prouvaires would certainly have overhung the shop-front of a marchand-mercier

in the rue Saint-Honoré opposite the Hôtel Montbazon. Finally, Séverin was established in the rue de l'Arbre-Sec and rue des Prêtres-Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

The principal marchands-merciers of the eighteenth century were the following:

GERSAINT (died 1750), marchand-joaillier, was established on the Notre-Dame bridge. His first sign, 'Au Grand Monarque', Watteau's famous painting now in Charlottenburg, reveals that he used to sell pictures as well as clocks with Boulle marquetry, consoles and mirrors. On the small trade label engraved by Boucher in 1740 there is a Chinese porcelain figure perched on a Chinese lacquer cabinet surrounded by shells, pictures and tea-sets. It reads: 'At the Pagoda, Gersaint, marchand-joaillier on the Notre-Dame bridge, sells all kinds of new and tasteful metal-work, jewellery, mirrors, cabinet paintings, pagodas, lacquer and Japanese porcelain, shells and other items of Natural History, stones, agates and generally all kinds of interesting merchandise from abroad.'

THOMAS-JOACHIM HÉBERT (died 1773), enjoyed the benefit of a special warrant as 'marchand suivant la cour' (dealer to the Court), known also as 'marchand privilégié du Palais' (approved dealer to the Palace). At Versailles these dealers were established in the lower Galeries and on the staircases of the Château. In Paris Hébert had his shop first on the quai de la Mégisserie at the sign 'A l'Écu de France' and then in the rue Saint Honoré. In 1745 he is mentioned as 'marchand bijoutier, rue Saint Honoré, vis à vis le Grand Conseil'. He married in 1714 Louise Dezgodetz who died in 1724, and then Marie-Jeanne Legras who died in 1763. He was renowned during the years 1737 to 1750, when he supplied the royal family with all kinds of furniture in Chinese lacquer or vernis Martin as well as with porcelain, clocks and chandeliers. The ébéniste to the King at the time was Gaudreaus, but the royal family preferred to use Hébert for any furniture out of the ordinary, and in particular for lacquer work, which seems to have been his speciality. It is probable that he was the first to have the idea of using panels of Japanese lacquer to decorate furniture; the oldest documented piece in Japanese lacquer is the commode stamped by B. V. R. B. which he supplied in 1737 for the private sitting-room of Marie Leszczyńska at Fontainebleau. For ten years he alone supplied furniture of this type to the Crown, which suggests that he must have had something in the nature of an exclusive right. He gave work to the ébénistes B. V. R. B. and Criard, entrusting the former with furniture in Japanese lacquer and the latter with furniture in vernis Martin such as the pieces supplied in 1742 to Mlle de Mailly at Choisy. In ten years, from 1737 to 1747, Hébert supplied more than forty sumptuous pieces of furniture to the royal family, including two commodes and a small bureau in Japanese lacquer, a dozen pieces in Chinese lacquer and the same

again in vernis Martin. In 1747 he supplied a suite of furniture in green vernis Martin to the daughters of Louis XV. The pieces with floral marquetry which he supplied in 1745 to the Dauphin and Dauphine were the first entries for floral marquetry, then a new fashion, in the day-book of the Garde-Meuble Royal. Hébert's success was prodigious. On the occasion of his daughter's marriage in 1751 to Dufour, the son of the first lady of the bedchamber to the Dauphine, the Duc de Luynes noted in his memoirs: '[...] daughter of the celebrated Hébert, marchand to the court, who will have a large inheritance [...]' He seems to have retired at about this time, having in 1752 obtained the post of 'Conseiller secrétaire du Roi, Maison, Couronne de France et de ses Finances'.

CLAUDE DELAROUE was established between 1746 and 1785 in the rue de la Verrerie in a shop at the sign of 'La Toilette Royale', where he sold furniture, mirrors, fabrics and everything to do with toilette. His father and grandfather had been 'lustriers du roi', (makers of chandeliers to the King), a title kept by his brother Jérémie and then his nephew until the Revolution. He himself was a marchand ordinaire, an ordinary dealer to the Court, and supplied the Garde-Meuble with chandeliers and girandoles as well as ébénisterie and meubles de toilette. He was purveyor to the Comte de Provence. (He supplied a jewellery-box in gilt wood and crimson velvet intended for the Comtesse de Provence on the occasion of their marriage in 1771.) He also supplied the Comte d'Artois with various meubles de toilette intended for Bagatelle or the Palais du Temple, including two commodes fitted with toilet accessories made by Dester, decorated with Paris porcelain plaques [378]. For Bagatelle he supplied a 'table mobile' which was both bureau and dressing-table, with marquetry in mosaic of blue wood and richly decorated with gilt-bronze mounts on a martial theme. For the boudoir of the Comtesse d'Artois at the Palais du Temple he supplied a writing-table in bois satiné, decorated with tôlework medallions painted with dancing figures in the classical style.

LAZARE DUVAUX (1703–58), son of a marchand bourgeois, was related to Thomas-Joachim Hébert and also to the great collector Louis-Jean Gaignat, who acted as a witness for him at his marriage in 1741. He entered the guild of marchands-merciers around 1740 and then, like Hébert, became 'marchand suivant la cour', dealer to the Court. Established first of all in the rue de la Monnaie, he moved to the rue Saint-Honoré where he rented a house from Hébert and probably took over his business. (The high rental of 6,000 livres for the building would suggest that Duvaux had taken over the entire establishment; furthermore, the period of Duvaux's success covers the years 1748 to 1758, overlapping to a certain extent Hébert whose name is not mentioned after 1752.) In 1755 Duvaux was appointed 'orfèvre-joaillier du roi' (silversmith-jeweller to the King). On his death in 1758, he left a large stock, evidence of his pros-

perity. The inventory (Arch.Nat. Min.Cent. XCIV/290) gives the names of his principal suppliers, including the ébénistes Joseph Baumhauer (credit of 1,726 livres); Jean-François Dubut (credit of 62 livres); Pierre Macret (1,169 livres); the Martin brothers, lacquerers; the clock-makers Moisy, Etienne Lenoir, and various bronziers including Osmont, Paffe and Vassou. The day-book in which Lazare Duvaux registered all his commercial transactions between 1748 and 1758 (published by Courajod, new edition by de Nobele, 1965) gives the names of his clients and records the whole range of his business operations.

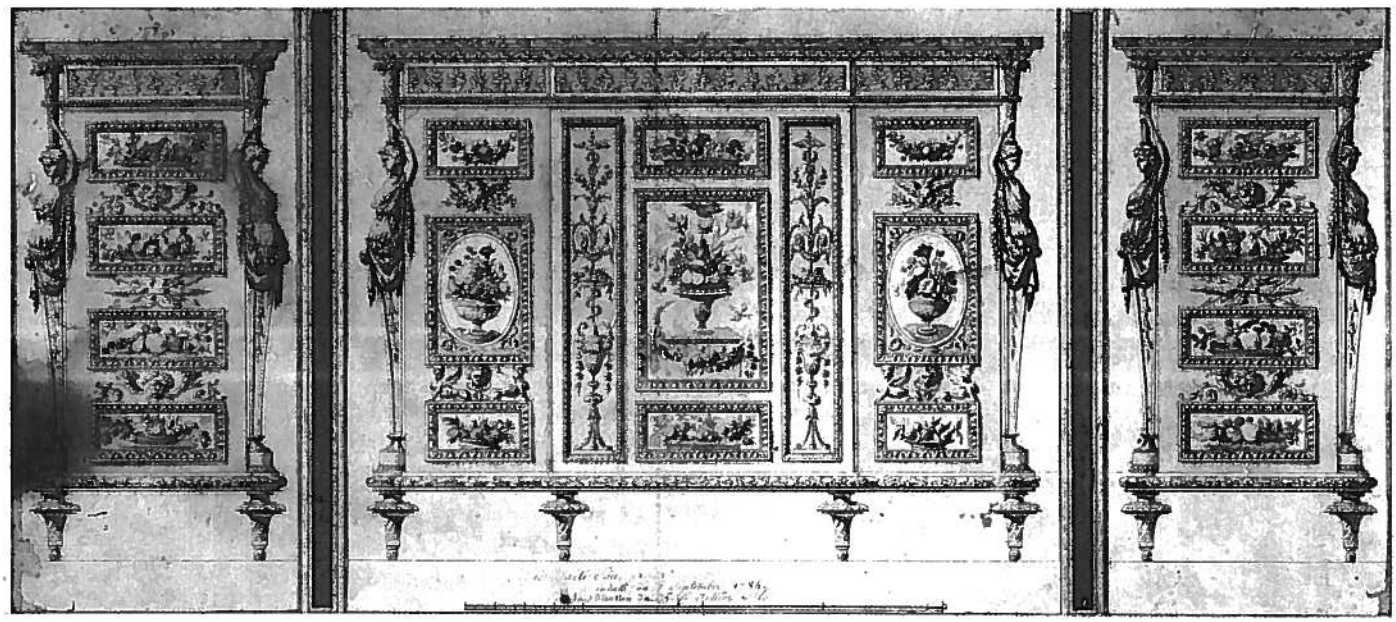
THE JULLIOT DYNASTY: CLAUDE-ANTOINE JULLIOT (died 1760); CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS JULLIOT (1727–94); PHILIPPE-FRANÇOIS JULLIOT (1755–1835). After 1739, the royal accounts mention 'Julliot, jeweller,' as supplier to the Crown. In that year Claude-Antoine Julliot supplied a rock-crystal chandelier for the Petite Galerie at Versailles. In 1740 and 1741 he supplied numerous objects in Chinese porcelain, as well as fire-dogs, girandoles and Chinese lacquer furniture, to Versailles. These included two commodes, one for Versailles in 1740 and the other for the bedchamber of Mlle de Mailly at Choisy in 1741, followed by two encoignures and two sets of corner shelves. In 1744 Julliot supplied 'a large bureau in amaranth decorated with six heads, of which two were of Bacchus, with escutcheons, handles, sabots and other gilt-bronze decoration.' This piece was intended for the King, for the Cabinet des Tableaux adjacent to the Petite Galerie at Versailles. It is possible, as Daniel Alcouffe has suggested, that this was a bureau by Cressent, since several pieces of furniture by Cressent were in Julliot's sale in 1777. In 1752 Julliot was the expert in charge of the sale, which took place at the Tuileries, of Louis XIV's cabinets in pietra-dura.

Son of Claude-Antoine Julliot, 'marchand bourgeois de Paris' and of a Mlle Février, Claude-François Julliot married Marguerite Martin in 1753. At the time he is noted as a 'marchand-bijoutier' on the quai de la Mégisserie. The following were present at the wedding: the agent of the King of Prussia, Mathieu Petit de Rougemont, the marchand-bijoutier Antoine Hazon, the marchand-mercier Rochinel de la Planche, and the casters Jean-François Prévost and Jean-Gabriel Dugué. The groom's assets were estimated at 6,000 livres.

While in the 1740s his father had specialized in chinoiserie, in the 1770s Claude-François Julliot made a speciality of the resale of Boulle furniture. Between 1769 and 1789 he was one of the main buyers of this type of furniture at public auctions. During this period he also commissioned pastiches by the ébénistes Levasseur, Joseph Baumhauer and Montigny. In 1777 he supplied a commode by Levasseur for the bedchamber of the Comte d'Artois at the Palais du Temple. The same year, following the death of his wife, there was a sale of Julliot's stock: besides some well-known pieces by Boulle, such as the coffers said to have belonged to the Grand

Dauphin [14], there were pieces by Joseph Baumhauer and Levasseur [244, 355]. The inventory taken after the death of Mme Julliot (Arch. Nat., Min. Cent. X/666, 5 November 1777) adds to the information given by the sale catalogue and confirms that the initiative in imitating Boulle furniture did indeed come from Julliot. There are descriptions of stocks of bronze models copied from Boulle (masks, corner mounts, eagle-head escutcheons, fringes, zephyr-heads and various unidentified figures in bas-relief which must have been copied from the furniture in Julliot's stock, decorated with the Seasons or the legend of Apollo). The bronze models were catalogued as 'models of ornaments in the style of Boulle suitable for bookcases', or 'models for commodes' or 'models for armoires basses', thus describing the three types of furniture which were a speciality of Julliot. The mention of 'eight ribbons in relief and nine unchased medallions' suggests that Julliot must have been making copies of famous armoires basses by Boulle with the figures of Aspasia and the Philosopher [32] decorated with medals. No doubt this was the origin of the pair of armoires from the Roudinesco Bequest (Versailles), which are stamped by Montigny and have medallions which are very obviously recast. In 1777 Julliot was established in the rue Saint-Honoré near the rue du Four (now rue Vauvilliers). He seems to have retired at this time. When he died in 1794 he was living in a house which he owned in the rue des Deux-Ecus. The inventory made after his death (Arch. Nat., Min. Cent. X/813) reveals that he no longer owned any stock of furniture or bronze mounts. His modest furnishing comprised a few pieces of furniture in mahogany or walnut. His assets amounted to 4,736 livres in cash and state bonds representing an annual income of 2,420 livres.

His son Philippe-François, known as Julliot the Younger



Sketch for a commode in pietra-dura inscribed 'This drawing was made for [?] on 7 September 1784 under the direction of P.-F. Julliot the Younger'. The piece was never made and the panels were ultimately used on various pieces of furniture by Weisweiler – see [491] and [492]. (Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris)

House of the dealer Pierre Le Brun, rue de l'Arbre-Sec, Paris

(1755–1835), became a dealer during the 1780s. The inheritance from his mother in 1779 as well as various loans and gifts from his father in 1782 and 1787 helped him to establish himself. He took over his father's shop at the sign of the 'Curieux-des-Indes' at the corner of the rue du Four and rue Saint-Honoré. He conceived the idea of decorating furniture with panels of pietra-dura from large, dismantled, seventeenth-century cabinets. A drawing (see p. 35) in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, signed 'Julliot Fils' and dated 1784, is a sketch for a commode close to the one in Stockholm [491]. The few recorded pieces using this technique were stamped by Joseph, Carlin and Weisweiler, all ébénistes who worked for Julliot or for Daguerre, the other dealer who also specialized in furniture in pietra-dura. Julliot the Younger was also expert in charge at the most important auction sales of the period: at the sale of the Duc d'Aumont in 1782, then at the sale of Montribloud's cabinet of curiosities in 1784, and finally at the Duc de Richelieu's sale in 1788. In other catalogues his name also appears as purchaser: in the Billy sale in 1784 he bought lot 175, a small secrétaire, 'decorated with four inlaid panels, in Florentine work', which can be identified as the secrétaire by Carlin recently acquired by the Louvre.

When his father died in 1794, Julliot was described as a 'négociant, rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, no. 392'. In 1802 while he was in jail at Sainte-Pélagie, there was a sale of his stock, winding up the activities of the firm of Julliot. The catalogue describes several cabinets and one commode in pieta-dura, along with some 'old' pieces by Boulle and many 'in the genre of Boulle', among them 28 low armoires, several cabinets, and pedestals of various shapes, some of which are described as 'unfinished', which shows that the production of pastiche Boulle furniture was still very active around 1800. On his death in 1835 he was described as a 'person of independent means living in Paris in the impasse Longe-Pierre near Saint-Jacques.'

PIERRE LEBRUN (died 1771) was established in the rue Saint-Honoré between the rue des Poulies and the Oratory, at the sign 'Au Roi des Indes'. He was recorded as still being there in 1765. He later moved to a fine house in the rue de l'Arbre-Sec opposite the rue de Bailleul, where he lived until his death in 1771. The catalogue of the sale after his death, which took place on 18 November 1771, described the assets of his business: 'paintings, drawings, prints, mounts, terracottas, marbles, different kinds of porcelain, interesting pieces of furniture by Boulle and other objects of curiosity which make up the business of the late Pierre Lebrun, painter of the Académie Saint-Luc, whose sale will take place in his house in the rue de l'Arbre-Sec, opposite the rue Bailleul . . .' He was the father of Jean-Baptiste Lebrun, husband of the artist Mme Vigée-Lebrun. Like his father before him, Jean-Baptiste Lebrun was an expert as well as an important buyer in the auction sales between 1776 and 1788, specializing in paintings and Boulle furniture. He used the

considerable funds accumulated from his wife's portrait-painting for his own business and commissioned the architect Raymond to build a large house on the rue du Sentier in 1785. Part of the house gave onto the rue de Cléry and was used as a sale-room; its Boulle pastiche furnishings were supplied by Levasseur [354]. Bad management forced him to put his collections up for sale in April 1791.

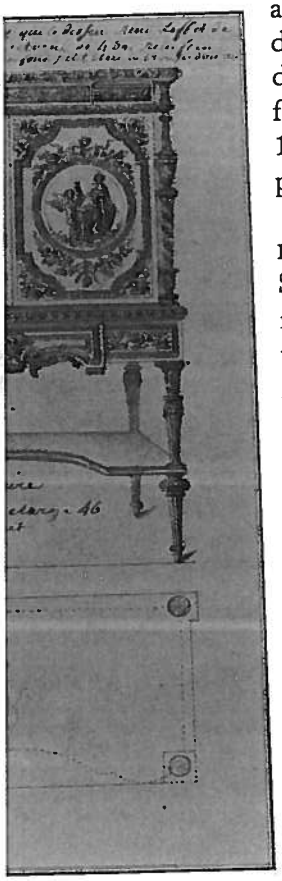
Trade label of the marchand-mercier Darnault found on a commode stamped Hansen. (Sotheby's London, 24 November 1988, lot 10)

DARNAULT AND HIS SONS. Established in the rue de la Monnaie at the sign 'Au roy d'Espagne', the business named 'Darnault et Compagnie' supplied the Garde-Meuble Royal from 1738 with various gilt-bronze wall-lights and lacquer étagères. During the 1750s Darnault often used the services of Joseph Baumhauer, as indicated by the presence of his business label on a lacquer commode in the J. Paul Getty Museum, a pair of commodes in the National Gallery of Washington and on a cartonnier in the Hermitage. He also used the services of Hansen, as confirmed by the label found on a commode en console in the Rosebery Collection (Mentmore sale, 18 May 1977, lot 141). In the 1780s the Darnault sons employed Carlin and Levasseur and became the main suppliers to Mesdames, Louis XVI's aunts, at their Château at Bellevue, supplying them with sumptuous furniture in Japanese lacquer (see pp. 344, 355).

SIMON-PHILIPPE POIRIER (*c.*1720–85), son of a marchand-mercier, in 1742 married the only daughter of mercier Michel Hécéguère who was also the niece of the well-known Hébert. At the same time he was received into the guild of the Parisian marchands-merciers. The large dowries (12,000 and 13,500 livres) from the two families enabled the Poirier couple to join the Hécéguère parents in the building occupied by them at 85 rue Saint-Honoré 'A la Couronne D'or', opposite the Hôtel d'Aligre. This partnership lasted until the death of Hécéguère in 1753. The inventory of the business drawn up at that time gives the names of their clients, who included the Prince de Soubise (who owed 26,577 livres), the Prince de Condé, the Garde-Meuble Royal, the Duchesse du Maine, the Cardinal de Soubise, the Duc de Duras, etc. Many ébénistes were employed by Poirier-Hécéguère: B.V.R.B., Dubois the Younger, Dubut, Garnier, Joseph, R.V.L.C., Lhermite and Tuart the Elder.

Trade label of the marchand-mercier Poirier at the time of his association with Hécéguère, at 'A la Couronne d'Or'; found on a table by B.V.R.B. (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva)

The size of the business is reflected in the high figures in the accounts: 27,088 livres in stock and 75,082 livres in credit. Later Poirier became one of the most important clients of the Sèvres factory. Between 1758 and 1770 he bought almost 700,000 livres worth of porcelain. From 1760 he ordered porcelain plaques from Sèvres to decorate furniture which he commissioned, first from B.V.R.B. and later from Joseph Baumhauer, R.V.L.C. and Carlin. Poirier had virtually a monopoly of these types of porcelain plaques from Sèvres. Furthermore, almost all furniture with porcelain plaques made during this period passed through his hands. This rare and expensive furniture attracted a prestigious clientèle. Between 1768



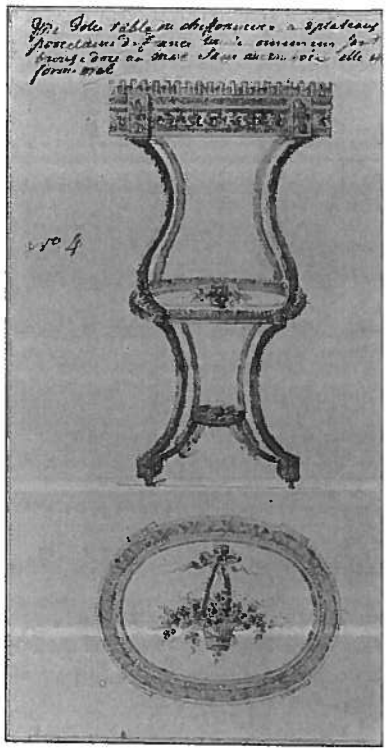
and 1774 he sold almost 100,000 livres worth of furniture to Mme du Barry. He also sold to the Duchesse de Mazarin, the Comtesse d'Artois, the Comte de Provence, the Marquis de Marigny, and foreigners such as the Earl of Coventry and Horace Walpole. In 1772 Poirier took Dominique Daguerre, a cousin by marriage, as a partner and made over his business to him in 1777.

DOMINIQUE DAGUERRE (*c.*1740–96), cousin by marriage to Simon-Philippe Poirier, became almost an adopted son to the Poiriers. At the time of his marriage in 1772, he became involved in their business and was given a stock of gilt-bronze models as a gift. As we have seen, in 1777 Poirier made over to him the management of the whole business, which at the time was very successful, with credit amounting to 505,929 livres and liabilities of 286,497 livres. In the same year Poirier became an associate of Francotais, but this relationship lasted only until 1781. A comment in the *L'Almanach général des marchands-négociants* for 1779 recommends 'Daguerre and Francotais for fine furniture with French porcelain plaques.' Like Poirier, Daguerre had made a speciality of furniture with Sèvres porcelain plaques although the volume of his purchases of plaques from Sèvres declined considerably after 1778. Daguerre entrusted his ébénisterie to Carlin until 1785, briefly to Schneider, and also to Saunier and Weisweiler. He also commissioned furniture in Japanese lacquer from the same ébénistes. The presence of identical bronze mounts on pieces made by these various ébénistes confirms that the bronze models did indeed belong to Daguerre. Daguerre also imported furniture from England, such as the two mahogany tables sold to the Comte d'Artois in 1779, and he reinterpreted the English styles in pieces such as the tea-tables which he had made by Weisweiler. He also had the idea of importing Wedgwood plaques from England (he had the sole agency in France from 1787) which he had mounted on small pieces of furniture made by Weisweiler. From 1777 he sold furniture to Mme du Barry [479], such as 'a small table in burr-mahogany with cameos and glass top, the legs in cluster columns of bamboo in gilt-bronze . . . 720L'.

During the 1780s Daguerre was the most famous dealer in Paris. Naturally all important visitors from abroad came to him, such as the Comte and Comtesse du Nord on their visit to Paris in 1782. The list of his clients spans the aristocracy (the Duc de La Force, the Maréchale de Mirepoix, the Comte de Médavy, the Comtesse d'Ennery, the Baron de Breteuil, the Duc d'Aiguillon) as well as bankers (Perregaux), the royal family and princes of the blood (Artois, Provence, Condé and Orléans). After 1785, when the Garde-Meuble Royal stopped employing Riesener and used Benneman for its current needs, the finest furniture intended for the King or Queen at Versailles and Saint-Cloud was bought from Daguerre. When a present was required for one of her sisters, the Queen turned to him. Her correspondence with Mercy in 1786 mentions one of the royal

gifts: 'I have asked the King, Sir, for the money which he is prepared to provide for the gift to my sister [Marie-Christine]. He is no more knowledgeable on the subject than I, but I do believe that a piece of furniture, decorated with nice mounts and above all with *good lines*, would be the best thing, and you can go to between 75 to 100 louis. I think that will repay, even with interest, for the King's pleasure in the wretched boxes which my sister gave him [...] Daguerre came this morning and the oval table seems to me to be perfect. It is also the one which my sister preferred the day she went to the dealer.' The Queen's sisters, Maria-Carolina, Queen of Naples and Marie-Christine of Saxe-Teschen, Governor of the Austrian Netherlands, in their turn became Daguerre's clients. It is probable that the latter ordered an important suite of furniture with porcelain plaques from him for her palace at Laeken. The only trace of this today is in a book of sketches in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see p. 5 and the illustrations at left and right).

In 1789 Daguerre became associated with Martin-Eloi Lignereux and began to forge business links with England. He supplied furniture to the Prince of Wales, to the Duke of York, Lady Holderness, Lord Spencer and the Duke of Bedford at Woburn. In 1791 he put his stock from France up for sale at Christie's. He died in 1794.



Designs for furniture mounted into porcelain that were made either by Carlin or by Weisweiler; the adulatory annotations would indicate that these sketches were originally part of a sale catalogue of Daguerre's stock. Other annotations in the same album would suggest that the majority of the pieces depicted did in fact belong to the Duchesse de Saxe-Teschen, Governor of the Austrian Netherlands, and were considerably damaged in a shipwreck off the Danish coast after the Duchesse de Saxe-Teschen had fled from Brussels before the advancing French Revolutionary forces. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

CHARLES-RAYMOND GRANCHEZ originally came from Dunkirk, where he had a shop at the sign of 'La Perle d'Orient'. He became a marchand-mercier in 1767, and in that year established a second shop called the 'Petit Dunkerque' on the quai de Conti, at the entrance to the Pont-Neuf. In Dunkirk as well as in Paris, Granchez's success came from the goods which he imported from England. Advertisements in *L'Avant-coureur* from 1767 to 1773, and then in the *Mercure de France*, reveal his growing success. In 1782 he had become one of the sights of Paris. Baroness d'Oberkirch who accompanied the Comtesse du Nord to Paris devoted a long passage to him in her memoirs: '28th May. We spent the whole morning running around the shops. We spent several hours at the Petit Dunkerque. It's the name of a jeweller on the approach to the Pont-Neuf. Nothing is so pretty or so gorgeous as this shop, filled with jewels and gold trinkets, which cost ten times the value of their materials. They sell at fixed prices and, even though the pieces are elegant and varied and the work exquisite, the dealer says that they are not expensive. And there are often so many people there that a guard is placed at the door. We chose the most fashionable piece, a little ornamental model of a windmill. Mme La Comtesse du Nord took a lot back to Russia with her.' It is not known what course Granchez's subsequent career took, but it is likely that the Revolution and the blockades that followed put an end to his trade with England.

In the creation of the fine furniture of the eighteenth century the rôle of the marchands-merciers was fundamental. At a time when most ébénistes had neither the means nor the artistic talent to

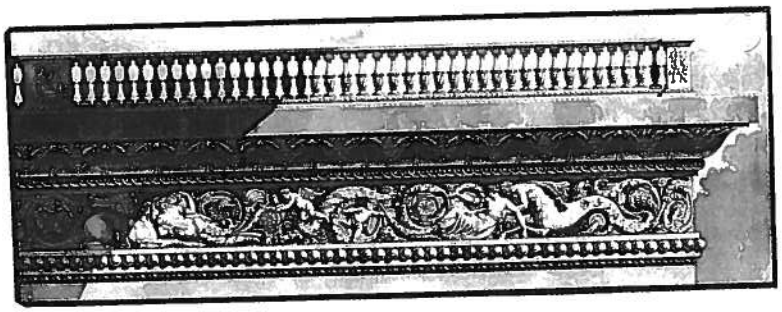
undertake the finest pieces of furniture, the merciers, who rubbed shoulders with architects, decorators, and most importantly, with a demanding clientèle, were constantly inventive. It was they who had the idea of marrying marquetry to precious materials; panels of Chinese or Japanese lacquer, porcelain plaques from Sèvres or Wedgwood, tôlework plaques imitating oriental lacquer, panels of pietra-dura or Boulle marquetry. They also invented many new types of furniture such as jewel-cabinets, the bonheur-du-jour or the secrétaire en cabinet, and numerous kinds of tables. They adopted new styles as fast as the most daring of the ébénistes.

With the exception of works by Cressent, Doirat, Latz, Oeben, Garnier, Leleu and Riesener, almost all the finest furniture of the eighteenth century was the result of the imagination and commercial enterprise of the marchands-merciers. Given this situation, the ébéniste appeared at the time to play a very secondary rôle, his talent being seen largely in craftsmanship of assemblage, the achievement of graceful curves and perfection of marquetry. It is therefore not surprising that ébénistes were described in contemporary records merely as 'workers'. In an invoice dated 1774 submitted to Mme du Barry relating to a table by Carlin, which is now in the Louvre, Poirier described Carlin's work as follows: 'invoice, order and delivery note for a tea-table with porcelain plaques, commissioned *from the workers* and the Sèvres factory.' A fine piece of furniture was often the work of a team with the ébéniste playing his part alongside the dealer who conceived the idea, the designer who created the form, the carver who supplied the bronze models, the bronzier who cast them, the craftsmen who chased and gilded them, and finally the lacquerer or the porcelain-painter who decorated the surface.

Nowadays, believing as we do in the idea of individual creativity, it is hard to understand the phenomenon of collective production. For this reason and partly also because of the existence of stamps, the history of furniture-making has recorded above all the names of the ébénistes. For practical reasons this study is organized along the same lines and covers sixty-three of the great ébénistes, who practised from the early years of the reign of Louis XIV, from around 1660 onwards, up to the Revolution. We shall need to be aware of the limitations of such an approach.

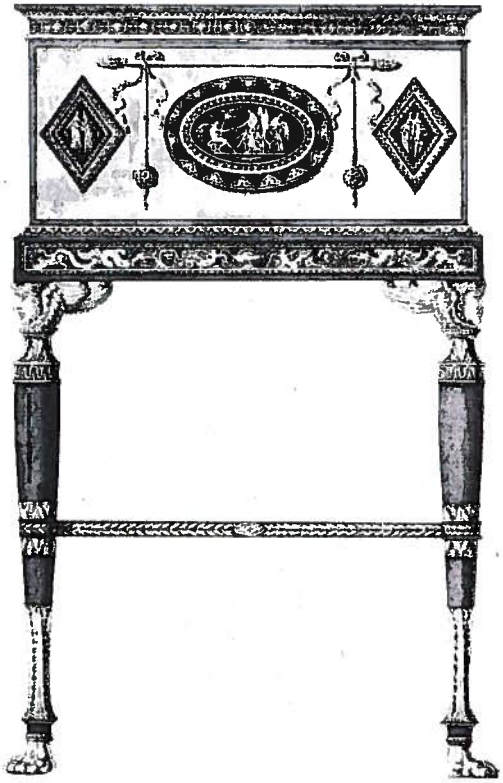
(right) *The bronze mounts on precious pieces of furniture at the end of the eighteenth century were of jewel-like quality, thus relegating the role of the ébéniste to a secondary one; it is not surprising, for instance, that we do not know the name of the ébéniste of this jewel cabinet. It was executed by the goldsmith Henry Auguste for William Beckford, the mounts being modelled by J.-G. Moitte in 1792. The cartouches are cameo-like, imitating Wedgwood. William Beckford mentions this piece in a letter of 27 February 1792 to William Hamilton: 'If the King of Naples is desirous of having good work in gold, silver or bronze, he should apply to Auguste . . . I think you will be enraptured with the furniture I am having made under his direction in the true spirit of Corinth and Athens.' (Private collection)*

(right, below) *Detail of the mounts on the jewel-cabinet shown above right.*



Design for a frieze in arabesque style for the coffer by J.-G. Moitte shown on p.41. (Formerly in the Odiot Collection; Sotheby's Monaco, 26 November 1979, lot 620)

Design by J.-G. Moitte (1746–1810) for the jewel-cabinet made for William Beckford; inscribed 'diamantaire de Lord Beckford', it was made under the direction of Henry Auguste, for whom Moitte executed numerous other designs for silver or furniture. (Sotheby's Monaco, 22 February 1986, lot 181)



binet in Japanese lacquer mped Weisweiler, made 1792 under the direction of goldsmith Henry Auguste William Beckford who is an avid collector of panese lacquer, with unts probably designed by J.-G. Moitte. The Hamilton Palace sale catalogue in which the piece featured in 1882 indicates that the medallions were painted by Benjamin West. (Private collection)

(right) *Design for a cabinet by J.-G. Moitte for Henry Auguste, c. 1792, probably commissioned by William Beckford. (Sotheby's Monaco, 26 November 1979, lot 619)*