

**EXCEPTIONAL PAIR OF MONUMENTAL TORCHES IN FINELY MOLDED
AND GILDED WOOD WITH MAT AND BURNISHED GOLD**



**ATTRIBUTED TO FRANÇOIS-HONORÉ-GEORGES JACOB, CALLED JACOB-DESMALTER
CARPENTER-CABINETMAKER OF THE FURNITURE STORE OF THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON**

PARIS, EMPIRE PERIOD, CIRCA 1810

DIMENSION: HEIGHT 102 3/8 IN

PROVENANCE: PRIVATE COLLECTION

27, Quai Voltaire, 75007 Paris

Their shafts shaped in baluster pillars, are underlined with bands and foliated stems punctuated with florets, and framed with pearls and olives friezes, with double rows of water leaves on top of it, where emerge patterns of tiny stems of crosses with foliated bases. The lower parts of the shafts have large Acanthus leaves on the top of which are bunches with double coiling ending in ear of wheat or florets. The upper parts, with bands in molded bulrushes and on the top falls of vine branches, shape bunches of waterleaves; and held the capitals in shafts with knurled bellies enlivened with ovum friezes. The overall stands on overturned bases, with Acanthus leaves ending in scrolls and framing small parts with bearded men masks of « antique style », and ribbons, held by tripod bases in leonine leg and faces of palm-leaf pattern, surrounded with facing crosses or coiling. Finally, some high triangular baseboards, with cut angles and re-entrant sides, hold the overall composition.

This pair of torches or columns of extraordinary and uncommon proportions, presents a drawing, male and indisputably influenced by the **Roman Antique** models discovered during the excavations of **Pompeii and Herculaneum**, that inspired more or less directly some famous Parisian decorators, painters and architects during the first years of the 19th century (as we can see in their archives, and particularly in the plate 75 of the *Collection and parallel of all sorts of buildings, ancient and modern* by **Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand**, edited in Paris c. 1800¹. It also inspired a drawing by **Jacques-Louis David** kept in a private collection in New-York². Finally, we can note that the same principle of tripod base with leonine patterns can be found on a torch or « floor lamp » that is reproduced on a plate of « details and adjustments from the studio of the painter C. (citizen) I. (Isabey) », edited in the famous Collection of Interior Decorations by the two architects Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Leonard Fontaine.

All dated from the last years of the 18th century or of the first years of the following one, these projects will have a determining role in the return to form of the decorative Arts wanted by the Emperor; their echo will go far ahead of the French frontiers and will gain most of the big European countries. In the specific field of the great-sculpted scenery applied to the light, a very specific type of torch makes its appearance that breaks with the slenderness of the models of the previous century and favors a powerful drawing and a neoclassical decorative repertoire. Because of the important cost of making process and of their uncommon proportions, these models were destined almost exclusively for the decoration of palaces and imperial castles, or ceremonial rooms of the great figures of the time, particularly the Marshalls of the Empire.

Among the rare copies listed of the same time and made in the same spirit, we can particularly name: a first pair of a whole of four torches, which was delivered in 1808 by Jacob-Desmalter and Cie for the throne room of the **Castle of Fontainebleau** and that still belongs nowadays to the collections of this castle³; and a second, still by Jacob-Desmalter, that was brought to the **Castle of Compiègne** in 1810 to complete the scenery of the **third Salon of the Empress' apartments**⁴; then a third pair that comes from a delivery of Jacob-Desmalter for the **Tuileries Palace** in 1808, and that belongs to the **Collections of the National Museum of the Castle of Versailles**⁵;

¹ Published in A. Dion-Tenenbaum, « The decoration collection », in the catalogue of the exhibition **The Eagle and the**

² Illustrated in A. Gonzales-Palacios, *Il Gusto dei Principi, Arte di Corte del XVII e del XVIII secolo*, Milan, 1993, p.37, fig.38

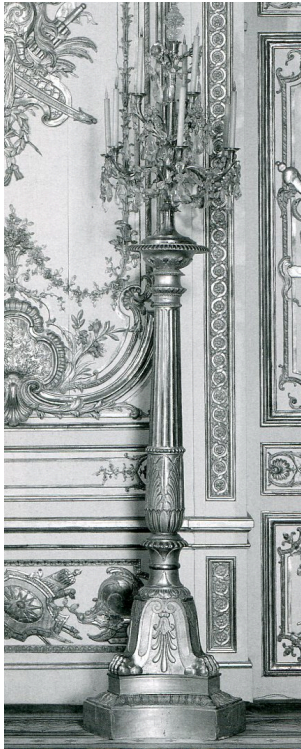
³ See for reference J-P. Samoyault, *Fontainebleau, National museum of the Castle, Catalogue of the collections of furniture 3, Furniture entered under the First Empire*, RMN, Paris, 2004, p. 330, catalogue n°264

⁴ Illustrated in J-M. Moulin, *Guide of the National Museum of the Castle of Compiègne*, RMN, Paris, 1992, p. 73

⁵ Published in P. Arizzoli-Clementel and J-P. Samoyault, *Furniture of Versailles, Masterpieces of the 19th century*, Editions Fatou, Dijon, 2009, p.163, catalogue n°47

And finally, we can mention a last pair of torches, of a row of three, delivered in 1810 by Jacob-Desmaller for the Throne Room of the Tuileries Palace and that is kept at the National Furniture of Paris⁶.

It appears that the common feature of all this lighting pieces is Jacob-Desmaller; the numerous techniques and styles that they share with the pieces we present is what help us to link them to the work of this carpenter-cabinetmaker considered as the most talented and innovative of his time.



Jacob-Desmaller,
Wood torch sculpted and gilded (of a row of four).
Paris, 1808.
Delivered for the Throne Room of the Castle of
Fontainebleau.
Collections of the National Museum of the Castle of
Fontainebleau.



Jacob-Desmaller,
Wood torch sculpted and gilded (of a row of six).
Paris, 1809-1810
Delivered for the Throne Room of the Tuileries
Palace.
Paris, Collection of the National Furniture

To this day, their provenance could not be stated with certitude. Indeed, with the absence of a castle mark and of inventory number, it seems that they do not appear in the Imperial collections under Napoleon. Furthermore, the ancient documents, mainly the inventory made after death, never describe, or well too briefly, this kind of pieces, often supposed to be linked with the decoration theme. However, we can cite one description from an inventory made in May 1817 at the Parisian hotel of Marshall Davout, who planned on renting it to his Highness Paul Prince of Wurtemberg; and this is what is said about the Music Salon: « Four big candelabras in gilded wood of six feet three inches of height with copper gilded balls on the top of them and carrying twelve lights each....the overall very pretty and that was never used and without any damage ». Their height, approximately 190 centimeters, doesn't match, of course, with the one of the pair we present, that are much more monumental; but this mention is indicative of the type of great personalities that could have order this kind of pomp torches, of such a sumptuous scenery and height.

⁶ Shown in J-P. Samoyault, **French Furniture of the Consulate and Empire, Paris, 2009, p. 245, fig. 425.**



FRANÇOIS-HONORÉ-GEORGES JACOB, SAID JACOB DESMALTER (1770-1841)

can be considered as the most important craftsman in Parisian seats of the first quarter of the 19th century. Younger son of the famous carpenter **Georges Jacob** (1739-1814), he marries in 1798 Adélaïde-Anne Lignereux, who is herself the daughter of the famous art dealer Martin-Eloi Lignereux. In the first times, he distinguishes himself with his talent for drawing, but then in 1796, he associates with his elderly brother Georges II Jacob (1768-1803), and they both take over the studio of their father, in the street of Meslée and called Jacob Frères. After the death of his brother, Jacob Desmalter becomes his father's partner, who came back in the business, and changes his stamp. After about a decade, they will be the official suppliers of the **Imperial Furniture Store** and some of the greatest amateur of the time. However, in 1813, the numerous delays of payment from the Imperial administration lead to the bankruptcy of the House Jacob. In 1825, he sells his business assets to his son for a comfortable life annuity income of 6000 francs a year. Freed from the load of his studio, he decides to travel, mainly in England where **George IV** asks him to participate to the scenery of the **Castle of Windsor**. He dies in Paris, in Cadet Street, on the 15th of August 1841.