

**ATTRIBUTED TO LOUIS FRANCOIS LAURENT PUTEAUX (1780-1864)**

GUÉRIDON TABLE KNOWN AS « THE TABLE OF RECONCILIATION »



PARIS, EARLY RESTORATION PERIOD, CIRCA 1815-1817.

DIMENSIONS: H. 31 ½ IN – D. 51 ¾ IN

PROVENANCE:

PROBABLY GIVEN BY CZAR ALEXANDER I OF RUSSIA TO GENERAL FRANÇOIS DE  
CHASSELOUP-LAUBAT, THEN BY SUBSEQUENT INHERITANCE

**27, Quai Voltaire, 75007 Paris**

The attribution of this guéridon, and the fact that it can be dated from 1815-1817, is established by the existence of three other tables by Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux. The first two of these come originally from the royal collections of Louis XVIII. The third and latest was ordered in 1830 by the City of Paris for a reception held at the Hôtel de Ville in honour of Charles X. Mme Droux-Puteaux, descendent of the cabinet-maker, later bequeathed it to the Musée Carnavalet in Paris (illustrated below in Fig.1).



Fig.1. Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux, Circular table supported by five lyre form legs, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, Inventory number MB235

Although there are strong similarities, the table of the Musée Carnavalet is some fifteen years later than the table presented here and can be excluded from our analysis. Only the two tables supplied by Puteaux for the Garde-Meuble of Louis XVIII are contemporary to our table and they merit further study because the composition of the tops are similar.

Both of these tables were purchased by the Garde-Meuble royal, the first in 1816 and the second in the subsequent year. The following is a partial description of the 1816 piece taken from D. Ledoux-Lebard, *Le Mobilier français du XIXe siècle, dictionnaire des ébenistes et menuisiers*, Paris, 2000, page 534: « Une table composée en marqueterie d'un genre étrusque ; sur le dessus et au centre est gravé sur ivoire le portrait d'Henri IV, et autour le chiffre de S.M. Louis XVIII, incrusté en nacre de perle dans l'écaille, et plusieurs autres emblèmes de la famille royale ; douze trophées en marqueterie représentant les Arts dans la frise...le dessus forme une mosaïque d'un dessin extraordinaire, composée avec diverses qualités de bois, la ceinture ou entablement, supportée par cinq lyres d'Apollon enrichies de tous les accessoires, ornements en bronze doré or mat ; en aplomb de chaque lyre sont les armes de France incrustées en nacre de perle dans l'écaille... ».

The second has a similar top at the centre of which lies the monogram of Louis XVIII. The border of the table is punctuated by trophies associated with fine art and decorated with medallions encircled by laurel crowns and the crest of France and the monograms of the Princes and Princesses of the Maison de France in mother-of-pearl.

The first of these tables, known as “au portrait d’Henri IV” was sold at auction by Christie’s in London on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1992, lot 59, purchased by Partridge (shown below in Fig.2).



Fig.2. Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux, Circular table in elm wood « au portrait d’Henri IV »,  
Private Collection

The second, known as “au chiffre de Louis XVIII” is part of the French national collection at the Château de Maisons-Laffitte and is kept in the bedroom of Maréchal de Lannes (Fig.3).

However neither of the two is in unaltered condition since all of the decoration that was linked with royalty was removed at some point from 1830. Only our example has been preserved in its original condition with its extraordinary decoration ; the most glorious of Puteaux’s works and the true masterpiece of his studio.



Fig.3. Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux, Circular table « au chiffre de Louis XVIII »,  
Maréchal de Lannes' bedroom in Maisons-Laffitte's castle

The supporting structure is veneered in Karelian birch: the base takes the form of a five-pointed star, while the five outside legs are composed of arrow shafts with the tips and feathering in delicately bronze gilt. The monumental central column is similarly decorated. This type of highly unusual design à l'antique with its strong military symbolism stemmed from the decorative compositions of the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the lavish nature of the design reflecting the importance of those who commanded the pieces, like the Comte d'Artois, brother of Louis XVI (see the catalogue *La folie d'Artois à Bagatelle*, Paris, 1988, p.133) or the projects intended for the powerful Marquis de Nesle (see *Le Faubourg Saint-Germain, Le Quai Voltaire*, Alençon, 1990, p. 155). Furthermore the arrow shaft was one of the most recognisable motifs of some of the most beautiful Empire-period pieces. It is to be found adorning the corners of the bed of Maréchal Soult, a work inspired by Charles Percier, and on the imposing central column of another magnificent guéridon known as "table des Grands Capitaines de l'Armée" where the work is attributed to the bronze-maker Pierre-Philippe Thomire. Similar to our table in a number of ways this guéridon is in the English royal collection at Buckingham Palace (illustrated in C. Huchet de Quénetaïn, *Les Styles Consulat et Empire*, Paris, 2006, p. 90).



Fig.4. Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux, Table des Grands Capitaines de l'Armée, Paris, 1810,  
English Royal Collections, Buckingham-Palace

The circular table top has a remarkable mechanism that allows it to disconnect from the rest of the table and swivel around. The entire surface is finely detailed marquetry: geometric patterns in tarsia geometrica laid out in a glorious rose-effect and composed of precious woods including sycamore, purpewood and karelian birch. At its heart lies a six-pointed star encircled by a laurel crown. The outer edge of the tabletop bears an exceptional frieze of twelve crests of weaponry in light-coloured wood standing out in a darker background of purpewood.

Between these lie twelve medallions of finely inlaid mother-of-pearl in which the monogram of Czar Alexander I alternates with the medal of the Russian Order of St Anne. These are encircled by laurel crowns of green-tinted sycamore.

The rim of the table is again veneered in the most extraordinary Karelian birch and above each of the legs there are five squares of a darker colour in which, laid out in mother-of-pearl, the coat of arms of the Russian Empire is displayed; a crowned two-headed eagle with its wings risen, it bears the shield of the Czar, in one of its claws it holds a cruciferous globe, a symbol of power, and in the other a lit torch, symbolising learning and knowledge. This latter motif, which replaces either a sword or sceptre, is exceptionally rare and was first introduced by Alexander I around 1815.



The glory of this table is that it brings together in perfect harmony a simplicity of design with the elegance of fine marquetry, its sumptuous veneer offsets the almost virile masculine strength that is exuded by the engraved bronze gilt.

The convergence of these elements is testament to the uniqueness and exceptional quality of the piece. Its unusual nature is further illustrated by the mother-of-pearl inlay work that is entirely dedicated to the Csar and to Russia, which allows us to ascertain that it was originally commissioned by Alexander I to be presented, at some point around 1816, as a gift to one of the most influential members of the new French political regime. The relationship between the Csar and Louis XVIII had its beginnings at the start of the 19th Century when Alexander I welcomed the future king, the Comte de Provence at the time, to Russia during his exile. The subsequent disastrous campaign in Russia hastened the fall of Napoleon and led to the re-establishment of the monarchy in 1815.

There were still at this time a number of experienced French officers who retained their royalist leanings even after the Revolution of 1789. One such officer was the député François de Chasseloup-Laubat who voted for the downfall of the Emperor as early as 1814 and then allied himself with Louis XVIII.

It is at this point we can imagine that the king's new ally Alexander I chose to not only honour his former opponent, Chasseloup-Laubat, with the Russian Military Order of St Anne, but also to present him with this magnificent guéridon which has since remained in the family and has become known as the "Table de la Réconciliation".

François-Charles-Louis de Chasseloup-Laubat (1754-1833) Comte de Chasseloup-Laubat and de l'Empire in 1808, then Marquis de Chasseloup-Laubat and Sénateur de l'Empire in 1813 (illustrated in Figure 5). As a general he had a distinguished record of service during the different Napoleonic campaigns, most particularly in Italy and Russia. Later, during the Restoration period he continued to take his seat in the Sénat. Having by this time grown wealthy he devoted himself to writing, notably his well known "Mémoires sur l'artillerie", and to the development of an audacious new system of fortification that can be seen at Invalides along side those of Vauban and Cormontaigne.

As homage to his courage and military accomplishments his name is engraved on the south side of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Louis-François-Laurent Puteaux (1760-1864) is arguably the most important cabinet-maker of the final years of the Empire period and the start of the Restoration, however relatively little of his furniture is known today.

Having developed a new method of working with exotic woods he came to Paris in 1812 to offer fine furniture with exceptional marquetry to the Comte de Montesquiou, Grand Chambellan de l'Empire,

who most probably went on to become one of his patrons. He set up his activity in the capital and quickly cultivated a significant clientele of those who were drawn to the perfection and magnificence of his furniture. However, as a probable consequence of his royalist leanings he would have had to wait for the fall of Napoleon before he was commissioned to work for the Garde-Meuble.

His fame brought him a number of important honours: in 1819 he received an honorable mention at l'Exposition des produits de l'Industrie française, then at the same event in 1823 he was awarded a bronze medal and was deeply flattered by the critical reception of his work. At the very peak of his fame he ceased to work as a cabinet maker and chose to concentrate on matters of business.

Bibliography :

- Anne FORRAY-CARLIER, Le Mobilier du musée Carnavalet, Editions Faton, Dijon, 2000, pp.262-265.
- Denise LEDOUX-LEBARD, Les ébénistes du XIXe siècle, 1795-1889. Leurs œuvres et leurs marques, les Editions de l'amateur, Paris, 1984.



Fig.5. Portrait of François, marquis de Chasseloup-Laubat (1754-1833) by Georges Rouget (1783-1869),

Oil on canvas, 1.27 m x 0,97 m, Versailles, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon,

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