

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



**François Linke (1855 - 1946)**

## **Le Bureau Du Roi**

Circa: Circa 1922

148 x 190 x 105 cm (58<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 74<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches)

Marquetry Gilt-Bronze

France

1922

The carcass stamped twice 'F. Linke' to the underside.

Linke Title: '*bureau du Roi Louis XV Musée du Louvre.*' The carcass stamped twice 'F. Linke' to the underside.

Linke Index No. 710

*Le Bureau Du Roi* - A Magnificent Secrétaire à Cylindre, by François Linke, after the model supplied to Louis XV by Jean-François Oeben and Jean-Henri Riesener. Undertaken by François Linke, circa 1922 and left unfinished at his death, recently completed through an ambitious restoration program with the assistance of the Linke archive.

The Bureau du Roi or Kings Desk is perhaps the most famous piece of furniture ever made and one of the most luxurious creations of the eighteenth century. The desk was ordered by Louis XV in 1760 from the Royal cabinet maker Jean-François Oeben for his private study and was completed approximately nine years later by Oeben's successor Jean-Henri Riesener. Adorned with lavish gilt-bronze mounts and remarkable symbolic marquetry, this magnificent cylinder bureau became an icon of Royal absolutism.

The breath-taking ambition of the design, combined with its regal history, guaranteed its fame to the present and made its recreation, the zenith of 19th century ébénistes ambitions.

The first copy of this celebrated Bureau du Roi was made in Paris by Carl Dreschler for the 4th

Marquess of Hertford between 1853 and 1870 and is now in the Wallace Collection, London. The complexity and fame of the Bureau du Roi led to the finest cabinet makers of the 19th century vying to recreate this spectacular tour de force. An important example was made by Henri Dasson in 1875 and exhibited at the Exposition Universelle of 1878, while Joseph-Emmanuel Zwiener exhibited his model at the 1889 exhibition. Patrons for such prestigious work included Ludwig II of Bavaria and Russian Tsar Nicholas II.

François Linke, however, was perhaps the ébéniste most inspired by the Bureau du Roi; three examples of the desk are noted in his green registre, completed in 1902, 1910, and 1922. The registre also notes a fourth unfinished desk, which would have been started at the same time as the example supplied to the King of Egypt in 1922, and restarted after the liberation of Paris on December 31, 1944. Interestingly Linke notes this desk in his Daybook, with no costs indicated for casting, mounting or chasing of the bronzes, confirming it as the present example.

In addition to recreating the celebrated desk itself, Linke in the ambitious manner of his 18th century precursor Guillaume Benneman, adapted elements of the design to create a bureau plat, a pedestal, a commode, a bergère, a large bibliothèque, and two pianos, all inspired by the design and mounts of the original desk.

Of the three original completed bureau's, the desk supplied to the King of Egypt remains today in the Abdeen Palace, on display in the King of the Belgian's suite. Of the earlier examples, one is noted as having been in the collection of the Duke of Buccleuch at Boughton House, Northamptonshire, England in 1934; the second, in 1967 in the possession of Madame Devisme, Paris, and subsequently sold in 1976, both of these desks now reside in important private collections.

As was his practice, Linke created two carcasses at the same time; the carcass and body of the present desk would have been created at the same time as the desk completed and supplied to the King of Egypt for the Abdeen Palace. The body of the desk was completed and the marquetry panels inlaid, but the costly mounting of the desk with gilt-bronze would have been postponed until a suitable client was found. Interrupted by the great depression of the 1930's and then the war, the desk, although fully assembled in 1944, was left ultimately unfinished at Linke's death.

Given unprecedented access to Linke's original master bronze patterns, held in the Linke Archive, the magnificent gilt-bronze mounts on the present desk have been cast and finished though an ambitious restoration programme painstakingly undertaken over the last six years to complete this last great work by Linke. The moulds for the mounts were destroyed following the casting, making this a unique and exceptional undertaking that can never be repeated. The present Secrétaire à Cylindre, finely restored and completed to Linke's exacting standards, therefore affords buyers a unique opportunity to own an exceptional example of one of the greatest pieces of furniture ever conceived, made by the finest cabinet maker of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Bureau de Roi:

*'Il n'est probablement pas au monde de meuble plus célèbre que le grand Secrétaire à cylindre.'*

Pierre Verlet

Without doubt one of the most important pieces of furniture ever made the Bureau du Roi was ordered by Louis XV of France in 1760 for his private study.

The construction of this extraordinary piece was started in 1760 by Jean-François Oeben, and finally delivered to the King in May 1769 after its completion by Oeben's successor, Jean-Henri Riesener. The desk, which took numerous craftsmen nine years of meticulous work to bring it to perfection, dominated Riesener's work during this period. In addition to the intricate marquetry and finely cast mounts, the roll-top desk mechanism was especially ingenious. It allowed the King to lock all his papers with a single turn of the key while cleverly still permitting servants access to the inkwells through the two side drawers.

The key an object of great beauty in its own right was designed by Riesener with Louis' double 'L' cypher' and was kept constantly in the pocket of the king. Originally the key had at its centre a small Sèvres porcelain medallion representing the king which was removed following the revolution.

Originally located in Louis XV's study at Versailles it was moved to the office of Napoleon's assistant in the Tuileries in an inventory of 1807. It was subsequently moved again to the grand salon at the Palais des Tuileries for a short time until transferred to Saint-Cloud by Empress Eugénie in 1855. In August 1870 it was at the Musée du Louvre before being finally returned to Versailles in 1957.

The extraordinary bronze mounts on the original desk representing Apollo and Calliope were modelled by Jean-Claude Duplessis père and cast and chased by Louis-Barthelemy Hervieu (maître 1749). As Riesener's notes indicate, there were no patterns for this desk as it was a pièce unique and the wax models were inevitably destroyed in the casting process.

Christopher Payne illustrates a bronze master model in the Linke Archive for the figure of Calliope, indicating that it corresponds exactly to the bronze master pattern used for the bronze mounts on the first nineteenth century copy, made by Dreschler in 1853, for Lord Hertford. It is possible, that as Henry Dason took over Dreschler's workshop in 1867, that he may also have acquired the bronze master patterns at this time and that they were subsequently acquired by Linke, however, there is no indication of how Linke obtained the models for these important bronze mounts in his records. (See Mestdagh p.77 & Payne p. 218).

The desk is further embellished with lavish marquetry with intricate detail depicting science and the arts to the roll top and front of the desk, with the sides further embellished with beautifully cast gilt bronze cornucopia issuing finely inlaid marquetry flowers.

Several alterations to the original design were made by Riesener himself during the post-revolutionary

turmoil of 1794, all of which were reflected in subsequent recreations of the desk. He removed the medallion with the king's effigy around the clock and replaced the intertwined 'L's on the side with Sèvres porcelain plaques imitating Wedgwood Jasperware plaques of the Three Graces and replaced the marquetry 'attributes of Royalty' in the centre of the roll-top with scientific instruments.

### **Literature:**

Payne, Christopher: 'François Linke, 1855 - 1946, The Belle Epoque of French Furniture', 2003., pps. 218-226, for a discussion on the Bureau du Roi and its variation; pl. 239, for an exquisite drawing of the Bureau du Roi in the Blue Daybook; p. 187, pl. 203, showing index number 710 at the 1905 Paris Salon du Mobilier Linke stand; p. 465, pl. 553, for a photograph of Linke's showroom in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine showing the Bureau du Roi; and p. 497, for a black and white cliché of index number 710.

Meyer, D: 'Versailles Furniture of the Royal Palace: 17th and 18th Centuries', Vol. I, p. 122-131; and R. Startmann-Döhler, Jean-François Oeben, p. 76, for illustrations and discussions on the 18th century model circa 1760-1769, by Jean-François Oeben and Jean-Henri Riesener.

Camille Mestdagh, 'L'Ameublement d'Art Français: 1850-1900, Editions de l'Amateur, 2010, p.76-78.

### **Artist description:**

François Linke (1855 - 1946) was the most important Parisian cabinet maker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and possibly the most sought after cabinet maker of his period.

He was born in 1855 in the small village of Pankraz, in what is now the Czech Republic. Records show that Linke served an apprenticeship with the master cabinetmaker Neumann, then in 1875 at the age of 20 he arrived in Paris where he lived until he died in 1946.

It is known that the fledgling Linke workshops were active in Paris in the Faubourg St. Antoine as early as 1881, and during this time he supplied furniture for other more established makers such as Jansen and Krieger.

The quality of Linke's craftsmanship was unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries and reached its peak with his spectacular stand at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, where his Grand Bureau took the gold medal. He gambled his fortune and reputation on this stand, exhibiting several breathtaking items of furniture with sculptural mounts of the most exceptional quality and proportion. His gamble worked and his reputation was established to such an extent that Linke continued to be the pre-eminent furniture house in Paris until the Second World War.

As the Art Journal reported in 1900 on Linke's stand:

The work of M. Linke ... was an example of what can be done by seeking inspiration amongst the classic examples of Louis XV and XVI without in any great sense copying these great works. M. Linke's work was original in the true sense of the word, and as such commended itself to the intelligent seeker after the really artistic things of the Exhibition. Wonderful talent was employed in producing the magnificent pieces of furniture displayed....

The formation of Linke's distinctive style was made possible by his collaboration with the sculptor Léon Messagé.

Together Linke and Messagé designed furniture for Linke's 1900 exhibition stand, with exuberant allegorical figures cast in high relief, that exemplified Linke's ability to seamlessly merge the different mediums of wood carving, bronze and marquetry into a dynamic unified whole.

Today Linke is best known for the exceptionally high quality of his work, as well as his individualism and inventiveness. All of his work has the finest, most lavish mounts, very often applied to comparatively simple carcasses of quarter veneered kingwood or tulipwood. The technical brilliance of his work and the artistic change that it represented were never to be repeated.