

Footnote Sotheby's New York (April 2011)

*Commode Louis XVI, reduction de commode Marie-Antoinette  
n. 203*

Linke Index number 904, dates to the 1920s

Linke's first model of this commode was a slightly larger version, started as early as September 1904 under index number 203. The Daybook entries are complex but it appears that the work went on intermittently with the gilding finished on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1901. No doubt the delay was due to Linke concentrating on the enormous amount of work needed to create his Gold medal winning display at the Paris *Exposition Universelle of 1900*, where he displayed in the main, his new creations with Leon Messager in a romanticised Louis XV style merged with art nouveau.

This model of a celebrated French Royal commission is an innovative updating of the original commode, slightly reduced in size. Linke was clearly adapting to the modern trend for smaller rooms but for a public who still enjoyed copies of French Royal furniture in their own homes. The marble top of the present lot is the original *fleur de pêcher* that Linke specified for this commode, a fine quality marble 4 centimeters thick. Linke originally retailed this smaller model at 5,500 French francs, whilst the larger model, 29 centimeters wider, was sold at 7,000 francs, rising to 25,000 francs with post war inflation in 1921. The present lot has two original keys, each marked in the specific manner, which seems to be consistently unique to Francois Linke, with the index or *registre* number, in this instance 904. Linke clearly had a meticulous eye and his fastidious attention to detail meant that the locks and keys, usually made by Linke's brother Clement, had the number stamped on them, on the flag of the keys and on the inside of the locks. These numbers were cross-referenced with the details of

costs and the individual craftsmen in the Linke 'Daybooks'. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century commode as altered by Benneman had Sevres plaques in imitation of Wedgwood. In the present lot, Linke has used genuine Wedgwood from England. It appears that one commode of this model was made in 1909, 1m 68 cms wide. Two further were made, cited by Linke as 1 m 54 cms wide, one in 1910 for stock and a second in 1912 for an unspecified client. All had the fleur de pecher marble top as in the present lot and Linke costed out the three Wedgwood plaques at 109 francs a set. A third small version was made for a Mr. Katzayantz in 1929. All models were with Wedgwood plaques but for the latter order Linke used two new plaques at a cost of 120 French francs the pair and one "ancienne" plaque that cost 315 francs on its own. Unfortunately Linke does not qualify his use of the word "ancienne". The last version in 1930 Linke spent 1,350 francs on the three plaques and in this instance does not specify the marble type or size.

The original model was conceived by Stockel but altered at the command of the *Garde-Meuble* by German-born Guillaume Benneman, master cabinet maker in 1785, died 1811. He worked as a cabinet maker to the Crown between 1786 and 1792. Alexandre Pradère in *French Furniture Makers*, Sotheby's Publications 1989, records him as a relatively unknown maker, employed by the *Garde-Meuble Royale* as an alternative to J-H Riesener who had become too expensive in the difficult economic climate and Benneman was seen as a refreshing change to the old guard of Royal maker. Due to almost contemporary alterations, the history of the two commodes now on display at the *Salon des Jeux* at Fontainebleau, is somewhat complex, one had to be enlarged for its new destination and a second made to take the elaborate scrolling foliate gilt-bronze mounts from the first.

Two other models of Royal commodes of similar scale, altered by Benneman at the command of the *Garde-Meuble* were also made by Linke, index number 776 and 777 both in the Louvre Museum, Paris. The intricate details of the latter model, made for the King of Egypt, are illustrated in Payne, *Linke*, p. 351, pl. 383.