



Important Directoire Period Clock - Cleopatra's Final Decision



4 500 EUR

Signature : Très Bel Atelier Parisien, à Rapprocher De Thomire Ou Ravrio

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Bronze

Width : 37 cm

Height : 50 cm

Depth : 11,5 cm

Description

This remarkable clock in finely chased and mercury-gilded bronze, made in Paris during the refined years of the Directoire (1795-1799), illustrates with rare intensity the final episode in the life of Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt. Through the nobility of its composition, the singularly refined quality of its chasing, and the serene harmony of its volumes, it ranks among the finest Neoclassical creations of the late 18th century. Its artistic value is confirmed by the existence of a virtually identical model in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, attesting to the truly museum-quality nature of this clock. The queen is depicted seated on an antique pedestal, in the solemnity of a suspended gesture. Her dignified features stand out gently as she extends her hand toward a basket of fruit

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placed to her left--to the viewer's right of the dial. This basket is not merely a decorative accessory: according to tradition recounted by Pliny and Plutarch, it was in a similar container, concealed beneath figs and other fruits, that the asp was placed, allowing Cleopatra to choose a sovereign death rather than the humiliation of a Roman triumph. The bronze sculptor captures here the fragile moment when the decision becomes destiny. Framing the white enamel dial, with its pure and classical design, two compositions echo each other. On the left, an Athenian woman holds a censer whose flame rises brightly, entwined with a serpent, symbol of transition, ritual, and fate. On the right, a column topped with a floral basket evokes the wealth and splendor of a reign whose brilliance extends even into death. The balance between these two motifs reflects the measured and erudite aesthetic characteristic of the Directoire period. The base, resting on six toupie feet, features in its center a large cartouche enlivened by a bas-relief of great delicacy: Cleopatra appears reclining, already faint, surrounded by figures come to witness her last breath, while Octavian stands near the bed, a witness to the tragic grandeur of his adversary. In the background, a bust of Julius Caesar recalls the alliances, ambitions, and passions that shaped the queen's destiny. The fineness of the drapery, the softness of the modeling, and the narrative precision of this frieze reveal a bronze caster at the height of his powers. The rounded sides of the base--a rare and precious feature in the corpus of Directoire clocks--are each adorned with an owl with outstretched wings, perched on a garland. An attribute of Athena, the owl embodies wisdom, foresight, and protection; Here, she watches over the scene as a discreet tribute to the last queen of Ptolemaic Egypt. In the ancient imagination, she also accompanies the soul's journey, a symbol perfectly suited to this funereal and heroic subject. The vigor of the chasing, the richness of the gilding, the balance of proportions, and the overall iconographic

coherence place this clock among the major works of its era. Its rarity--particularly due to its decorated sides--its subject treated with masterful elegance, and its exact parallel to an example held in a major European museum make it an exceptional work of art, destined for discerning collectors and lovers of the great narratives of Antiquity.