

# The History of the Maréchal de Villars Group

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PIERRE-PHILIPPE THOMIRE, considered the foremost *bronzier* of the period, was among the exhibitors at the 1806 Exposition Publique des Produits de l'Industrie Française.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time that a *bronzier* was allowed to participate in the show, and the first time that Thomire, who had recently bought Martin-Eloy Lignereux's shop at 41 rue Taitbout,<sup>2</sup> exhibited under his own name. Unfortunately, the official catalogue does not specify what he exhibited,<sup>3</sup> but it is possible to find references to individual objects in contemporary descriptions of the show. The report of the jury mentions that Thomire exhibited a "cheminée en malachite," as well as other chimneypieces, and had been awarded a gold medal for his work.<sup>4</sup> Newspaper descriptions add one other object: a "groupe représentant S. M. l'Empereur, tenant d'une

main la Victoire & appuyé sur Minerve, derrière est la Renommée publiant ses conquêtes."<sup>5</sup>

Thomire was obviously proud of the fact that he had been awarded a gold medal, the first given to a *bronzier*. In his New Year's advertisement for 1807, he mentions that in his shop:

L'on verra encore la garniture de malachite & la groupe en Bronze à la Gloire de S. M. l'Empereur, qu'ils [Thomire and Dutorme] avaient portés à l'exposition, & qui ont fait obtenir au Sieur THOMIRE la médaille d'or.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Thomire found that he could not sell his bronze group. Thinking no doubt that the most obvious buyer was the emperor himself, he sent two letters in April 1807 to the Minister of the Interior, asking him to arrange a visit of the empress to his

1. The information in this article is part of the research done for a doctoral dissertation on Pierre-Philippe Thomire for Columbia University.

2. Minutier Central, Etude XXIV, 1101, 1 Frimaire, An XIII. Act passed before Me Lahure. Thomire's own business association was formed the same day between himself, Dutorme, Carbonelle, and Beauvisage. The *marchand-mercier* Lignereux had exhibited in the second and third Expositions Publiques, and had been awarded a gold medal during the former. Thomire had worked for Lignereux and it is possible that he had exhibited under the merchant's name. The address of Thomire's shop changed sometime between 29 Pluiose, An XIII (Feb. 18, 1805) and Jan. 1, 1806, from 41 to 15 rue Taitbout.

3. *Catalogue des produits de l'industrie française, qui seront exposés pendant les derniers jours de septembre 1806, dans les cent vingt-quatre portiques construits sur la place de l'hôtel impérial des Invalides, et dans plusieurs salles de l'hôtel de l'Administration des Ponts et Chaussées, avec les noms et demeurs des fabricans et des artistes admis à l'exposition* (Paris, 1806) p. 51. The catalogue mentions only Thomire's name and address and that he exhibited bronzes. He was in the sixth room of the Hôtel de l'Administration des Ponts et Chaussées. See also *Athenaeum, ou galerie française des produits de*

*tous les arts*, no. 9 (Sept., 1806) pp. 1–6, for a general description of the exhibit.

4. *Exposition de 1806—Rapport du jury sur les produits de l'industrie française. Présenté à S.E.M. de Champagny, ministre de l'Intérieur, précédé du proces-verbal des opérations du jury* (Paris, 1806) pp. 206–207. See also *Notice sur les objets envoyés à l'exposition des produits de l'industrie française: rédigés et imprimés par ordre de S.E.M. de Champagny, ministre de l'Intérieur, an 1806* (Paris, 1806) pp. 206–207.

5. *Journal de Paris* (Oct. 7, 1806) no. 280, p. 2056.

6. *Feuilleton du Journal de Paris* (Jan. 1, 1807) no. 1, n.p. Thomire again described the fireplace and the bronze group in his advertisement of Dec. 23, 1807, specifying that the "garniture de cheminée" belonged to M. Demidoff. In the Demidoff sale at San Donato (Mar. 15 and following days, 1880), lot K of the "Cheminées et Avant-foyers" section, p. 415, is described as, "La cheminée en malachite du Grand Salon d'honneur avec médaillons anciens en pierres dures en relief à tiges en bronzes dorés, et bronzes dorés de Thomire." It was purchased by Federico Stibbert for 2080 francs and is now in the Museo Stibbert; see Giuseppe Cantelli, *Il Museo Stibbert a Firenze* (Florence, 1974) II, p. 109, no. 1074.

shop so that he could present the bronze group to her.<sup>7</sup> In a third letter dated August 7, 1807, he added:

J'estimerois tres heureux, s'il [Thomire] pouvoit le recevoir [the emperor] en son magasin pour voir ses ouvrages, mais comme il n'est peut-etre pas digne de tant d'honneur, il ose ici vous demander votre protection à l'effet d'obtenir de pouvoir placer ce Bronze dans un des passages le plus fréquenté de l'Empereur pour qu'il puisse fixer les regards, et dans le cas ou il daigneroit les y jeter il espere assez dans votre bonté pour trouver dans votre Excellence un appui et un protecteur: nous attachons un très grand prix à l'approbation de Sa Majesté; notre Bonheur en dépend.<sup>8</sup>

Attached to this letter is a note in two different hand-writings, the first part stating: "Ce monument en bronze a été regardé comme un chef d'oeuvre de l'art & comme tout à fait digne d'être présenté à S. M.—il a été fait dans cette intention"; and the second: "Je desirerais avoir une idée de la Composition et du Valeur de ce monument avant de la soumettre à S. M."<sup>9</sup> Though the answer to Thomire's request is not known, he mentioned in a letter dated six days later that:

Nous n'avons pas fait de dessin du Monument en bronze à la Gloire de Sa Majesté, que son Excellence le Ministre de l'Interieur nous demande par votre organe, d'ailleurs il ne rendroit qu'imparfaitement l'exécution, nous préférons le porter chez son Excellence.<sup>10</sup>

The period during which this correspondence took place was a difficult one for French industry. Thomire, despite his renown and the honors he had received, found himself, along with many other manufacturers, with a large amount of unsold stock. The government was extremely concerned, and in January 1806 began trying to decide exactly what should be done to alleviate the financial crisis.<sup>11</sup> Two imperial decrees resulted from these deliberations. The first, dated March 27, 1807, from Napoleon's camp at Osterode, opened a 6,000,000 franc credit to be distributed by the Caisse d'Amortissement as loans to those manufacturers who found themselves in financial difficulty. Unsold merchandise was to be held as security for moneys advanced. The loans were to be for one year, renewable upon approval, and no interest was to be charged except to cover the expenses incurred by the Caisse d'Amortissement.<sup>12</sup> The sec-

ond decree, dated May 11, 1807, from the imperial camp at Finkenstein, clarified exactly how the loans were to be administered and the consequences if the manufacturers were unable to fulfill their financial obligations.<sup>13</sup> Thomire requested help of the Minister of the Interior on May 20, 1807, and was told that he could possibly receive a loan "sur consignation" under the imperial decrees described above.<sup>14</sup> Sometime during the first few days of June, his shop was visited by Frochot, Conseiller d'Etat, Préfet du Département de la Seine, whose report to the minister was in favor of loaning Thomire 140,000 francs. This was approved on June 9.<sup>15</sup> For just over one year, between June 22, 1807, and July 7, 1808, Thomire supplied the government with objects valued at 186,666 francs to be held as security.<sup>16</sup> Though a specific list of these objects has not survived, the inventory Thomire submitted before the loan was approved opens as follows:<sup>17</sup>

1807 Soumission de S<sup>s</sup> Thomire Duterme/ Et Comp<sup>s</sup> fabricants de bronze/ rue Taitbout N<sup>o</sup> 15.

7. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 622. Two letters survive, dated Apr. 7 and 8, 1807. All documents are from the Archives Nationales in Paris unless otherwise stated. Original spelling has been retained, and punctuation added only where its absence made understanding difficult.

8. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 507.

9. Ibid. The first part of the note was probably written by M. de Gerando, Secrétaire Général du Ministre, the second by the Minister of the Interior himself.

10. Ibid., letter probably addressed to M. de Gerando, dated Aug. 13, 1807. It is not known whether the viewing actually took place.

11. See Ch. Ballot, "Les Prêts aux manufactures sous le Premier Empire," *Revue des Etudes Napoléoniennes* 2 (July-Dec. 1912) pp. 42-77. for a study of the financial crisis in France during 1807 and what action the government took. Also see A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 4639, for the minutes of the meetings of the Conseil d'Etat on Jan. 24 and Mar. 7, 1807.

12. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 4639. The interest could not exceed 2 percent.

13. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 1559.

14. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 2282. The minister's answer is dated May 25, 1807. The loan became known as the "consignation."

15. Ibid.; Frochot's report is dated June 8. The Minister of the Interior wrote three letters of approval, one to Frochot, one to Berenger, Conseiller d'Etat et Directeur de la Caisse d'Amortissement, and the last to Thomire himself. Thomire was to receive one quarter of the loan during the month of June, and one sixth of the remainder each month until the end of the year.

16. Ibid. A number of letters from the Minister of the Interior, Frochot, and Berenger specify on which dates merchandise was received during this period.

17. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 623, fol. 98.

N° 1 Un Groupe en bronze représentant S. M. l'Empereur tenant d'une Main La Victoire et appuyé sur Minerve derrière et la renommée publiant ses conquêtes, chaque figure porte 70 cent<sup>s</sup> de hauteur. . . . 12000 f

Nota. Cet objet est un de ceux qui a été porté à L'exposition et qui a mérité le suffrage des connaisseurs.<sup>18</sup>

Thomire was unable to repay his loan by the agreed date and repeatedly received extensions.<sup>19</sup> On September 17, 1811, by imperial decree from Compiègne, Napoleon decided to terminate the loans and take the merchandise as repayment.<sup>20</sup> By this date, Thomire had reimbursed only 20,500 francs, leaving an outstanding balance of 119,500.<sup>21</sup> On September 25 the duc de Cadore, Intendant Général, informed M. Desmazis, Administrateur du Mobilier de la Couronne, of the situation resulting from the emperor's decision and ordered him to receive the goods.<sup>22</sup> Desmazis took immediate action, but the list of objects was not drawn up until February 1, 1812,<sup>23</sup> in a separate register kept distinct from those that contained the inventories of the Garde-Meuble Impérial. All the merchandise from the "consignation" now belonged to the Trésor du Domaine Extraordinaire, which had taken title from the Caisse d'Amortissement once the

18. In his letter of Aug. 13, 1807 (see note 10), Thomire states of the bronze group that "il est compris dans la Consignation." The manufacturers had the right to sell the merchandise held as security, but each piece removed had to be replaced by one or more objects of the same value. Thomire's merchandise was left in his shop but was inventoried separately and guarded by an agent of the Caisse d'Amortissement. A large correspondence exists in which, because of complaints from Thomire, among others, it was decided to use a guard rather than padlocks for the areas in which the objects were stored. See A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 2282 for letters between Thomire and various government officials, and A.N., AF IV 959, doc. 272, for the final government decision on this matter. It is possible that not all manufacturers stored their own merchandise. In the anonymous work, *Le Palais royal—1829*, (Paris: Imprimerie de Gauthier-La Quionie, 1829) p. 45, the author states that, in 1814, "Le Duc d'Orléans ne puit habiter immédiatement le palais qui lui était rendu. Le domaine extraordinaire auquel, . . . il était réuni depuis 1807, l'avait rempli d'effets de toute nature. On en avait fait un magasin, un dépôt dans lequel se trouvaient entassés des objets d'ameublement de différentes sortes, et entre autres ceux commandés et achetés aux fabricants de Paris qui manquaient d'ouvrage, pendant la campagne de Prusse, en 1807."

19. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 2282, letters dated between July 23, 1808 and Aug. 13, 1810. In the final one, Thomire requests that the objects be taken in payment of his debt.

20. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 1232. Attached to this document is a summary

loans had been terminated. Under number 63 is the following description: "Un Groupe en Bronze Composé de Trois figures représentant Sa Majesté soutenue par Minerve et la Renomé publiant ses exploits. . . . 8000."<sup>24</sup>

Many of the objects of the "consignation" were used to furnish the imperial and royal palaces. As they were taken by the Garde-Meuble, whether during the Empire or following the Restoration, this organization paid the Trésor du Domaine Extraordinaire for them. Louis XVIII's government did not immediately deal with the problem of their ownership. Only on November 17, 1817, by royal decree, was it decided that the remaining merchandise belonged to the Domaine de la Couronne and it was incorporated into the regular inventories of the Garde-Meuble without payment.<sup>25</sup> The bronze group was included as number 2157 of the new inventory of 1817.<sup>26</sup> But as early as February of that year, an unofficial decision had been made to do this.<sup>27</sup> On February 13, Thomire's bronze group reappears in a report of an inspector of the Garde-Meuble: "M. Morquet dem[ande] à être autor[isé] à détruire un groupe et un buste qui feront partie d'une vente projeté."<sup>28</sup> The matter was referred to another inspector,

of what can be taken by the government. Under Thomire's name, is found: "Meubles propres à un Cabinet—1 groupe en bronze repres<sup>t</sup> S. M., Minerve et une Renommée," valued at 8000 francs. A second copy of this document is to be found in A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 156, doc. 461.

21. A.N., F<sup>12</sup> 4639, F<sup>12</sup> 1559, and F<sup>12</sup> 507, for the official reports on the state of the loan between 1807 and 1811.

22. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 541\*, fol. 189 and O<sup>2</sup> 156, doc. 459. The value of the merchandise received came to 544,378 francs, 60 centimes.

23. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 593\*. The objects supplied by Thomire are found on fols. 17–23. See also A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 505, dossier 27, doc. 2, for the official receipt for these objects, dated Mar. 12, 1812.

24. A.N., O<sup>2</sup> 593\*, fol. 22. Thomire's own *mémoire*, A.N., o<sup>2</sup> 505, dossier 27, doc. 4, contains the same information but is dated Feb. 12, 1812.

25. A.N., O<sup>3</sup> 1883, dossier 1 and O<sup>3</sup> 1884, dossier XII. The former contains the official report to the king, dated Nov. 9, 1817, which is approved on Nov. 17; the latter various correspondence of Oct.–Dec. 1817, informing branches of the government of the king's intentions and final decision.

26. A.N., O<sup>3</sup> 2137, fol. 53 and AJ<sup>19</sup> 606\*, fol. 80. Both registers contain the same description: "Un Groupe en bronze, Minerve, la Renommée, &c."

27. A.N., O<sup>3</sup> 1946\*, fols. 45 and 46.

28. *Ibid.*, fol. 51. No document has come to light concerning a possible sale of objects. There does exist the mention, in an

M. Veytard. On December 19, 1817, M. Veytard reported to the Intendant of the Garde-Meuble that the list of objects from the “consignation” was ready, but that, “on [n]’a pas compris dans ledit des vases un groupe &<sup>a</sup> chargés d’Emblèmes de l’usurpateur.”<sup>29</sup> The Intendant answered: “Le groupe, les vases &<sup>a</sup> sont peut être susceptible de restauration; il faut provisoirement les comprendre dans l’état des objets à détruire.” The following report, dated January 22, 1818, definitely identifies the bronze group from the “consignation.”

Note pour Monsieur le Garde Général des / Meubles et diamants de la Couronne / Objets à Detruire  
C. N° 63. Un groupe en bronze représentant buona-  
parte soutenue par Minerve et la renommée, prix de la  
Consignation. . . .8000 f

Dans l’état présenté au Ministre pour la reprise de la  
Consignation par le Gardemeuble, cet objet est porté à  
la colonne de la Consignation pour 8000 f et à celle du  
garde meuble pour mémoire étant à detruire.<sup>30</sup>

A note in the margin of this report states: “Rapport à faire pour que ces deux objets soient détruits, comme inconvenans.” But on February 23, 1818, the “Rapports de M<sup>rs</sup> les Inspecteurs” [of the Garde-Meuble] shows that a new decision was taken. “Le meme [the Garde Général] propose de faire placer dans un très beau groupe la tête du Marechal de Villars à la place de celle de Buonaparte, de recevoir à cet objet la soumission de M<sup>r</sup> Thomyre.”<sup>31</sup> Alongside is the Intendant’s reply: “C’était à M<sup>r</sup> Veytard à proposer cette

1814 list of objects which bear the insignia or likeness of members of the imperial family, of “un groupe ou se trouve Buonaparte” in the reserves of the Garde-Meuble (A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 1878, dossier IV). It is uncertain that this refers to the work under discussion.

29. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 1948\*, fol. 88.

30. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2103. The other object mentioned in the report is a bronze from the Elysée-Bourbon representing “Buonaparte assis pres d’une table, sans numero ni estimation,” which is possibly one of the bronzes discussed by R. G. and C. Ledoux-Lebard, “Deux Effgies peu connues de l’empereur dues au sculpteur Moutony,” *Institut Napoléon: Recueil de Travaux et Documents* (1942) pp. 33–46.

31. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 1949\*, fols. 32 and 33.

32. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2103. Three copies of this estimate exist. Thomire indicates that the main figure already represents the Maréchal de Villars. It is possible he does this to avoid mentioning Napoleon. The 1817 description of the group names only Minerva and Fame, and does not mention the fact that the third figure is the emperor (see note 26). The inscription added to

affaire, que pourtant j’approuve, faire rediger la soumission de M<sup>r</sup> Thomyre.” The estimate that Thomire submitted is dated February 25, 1818 and reads as follows:

Nous soussignés Thomire Duterme et Comp<sup>e</sup> fabricants de Bronzes et doreurs de Leurs Altesses Royales Monsieur frère du Roi, de Monseigneur le Duc de Berry et du Garde meuble de la Couronne, demeurant Boulevard Poissonniere N° 2 les ateliers rue Boucherat N° 7

Nous engageons envers Monsieur l’Intendant du Garde meuble de la Couronne a lui livrer et Confec-tioner le groupe en Bronze dont est parlé ci-après.

Savoir

La restauration d’un groupe de trois figures en Bronze, sujet allegorique, qui a été endomagé, représentant le Marechal de Villars, faire la tête de la figure principale et les ornements accessoires, faire sur la base une inscription. . . .f 400

Nous livrerons ledit groupe restauré au garde meuble de la Couronne, pour la somme susindiqué de Quatre cens francs.

Paris ce 25 fevrier 1818  
Thomire Duterme et Comp<sup>e</sup>.<sup>32</sup>

This document was sent to the comte de Pradel, Directeur Général du Ministre de la Maison du Roi, on March 3, 1818, along with a cover letter from the Intendant and the “Devis de la Depense à faire pour restauration d’un Groupe en bronze a trois figures.”<sup>33</sup> It was approved on March 25.<sup>34</sup> Thomire was paid the 400 francs for his work on May 6, 1819.<sup>35</sup>

the base was presumably *Denain 1712*.

33. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2113. Two rough draughts of the cover letter are found in A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2103. See also A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 1949\*, fols. 36 and 37, where it is indicated that the decision to send the minister the documents is made on February 28. See also A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2169\*, fol. 28, where the order for the “restoration” is registered.

34. *Ibid.* A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2113 and A.N. O<sup>s</sup> 1949\*, fols. 51 and 52. The latter register indicates that the matter was given to M. Veytard for “communication et exécution.” In the correspondence between the Intendant and the comte de Pradel, the main figure is always referred to as the Maréchal de Villars. See also A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2168\*, fols. 8 and 41, where the approval for the “restoration” is registered, and A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 573\*, fol. 69 for the same, here dated Apr. 8.

35. A.N., O<sup>s</sup> 2159\*, p. 368, for the registration of Thomire’s bill on Apr. 8, 1819, and p. 374 for the payment on May 6. The 400 francs were taken from the 1818 credit of 70,000 francs opened for “Dépenses Imprévues,” and not from the 1815 and 1816 credits opened to change Napoleonic emblems.

The “new” group, though, remained in the reserves of the Garde-Meuble. It figures in the 1833 inventory under number 5120:

1. Un Groupe en bronze Composé de 3 figures La Renommée, La Victoire et le Marechal de Villars tenant dans sa main droite le Genie de la Paix, portant à droite la palme & à gauche une Couronne dans la main droite de Louis XIV est placé une Branche de Laurier à ses pieds sont les drapeaux des Vaincus, la tout placé sur une Terrasse en bronze socle rond. h<sup>r</sup> 1<sup>m</sup>02<sup>c</sup>.<sup>36</sup>

Opposite this account is a note of the group’s exit, on October 16, 1839, for the Palais de Versailles, where it figures in the entry register for the same year,<sup>37</sup> and again in the general inventory drawn up in 1840, under number 6422, once more placed in the reserves.<sup>38</sup> Along with many other bronzes, the group returned to the Garde-Meuble on July 15, 1840, to remain there until 1850, when it was sent to the Palais des

Tuileries.<sup>39</sup> It figures in the Tuileries inventory of 1851 under the number 8794, again in the reserves;<sup>40</sup> on June 3, 1854, it was returned to the Garde-Meuble.<sup>41</sup> No exit order is recorded, but the bronze appears next in the inventory of 1855 of the Palais Royal, under number 752. For the first time since the work was originally acquired by the government in 1811, it was taken out of the reserves and placed on view in the first salon of the *grands appartements* of Prince Napoleon.<sup>42</sup>

The 1855 inventory of the Palais Royal remained in force until January 31, 1892, when a note indicates that it was closed. No exit order is recorded opposite the description of the group, so it must be assumed that it remained in the palace until then. At present, it has been impossible to determine where the group was placed after 1892, or how and when it left the French national collections.

36. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 627\*, fols. 180 and 181. There are several mistakes in the description, the most blatant being that the main figure is called both the Maréchal de Villars and Louis XIV. There is also some confusion as to whose hand is holding what. The bronze group is stamped with the number 5120 (see J. D. Draper, “The Fortunes of Two Napoleonic Sculptural Projects,” *MMJ* 14/1979 [1980] pp. 173–180, and n.2).

37. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 185\*, fol. 229. The group enters for “Service Général” under the number 6069. I would like to thank Mme Denise Ledoux-Lebard for having brought this document and the one cited in note 39 to my attention.

38. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 396\*, fol. 124. Placed in the “Magasin de Lustrerie.”

39. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 644\*, fols. 23 and 24.

40. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 191\*, n.p. Placed in the “Magasin de Lustrerie.”

41. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 683\*, fols. 26 and 27, under number 7382.

42. A.N., AJ<sup>19</sup> 134\*, fol. 151. This particular salon was in the Pavillon du Centre, Premier Etage. The bronze is stamped twice with the number *P.R* 752 (see Draper, “Two Napoleonic Sculptural Projects,” p. 173).