

# A *Meuble à Corbeil* in the Metropolitan Museum

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IN CATALOGING EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH furniture, one occasionally comes across a previously unrecorded inscription that provides information for a whole group of objects.<sup>1</sup> Such is the case with the table by the cabinetmaker Martin Carlin in the Robert Lehman Collection at the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

On the underside of the circular Sèvres porcelain plaque mounted on the top (Figure 2), Clare Le Corbeillier and I found the types of marks that are frequently painted on such plaques: the blue crossed Ls of the Sèvres manufactory, the date letter (Y for the year 1776), and the painter's mark (Y, the mark of Edme-François Bouillat, called Bouillat *père* [1758–1810]) (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> We also found the inscription "Meuble à Corbeil" (a piece of furniture with an open basket) that provides an additional name for a group of similar tables made by Martin Carlin for the Parisian dealers Simon-Philippe Poirier and Dominique Daguerre (Figure 4).<sup>4</sup> Most of these tables have mounted on the top a large circular plaque that was called a *grand plaque ronde* at the Sèvres factory, with three curved plaques called *quarts de cercle* just below.<sup>5</sup> Both types of plaques were made at Sèvres specifically for mounting on furniture.

A table of this type was used primarily for sewing and was often known as a *table en auge* (trough-shaped table), *table en crachoir* (spittoon-shaped table), or *table chiffonnière* (after *chiffon*, a piece of lace or ribbon), all three terms describing a deep rim or gallery around the top, the purpose of which was to prevent sewing materials from falling off. The term *meuble à corbeil* is puzzling only in the choice of the word *meuble* rather than *table*.

The Lehman table was part of a large group of furniture mounted with Sèvres plaques in the collection of the third lord Hillingdon that was acquired by the famous dealer Sir Joseph Duveen in 1936. Most of the Hillingdon collection had been formed in the



Figure 1. Martin Carlin (d. 1785). Table, 1776. Oak veneered with tulipwood, holly, and ebony, set with four soft-paste plaques from the Sèvres manufactory, gilt-bronze mounts, H. 28 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (73.3 cm), diam. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (40 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.2028)

nineteenth century by Sir Charles Mills, a partner in the London banking house of Glyn, Mills and Co., and passed down to his son Charles Henry Mills, who was raised to the peerage as Baron Hillingdon in 1886, and then by direct descent to the third baron.<sup>6</sup> Most of this furniture was acquired from Duveen by the Kress Foundation in 1947 and presented to the Metropolitan Museum in 1958. But not all of it. The

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Figure 2. Round Sèvres porcelain plaque mounted on the top of the table in Figure 1

Lehman table followed a separate path from Duveen to a Paris collector, Audrey Kilvert Taylor; to the New York dealers Rosenberg and Steibel; and then, in 1959, to the New York banker Robert Lehman, who gave it to the Metropolitan Museum together with his large collection of paintings, drawings, and decorative arts in 1975.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Clare Le Corbeiller for her help in studying the marks on the Sèvres plaques on this table and on several other pieces of furniture in the Robert Lehman Collection in preparation for the catalogue of furniture in this collection.
2. The table is round with a top of white Sèvres porcelain painted with multicolored sprays of flowers within a blue border. The top is surrounded by an openwork gallery of gilt bronze above a frieze mounted with three Sèvres porcelain plaques, one of which masks a drawer running the full depth of the top. The top rests on three straight supports mounted with gilt-bronze mounts in the form of pendant leaves and berries. A galleried undershelf, veneered with tulipwood radiating from a central rosette in a sunburst pattern, sits above three slightly splayed cabriole legs with gilt-bronze mounts in the form of acanthus leaves, the legs terminating in gilt-bronze scrolled feet. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Robert Lehman Collection for permission to publish this table.
3. For the variant forms of the mark of this painter, which was usually placed to the right of the factory mark, with the date

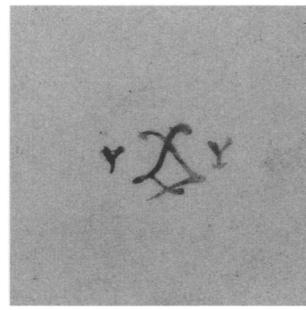


Figure 3. Marks on the underside of the round porcelain plaque in Figure 2: the crossed Ls of the Sèvres manufactory, with (on the left) the date letter Y for the year 1776 and (on the right) the painter's mark Y of Edme-François Bouillat, called Bouillat père



Figure 4. The inscription "Meuble à Corbeil" on the underside of the porcelain plaque in Figure 2

letter to the left, see David Peters, *Decorator and Date Marks on c.18th Vincennes and Sevres Porcelain* (London, 1997), p. 16.

4. There are a number of tables of this model. The ones most closely related to the Lehman table, with a round porcelain plaque on top and three segmental plaques on the frieze, are as follows:
  - two in the J. Paul Getty Museum (70.DA.74, 75). See Adrian Sassoon and Gillian Wilson, *Decorative Arts: A Handbook of the Collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, 1986), nos. 68, 69, and Adrian Sassoon, *Vincennes and Sèvres Porcelain: Catalogue of the Collections. The J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, 1991), nos. 33, 34, pp. 166–72;
  - two in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA 7624, OA 10468). For OA 7624, see Daniel Alcouffe, Anne Dion-Tenenbaum, and Amaury Lefébure, *Furniture Collections in the Louvre* (Dijon, 1993), vol. 1, no. 69, p. 228;
  - one in the Musée Nissim de Camondo, Paris (cat. no. 133). See Nadine Gasc and Gérard Mabille, *Le Musée Nissim de Camondo* (Paris, 1991), p. 39;
  - one formerly in the Stavros Niarchos Collection. See F.J.B. Watson, *Louis XVI Furniture* (London, 1960), fig. 122.
 On a variant form of this table, also with three segmental porcelain plaques on the frieze, both the top and shelf are veneered with tulipwood radiating in a sunburst pattern. Of this form there are many examples.
5. For an extensive discussion of the Sèvres production of porcelain plaques made specifically for mounting on furniture, see Sassoon, *Vincennes and Sèvres Porcelain*.
6. See James Parker, "Sir Charles Mills and the Hillingdon Collection," in *Decorative Art from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1964), pp. 116–19.