

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



CIRCLE OF CHARLES PERCIER (1764-1838)
AND PIERRE-FRANÇOIS-LÉONARD FONTAINE (1762-1853)

An Empire Candelabrum, in the Background Architectural Fragments in Front of a Wall

Pen and black ink, grey wash over pencil on paper; on the original mount.
Executed c.1810-30.
960 x 610 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Germany

This large-format, highly decorative drawing depicts an Empire *torchère* or 'candelabrum' crowned by a circular, fluted dish with a frieze of egg-and-dart ornamentation upon a baluster stem decorated with a band of Greek theatre masks, a row of dancing classical maidens and flowering acanthus above acanthus volutes on a tripartite plinth with seated, winged lions, the whole on a tripartite base with canted corners. The candelabrum is illuminated by powerful light. In the shaded background are antique architectural fragments set on boulders before a stone wall, amongst them a column shaft with Ionic chapter and a corner acroterion, both decorated with acanthus ornamentation.

This drawing was undoubtedly influenced by the work of the most celebrated architects and designers of the Empire period, Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine. From 1786 to 1792 Percier was in Rome, where he studied the architecture of antiquity. He published the results of his archaeological research under the title *Palais, maisons, et autres edifices modernes, dessinés à Rome* in 1798. With these drawings he launched the fashion of capriccios of architectural elements drawn with precision and an unparalleled finesse [Fig. 1]. He formed a lifelong friendship with Pierre Fontaine and, from 1792, a close working collaboration in the design of theatre scenery, architecture and interior decoration. As architects and *ornementistes* Percier and Fontaine produced designs that were instrumental in shaping the Empire style for Napoleon and which had a profound impact on the work of other contemporary artists and craftsmen.

In 1801, Percier and Fontaine published a *Recueil de décoration intérieure*. The illustrations include two candelabra [Figs. 2 and 3]. Directly inspired by ancient Roman models, which were originally used to support oil lamps, they closely relate to Bacchic candelabra dating from the second century AD, a prime example of which was excavated near Naples in 1777 and sent to Paris in 1798. This and a second, similar candelabrum in the Musée Napoleon were depicted by Henry Moses in 1811 [Fig. 5]. Nevertheless, the candelabra drawings by Percier and Fontaine are also typical examples of fashionable Empire design. The *Recueil de décoration intérieure* was used by craftsmen to produce carved or sculpted candelabra inspired by the illustrations¹ [Fig. 4].

¹ See Olivier Lefeuel, 'Percier et Fontaine', in *Connaissance des Arts*, Paris, 15 June 1954, no. 28, p. 35, reproducing a page of work in the Louvre from a set of designs by Charles Percier and Pierre François Léonard Fontaine for the Russian Tsar, showing a woman's bedroom with a *torchère*. – See also Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, 'The Percier and Biennais Albums in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris', in *The Burlington Magazine*, March 1998, p. 197, plate LV, illustrating a design for a candelabrum by Charles Percier for the Empress Joséphine, now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

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The present drawing is similarly inspired and its author must have known the illustrations of the *Recueil de décoration intérieure* by Percier and Lafontaine, as his candelabrum repeats many details of the candelabra on plate 23 [Fig. 3]. However, the author of the present drawing has also varied some of the details. The model by Percier and Fontaine is an outline drawing. The artist of the present work has transformed it into an image with strong three-dimensional qualities. Under the powerful light entering from the left the contrast between areas of bright light and deep shadow gives the candelabrum an extraordinary plasticity.

In addition, it is possible that the creator of this drawing also knew the antique model in the Musée Napoleon or the reproductions of the Manufacture de Sèvres executed in 1810 [Fig. 6].

That the author of this sheet drew on different sources is evidenced by the Ionic chapter in the background. It corresponds in numerous details with an etching by Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau (c.1510-c.1585) also depicting an Ionic chapter from a series titled *Détails d'ordres d'architecture* executed in the mid sixteenth century [Fig. 7]. Only the acanthus decoration and two figural details are additions by the creator of the present sheet.

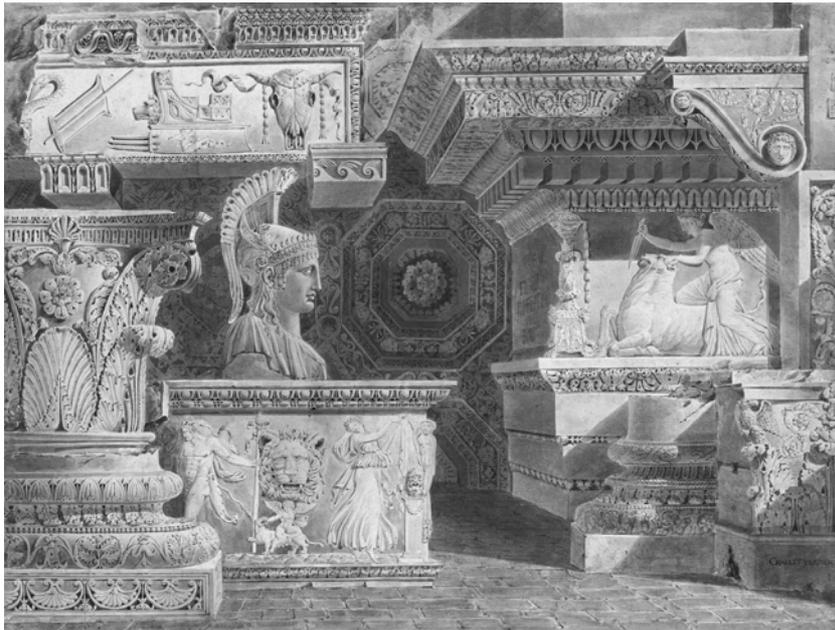


Fig. 1: Charles Percier, *Antique Monuments*,
pen and black and brown ink, grey and brown wash on paper, 385 x 505 mm.
Private collection, United Kingdom.

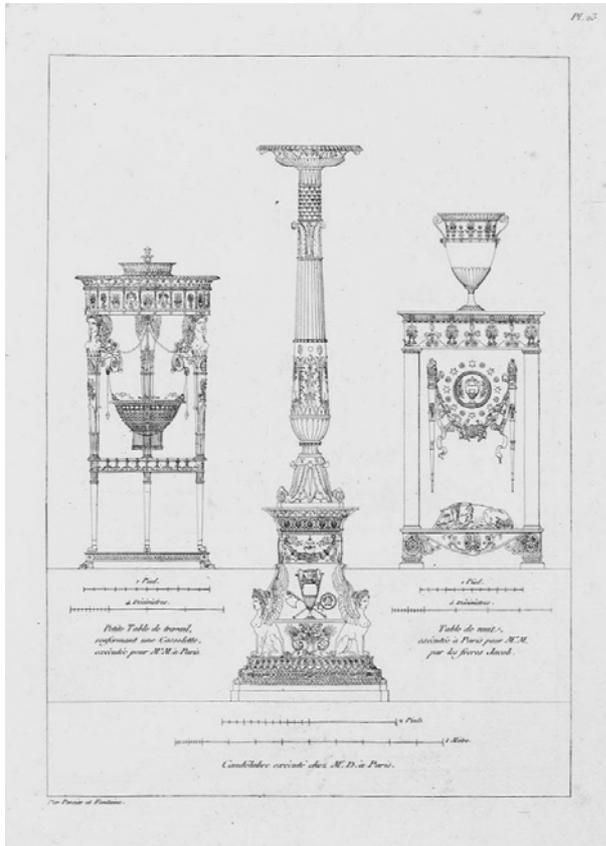


Fig. 2: Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine,
Recueil de décoration intérieure, Paris 1801, plate 23.

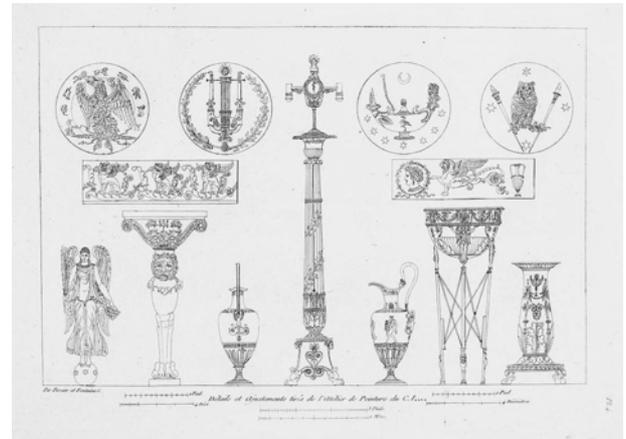


Fig. 3: Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine,
Recueil de décoration intérieure, Paris 1801, plate 4.

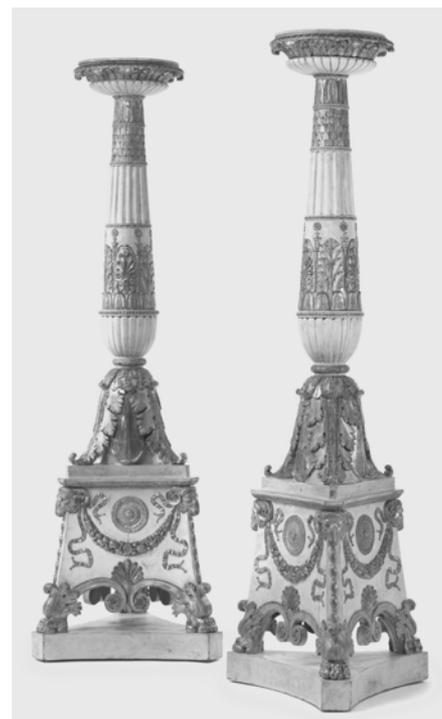


Fig. 4: After Percier and Fontaine, c.1810.
A pair of Empire *torchères*, parcel-gilt, white-painted
and carved, height: 235 cm.
Richard Redding Antiques Ltd., Switzerland.

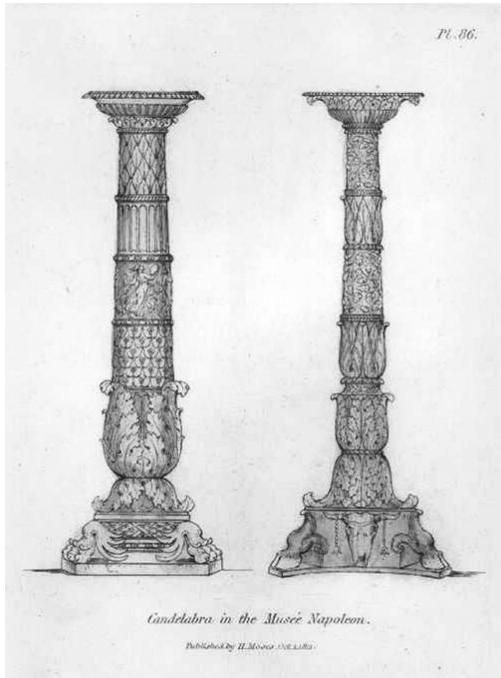


Fig. 5: *Candelabra in the Musée Napoleon*, Engraving with watercolour, c.1811, plate size: 14 x 10 cm. Published in *A Collection of Antique Vases, Altars, Paterea, Tripods, Candelabra and Sarcophagi, from various Museums and Collections*, Henry Moses, London 1811-4, plate 86.



Fig. 6: A pair of Sèvres biscuit *candelabra*, 1810, hard paste porcelain on yellow marble bases, height: 87 cm. From Napoleon's table service at the Palais des Tuileries. After the antique candelabra formerly in the Musée Napoleon, Paris. Musée du Louvre, Department of Decorative Arts, Don de Mme Akram Ojjeh 1997.

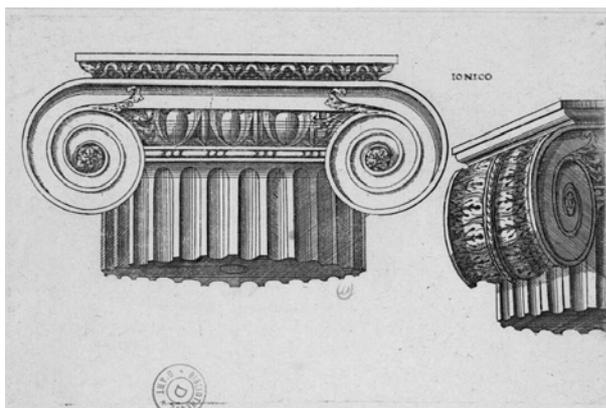


Fig. 7: Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau (1510?-85?), *Ionic Chapter*, etching. From the series *Détails d'ordres d'architecture*. Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire d'Art, Paris.