

# *A Silver Toiletry Set by Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot in Havana, Cuba*

**A**fter a three-year capital restoration the Napoleon Museum, located on San Miguel Street, in Central Havana, opened its doors to the public in the spring of 2011. In attendance for the opening ceremony was Her Imperial Highness the Princess Napoleon Alix de Foresta, widow of Luis Marie Bonaparte, a descendent of King Jérôme, Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother. Also in attendance were the French ambassador to Cuba at the time, Monsieur Jean Mendelson, and renowned chief historian and director of the famous restoration program of Old Havana Dr. Eusebio Léal who presided over the inaugurational ceremony.

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*by Karolina Stefanski*

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Havana's Napoleon Museum was originally founded in 1961 after the 1959 Cuban War for Independence with the historically significant Napoleon collection that previously

belonged to Cuba's wealthiest sugar baron Julio Lobo Olavarria (1898–1983). Today, known as the largest collection of Imperial items outside of Europe<sup>1</sup> it is housed in an

early twentieth-century Florentine Renaissance style house, once the home of Italian-Cuban politician, Orestes Ferrara, and named "*La Dolce Dimora*" ("The Sweet Home").

During my Master of Art research, I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba to examine the Napoleon collection, specifically the silver and discovered an early nineteenth-century silver toiletry set comprising of a pair of gilded jewelry caskets and an accompanying mirror, all produced by renowned nineteenth-century French silversmith Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot (1763–1850).

Dressing (toilet) tables were introduced in France in the early seventeenth century and called "*toilette*" by the eighteenth century. The name changed in the nineteenth century from "*toilette*" to "*coiffeuse*" and/or "*poudreuse*."<sup>2</sup> These sets generally consisted of a dressing table with a mirror, an ewer, a basin, a pair of candlesticks, a pair of caskets for jewelry, a powder container, a container for toothpicks, and sometimes snuffers and an *écuelle*.<sup>3</sup> Toiletry sets became increasingly fashionable throughout Europe and the silver ones were considered most precious and desirable and were usually the most lavishly and finely crafted.



*Fig. 1. A silver set that consists of three pieces, a pair of jewelry caskets and a swivel table mirror, for which the French term is *psyche de table*. The silver set was manufactured by French nineteenth-century silversmith Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot (1763-1850) and is part of the collection at the Napoleon Museum in Havana, Cuba. ©Rick Hadley Photography.*

Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot descended from a prominent silversmith family and learned his trade early on at home. His grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Odiot (1692–1767), established the high reputation of the Maison Odiot, founded in 1690. In the following centuries the Odiot silversmith studio grew into a successful family business. Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot's father, Jean-Claude Odiot (1722–1788), was active from the mid-eighteenth century and crafted lavish silver pieces in the rococo style fashion of the day. During this time, the Maison Odiot was considered one of the most successful silversmithing companies in Europe.

Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot received a master title<sup>4</sup> under the Old Regime in December of 1785. He was presented with a gold medal in the third *Exposition de l'Industrie de Paris* in 1802, along with a competitor Henri Auguste (1759–1816). In 1810, after Auguste faced bankruptcy, Odiot purchased designs and tools from Auguste's workshop.<sup>5</sup> It was soon afterwards that Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot reached the height of his prominence.

At the end of the First Empire period, Odiot began to craft tableware in a succeeding fashionable taste, a transitional style that was an embellishment on the Empire style and adapted decorative motifs and elements from the previous eighteenth century. The second quarter to mid-nineteenth century, this late Empire style celebrated a freedom of sensuality and imagination, and could be described as a reaction against, or a kind of liberty from, the rigid and symmetrical forms and geometric lines of the earlier neoclassical and First Empire styles.

The rediscovered toiletry set in Havana, Cuba, although crafted in a late Empire fashion includes early Empire decorative stylistic elements (Figure 1). Both jewelry caskets and the mirror carry Odiot's hallmarks and consist of cast subjects (miniature sculptures and appliqués) that are attached with bolts and rivets to the smooth surfaced pieces. This type of non-traditional soldering, called "cold soldering" (*sodure à froid*), was an innovation of Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot. He collaborated with sculptor and bronzier Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751–1843) who is said

to have been responsible for teaching Odiot the method. This procedure was advantageous to manufacturing because it facilitated a faster and more diverse and sometimes more affordable production of silver pieces for what was to be an emerging bourgeoisie class.

Both Havana jewelry caskets are supported on four feet in the form of spread-winged doves sitting in a laurel wreath (Figures 2a and b). Corinthian pilasters frame the sides of the rectangular façade of each jewelry casket with two busts of putti, their bodies ending in elaborated acanthus leaves and foliage.<sup>6</sup> The putti hold one laurel wreath around a cartouche that once had borne a monogram. Moreover, the caskets are decorated with arabesques, ribbons, thyrsus, and crowns, as well as birds and butterflies (Figures 3 and 4).

The casket covers display a dominant miniature putto sculpture in the center that serves simultaneously as the handle for the casket's cover. While one of the caskets presents a putto watering an olive tree, the other cover shows a putto engaged in harvesting fruit. The jewelry caskets were originally made of



Figs. 2a and 2b. The silver Odiot jewelry caskets from Havana rest on four feet in the shape of open-winged doves that sit in a laurel wreath. Other casket models, such as the ones from the Louvre collection, show different shaped feet, such as the vasisform. ©Rick Hadley Photography.



vermeil that has worn off over the years. The surface technique of vermeil<sup>7</sup> was commonly used during the French Empire period to express the splendor of wealth and prosperity.

According to French Odiot specialist Olivier Gaube du Gers, the Havana caskets were gilded in 1822. Gaube du Gers further explains that there was “a release of two jewelry caskets (4,977 grams) at a value of 700 francs from the Odiot workshop on October 9, 1822, with a note from a gilder ‘Henri’ indicating the same date for an amount of 376.50 francs - hence passing from polished silver weight of 4,952 grams to 5,032 grams, which corresponds to a load of gold of 80 grams for both caskets.”<sup>8</sup>

The rectangular framed gilded swivel table mirror, also referred to as the “*Psyché de table*,” is topped by a cornice with a seated nude female figure that is surrounded by two putti on either side representing the birth of Venus (Figures 1 and 5). The

triangular-shaped pediment shows a large ribbon held by the putti and the figure creating a loop above the figure’s head. A swan in profile featuring a rosette is placed on both corners of the pediment. Below the nude female’s feet in the center of the cornice are two medallions, each feature a dove with open wings that face one another and are surrounded by a floral motif. The cornice is supported by two separated egg and dart friezes. Beneath them we find a wide band of sculpted cornucopia attached with bows to tapered ribbed and flower-embellished columns forming a garland on which lay putti. Two putti are drawing their bows while others play with doves, referring to love and peace. Beneath this sculpted band is another very fine frieze of egg and dart. The swivel mirror frame that supports this cornice is covered with parallel typical French Empire motifs on each side: Cupid with his attributes, winged Victory, caduceus with grape vines, and the personification of

Psyche with butterfly wings. Each of these figures is separated by stylized palm leaves and various forms of palmettes. On each side, a three-tiered candelabrum embellished with palm leaves is attached. The swivel mirror itself is framed in a thin frieze of leaf-and-tongue molding.<sup>9</sup> At the frame’s base sits a putto on each side, with one playing the cymbals, and the other suggestively playing an instrument that has been lost over the years. Given the fact that the decorative motifs are analogous and that the putto’s hands are in a similar position to the putto on the opposite side of the mirror, it is assumable that both putti were playing cymbals (Figure 6).

Gaube du Gers explains that the nude figure “was sculpted by Pierre-Philippe Thomire due to an invoice from his atelier billed 70 francs and dated October 9, 1822,” and gilded by the gilder Henri.<sup>10</sup> This particular set was based on the design of the one produced initially for the



*Fig. 3. Both Havana jewelry caskets have identical designs with exception of the central putto above. This miniature sculpture serves as a handle to each casket cover. On the casket, the putto is shown watering an olive tree. ©Rick Hadley Photography.*



*Fig. 4. The mate to the previous jewelry casket shows a putto harvesting fruit. The iconography of the two putti – one watering a tree and the other one harvesting fruit – is considered a representation of masculine and feminine, together symbolizing conjugal love. (See: Anthony Phillips, and Jane Sloane, *Antiquity Revisited : English and French Silver-Gilt from the Collection of Audrey B. Love* [London: Christies Books, 1997], 124). ©Rick Hadley Photography.*



Fig. 5. The table mirror or *psyche de table* was based on Adrien-Louis Marie Cavelier's (1785-1867) model of a table mirror for the Fontainebleau bedroom of the Empress Marie-Louise. ©Rick Hadley Photography.

Empress Marie-Louise, second wife of Napoleon I, on the occasion of their marriage in 1810 for her bedroom at Fontainebleau.<sup>11</sup> According to Louvre curator and silver expert Anne Dion-Tenenbaum, the Marie-Louise set, which contained the semi-precious stones of lapis lazuli and mother of pearl, was melted in Parma in 1836.<sup>12</sup>

Dion-Tenenbaum also writes that the previously mentioned French sculptor and bronzier Thomire collaborated with Odiot on the Marie-Louise vermeil toiletry set. The original drawings were a collaboration of two artists: the renowned French painter Pierre Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823) who designed the *ronde-bosse* figures of the putti as well as the relief putti for the jewelry caskets and the stucco artisan Adrien-Louis-Marie Cavelier (1785–1867). Engravings made after the drawings by Cavelier exist to this day and were first published by Jean Antoine Pierron (active 1780–1812) and exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1812.<sup>13</sup> The original design of the Marie-Louise vermeil jewelry caskets

was also published by L. Ch. Soyer in 1822<sup>14</sup> (Figure 7).

My research is proof that the Prud'hon and Cavelier's toiletry set designs for Marie-Louise were used as a model for international orders. Russian Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) placed an order based on the Prud'hon/Cavelier design to be executed by Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot as a gift for his mistress and favorite princess Gagarine, Maria Antonova Naryshkin (1779–1854).<sup>15</sup> Naryshkin, an aristocrat, was Russian born as the princess Sviatopolsk-Tchetvertinsky and married Dimitri Naryshkin (1764–1838), governor of Crimea and brother of the Countess de Ségur in 1795. She remained Tsar's Alexander I mistress for fourteen years.<sup>16</sup> Tsar Alexander I ordered this toiletry set originally consisting of a swivel mirror, a water jug, a basin, and two jewelry caskets (Figure 1) during his Paris stay in 1821.<sup>17</sup>

Later, the Tsar's Alexander I toiletry set was turned over by succession to Alexander's younger brother Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855), emperor

of Russia from 1825 to 1855, who gave it as a gift to Russian General Nikolai Mouraviov – count Amourski (1809–1881), responsible for the development of Russian-Chinese relations during this term.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, Cavelier's drawing of Marie-Louise's mirror for her Fontainebleau bedroom was sold at auction at Artemisia Auction House in Paris (Figure 8).<sup>19</sup> The accompanying text from the auction catalogue also mentions the order of Tsar Alexander I to Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot.<sup>20</sup>

The Havana Odiot jewelry caskets are not only stylistically consistent but nearly identical with a pair that is presently in the Louvre collection in Paris, (Figure 9)<sup>21</sup> and a similar jewelry casket in the collection of Palácio Nacional da Ajuda in Lisbon, (Figure 10).<sup>22</sup>

The Louvre collection jewelry caskets were also surfaced of vermeil and are dated 1819–1827. Both are signed "J.B.C. / ODIOT" and also show hallmarks by silversmith Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot. Their decorative motifs, including the putti and their activities



*Fig. 6. The table mirror or psyche de table is a vertical mirror used primarily as a dressing mirror. Dimensions: 113 x 91 cm, Napoleon Museum in Havana, Cuba. ©Photography by Bruce Buck.*





(watering and harvesting fruit) are identical.

The one jewelry casket that exists in the Palácio Nacional da Ajuda in Lisbon collection (Figure 10) is marked with Jean-Baptiste Claude Odier's maker's marks and also created in vermeil. The rectangular casket rests on four feet shaped like winged doves. It shows extremely similar stylistic elements as the caskets in Havana, the corners are composed of square columns decorated in low relief with Empire style motifs. A pair of putti holds garlands and laurel wreaths and are surrounded by scrolls, foliage, and ribbons. The lid bears similar decorative motifs as the Havana caskets and represents a pair of sculpted putti, one kneeling, and the

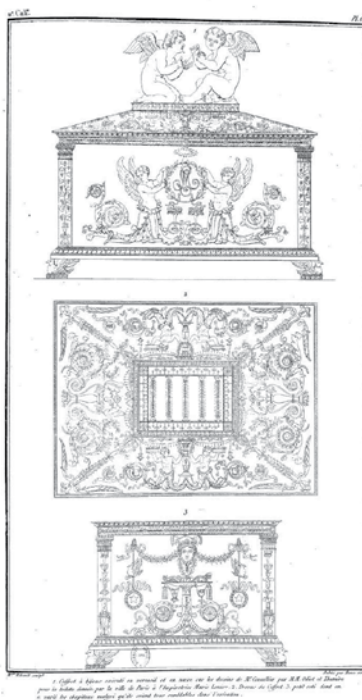


Fig. 7. L.C. Soyer's book, *Modèles d'orfèvrerie, choisis à l'Exposition des produits de l'industrie française au Louvre en 1819*, illustrates silver designs chosen for the Exposition of French Industrial Products at the Louvre in 1819. The collection of seventy-two illustrated plates includes drawings of the jewelry caskets for Empress Marie-Louise. ©Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

other sitting on a rock, both involved in rolling thread from a bobbin into a ball. The publication *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte* promotes the motif of putti engaged in themes of games and professions, such as woodwork, weaving and other traditional "artisanal professions" explains decorative arts scholar Chen-Chan Lieu. He writes that this type of motif was already popular in the eighteenth century and can be seen in the ancient paintings of Herculaneum.<sup>23</sup> The base and the rim edge of the Lisbon casket are framed by a tapered frieze of water leaves and beads.

In comparing the three existing sets, several differences are evident in the jewelry caskets: their feet, their sculpted groups of putti, and the slight different decoration of the surfaces. The Louvre collection caskets have four vasiform feet instead of the winged dove feet that support the caskets in Havana and Lisbon. The fact that the feet on the Havana and Lisbon caskets are different from those on the service in the Louvre, employs that Odier workshop had different molds available and easily tailored things to a client's specific taste.

Although the lid covers carry the same decorative motifs, the sculpted putti vary on two of the caskets. While the Louvre and the Havana caskets show the same theme of their *ronde-bosse* sculptures, the Lisbon casket shows a pair of putti engaged in different activity but the same theme on the surface of the lid covers. Although all caskets show the same ornament, there are slightly different designs, which refer to the available pre-fabricated appliqués that were tailored to the client's choice.

The sides of all the caskets also vary slightly. The two jewelry caskets in the Louvre collection frame the putti scene with two undecorated columns on each side on the front and back of the caskets, while the Havana jewelry



caskets only show one column on each side, and the Lisbon casket has one fully ornamented column on each side of the putto.

Moreover, while the Lisbon jewelry casket displays an escutcheon-like-keyhole on the front center of the casket, the Havana caskets' cartouche area may have once borne a coat of arms. The Louvre caskets carry an "L" inscribed heart-shaped relief in the cartouche area of each casket.

According to Gabue du Gers, the letter "L" is the initial of Franz Labensky, chief curator of the Hermitage gallery from 1797 to 1850 in St. Petersburg. Labensky was in charge of the painting collections for Empress Josephine (first wife of Napoleon I). Gaube du Gers clarifies that Labensky commissioned "three pairs of jewelry caskets from Jean-Baptiste Claude Odier in 1830."<sup>24</sup>

However, according to Dion-Tenenbaum, the Louvre jewelry caskets once belonged to Ruxton and Audrey B. Love and the letter "L" represents the initial of the Love family and was a later addition to the caskets.<sup>25</sup>

These two French Empire silver authorities disagree on the origin



*Fig.8. Pen drawing and watercolor by Adrien-Louis Marie Cavellier (1785 - 1867) displays a large table mirror, or psyche de table, commissioned for the Empress' Marie-Louise bedchamber at Fontainebleau. Dimensions of the mirror: 90 x 60 cm. Artemisia Auctions, sale January 25, 2013, lot# 32. ©Photo courtesy of Artemisia Auctions.*

of the "L" initialed cartouche as to whether it was a later addition or originally commissioned. The limited information available today can substantiate either theory and until more evidence is brought forward, each scenario lies within a documented "confirmation bias."

After the death of Ruxton Love in 1971, the Love family donated their collection to various international museums. This Napoleonic silver was first exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1978,<sup>26</sup> but after the death of Audrey Love in 2002, much of the collection was donated to the Louvre.

The Havana Odier toiletry set was previously owned by Cuban sugar trader and financier Julio Lobo, a world-renowned art collector of Napoleon memorabilia. He acquired the set at auction at Galerie Charpentier in Paris in 1958.<sup>27</sup> Lobo was an avid collector in the sense that he thoroughly researched the Napoleon items he collected contributing to their provenance. For example, he published the private letters between Napoleon and the Comte de Mollien in 1959. General



*Fig. 9. Another pair of jewelry caskets of silver gilt produced by Jean-Baptiste-Claude Odier, Paris, between 1819 and 1827. This pair of caskets is nearly identical to the pair at the Napoleon Museum in Havana and the jewelry casket in the collection at Lisbon Palácio Nacional da Ajuda. Dimensions: 21.5 cm x 27.2 cm x 20.3 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. ©bpb Photo - Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte / RMN.*

Charles de Gaulle praised Lobo for this historically significant contribution.<sup>28</sup>

My continuing research reveals that more French silver exist in Cuba, specifically a silver dinner service that was imported by Napoleon's last physician Francesco Antommarchi.<sup>29</sup> Antommarchi, who settled in Cuba, was the Italian physician who accompanied Napoleon to the island of St. Helena and was responsible for producing Napoleon's three death masks, one of which sold at London's Bonhams Fine Art Auctioneers & Valuers in June of 2013 for £170,000 (\$273,946.50US).<sup>30</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Claude Odiot continued his craft and survived the French Empire period and the Bourbon monarchy and was awarded the symbol of the French legion-of-honor.<sup>31</sup> He retired in 1827 handing over his

business to his son Charles-Nicolas Odiot (1789–1869) who pursued to build the company's international prosperity<sup>32</sup> and whose work was shaped mostly by English taste at that time.<sup>33</sup> He manufactured for Garrard & Co. in London and his later works show soft forms, scroll elements and more natural forms, that he introduced in the late 1820s.<sup>34</sup> Charles-Nicolas Odiot also returned from England with new techniques such as electroplating.<sup>35</sup> His designs of silverware continued to be popular not only with the European aristocracy but the emerging bourgeoisie class as well. By the 1840s, the Maison Odiot was one of the three major large firms competing with Christofle and Froment-Meurice and controlled the European silver market, focusing on the manufacturing of table

silver in both the rococo revival and renaissance revival styles.

The Maison Odiot produced silver for the royal family, such as François d'Orléans<sup>36</sup> the Prince de Joinville and His Majesty the King Louis-Philippe<sup>37</sup> and operates today from 7, Place de la Madeleine in Paris.

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Fig. 10. The Odiot jewelry casket in the collection of Palácio Nacional da Ajuda in Lisbon, and according to the inventory from 1911 to 1913, was one of a pair and a gift to Princess Maria Pia of Savoy on the occasion of her marriage to King Louis I in 1862. Silver gilt, 22.5 x 29.5 x 21.3 cm. ©Photography Manuel Silveira Ramos, Palácio Nacional da Ajuda, DGPC.



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#### Notes

1. John Paul Rathbone, *The Sugar King of Havana: The Rise and Fall of Julio Lobo, Cuba's Last Tycoon* (The Penguin Press, 2011), 169.

2. Gordon Campbell, *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006), 331; and Ernest Dumonthier, *Le Meuble-Toilette* (Paris: France Mobilier National, A. Moranée, 1863).

3. A vessel made of metal (wood or clay) similar to a bowl, used to for broth, soup and any liquid food.

4. The French guild system dates back to the thirteenth century. All gold- and silversmiths had to join the guild and go through a six to eight-year traineeship in order to become a Master. This system ensured high quality standards in French silver. The French guild system was abolished with the French Revolution in 1789.

5. Henri Bouilhet, *Orfèvreries du Style Empire exécutées par Claude Odiot* (Paris: Librairie Centrale des Beaux Arts, 1909), 7.

6. Young winged men, their bodies ending in elaborated foliage are a typical motif of the Renaissance. See: Charles Normand, *Nouveau recueil en divers genres d'ornemens et autres objets propres à la décoration* (Paris: Joubert, 1803), plate #1.2. Normand shows a composition of a candelabrum featuring the motif of young men with butterfly wings their bodies ending in foliage.

7. *Vermeil* is the French name for silver gilt. It is a type of silver plating. Invented in the mid-eighteenth century in France and used commonly in gold- and silversmithing to underline the splendor of wealth.

8. Email communication between Olivier Gaube du Gers (author of *Odiot L'Orfèvre*, Éditions Sous le Vent, Paris, 1990) and author (October 16, 2013), in which Gaube du Gers confirms this information citing it from "personal sources."

9. This leaf-and-tongue molding is a variation of the egg-and-dart motif in which the oval form is replaced by a series of leaves. In decorative art jargon it is also called Kymation, Kyma and was used abundantly in Greek ornamentation and architecture.
10. Email communication between Olivier Gaube du Gers and author (October 16, 2013), in which Gaube du Gers confirms that the nude female figure was sculpted by Thomire. An invoice dated July 1, 1822, in the amount of 70 francs exists. At the same time, there is a balance billing Lebrun for "acte sur les enfants du miroir" (the putti of the mirror) for a value of 150 francs. The actual mirror was delivered by Beranger on May 15, 1822, for an amount of 73 francs.
11. Email communication between Oliver Gaube du Gers and author (October 2012).
12. Anne Dion-Tenenbaum, *L'Orfèvrerie française du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2011), 220.
13. Ibid., 221.
14. L. Ch. Soyer, *Modèles d'orfèvrerie, choisis à l'Exposition des produits de l'industrie française au Louvre en 1819* (Paris: Recueil de 72 planches, Bance, 1822).
15. Olivier Gabue du Gers, and Jean-Marie Pinçon, *Odiot l'orfèvre* (Paris: Sous le Vent, 1990), 138. The Maison Odiot conserved also drawings of these caskets; Henri Troyat, *Alexander of Russia: Napoleon's Conqueror* (Dutton Adult, First edition, 1983).
16. Henri Troyat, *Pushkin: A biography* (Pantheon, 1950), 437.
17. In a conversation with Oliver Gaube du Gers, in October 2012, he referred to his notes, in which he says, "En 1821 l'Empereur de Russie Alexandre Ier [...] en fit don à la princesse Gagarine..."
18. For more on this subject refer to: Walter G. Moss, *Russia in the Age of Alexander II, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky* (London: Anthem Press/Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2002).
19. Artemisia Auctions website, "A Collection of Autographs Rediscovered around Napoleon catalogue – Sale 6, Lot #32: Adrien-Louis-Marie Cavelier (Paris 1785-1867)," <http://www.artemisia-auctions.com/flash/index.jsp?id=13978&idCp=79&lng=en&npp=10000> (accessed August 12, 2013).
20. Ibid.
21. Dion-Tenenbaum, *L'orfèvrerie française du XIXe siècle*, 220-221.
22. Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, *Royal Treasures* (Lisbon: Pálacio Nacional da Ajuda, Instituto Português do Património Cultural, 1992), 276, object #434.
23. Chen-Chang Lieu, *Les Répertoires d'Ornement en France au début du XIXe siècle* (Université Pierre Mendès France, Grenoble II, Thèse de doctorat sous la direction de Mme le Professeur Daniela Gallo, 2009), 270.
24. Email communication between Oliver Gaube du Gers and author (October 9, 2013).
25. Email communication between Louvre curator Anne Dion-Tenenbaum and author (October 16, 2013), in which Dion-Tenenbaum confirms that the initial "L" refers to Mr. and Ms. Love.
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