

A small spinning wheel or silk winder designed to be used on a table or the owner's lap, the flat stand of walnut veneered in Indian walnut, kingwood, ebony, mother-of-pearl and ivory, the wheel and working elements, the arm holding the glass water pot and the distaff of rosewood and turned ivory, probably made by the Italian cabinetmaker Pietro Piffetti (1701–77). Turin, circa 1740.

Height: 10,62 in. (27 cm)

Width: 19,29 in. (49 cm)

Depth: 8¼ in. (21,5 cm)

Literature:

Luigi Mallé, Museo civico d'arte antica di torino: Mobili e Arredi Lignei – Arazzi e Bozzetti per Arazzi; Torino, 1972, figs. 303–305;

Vittorio Viale, Mostra del barocco piemontese - Mobili e intagli - tessuti e ricami, vol III, Torino, 1963, tab. 40.

Small spinning wheels and winders such as the present one were made in the 18th century to be used in drawing rooms, when spinning was regarded as a pleasant past-time for women. Needlework was an important element in the education of young ladies and such equipment allowed them to show off their elegant hands to admirers as they practised their skill.

This spinning wheel was designed for spinning fine fibres, probably silk, into thread. The fibres were attached to the tall distaff and fed by hand into the flyer. The small water pot was used to dip the fingers into, in order to dampen and smooth the fibres as they were spun. The rotation of the flyer twisted the fibres into thread, which then wound onto the bobbin. A cord around the flyer whorl connected it to the wheel, which was operated by turning the handle. The user would feed the fibres into the flyer with her left hand while turning the wheel with her right. The handle is always turned clockwise so that the flax is given an anti-clockwise, or 'S', twist. Small spinning wheels such as this one were used on the lap (fig.1).

Comparative Examples:

Spinning Wheel, c. 1740–50, almost certainly by Piffetti, London, V&A Museum, W.159-1921.

Spinning Wheel, Turin, Palazzo Madama, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica (illustrated in L. Mallé, 1972, fig. 303).



Fig.1 Jacques André Joseph Aved, *Portrait of a Lady*, believed to be *Françoise-Marie Pouget*, second wife of *Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin*, c. 1755–65, Paris, Musée Carnavalet. The lady holds on her lap a French spinning wheel comparable with the present one.