

A pair of Russian Empire candlesticks with an exceptional design and extraordinary artistic craftsmanship, each consist of 32 assembled parts that are all chased and executed to perfect finesse, attributed to Friedrich Bergenfeldt. Marked on different parts: 'L' and 'B'.

Circa 1805

**Hight:** 13,97 in. (35,5 cm)

**Diameter:** 5,7 in. (14,50 cm)



The rounded wings attached to the hexagonal base give the illusion of a round shape. The base itself is alternately decorated with stylised fountains and mirrored swans, each with a snake in its mouth. The curved triangular socle with grotesque masks spouting into small shell-shaped basins below. The base is topped by three Hippocampus figures, their wings seemingly supporting the sheathed shaft embellished with mounted tridents and rudders. The shaft is crowned by three Poseidon heads that carry an overflowing ceremonial font into which watery cascades pour from the rim of the sconce above it.

#### **Provenance:**

Baron de Baye.

Sale Galerie Georges Petit: Succession de Madame la Marquise DE BAYE (Paris), 19 May 1930, lot 49.

Collection Tissot-D.

#### **Literature:**

- Jörg Ebeling & Ulrich Leben, *Empire Style; The hotel de Beauharnais in Paris*, 2016, p.96.
- Arcadi Gaydamak, *Russian Empire*, Moskou 2000, p.39-59.
- Igor Sychev, *Russian Bronze*, Moskou 2002, p.95-98.

Very characteristic of Bergenfeldt's work is the repetition of motifs relating to the element of water. This pair of candlesticks features cascading water from the rims, for example. His decorative repertoire further included spraying fountains, Poseidon busts and heads, the sea god's attribute the trident, his son Pegasus, hippocampi and fountains flanked by swans. They can be traced back to design drawings of vases and other decorative objects. It is generally assumed that they were drafted by Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813). The Swiss native De Thomon was active as a designer, painter and engraver, but is best known for his architectural designs of structures such as the (former) Stock Exchange building in Saint Petersburg and the Rostral Columns on Vasilievsky Island in the River Neva. These monumental Doric columns feature four sculptures of allegorical figures at their base, representing the main rivers of Russia. These rivers played a major role in the country's flourishing trade and the recurring motifs of water can therefore be interpreted as symbols of prosperity, wealth and abundance.

The style of the decorative program of these candlesticks is closely related to the motifs of an ornamental vase signed 'F. Bergenfeldt A St Petersburg 1802', which was made for Count Stroganoff. Also, an exquisite pair of vases, comparable in style, was part of Count Bobrinsky's collection in Saint Petersburg until the beginning of the twentieth century.

## **Friedrich Bergenfeldt**

The German born bronzier Friedrich Bergenfeldt (1760-1822) established his career in Saint Petersburg during the last decade of the eighteenth century. However, he was most likely temporarily active in Paris just before the turn of the century, where he may well have come into contact with the famous Parisian bronzier Claude Galle (1759-1815). Following his return to Saint Petersburg, his work after 1801 shows unmistakable similarities to that of Galle. The supreme quality of his production and craftsmanship far surpasses that of the average bronzier active in Russia at the time. For this reason, Bergenfeldt was in high demand at the Russian imperial court and within the highest circles of Russia's aristocracy. Although Bergenfeldt was the most celebrated bronzier from 1801 onwards, his active period was relatively brief, already coming to a halt in 1807. The reason for this is not known. Apart from candlesticks, chandeliers and decorative vases, Bergenfeldt also supplied workshops with individual mounts and appliqués for furniture. One of his well-known clients was the atelier of Heinrich Gambs (1764-1831), a long-established and renowned furniture maker in Saint Petersburg at the time.

## **Baron de Baye**

These candlesticks were acquired in the early twentieth century by the Baron de Baye. In order to understand how a French Baron became the owner of this pair of Russian candlesticks, we will take a closer look at this intriguing man.

Amour Auguste Louis Joseph Berthelot, Joseph Baron de Baye, was born as the son of Auguste de Baye and the British Georgina Wilkinson on 31 January 1853 in Paris. They lived in a grand apartment on the rue Boissy-d'Anglas. The aristocratic De Baye family owned a castle in the town of Baye, between Epernay and Sézanne in the Marne. Joseph de Baye was married to Marie-Béatrice Oppenheim Baronesse de Chabert, with whom he had two daughters.

From an early age, Baron de Baye, was fascinated by archaeology, an interest revealed to him during hunting trips with his father. In 1873, he received his first assignment from the French government, namely to carry out archaeological excavations in the Baye area. This marked the beginning of a long series of excavation campaigns in France and around Europe, the results of which he presented in the journal *L'Archéologie préhistorique* in 1880. The Baron de Baye organised exhibitions and published his theories and findings in articles and pamphlets, illustrated with his own drawings. He also erected a museum free of charge in a wing of his chateau. Although the scientific and academic communities of the time were initially interested in the baron's research, they eventually questioned his working methods and conclusions.

In 1890, Joseph Baron de Baye attended an archaeological congress in Moscow. His time there triggered a unquenchable passion for Russia and its people. Every year from 1892 onwards, he would go on archaeological, ethnographic and historical missions to different regions of the Russian empire. He travelled through the Caucasus, the Volga region and even ventured off to Siberia for research. He was greatly interested in the history and way of life of the indigenous people. He collected objects and documents and vigilantly took notes on his random finds. The baron de Baye was even responsible for the photography himself and also shot numerous portraits. By doing so, he immortalised a culture that was doomed to disappear in the face of colonisation and industrial development. His findings were acknowledged by the scientific community of Russia and Baron de Baye became a member of the Imperial Historical Museum in Moscow in 1897.

A year before, in May of 1896, the baron had attended the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II. He took advantage of this occasion and collected numerous objects and papers especially made for this historical event and handed them over to the museum and library of Reims.

At the turn of the century, he was again sent on a mission to the Russian Empire by the French Ministry. This time, he was requested to collect pottery. After his return to Paris, he gave lectures and published his information on archaeological and ethnographic treasures in an article with the title 'Souvenirs d'une mission en Abkhazie, en Crimée, en Géorgie, en Lituanie, en Nouvelle Flussie, en Petite Russie'. The Baron de Baye donated numerous objects he had accumulated in Russia to the Musée Guimet in Paris while the city's Musée de Sèvres were gifted more than five hundred pieces of Russian folk pottery. By 1905 he had already passed on his French archaeological finds to the museum in Epernay. International organisations also benefitted from his collector mania. For instance, the British Museum purchased various Russian archaeological treasures from the baron.

In July 1914, Baron de Baye left for Petrograd (the name for Saint Petersburg from 1914 until 1924) to attend the French President Raymond Poincaré's visit there. The outbreak of the First World War subsequently forced him to remain in Russia. He was still there when the February Revolution broke out in 1917. Aware of the historical significance of events, he collected pamphlets, military orders and even removed posters from walls to send them to France. Due to his many contacts with important dignitaries of the Russian empire, he was imprisoned twice during this period. He was not released until 1920, after the intervention of Natalia Sedova, Lev Trotsky's second wife, who pleaded for his release because of his frail health. Upon his return to France, the baron found his castle, and museum, looted by the German troops of the First World War.

In 1928, after the death of his wife Marie-Béatrice Baroness de Baye, the baron decided to offer a large part of his art collection for sale. Thus, on 19 May 1930, his furniture, paintings, bronzes and porcelain went under the hammer in Paris at an auction held in his wife's name. In addition to these two candlesticks, which were auctioned under lot 49, Thomire's exquisite chandelier, now in the Musée Marmottan, was also sold from the collection. Joseph Baron de Baye died on 30 May 1931 in Paris, anonymous and financially ruined.

## Russian Empire:

In the late 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century, the French style was tremendously popular in the decorative arts and was widely represented throughout Europe. The market for typically French gilded bronzes grew to such an extent that numerous Parisian bronzesmiths established workshops in major European cities such as Berlin, Warsaw, Stockholm, and Munich. The wealthy Russian nobility had a strong preference for the French style, but it was impossible for French bronzesmiths to set foot in Russia. This was due to restrictions imposed by Paul I, which stipulated that French citizens were not allowed to work in Russia. As a result, most bronzesmiths in Russia had German or Swedish origins. And despite the absence of French bronzesmiths in Russia, there was a high demand for gilded bronze from France. Due to the high import taxes on items from France, prices increased dramatically. This triggered a lively black market, with traffickers smuggling bronze art objects from France across the border.

Tsar Alexander I, who came to the throne in 1801, tightened regulations on French contraband goods and acted by supporting the national bronze workshops with stimulating subsidies. This led to the creation of a number of new workshops in which bronziers were given the financial and artistic opportunity to develop. However, most of these "start-ups" were short-lived, which was partly due to the way in which work was conducted in Russian studios. Barely any drawings or design sketches were made, which meant that there was no clear structure for the bronziers to follow.

A key exception was the bronzier A.N. Voronikhin (1759-1814), who had trained in France and was very familiar with the French style. The clear and consistent style of his numerous designs and model drawings gave Russian bronziers a firm foothold and thus formed the basis for the development of the Russian Empire style.

Swiss bronzesmith Pierre Marie Louis Agis (1752-1828) also had a major influence, despite his very short career at the State Stroganov Bronze Factory. He worked at the factory for less than a year, but when he left, the Russian state acquired all of his sketches, molds, and other creations and models, so that his artistic influence would continue for years to come. A protégé of Count Stroganoff, A.F. Bestuzhev ran the factory until 1810. In that year, Agis returned to the State Stroganov Bronze Factory until it went bankrupt in 1812.

A third successful bronzesmith who had a major influence on the Russian Empire style was Friedrich Bergenfeldt (1760-1822), a native German who was active in St. Petersburg. He is also known for drawing his own designs. Bergenfeldt's designs and his high-quality bronzes clearly show the influence of Claude Galle (1759-1815), which leads us to believe that Bergenfeldt must have had close contact with the French bronzier Galle. Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813), the French-trained architect who worked in the same city, also had a great influence on Bergenfeldt's work.