

## DESIGNING FOR THE EMPEROR: THE CASES OF AN EMPIRE STYLE CEREMONIAL ARMCHAIR AND A ROYAL CONSOLE TABLE IN TUILERIES PALACE.

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**Abstract:** This paper constitutes an attempt to both examine and illustrate the uniqueness of the Empire style furniture during the Napoleonic times under the charismatic influence of the most notable architects and designers of the era Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Leonard Fontaine and their partners. The reason for this research is the selection and analysis of two outstanding pieces of furniture, from a utility, design and aesthetics perspective, created for special reasons by the above-mentioned designers for the famous Tuileries Palace, the building of prominent political and personal importance for Napoleon Bonaparte. Through the research of these two different case studies / objects will emerge the specific morphological, aesthetic, historical, political and cultural elements that shaped the famous Empire style, while we will attempt to discuss and finally understand the design logic of its two characteristic, most representative designers.

**Key words:** Napoleon, Empire style, furniture, Tuileries Palace, Percier, Fontaine, ancient world.

### Introduction

The most stable period for art after the insecure years of Horror<sup>2</sup> that followed the French Revolution, was the Directory Period which along with the Consular Period constituted the prelude of the famous Empire period, namely the personification of the artistic and decorative beauty and elegance. The struggling French people of the early nineteenth century were thrilled for works of art and architecture which were associated with the new sociopolitical situation and which would make them celebrate their new power, freedom and new perspectives of life. On the other hand the new class of wealthy citizens created by the Revolution would look for new aesthetics standards in a brand new social context that would automatically render them consumers of both high art and expensive utilitarian or simply decorative objects.

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<sup>2</sup>After Louis XVI's death in 1793, in the revolutionary France, the 'kingdom' of Horror began. The guillotine, the new 'instrument' of the Revolution for Equitable Justice, was put into operation. Public executions were seen as educational spectacles. Terrorism was made to fight the enemies of the Revolution, to prevent any counter-revolution in which the French people could be defeated. That's why most of those who were executed were not aristocrats but just ordinary people.

In line with this new order, artwork themes that depicted events and scenes from the exotic landscapes visited by Napoleon's troops, and areas that housed many of its victorious military operations, mainly outside France, were in high demand. It is easy to see that all the art forms of the time had the ultimate goal of glorifying in a passionate and idiosyncratic way Bonaparte's military achievements, which of course meant the definitive deviation of the Neoclassical artistic ideal from its first ideological applications. Artists and designers no longer described the virtues of democracy, but the aesthetic glamour of ancient Greece, the mystery of Etruscan culture, but above all the power and majesty of imperial Rome, which constituted the ideological historical origin of Napoleon's ambitions (KINDERSLEY, 2013, p. 157). Forms, shapes, motifs, ornaments and ideas from antiquity seemed to blend marvelously with the imperialist symbols of Bonaparte.<sup>3</sup> However, exotic hieroglyphic patterns, symbols and themes arising from his famous military campaign in Egypt (1795-1799) constituted key elements of the new imperial style. All these inspired the well-known French archaeologist in the Middle East Baron Dominique-Vivant Denon (1747-1825) to flood the world of French art with innovative, fresh ideas not simply from an exotic, mysterious country but mainly from one of the most glorious, victorious campaigns of Napoleon. Through his monumental work titled *Voyage dans la Basse et Haute Égypte pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte* (1802) (GOETZ and GUICHARD, 1998, p. 4), Denon wondrously depicted the achievements of his research through drawings and lithographs of palm leaves, ancient Egyptian divine symbols, faces of Egyptian gods or kings, architectural elements of temples or graves, all taken from the mystical art of the pyramids, places of worship, palaces and royal tombs (BRIER, 2013, p. 52). Soon the fascinating French architecture and art in the years of Napoleon's glory began to absorb the elements of this esoteric and obscure ancient civilization and, to form, along with the splendor and light of the Roman, Etruscan and Greek antiquity, the hegemonic Empire Style.<sup>4</sup> The Tuileries Palace in Paris<sup>5</sup> had been a place of intense innovations as regards its new interior decoration under the suggestions of the new emperor, as both fine and decorative arts of the new style seemed to finally find their own natural space.

On the occasion of two important and rare pieces of furniture from the many wondrous ones created to satisfy the imperial taste, we will try to outline the basic technical and aesthetic features as well as the importance of political expediency reflected in the specially designed Empire Style furniture, through the genius of the great architects / designers and furniture makers who served Napoleon with loyalty and devotion.

### **A Percier and Fontaine Imperial carved giltwood ceremonial armchair**

Perhaps there were no other architects and interior designers during Napoleon's political and military power that left their aesthetic, practical, and ultimately ideological 'fingerprints' on the glorious and omnipotent Empire Style than Charles Percier (1764-1838) and Pierre-François-Leonard Fontaine (1762-1853). The two, besides being French, first met in Paris and later in Rome, where they became fully familiar with Ancient Greek and Roman art, which was a major inspiration for their decoration and furnishings under the emperor's patronage (PILE, 2005, p. 180). But despite their huge in number and quality range of projects, today there are only few that remain untouched by the time and the storm of historical developments since 1815.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Such was the capital letter *N*, the initial of his name, surrounded by a laurel wreath as a symbol of everlasting glory, the bee which constituted the symbol of eternity in antiquity, the Roman eagle, stars, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Though ancient Egyptian art had already become à la mode much earlier in the eighteenth century, it was then that the highest and most respected courts of Europe adopted the Empire style.

<sup>5</sup> Residence of most French Kings, from the reign of Henry IV to Napoleon III, constituted Napoleon Bonaparte's favorite premises as he soon after his coming to power in 1799, rendered it a magnificent Imperial palace, through an extensive series of restorations.

<sup>6</sup> That is, after Napoleon's military and political fall, his death and the launch of a new historical page for France.

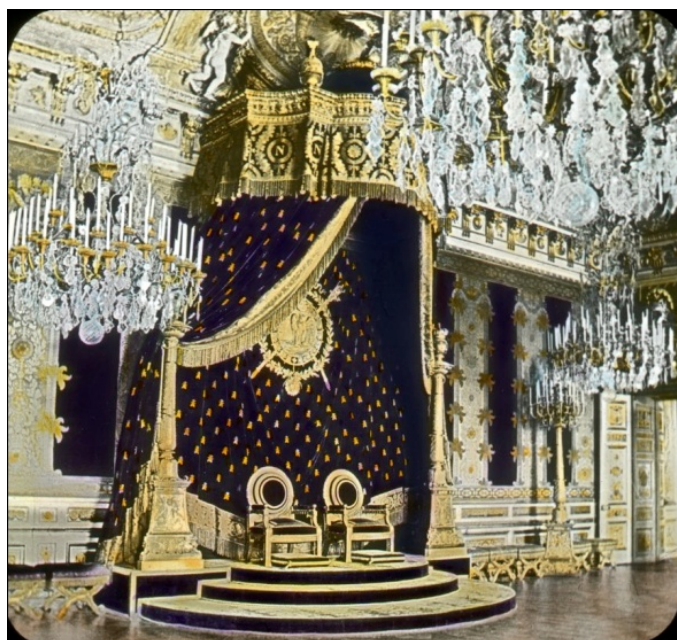
We observe that in most of their works they tried to fit under the wide umbrella of design the concept of architecture itself but also the design of objects that belonged to each building they undertook to restore, taking into account even the smallest decorative detail of the bulky or elegant objects they designed for each occasion, combining, at the same time, mastery elements not only from the ancient Greek and Roman world, but also from Egypt.

Many of their projects included the design of state beds, heavily sculptured side tables and other types of furniture, but also wall lights and candlesticks, chandeliers, mirrors, furniture upholstery, textiles, and wallpaper. On special occasions, they were both called upon to design for the Sèvres porcelain factory as many of their works included parts or whole objects made of high quality porcelain. All of their work bore the typical qualities of an unusual blend of luxury, austerity, masculinity and vigor which corresponded ideally to the Emperor's preferences (PILE, 2005, p. 180). However, it should be noted that in all kinds of seats and chairs in particular they designed, the influence they received from the Roman sculptor and restorer Francesco Antonio Franzoni's (1734-1818) work was as big as it was for the most furniture designers in Italy, Great Britain and France of the end of the eighteenth century.

Most of the furniture they designed for the numerous interiors of the stunning palaces or state buildings of the time were made of many skilful furniture makers of that period, some of which were Jacob Freres, Jeanselme and Adam Weisweiler. However, it was the distinguished furniture maker, François-Honoré-Georges *Jacob*-Desmalter (1770-1841)<sup>7</sup>, who prevailed among the rest, as he gradually became Fontaine and Garnier's closest partner. Their successful collaboration started as early as in 1803, when in preparation for Napoleon's coronation the following year, the two designers were commissioned to redesign the interior of the Tuileries Palace, the then decadent royal residence which was to become for Napoleon the 'urban shelter' for his imperial and military power, and by 1808 his own official residence (FONKENELL, 2010, p. 135). This was only a part of a much more ambitious project according to which they had to connect in a way the Louvre with the Tuileries Palace, which literally meant to recast the center of Paris (GARRIC, 2016, p. 23).

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<sup>7</sup> Descendant of a great family, with prominent personality his own father Georges Jacob (1739-1814) who was the most famous furniture manufacturer during the reign of Louis XVI, François-Honoré-Georges Jacob Desmalter founded, along with his first-born brother, *The Jacob Frères Company*, in 1796. However, soon after his brother premature death the company was dissolved. At the beginning of 1803 François-Honoré-Georges in collaboration with his father set up a new company the progress of which proved to be particularly successful. In the next five years, he received a lot of commissions from Napoleon, while his reputation was spread abroad as well. Around 1810 his company employed more than 350 workmen in several sections of furniture making.



**Fig. 1.** The Throne Room in the Tuileries. © Keystone View Company, “Throne Room in the Tuileries, Paris, France.,” Student Digital Gallery, accessed September 15, 2017, <https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/items/show/10616>.

In 1803 the two eminent designers were commissioned to redecorate and furnish the magnificent Throne Room of the Palace, a unique room used for ceremonies of many kinds such as formal audiences, the presentation of the major state organizations and the homage of civil servants. The Room was also used for the reception of the Senate, the Conseil d’Etat, the Corps Legislatif, the Tribunat, the Cour de Cassation, or the representatives of these bodies. Percier and Fontaine were also commissioned to design more than 330 furniture pieces which were, after been designed, given almost immediately to Jacob-Desmalter so as to be constructed. The commission included, inter alia, Napoleon’s throne, which was to be placed in a central place of the Throne Room and was strongly distinguished for its imaginative design (LEFEUDEL, 1954, p. 32). Jacob-Desmalter was given a series of exquisite life-size drawings both for the throne itself, a set of six armchairs, another set of six chairs and thirty-six folding stools<sup>8</sup> which he had to finish on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1804, that is one day before the ceremony of Napoleon’s coronation. However, only the throne and the six ceremonial armchairs were finished in time, while the rest of furniture was not finished but quite a few months later.

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<sup>8</sup> Among them there are drawings of equal number for the throne and the chairs of The Château de Saint-Cloud, an astonishingly beautiful palace restored by Marie Antoinette in the 1780s, about five kilometers west of Paris. However, Jacob-Desmalter made them after he had finished the throne and the ceremonial armchairs for the Tuileries Palace.



**Fig. 2.** One of the six Imperial carved giltwood ceremonial armchairs, Tuileries Palace, 1804.  
© Private collection.

Two years later, mainly for ceremonial reasons, the layout of the Hall of the throne was changed and this resulted in the remaining of only two of the six ceremonial armchairs, distinguished for their contemporary, innovative design, and of all thirty-six impressive folding stools. According to the protocol, only high rank courtiers had the right to sit on those stools or tabourets in general, whereas armchairs were mostly used by the Emperor, the Empress and members of the imperial family (MANSEL, 1987, p. 74).

Today there is only one surviving example known, that is a rare ceremonial piece of furniture which bears all the incomparable art and technical characteristics of the Empire style. This armchair is particularly attractive because, despite its low height, it has strong morphological and allegoric features that give it the glamour of imperial power and luxury. Examining it from a purely technical point of view, we discover that it consists of about twenty-four different assembled pieces of solid walnut wood which, after being properly processed - cut and carved - , are covered with twelve subsequent layers of gesso and then lacquered in matte golden color. The high flat back of the armchair, that is the basic frame of its top part, is composed of two-post quadrangular, carved units, whereas the basic frame of the seat is of a rather square shape, and slightly curved at the front. When it was finished in the form of frames in the Jacob-Desmalter workshop, it was sent to the famous Garde-Meuble's upholsterers where it was covered with rich, dark brown silk fabric woven by Camille Pernon, the most notable silk manufacturer in Lyon.

From a morphological / design point of view we can see that carving itself is one of the main characteristic elements of the fauteuil as it is found in different parts of it at different levels, in different forms and symbolisms, with patterns obviously inspired by the Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Etruscan antiquity. The upper part of the back carries almost intact the symbol of the

anthemium, which constitutes the central element of the composition, as well as spiral grooves that not only refer to elements of the ancient Greek Ionic rhythm, but are intricately intertwined with stylized flowers, blooming periwinkles and bindweeds creating a sense of reflection on either side of the central theme.

This impressive composition in triangular shape at the top of the armchair is reminiscent of the frontispiece of an ancient Greek edifice, temple or state building, but also of a classical antiquity tomb. The skillfully carved palm leaves, along with the perfectly embossed hexagrams, the six-pointed geometric star figures, dominate the front and the side parts of the two main axles of the back panel, displaying ancient symbols.<sup>9</sup>

The four short legs in Etruscan style with a slight sloping outwards are heavy and firm, made of solid wood, giving the feeling of stability and balance in the object (BONFANTE, 1986, p. 67). The front legs are carved in ornate coils inside out, while their front sides are dominated by a simplified palm leaf in magnification. On the contrary, only the outer sides of the rather plain hind legs of the fauteuil are decorated with simple spiral shapes.

The frame of the base, on which a silk pillow of the same quality and color with the fixed upholstery of the back is placed, is embellished with geometrically repetitive, stylized carved rosettes in small size on the side parts and on some points above the front legs. On the other hand, two elongated palm branches are engraved on the front, opposite to each other, connected with a rosette in the center.

However, the most distinctive feature of the armchair is its two striking arms, which consist of several assembled sections, are upholstered with the same fabric and rest on the head and the eagle wings of a mythical lion with a raised tail ending in a rosette in either side of the armchair. The two wooden, gilded similar sculptures are not realistic depictions of the lion, as they have been given an enigmatic, almost sacred form which overall refers to unearthly mythological beings. More precisely, they refer to the ancient Greek as well as Egyptian mythology. Nevertheless, they seem to have many common features with the with the Etruscan nenfro<sup>10</sup> statues of the winged four legged lions or sphinxes that were found in the area of Vulci, western Italy, and were placed to face each other at the entrances of Etruscan houses or tombs (VERMEULE ; BRAUER, 1990, p. 24). There is also one more explanation: the winged four legged lion as it is known today was the emblem of St. Mark who became the patron saint of Venice when his body was brought back in the city from Alexandria, Egypt. Napoleon adopted this emblem and made it one of his own imperial symbols when he conquered Venice in 1797.

### **An Empire console table**

The second work selected for analysis is completely different from the previous one, at least in terms of its functional value, although it is one of the same logic that governs most of the furnishings created for the Tuileries Palace: the emergence of the imperial glory of the building and therefore the unquestionable supremacy of the Emperor's multiple powers. This astonishing object is an elegant console table and bears all the functional features of its kind. As we know this type of furniture starts becoming popular in France from the late seventeenth century and especially during the reigns of the Louis XIV, XV and XVI and reaches its peak in the Napoleonic times (PERIVOLIOTI, 2004, p. 150).

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<sup>9</sup> The palm leaf has always been a symbol of victory, triumph, peace and eternal life originating in the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and especially in the religions of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt where it was synonymous with immortality. The hexagram was also a popular symbol that can be found in many cultures from earliest times such as Ancient Greek or even Judaism.

<sup>10</sup> A kind of volcanic rock of usually grey color, quite easy to carve in the area of Viterbo, northern Lazio, Italy from which Etruscans made many sculptures.

The influences it seems to have accepted by other civilizations of antiquity are obvious, as is the case with the ceremonial armchair, and in other types of work of the two inspired designers, at that time. Its construction is again ascribed to Jacob-Desmalter, while a large part of its extremely fine gilt bronze mounts is attributed to the sculptor Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751-1843).<sup>11</sup> Thomire's collaboration with the skillful Jacob-Desmalter was successful and repetitive not because they were both patronized by Napoleon, but mainly because they both respected and admired each other's work. This resulted in the production of some of the most exquisite pieces of furniture in the Empire style as the aforementioned one, which bears characteristic elements of Thomire's *bronzes d'ameublement*<sup>12</sup> detailed sculptural work. This high quality console table was made in Paris, circa 1805 and its dimensions did not differ from the average console tables of the time, that is: height 105 cm, width 114 cm and depth 51 cm. Its basic frame is made of gilt bronze mounted thuya wood, a rather unusual type of wood comparing to other, ordinary types used in furniture of the time such as oak, walnut, beech or even chestnut wood. Thuya or citron wood comes from thuya tree, a type of conifer from the cedar family, exclusively native to northwest Africa and especially Morocco. It is a type of wood known from antiquity and it was highly praised by the Romans and Greeks while its oils were used in religious rituals and ceremonies and, according to our view, it was not accidentally used in the Empire style furniture.

The table top is covered with a massive, rectangular piece of polished *verde antico* marble<sup>13</sup> which makes the flamboyant gilt console much more sophisticated. Just underneath there is a rather stylized frieze which is composed of two laurel branches in different direction each, centered by an unconventional cast medallion depicting Jupiter's head. It is framed by another two impressive medallions of equal size at either end, to the left that of Ares (Mars in Latin) and to the right that of Hector. The way Thomire depicted the three great figures of the ancient Greek mythology, who were later incorporated in the Roman mythology, is admirable as all of them seem to have been portrayed in a way so as to symbolize the power of both the divine and earthly nature of the Emperor.

Zeus (Jupiter in Roman culture), the King of Gods and the humans and the most powerful of the Olympian gods, the fierce punisher and at the same time the gracious protector of the weak and poor is not depicted accidentally in the middle of the frieze, as he represents the basic divine power of the Emperor. It is the only figure which looks in face with an intense, intriguing look that betrays his ignorance of every hesitation and his claim of any kind of victory.

On the contrary Ares, son of Zeus and Hera, the God of war is depicted in profile wearing a Trojan helmet decorated with a golden oak leaf victor's wreath. He was a provocative, warlike deity and represented the impulsive nature of people who were looking for extreme ways to resolve their differences (RAAFLAUB, 2007, p. 15). In this case he symbolizes Emperor's love for war and fight, but also the feelings of fear, hatred, respect and honor that he caused to all his great opponents and conquered peoples because of his military valor.

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<sup>11</sup> This famous French sculptor but also prominent maker of decorative gilt-bronze artifacts had already been known throughout Europe for his work since 1775 when he first established his own business as a bronzier-fondeur in Paris. It was a few years before the French Revolution that he worked for the Sèvres factory making beautiful bronze mounts for expensive porcelain vases. In 1804 he was involved with furniture and founded a workshop that produced not only unique pieces of furniture but also luxury bronzes (KISLUK-GROSHEIDE ; KOEPPE ; RIEDER, 2006, p. 224-226).

<sup>12</sup> Furnishing bronzes.

<sup>13</sup> It is a type of marble quite popular since ancient times as a decorative facing stone. Its color is dark green, while it is usually embellished with white-veined thin lines which make it particularly attractive. It became popular as a decorative material for architectural facades in the Roman Imperial times while later it was much appreciated by Byzantine architects and builders.



Fig. 3. A console table, Tuileries Palace, 1805. © Richard Redding Antiques Ltd.

Hector, one of the key persons of the Iliad and the leader of the Trojans and their allies in the defense of Troy, is also depicted in profile with long, wavy hair and sideburns wearing a typical Trojan helmet which is also decorated with a similar golden oak leaf wreath. He represents the mortal part of Emperor's personality which is however characterized by considerable moral values such as self-sacrifice, love for the fatherland, braveness and heroism.<sup>14</sup>

The frieze with its symbolic laurel wreath and the three mythological figures is supported at the back by a pair of simple rectangular wooden legs and in front by a pair of gilded monumental winged lion's paw feet monopodia which give to the whole piece of furniture an air of magnificence. The monopodium, that is a kind of decorative furniture support formed from the head and leg of an animal, was widely used in French furniture, especially after the second half of the eighteenth, but mainly in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Monopodia consisted highly decorative and structural elements in antiquity but also in the Renaissance, as the use of the ferocious but also mighty lion standing upon a single paw was a favorite, emblematic motif used by people dealing with the arts or education, or people with strong political power and wealth for centuries. In general, the use of animal monopodia, including lion ones, as in this case, was widely used in ancient Egypt furniture supports (CURL, 2005, p. 118) in the form of bed or biers (where bodies were placed after death) front legs, but also in Roman and Etruscan culture, in the form of tables and seats decorative elements and supports. At the same time the feature of the impressive pair of wings gives a more superficial nature to this mythological creature, rendering it able to 'fly high into the heavens', that is to the core of fulfillment and success. Its origins can be traced in Shedu, the Assyrian deity of the Sumerian and Akkadian mythology. That human headed winged bull or lion female deity was the statue of a beneficent and protective spirit which was mainly placed outside the entrances to palaces and cities. It is also believed that Egyptians, influenced by

<sup>14</sup> All these three figures seem to be related to each other through the plot of Homer's Iliad, and each one plays a distinctive role. Jupiter supervising the war between the Achaeans and the Trojans forbade Mars who supported Trojans to help them directly. However, he secretly armed with his superhuman strength Hector who fought heroically against the Achaeans until he finally was killed by Achilles.



other civilizations of the era such as Assyrians, Greeks and even Romans adopted many of their legends and mythical creatures, incorporating them into their own culture. So the emblem of half-lion figures can be found in Egyptian mythology in forms such as the lion headed deity Sekhmet or Sachmis, the warrior goddess and the protector of the pharaohs (PINCH, 2002, p. 187), but also in the form of sacred lion masks or ‘gryphonics’.<sup>15</sup>

This piece of furniture has in common, along with the previous one, the features of lion motifs and supports, both in the form of whole sculptures and in the form of monopodia. Nevertheless, it merely constitutes one of the many pieces of work made by Georges Jacob based on Percier and Fontaine’s design ideas. In essence, both works were nothing but perhaps less ambitious variants of the earliest and most impressive winged lions that appeared in the Emperor’s throne design project.

## Conclusion

*‘Persuaded as we are that this sickness, which is that of modern taste..., must find its treatment and cure in the examples and models of antiquity—followed not blindly but with the discernment suitable to modern manners, customs, and materials—we have striven to imitate the antique in its spirit, principles, and maxims, which are timeless’ (HARWOOD, 2012, p. 34)*

The above statement by Percier and Fontaine perfectly reflects their design philosophy. However, through both pieces of furniture once stood at one of Napoleon’s main Imperial residences at the Tuileries Palace, we can clearly identify not only the creative intentions of these two designers, but also the new aesthetic ideology that began to be created in the early 19th century Napoleonic France and which was based primarily on a heavily political agenda.

But before we proceed to the detection of all these, both tangible and intangible, evidential elements, we must say that these pieces are authentic as they carry particular labels and marks on their undersides as well as other characteristic labels and marks that can confirm their originality.

The basic aim of the two designers was not a simple representational design narration in the form of utilitarian / decorative objects with clear symbolisms of the imperial power of Bonaparte, nor was it, of course, the accurate reproduction of the buildings and their interiors of antiquity. Their main design goal was the interpretation of all the classic elements of the glorious past of many Mediterranean civilizations, their transformation into a modern, upgraded decorative vocabulary and finally the production of a totally new style which would include historical, mythical, architectural and decorative elements that could complement one another in an harmonic, comprehensive way.

What we can observe in these two objects is that both, despite having a completely different functional value, have specific features in common both in terms of design and construction, since both were devised and constructed, more or less, by the same artists and craftsmen, for the same place, at the same period (1804-1805). In both cases we can identify the same imposing design ideology which is associated with the emperor’s power and is represented not only with the profuse use of gold and other valuable materials, but also with the use of symbols such as the lion, a widely known symbol of royalty and mightiness. Along with these, there are also some totally opposite concepts to the above such as those of stiffness, rigidity and austerity which can be detected in the geometry that defines the final form of the objects, despite their intense and impressive ornamentation.

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<sup>15</sup> In ancient Egypt we can find winged lion bodies with heads of lions and not eagles. These are not true griffins as most of them constitute, along with countless others, hybrid variations which are called ‘gryphonics’.

In both cases we can see the designers' attraction to the enigmatic culture of ancient Egypt with smaller or greater references to mythical beings or symbols. It is assumed that many of these features were extracted, mainly as rough ideas and not as literal copies, from Denon's book, as Fontaine and Percier had never visited Egypt before so they had never come in touch in person with its historic treasures. On the contrary, their travels to Italy provided them with much useful information about the importance and splendor of ancient Roman, Etruscan and hence Greek culture. In these two cases the cultural / aesthetic values of a Greco-Roman and Etruscan blend are predominant since they are considered to contain symbolisms that best match both with the political and military aspirations and the exuberant and expansive personality of Napoleon himself.

However, the symbolic significance of the ceremonial armchair, which refers to the historical moment of Napoleon's coronation, seems to overshadow the value of the console table which was located in the same area of the palace, as despite its impressive design, it was not associated with any particular event of great importance. It is no accidental the fact that the use of the full-body winged lions in the case of the ceremonial armchair, despite their smaller size compared to the console table lion monopodia, is reminiscent of Napoleon's throne, as it is closely associated with it. Thus, it looks as if it borrows much from its power, prestige and charm.

From what we can understand through the analysis of the technical / aesthetic features of the two aforementioned pieces of furniture, the entire design ideology of Percier and Fontaine did not aim at a simply rich and 'noisy' decorative redefinition of the classical French architecture and design. That's why the Empire style in France had never been a superficial, pompous and meaningless decorative trend that had as its sole purpose to satisfy the demands of a seemingly abusive emperor. The Empire style was a profoundly political move as well as the most appropriate propaganda tool for keeping Napoleon in power.

At this point we should perhaps mention the fact that the then modern forms of political propaganda had already begun to emerge during the period following the French Revolution as the people of France and especially of Paris had received an unprecedented attack from various types of media which had the power not only to influence the public opinion, but also to form a new kind of national consciousness. These included forms that would have popular appeal and reach the masses easily, such as newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, engravings, cartoons and caricatures for mass distribution, but also public monuments, paintings, pieces of music and plays (REICHARDT, 2012). As it had happened many times in the past, so in France of that time, the leaders of the Revolution who wanted to unite the people under the umbrella of patriotism and independence, realized very quickly the power of art, and in general of imagery, in all its forms as a tool of influence of the population. Having already conceived the game of power and its preservation, Napoleon continued the tempting and fruitful idea of propaganda through almost all the above mentioned forms of art and communication. According to Holtman (1950, p. 245), both Bonaparte himself and the French Government as a whole during his sovereignty spent a lot of time to invent ways that would help them to create a positive view of the country's governance to the general public. So almost all the types of performing arts, as well as the popular press and of course the visual and applied arts, were soon recruited to serve the hegemonic vanity of Napoleon, who soon established himself as one of the most skillful manipulators of the public opinion in history. In order to achieve the incorporation of the fine and decorative arts into his grandiose, ambitious plan, Napoleon imposed an almost dictatorial centralization on the artistic production of the country, announcing with special decrees that every form of art in France ought to obey the new rules which were imposed by the Parisian authorities with main supervisors the duo Percier-Fontaine and the famous painter Jacques-Louis David (CHADENET, p. 95, 2001). The two great designers had to comply with this emphatic order of the emperor, trying to invent anything that would be capable of satisfying his highly demanding political feats. Their role was to incorporate the political expedience of the emperor into a decorative style that would nevertheless have a strong cultural and social character.

On the other hand their faithful partner Jacob-Desmaller, the officially appointed *ébéniste de l'Empereur*, contributed enormously in the practical side of their divine designs (WATSON, 1966, p. 550). Having fully improved his father's techniques and having contracted exclusive professional relationships with other specialists in the fields of gilding, sculpture and upholstery, Jacob-Desmaller managed to take full advantage of Percier and Fontaine's imaginative designs and produce furniture worthy of Napoleon's imperial caliber. His firm undertook a great deal of commissions not only by the Bonaparte family, but also by the rich bourgeoisie of Paris and many foreigner leaders such as the Russian Czar Alexander I and Charles IV of Spain and especially the leaders of the German and Austrian courts. Since then the Empire style, coexisting with the less intense Biedermeier style which was mainly associated with modest domestic interiors, started becoming a sophisticated, universal trend rather than a merely regional decorative style.

As a consequence, the totally new style that was created through its raging confrontations with the monumental art of antiquity, seemed to have dealt successfully with the uniformity and unification of difficult-to-combine concepts such as beauty, orderliness, sovereignty and victory, but also politics and social reform. Nevertheless, its 'modernist' spirit, in relation to its brand new aesthetic and ideological values, have ranked it in the list of the most interesting styles in the history of decorative arts that are able to remain equally challenging up to now.

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