for Maximilian until the initials were deciphered as interlaced C and E and associated with Charles and Elizabeth. The Brussels authorities were reluctant to accept the new theory, which advanced the date of their lace from 1695 to 1708. On a basis of style alone, they pointed out, the lace would surely have been given the earlier date. 

It is perfectly possible, therefore, that the design was originally furnished for the earlier marriage in 1695 and repeated thirteen years later for the second occasion. Further credence is lent to this hypothesis by the fact that Charles and Maximilian were related by marriage, Charles being the son and Maximilian, through his first marriage, the son-in-law of the Holy Roman emperor Leopold I. Consequently there is every likelihood that Charles knew the earlier flounce and had it copied for his own wedding.

Among the other laces in the group acquired by the Museum is a complete set (cap crown, ruffle, and lappets) for a headdress. It is made of fine needleworked muslin simulating drawn-work and is of a type known as fil tiré de Dinant. Cap sets with this sort of elaborate design are exceedingly rare. All of the above laces will be exhibited in Gallery H 18 adjoining the Textile Study Room.

Frances Little.

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BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

JUSTE AURÈLE MEISSONNIER
AND THE ROCOCO STYLE

The term rococo came into current use in Victorian England as a tag attached to the furniture and decoration of the reign of Louis XV, which the eighteenth century had simply labeled the “French taste.” During the 1830’s the English were going in heavily for classification and they needed a word to contrast this peculiar French style, with its restless curves and ornate embellishments, with the Gothic. In 1836 Fraser’s Magazine informed its fashionable public that there were now “two especial new mots d’argot, rococo and découssu.”

The influence of the rococo on English architecture and design gives us an added interest in tracing its early history in France. Although the French originated the style, they took it less seriously than the

4 E. van Overloop, Matériaux pour servir à l’histoire de la dentelle en Belgique (Brussels, 1912–1914), vol. 1, no. 4.
5 Acc. nos. 39.107.1, 3-6. Rogers Fund.

DETAILS OF THE FLOUNCE
LEFT: THE INITIALS M AND T.

ILLUSTRATED ON PAGE 253
RIGHT: THE INITIALS T AND C

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nations that borrowed it. It was for them an experiment, a fashion, not a style. As they never allowed themselves to forget the classic laws of architecture, their structures remained classic and only the ornament applied to them followed the current taste. The English, on the other hand, were completely taken in by the rococo. (In the English version at its most extreme it is quite impossible to say whether a given design was intended for a country house, a wall mirror, or a birthday cake.) Horace Walpole was aware of this difference and wrote from France, where he had gone in search of new ideas for the decoration of a friend’s house:

“Your commission, Madam, is in a fair way. Mariette has undertaken to get me the design by the best draughtsman in Paris . . . . You need not be in dread of true architecture. It appeared here for a moment as a mode, and consequently spread itself like wildfire into their snuff-boxes, china, and dress; for whether composed of gauze or marble, no fashion is meant to last longer than a lover.”

The origin of this style, which Stendhal calls “ce mauvais gout designé dans les ateliers sous le nom un peu vulgaire de rococo,” is as uncertain as the origin of the word itself, said to have been derived from rocaille, meaning rockwork. In the sixteenth century rocaille was applied to the artificial grottoes decorated in imitation of natural rockwork (the famous one in the Jardin des Tuileries was built by Bernard Palissy), and it was later used to describe the fantastic rock gardens at Versailles. Rocaille now properly refers to the shell and other florid motives characteristic of the rococo style. As for the style itself, some day patience and persistence may lead us to the sources from which the French derived it, but for the present it is more important to establish the facts about the men who originated and popularized it.

There were many architects and craftsmen working in France in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and each one of them undoubtedly contributed to the architecture and decoration of the Louis XV style, but for us of today the name of Meissonnier is synonymous with the rococo.

The purpose of this article is, first, to bring together the few scattered facts about his life and work and, second, to establish the chronology of his published designs.

Juste Aurèle Meissonnier was born in 1695 (if the Mercure de France for October, 1750, can be trusted), of Provençal parents living in Italy. His father worked as a sculptor and as a silversmith and is reputed to have been the teacher of Vanloo. Juste Aurèle learned his trade at home but went to Paris as a fairly young man, where for some years he had a shop in the rue Fromenteau. By 1725 he was well enough known as a silversmith to be appointed “orfèvre du roi,” although there is said to be only one piece of silver that bears his registered mark, J.O.R. He was still working in silver as late as 1735, when he designed an elaborate surtout de table for the English Duke of Kingston, a nephew of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. He had, however, been well launched on his career as architect and decorator since 1724, having designed in that year a wind dial for the Duke of Mortemar; and by 1736, when he completed and exhibited the boiseries to be installed in Count Bielinski’s château in Warsaw, his reputation had become international. We have no data on the work done after 1736, but there is every reason to believe that Meissonnier and the rococo style were still very much in vogue at the time of his death in 1750.

The explanation of the gaps in our knowledge not only of Meissonnier’s life but of his work is that his reputation, like Thomas Chippendale’s, rests on his published designs rather than on actual work executed. The collection of 118 plates engraved after his designs and issued sometime between 1742 and 1750 under the title Œuvre de Juste Aurèle Meissonnier is the bible of the style it represents and to us an immensely important historical document. But what is its relation to the work actually done by Meissonnier? What was his reputation in his own time?

We know that he was décorateur du roi, but he might have got that title through political influence, and there seems to be no record of his work for the Crown. It is possible that he was better known abroad than
at home. The room executed for Count Bielinski’s château in Poland appears to be the only commission of which we have a contemporary description. The Mercure de France for July, 1736, devotes three pages to it. We read that it was designed, planned, and carried out under the care and supervision of M. Meissonnier, “whose famous talents made him deserving of the rank of Dessinateur ordinaire du Cabinet du Roi.” This paneled room, of which there are four engravings in Meissonnier’s Œuvre, was exhibited in the Palace of the Tuileries.

“The curious have viewed it,” the Mercure de France continues, “with much satisfaction, and we are persuaded that this work, in which painting, sculpture, and architecture are combined with so much distinction and taste, will carry to Poland, where it is to be installed, a very favorable idea of the progress of the fine arts in France.” The number and location of the windows and mirrors are given, with all their dimensions, the subjects of the wall paintings, and the minute details of the cornice decoration. But the only part of the description that

FIG. 1. DESIGN BY MEISSONNIER FOR A ROOM IN COUNT BIELINSKI’S CHÂTEAU IN POLAND
adds anything to the engraved designs in the Œuvre (see fig. 1) is the statement that the lambris d'apui were decorated with garlands of flowers, partly painted, partly carved—a combination that gave a "very . . . the boasted Hôtel de Richelieu, and could not perceive any difference, but in the more or less gold, more or less baubles on the chimneys and tables; and that now and then Vanloo has sprawled goddesses extraordinary effect"—and that the panels were ornamented with allegorical representations of Geometry, Music, and the Four Elements painted in grisaille heightened with gold. Another comment of Horace Walpole's is in order here:

"I have seen the Hôtels de Soubise, de Luxembourg, de Maurepas, de Brancas, and over the doors, and, at other times, Boucher."

It is also known that Meissonnier designed furniture and paneling for the Hôtel de Bezenval, a house evidently well known and admired, for Thiery in his guidebook to Paris, published in 1787, devotes pages to listing the Baron's paintings and porce-
lains, room by room. Incidentally he speaks
of innumerable pieces of furniture designed
by Boule but entirely ignores the Baroness's
rococo armchairs with their superb uphol-
stery. Lady Dilke contrasts the design illus-
trated in figure 2 with the room done for
Count Bielinski and says:

"We cannot help observing that whilst he
[Meissonnier] sends to Portugal or to Po-
land the most recklessly fantastic schemes,
his imagination is at once sobered when a
Paris patron, such as Madame de Besenval,
has to be considered. . . . This curious dif-
ference always distinguishes that which the
French design for themselves from that
which they make to send abroad."

This is an excellent theory, but the par-
ticular case does not prove it, as Meisson-
nier probably made his designs under the
supervision of Brongniart, the architect of
the house.

Apparently the only documented piece
of work after Meissonnier's designs that is
still in existence is the Maison de Brethou.
The ground acquired for this house by
Léon de Brethou, "gentilhomme de la
grande vénérie du roi," did not permit the
erection of the house as planned by Meis-
sonnier, and so, instead of ordering the
great designer to change the plans, M. de
Brethou applied to the city council for per-
mission to use part of the public quai. This
permission was granted, and the house was
built as planned. Incidentally it was built
at Bayonne, in the Basses-Pyrénées, and
not, as one historian says, on the Île St.
Louis in Paris. Unlike most architecture of
its period it survived the return to clas-
sicism under the Empire and was still un-
changed when Maret lived there while
Napoleon held court in Bayonne. It re-
mained intact until partly destroyed by
fire in 1896, has since been restored, and
now houses the town archives.

This is a small showing of executed work
for the leading exponent of a style. It is
possible that other houses or interiors exist
that will eventually be identified as his
work, but probably most of Meissonnier's
architecture, like his silver, was destroyed
during the French Revolution. For the

1 French Furniture and Decoration in the

present, in any case, students must content
themselves with his engraved designs.

The Œuvre as we know it is a collection of
plates published presumably in "cahiers,"
or gatherings of a few plates each, and in
collected sets, at various times between
1734 and 1750, the date of Meissonnier's
death. The dates of issue of the separate
cahiers, like those of the collected sets, are
not definitely known. In the issue of the
Mercure for March, 1734, the following
note appears:

"Il paroit une suite d'Estampes en large,
dans le goût d'Etienne la Belle, qui doivent
piquer la curiosité du Public et de Curieux
du meilleur goût. Ce sont des Fontaines,
des Cascades, des Ruines, des Rocailles, et
Coquillages, des morceaux d'Architecture,
qui font des effets bizarres, singuliers et
pittoresques, par leurs formes piquantes et
extraordinaires, dont souvent aucune partie
ne répond à l'autre, sans que le sujet en
paroisse moins riche et moins agréable. Il y
a aussi des especes de plafonds avec figures
et animaux, groupez avec intelligence, dont
les bordures sont extrêmement ingénieuses
et variées. Le Cartouche qui sert de Front-
tispice, porte ce Titre: Livre d'Ornemens,
iventez et dessinez par J. O. Moissonnier,
Architecte, Dessinateur de la Chambre et
Cabinet du Roy.

"Ces Estampes se vendent rue S. Jacques,
chez la veuve Chereau, aux deux Pilliers
d'or. Il y en a près de cinquante de gravées
par Laureoll."

This seems to be the first published notice
of the plates. The set, however, as indicated
above, came out in cahiers, and it was cus-
tomary in those days to issue the cahiers
from time to time as they were finished.
Also it was customary to sell to the pur-
chaser such cahiers as he wanted without
compelling him to buy the whole set. From
this it would appear reasonable to believe
that the earliest issue of the set would be a
collection of the several cahiers as originally
and separately issued. Much the same
problem faces the collector of Dickens
"firsts." In some collection in Paris there is
undoubtedly a set made up of the cahiers
as they originally appeared. The incom-
plete catalogue of the Cabinet des Estampes
describes a number of plates under the
name of Allouis as engraver and the widow Chereau as publisher. Unfortunately that catalogue has yet to come down to the H of Huquier and the L of Laureolly; so at the present time it is impossible to check the matter further.

The set was advertised in the _Mercure_ for March, 1734, undoubtedly because there were enough cahiers finished and ready to justify the expense of advertising, but how many plates there were in all at that time is unknown. In June, 1734, the _Mercure_ advertised an additional plate. With this notice all contemporary reference to the set and its plates seems to come to an end.

There has long been known an issue of the complete set, of which many copies are in existence. A slightly imperfect set is mounted as single sheets in the Museum Print Room. This issue is the only one which bibliographers appear to have described. It was published by Huquier, who substituted his name for that of the widow Chereau on the plates. Furthermore this issue was put forth as a single volume, not as a collection of cahiers, as is shown by the fact that to save paper the plates were printed up, two, three, and four on a sheet without regard to their running numbers or the constitution of the cahiers. For example, O 86 and G 46 are printed on the same sheet.

The Museum has recently acquired, in a battered contemporary binding, a set of the plates, complete with the portrait, of an issue which appears so far to have escaped description or cataloguing. This copy of the set is remarkable for several reasons. Many of the leaves show the holes left by the temporary stitching of the cahiers as sepa-

FIG. 3. DESIGN FOR A TUREEN BY MEISSONNIER

rately issued. The plates are bound in the order of their running numbers. The change from the widow Chereau to Huquier has already been made. The legend under the plate of the great silver garniture designed for the Duke of Kingston reads: “Projet de Sculpture en argent d’un grand Surtout de Table, avec les deux Terrines qui ont été executée pour le Millord Duc de Kinston.” In the later edition there is a period instead of a comma after “Table”; the following word, “avec,” has been changed to “et”; and “en 1735” has been added. It would appear, therefore, that sometime in the 1720’s Meissonnier and the Chereau establishment began to publish Meissonnier’s designs in separate cahiers. Later, in 1734, the widow Chereau advertised her sets of
Meissonnier, although they were not yet complete. Sometime thereafter the coppers passed from Chereau to Huquier, who continued to print and issue them in cahiers as Chereau had done. The watermarks in the Huquier issue bear the date 1742. That date provides only a most uncertain *terminus a quo*—as, owing to slipshod draughtsmanship in the edict governing the manufacture of paper, all the paper issued for many years after 1742 bore that date no matter in what year it was actually made. Sometimes later, but still within the 1742 watermark period, Huquier issued his mixed-up set—the first and only true edition of all the plates, that is, all printed and bound up at one time, the previous issues being only gatherings of the separate plates, or cahiers, and not homogeneous books. In ordinary terminology this would be explained by saying that the “Meissonnier” went through three editions: first, that published by Chereau; second, that published by Huquier in the order of the numbers on the plates; third, that published by Huquier in which plates bearing widely different numbers appear on the same sheets. As the “Meissonnier” is one of the greatest of the French eighteenth century’s contributions to engraved ornament, this clearing up of a bibliographical question may not be out of place.

Meissonnier died in Paris in 1750 at the age of fifty-five. In October of that year the *Mercure* published a memoir regretting that he had not confined himself to one of the arts instead of dabbling in all of them and attaining perfection in none. The praise given to him “falls rather on the execution than on the composition”—which was extravagant and lent itself to bad imitation—“the more so that strange and unusual things are a thousand times easier to produce than those that are sound and logical.” The *Mercure* particularly deprecates the false facility (“always an enemy of good taste”) of his imitators: “they imitated only his faults, and they have spread them across Europe.” The author of this memoir also finds it unfortunate that Meissonnier approached architecture with the technique of a silversmith and that he spent the latter part of his life in designing impossible projects for churches, palaces, and public monuments—gigantic and mannered *bizarrettes*. “With a little more simplicity and constancy and a little less arrogance his genius would have rendered him a really great man instead of only a clever designer.”

Edna Donnell.

**NOTES**

**Election of a Trustee.** At the meeting of the Board of Trustees on October 20, 1941, Devereux C. Josephs was elected a Trustee in the Class of 1943. Mr. Josephs is a graduate of Groton School and Harvard University. He occupies the position of financial advisor to several Carnegie foundations for the advancement of learning and the arts.

**Membership.** At a meeting of the Board of Trustees held November 17, 1941, Elisha Whittelsey was declared a Benefactor in recognition of his bequest to the Museum. H. Edward Manville was elected a Fellow in Perpetuity in recognition of his gift to the Museum, and thirteen Annual Members were elected.

**The Christmas Story.** A seated statue of the Madonna, shown in a mediaeval garden, and a colorful Spanish woodcarving of the Miracle of the Palm Tree have been chosen as the principal objects of the Christmas exhibition in the Junior Museum.

**Christmas Cards and Gifts.** The Museum is again offering for sale a series of distinctive Christmas cards and a varied selection of unusual gifts. Twenty-two objects from the collections have been reproduced as cards or bookmarks. Among those from the collection of prints are a Nativity by Dürer, an Adoration of the Shepherds from a fifteenth-century book of hours, figures from a set of silhouette puppets, and an amusing floral piece in the