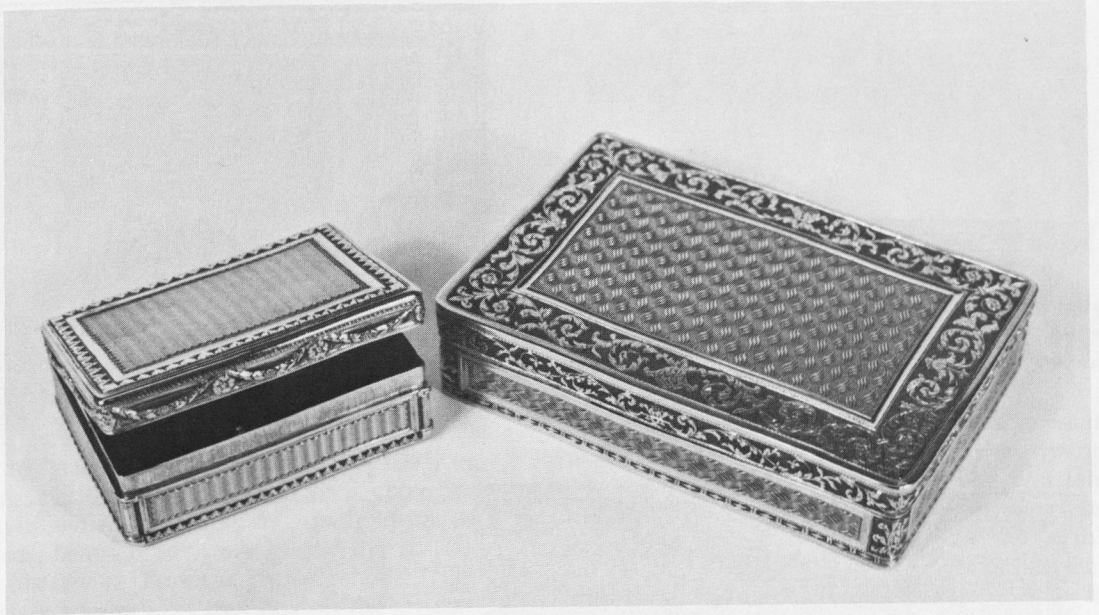




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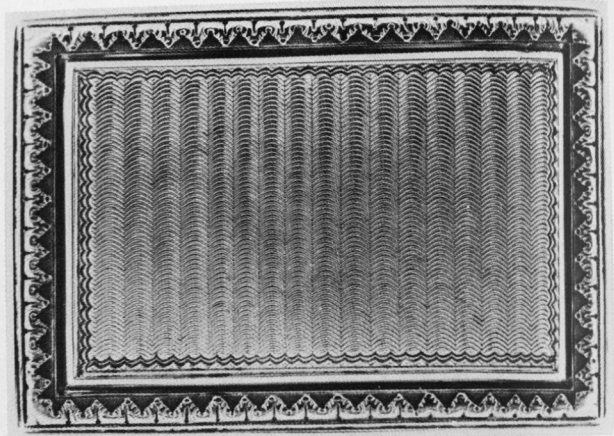
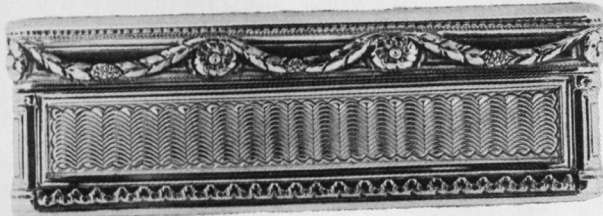
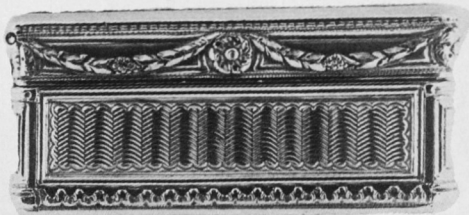


Two Parisian Gold Snuffboxes

The aristocratic mania for ever more exquisite, artful and elegant snuffboxes reached its dazzling zenith in the eighteenth century. Contriving to satisfy this excessive if cultured appetite by the production of an extraordinarily large number of boxes of beauty and high quality, the goldsmiths of Paris early established their city as the unrivaled international center of snuffbox manufacture. Fashioned from wonderfully rich materials — gold, silver, ivory, hardstones, lacquer, tortoise-shell, porcelain, mother-of-pearl, horn, diamond and other precious stones among them — and displaying their makers' ingenuity and consummate craftsmanship, the rare Parisian boxes, more highly prized than any others, were avidly sought after and collected. The Museum of Art and Archaeology has in its holdings, as a part of the Sarah Catherine France Collection, two gold snuffboxes representative of Parisian *orfèverie*, or precious

metalware.¹ Solid gold, of simple shapes simply decorated, these boxes bear witness to the careful and loving attention lavished by Parisian *orfèvres* on even their most modest creations.

In France it was the goldsmiths' guilds that jealously watched over the quality of workmanship of and purity of materials used by their members; and the guilds, in turn, were regulated by the State. Only master-craftsmen were admitted to the guilds, and only guild members were licensed by the State to manufacture and sell *orfèverie*. Thanks to this careful control quality was maintained. But just as important for us, these rigorous standards make possible the attribution of individual pieces of goldwork to the *orfèvre* who produced them, for the State required that each article produced by a goldsmith bear a series of marks showing that he had adhered to the specified system of production. Throughout the eighteenth century,



1. Gold snuffbox by Louis-Claude Porcher, top and side views.

until 1791, each gold box made in Paris was to bear four *poinçons*, or impressed marks:²

1) the maker's mark, which consisted of a crowned fleur-de-lis designating the city of Paris, the initials of the goldsmith with a personal device, and one small dot on either side of the fleur-de-lis;³

2) the *charge* mark, a preliminary tax mark put on each section of the box before final assembly;

3) the hall or warden's mark, the mark of the guild in the form of a crowned letter of the alphabet, which attested to the purity of the alloy; and

4) the *décharge* mark, which was impressed after completion of the box to show that taxes had been paid on the work and that it might lawfully be sold.

The maker's mark, designed and registered when the goldsmith was admitted to the guild, remained constant for his work. The other marks, however, changed at more or less regu-

lar intervals: the warden's mark, for example, was changed every year at mid-July, while both the *charge* and the *décharge* marks were changed, on the average, every seven years.

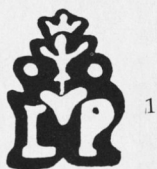
Markings on the Missouri boxes, remarkably complete, make possible an identification of the *orfèvres* who produced them, and a dating. Moreover, since one of these boxes was made in the first years of the nineteenth century, its *poinçons* serve to illustrate the changes in the practice of marking goldwork that came with the Revolution.

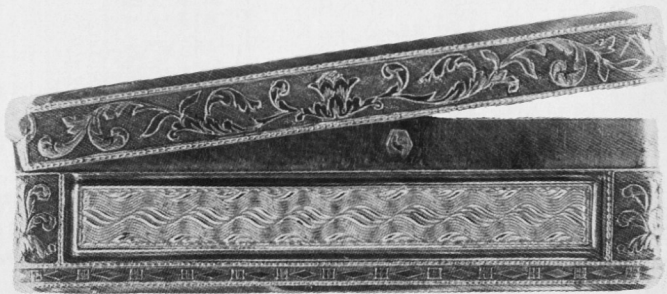
2. Opposite page: hallmarks on the Porcher box, greatly enlarged: 1) poinçon of Louis-Claude Porcher, registered 26 July 1762; 2) charge mark of J. B. Fouache, used 1 October 1774-77; 3) warden's mark for Paris, 1774-75; 4) *décharge* mark of J. B. Fouache, used 1 October 1774-77.

THE SMALLER MISSOURI BOX (Fig. 1)⁴ bears on its floor the mark of the Parisian goldsmith Louis-Claude Porcher (1737-active 1791), who was received into the guild as a master on 21 July, 1762: his personal *poinçon* was registered on 26 July of that year.⁵ As prescribed by regulation, Porcher's mark takes the form of a crowned fleur-de-lis with the *grains de remède* dots on either side, below which are placed the initials LP. As his device Porcher chose a heart. The *charge* mark appears on this box on the underside of the lid only but is, even there, largely obliterated (not unexpectedly, since it would have been stamped before completion of the

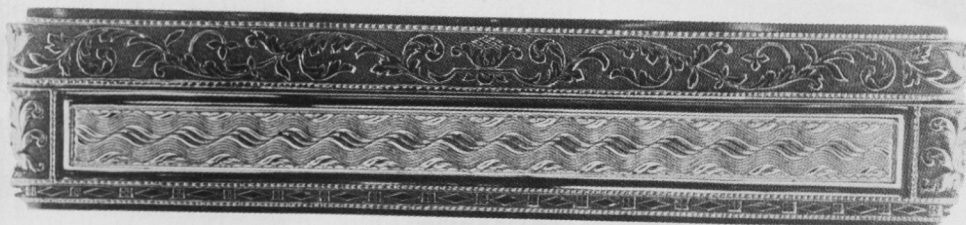
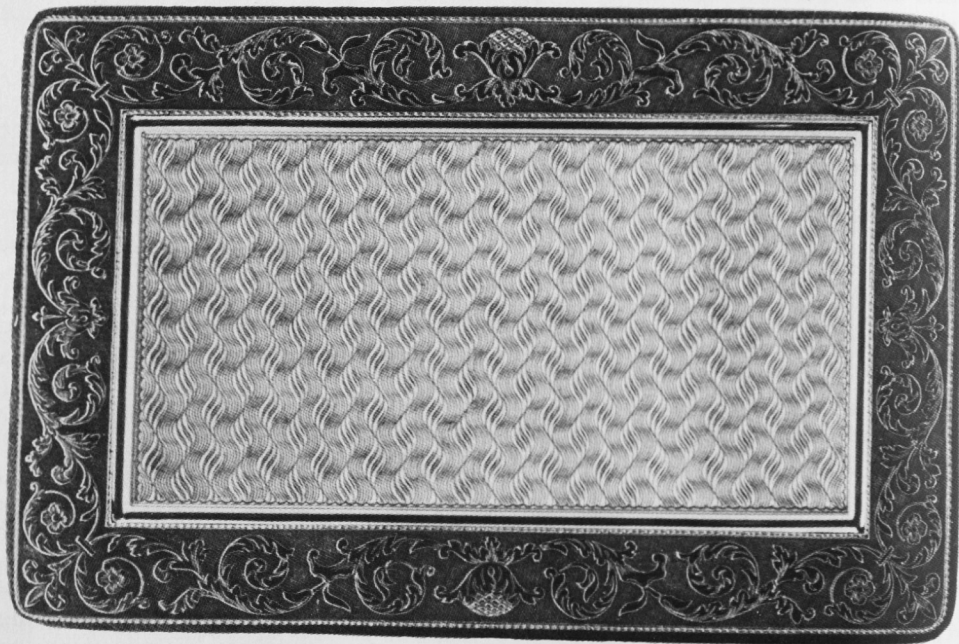
box). Because of the warden's and the *décharge* marks, however, it can be identified as that of the *fermier* Jean-Baptiste Fouache, who served as "tax-farmer" from 1 October 1774 to 1777.⁶ A clear impression of Fouache's *charge* mark would show a design of entwining ribands centering on a capital letter A.⁷ The warden's mark consists of a crowned letter L, the letter used for the year from mid-July 1774 to mid-July 1775.⁸ Guaranteeing the alloy to be at least twenty-carat gold, this mark, impressed like the *charge* mark before completion of the box, is seen clearly on the floor, and low on the inside front near the left corner, as well as on the underside of the lid. The tiny *décharge* mark is one used by Fouache for small pieces of *orfèvererie* and appears on the outside right flange. As do most other *décharge* marks, that of Fouache takes the form of a bird's or animal's head: Fouache's mark is a monkey's head (Fig. 2).⁹

Like all else in the fashionable world, the style and decoration of snuffboxes changed continually in order to reflect the latest vogue. Porcher's box is no anomaly, its decorative elements wholly in keeping with the period of its manufacture, which, through the evidence of its marks, can be assigned to the months between 1 October 1774 and mid-July 1775. Extremely modest, this box supports engine-turned (*guilloché*)¹⁰ panels on sides, top and bottom, with both the top and bottom panels bounded by an acanthus leaf motif. The latter motif appears along the bottom of the box, with the lid's sides displaying garland swags set on a *sablé* or ("granulated" matt) ground. Small pillars are placed at each of the rounded corners of the side walls of the box. Small enough to be portable, this snuffbox is an excellent example of the craftsmanship found in Paris before the Revolution.





3. Gold snuffbox by Gabriel-Raoul Morel, top and side views.





4. Hallmarks on the Morel box, greatly enlarged: 1) *poinçon* of Gabriel-Raoul Morel; 2) standard mark for the third gold standard (750/1000 = 18 carats), used in Paris 1794-1819; 3) standard mark for the third gold standard, for Paris 1809-19; 4) excise mark, for Paris 1809-19.

THE LARGER MISSOURI BOX (Fig. 3)¹¹ gives an important glimpse of post-revolutionary Parisian goldwork *poinçons*. The goldsmiths' guild survived the Revolution — the only guild to do so — but the State assumed the responsibilities of both the *fermiers* and the guild's wardens. Gone, of course, was the fleur-de-lis of the maker's mark, replaced now by the initials of the *orfèvre* and a device of his choosing placed in a diamond shape, the *poinçon losangique*. The warden's and the *charge* marks were replaced by marks guaranteeing the standard of the gold alloy used.¹² The *décharge* mark gave place at this time to an excise mark that also assumed its function. Initiated in 1791, these State marks were changed in 1798, 1809, 1819 and 1838.¹³

An examination of the maker's mark of the large Missouri box reveals that it comes from the workshop of Gabriel-Raoul Morel (active 1798-ca. 1827), an *orfèvre* known for his use of costly materials in the creation of elaborate boxes.¹⁴ His mark,¹⁵ consisting of his initials, GRM,

placed with his device (an ear) in a *poinçon losangique*, appears clearly on the floor of the box, and is found, too, on the underside of the lid and on the inside right flange, though partially obliterated in the latter two locations. Beside his mark on the floor of the box is a preliminary standard mark for the third gold standard (750/1000=18 carats), a mark in use from 1794 until 1819, consisting of a dog's head and the numeral 3 placed in a circle.¹⁶ Another standard mark, a more important and a more common one, appears on the left outside flange, being a cartouche in which a cock and the numeral 3 are seen.¹⁷ An excise mark, located on the right outer flange, represents a roaring lion (Fig. 4).¹⁸ These last two marks—the standard mark with the cock, and the roaring-lion excise mark—were in use from 1809 to 1819,¹⁹ the decade to which, therefore, this box may be assigned.

The Morel box, like the smaller one, has a rather unassuming, even conventional decoration, recalling the quiet elegance of similar eighteenth-century designs. The top, bottom and side panels have another engine-turned pattern, bordered by chased scroll-work on *sablé* or grounds. Again the corners are rounded, with stylized leaves in the place of the smaller box's pillars. A raised band of chased diamonds and tiny squares runs round the bottom edge of the box.

Unlike the small Porcher box, however, this snuffbox was probably not carried but was intended to be placed upon a table. There it would have been ready at all times to yield to the thumb and forefinger that delicious pinch of glorious snuff.

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¹ See notes 4 and 11 below.

² Marc Rosenberg, *Der Goldschmiede Markzeichen*, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Frankfurt-am-Main and Berlin 1922-1928) IV, 246 ff. Note that these remarks apply to Paris; other French cities had the same basic regulations but the forms of their marks are often different from those of Paris.

³ These two dots are the *grains de remède*, which symbolize the tolerance in the standard of silver, these maker's marks being used on small pieces of silver as well as goldwork.

⁴ Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. Acc. No. 69.1031. L. 5.4 cm., W. 4.1 cm., H. 1.8 cm. Gift of Miss Sarah Catherine France.

⁵ Henri Nocq, *Le poinçon de Paris: répertoire des maîtres-orfèvres de la juridiction de Paris depuis le moyen-âge jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e siècle*, 5 vols. (Paris 1968) III, 352. The following information is given: Porcher (Louis-Claude). Fils d'Alexis Porcher./ 23 Décembre 1737. Baptisé./ 21 Juillet 1762. Demeurant à Paris, pont Notre-Dame, paroisse de la Madeleine en la Cité, reçu maître en cette ville, cautionné par son père même pont./ 26 Juillet 1762. Fait insculpter le poinçon: *Fleur de lys couronnée, deux grains, LP, un coeur.* La liste de 1765 le donne rue St. Louis; celle de 1768, pont Notre-Dame./ L'almanach d'indication nomme Porcher le jeune, pont Notre-Dame, au Vase d'or, connu pour tout ce qui concerne le bijou de fantaisie et à secret./ 10 Décembre 1781 (Liste). Pont Notre-Dame./ 9 Juillet 1784. Le Journal de Paris annonce le décès de Louis-Alexis, fils mineur de Louis-Claude Porcher./ Les tableaux l'indiquent: pont au Change de 1783 à 1786 et rue de la Sonnerie de 1787 à 1791.

⁶ Rosenberg, op. cit., IV, 259. *Fermiers* purchased their positions from the State for large sums and in so doing obtained the right to collect taxes on metalwork, a portion of which, of course, they kept. Parisian "tax-farmers" were required to cause both the *charge* and *décharge* marks to be impressed on *orfèvrerie*. They held their posts for an average of seven years. I give here the date of Fouache's assumption of the duties of *fermier* as shown by Rosenberg. However, Claude Fregnac et. al., *Les Grands Orfèvres de Louis XII à Charles X* (Paris 1965), assign to him the dates of September 1775-April 1781. That his *charge* and *décharge* marks are those on the box cannot be doubted. If the Fregnac listing is correct, it may be that the warden's mark was being used beyond its expiration date in mid-July 1775.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 6529.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 253, no. 6431. Crowned letters of the alphabet,

excepting *J*, *U* and *W*, were used as warden's marks in Paris and were changed each year at mid-July. *U* was used in 1783-84, and from 1784-89 the mark consisted of a crowned letter *P*, for Paris, with the last two digits of the year.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 259, no. 6530. A. Kenneth Snowman, *Eighteenth-Century Gold Boxes of Europe* (Boston 1966) 87, identifies Fouache's *décharge* mark as a monkey's head. A very clear impression of a ram's head appears on the left outside flange of the Porcher box. It is unlike any other marks used in Paris which I have seen illustrated, and its presence here is anomalous. Rosenberg, op. cit., IV, 264, no. 6591, shows a ram's head used as a standard mark for the third gold standard, in use in Paris 1819-38. These marks are dissimilar in design, however. Also appearing on the outside of this box's flange is the engraved number 260. Similarly, the Morel box (see below) has the number 404 on the outside of its lower flange. I have not discovered to what these numbers refer.

¹⁰ Engine-turning is the term for a mechanical process of engraving regular linear patterns on metal surfaces, a process most often used to produce undulating lines simulating moiré. It had the effect of standardizing decoration after its perfection about 1768. "Engine-turning" is the English equivalent for the French term, *guilloché*. Cf. Clare Le Corbeiller, *European and American Snuff Boxes 1730-1830* (London 1966) 29.

¹¹ Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. Acc. No. 69.1046. L. 8.5 cm., W. 5.8 cm., H. 1.8 cm. Gift of Miss Sarah Catherine France.

¹² Three standards were now allowed: 22 carats (920/1000), 20 carats (840/1000) and 18 carats (750/1000).

¹³ Rosenberg, op. cit., IV, 261 ff.

¹⁴ Le Corbeiller, op. cit., 86; Snowman, op. cit., 60, 135.

¹⁵ Le Corbeiller, op. cit., App. V, h; Snowman, op. cit., 89.

¹⁶ Rosenberg, op. cit., IV, 262, no. 6564.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 263, no. 6572.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 264, no. 6584.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 263 f.

Two articles concerning other objects in the France Collection have appeared in *Muse* No. 8 (1974): "David Le Marchand's Madonna and Child," by Robert L. Foah (pp. 38-43) and "A Signed Portrait Miniature," by Beverly Zisla Welber (pp. 44-48).