

REPORT

August 15, 2022

On July 11, 2022, Graham Arader asked me for my written opinion on the identity and authenticity of a walnut Philadelphia Chippendale dressing table with a carved shell drawer, furniture inventory number 327. This report summarizes my observations and opinions.

Dressing table

Philadelphia, 1765-75

Walnut; hard pine drawer sides and case back, white cedar drawer bottoms and case bottom boards

29-1/4 x 38-1/4 x 21

This dressing table is a simpler version of urban Philadelphia cabinetry of just before the Revolutionary War. It is made of walnut rather than more costly mahogany, lacks engaged quarter columns in the front corners of the case, and has no carving on the knees, but the carved shell drawer links it to a small group of ambitious examples. Key attributes that distinguish this carving include a relief-carved shell with a distinctive scalloped outline, a central six-petal flower with over-lying and opposing leaves that extend outward at the sides covering part of the shell, and punchwork made with a square, four-point punch. The tendrils, which are applied to the face of the drawer front, also link the work to other examples. The tendrils trace two essentially parallel stalks. In contrast, other stalks or tendrils cross or loop or trace some other patterns. Additionally, these tendrils branch at strategic places as do the related examples. The other dressing tables include one from the E.J. Nusrala collection (Christie's, January 21, 2006, lot 672), and two that appeared in advertisements of Ginsburg & Levy (*Antiques*, April 1967, p. 409) and David Stockwell (*Antiques*, May 1970, p. 619). Others exist as well, and all exhibit small variations from one another. The Arader carving differs in having C scrolls in place of the slender tendrils on the inside. Comparison of the tendrils on one side of the drawer front with those on the other reveals that a short section of the bottom-most leaf on the right side must have broken off. Instead of restoring it, the repairer shaved the end to make it less obvious.

The carving on this and related dressing tables and other furniture forms has been attributed to the Philadelphia carving partnership of Nicholas Bernard and Martin Jugiez. The earliest evidence of their work in Philadelphia appears to be an advertisement of November 25, 1762, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a newspaper published in that city. Their work, including discussion of a fourth dressing table, very similar to the Nusrala one, is in Luke Beckerdite, "The

Philadelphia Carving Shops: Part II: Bernard and Jugiez," *Antiques* (September 1985), pp. 498-513.

The dressing table is wider than most by about two inches. The relatively shallow center shell drawer reinforces the wider proportions. It also allows the carved tendrils to fill out the drawer in a more natural fashion, in contrast to some other compositions that can look tightly enclosed. This dressing table survives in very good condition. The brasses are original, as are all of the knee brackets, the table top, and other parts. A small piece of the lower left corner of the drawer front has broken off. Similarly, a small portion of the inside (i.e., back) knuckle of the left front claw-and-ball foot has chipped off.