

# Rediscovering a sixteenth-century Burgundian cabinet at the J. Paul Getty Museum

by JACK HINTON, *Philadelphia Museum of Art*, and ARLEN HEGINBOTHAM, *J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles*

THE ACTIVITIES OF fakers and restorers have thrown down more challenges to scholars of Renaissance furniture than in almost any other field. This is attributable to the vulnerability of wood to decay, combined with traditional restoration practices, which often involved the wholesale replacement of damaged elements. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, a strong market demand fuelled the creation of licit and illicit copies, as well as hybrid objects assembled from older, disparate parts. Consequently, scholars have to distinguish between originals, fakes and nebulous categories of restored objects.

Recent scholarship has provided new directions and classifications based on both physical and visual examination, such as 'largely original', 'pieces with single original parts' and 'Renaissance-style creations'.<sup>1</sup> This work is fundamental in a subject where the literature has occasionally relied upon an appreciation of carving style and composition to evaluate examples, ignoring problems of construction; in this way, problematic aspects of hitherto widely accepted pieces have been identified. Enduring scepticism towards early furniture and the relative paucity of further investigative methods leaves open the possibility that the eye can be fooled, and that genuine pieces might be falsely condemned.

The story of a cabinet (Fig.16) at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, reflects these difficulties, underlining the adverse effect of suspicions and, to some extent, the limits of purely visual analysis.<sup>2</sup> Despite its impressive decoration in a style associated with Renaissance Burgundy or Lyon, and an illustrious provenance, the cabinet's authenticity was doubted in the late twentieth century. Its execution, excellent state of preservation and uniform patina seemed improbable for a sixteenth-century object, and it was published as a nineteenth-century fake.<sup>3</sup>

The 2001 exhibition *Hugues Sambin: un créateur au XVIe siècle*, held at the Musée National de la Renaissance, Ecouen, celebrated the acquisition of an armoire (Fig.17) from the château of Thoisay-la-Berchère. The accompanying catalogue

The authors would like to thank the following people for their invaluable assistance: Maarten van Bommel, Agnès Bos, Christine Brennan, Emmanuelle Brugerolle, David Carson, David deMuzio, Christian Dresen, Lisa Ellis, Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, Mark Henderson, Nick Humphrey, Anne Iverson, Simon Jervis, Anna Jolly, Timothy Jull, Peter Klein, Wolfram Koeppe, Christine Locatelli, Jonathan Marsden, Stuart Phyr, Alain Prévét, Jack Ross, Julia Schultz, David Scott, Sharon Shore, Ellen South, Dusan Stulik, Eleanor Tollfree, Jeremy Warren and Lucy Wood. We would particularly like to recognise the work of Didier Pousset and Aubert Gérard on the dendrochronological analysis of the cabinet. In early 2002, Catherine Hess, Associate Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Getty Museum, recommended that the cabinet be brought out of storage for re-examination under the supervision of Brian Considine, Senior Conservator. Their importance to the direction and completion of this project cannot be understated, and the authors would like to express their gratitude to them here. This article is dedicated to the memory of Dean Walker (1948–2005), whose enthusiasm and interest in all aspects of Renaissance furniture and decorative arts was truly inspirational.

<sup>1</sup> W. Koeppel: 'French Renaissance and Pseudo-Renaissance furniture in American collections', *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 1, no.2 (Spring 1994), pp.48–66; *idem*: 'French renaissance furniture at the Frick collection', *Apollo* 137 (May 1993), p.326.

discusses Hugues Sambin (c.1520–1601), an important but enigmatic figure of the Burgundian Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> In addition to his work as an architect, engineer, sculptor and designer, Sambin was the head of a prominent furniture-making workshop in Dijon. Many fine pieces of furniture ornamented with heavily carved figures have been and continue to be attributed to him, perhaps too readily: the Ecouen show attempted to clarify this problem by reconstructing Sambin's œuvre. An essay by Alain Prévét in the exhibition catalogue questioned the rejection of the Getty piece.<sup>5</sup> Prévét's argument drew attention to similarities in the carved decoration, metal hardware, paintings and construction shared by the Getty cabinet and a cabinet in Besançon (Fig.18). This is significant in that the Besançon object has been convincingly identified as being listed in the 1596 post-mortem inventory of Ferdinand Gauthiot, seigneur d'Ancier.<sup>6</sup> Painted with the family arms, the cabinet was probably made for Ferdinand's father, Jean, who was elected governor of the city in 1582. It was bequeathed to the Jesuit College in Besançon by Jean's grandson in the seventeenth century, where it stayed until 1765, when it was seized for the city. Although the cabinet has minor losses and restoration, its virtually unbroken provenance is unprecedented. Its importance is enhanced by the fact that the gold-on-black paintings and gilded highlights on the carvings are the work of the Dijon painter Evrard Bredin, who signed one of the figure scenes and dated it 1581. The woodwork is often attributed to Sambin, based on stylistic and circumstantial evidence.<sup>7</sup> Although the attribution remains to be proved, a conservation study included in the Ecouen catalogue demonstrated the unity of the object's construction; dendrochronological analysis dated it to c.1563.<sup>8</sup> The piece is arguably a touchstone from which other works can be judged. The powerful argument presented at Ecouen prompted a serious re-investigation of the Getty cabinet. From early 2002, the physical and documentary evidence was analysed by a team of curators, conservators and scientists, and the results

<sup>2</sup> Acc. no.71.DA.89; G. Wilson and C. Hess: *Summary Catalogue of European Decorative Arts in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Los Angeles 2001, pp.4–5, no.6.

<sup>3</sup> Koeppel 1994, op. cit. (note 1), pp.59–61.

<sup>4</sup> A. Erlande-Brandenburg et al.: exh. cat. *Hugues Sambin: Un créateur au XVIe siècle (vers 1520–1601)*, Paris (Musée national de la Renaissance) 2001. The exhibition was accompanied by an eleven-page broadsheet leaflet with comparative photographs of pieces of furniture and drawings that were not exhibited.

<sup>5</sup> A. Prévét: 'Œuvre Authentique, Œuvres Hypothétiques: de la main de l'artiste aux recettes de l'atelier', in Erlande-Brandenburg, op. cit. (note 4), pp.94–101.

<sup>6</sup> Prévét, op. cit. (note 5), pp.94–95 and pp.116–17, note 15; see C. Barral et al.: exh. cat. *Hugues Sambin vers 1520–1601*, Dijon (Musée des Beaux-Arts) 1989, pp.38–40, no.15, for a different attribution and bibliographical notes; J. Thirion: *Le Mobilier du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance en France*, Dijon 1998, pp.118–19.

<sup>7</sup> The attribution dates to the nineteenth century; see Prévét, op. cit. (note 5), pp.94–101 and p.117, note 22.

<sup>8</sup> B. François, A. Gérard and D. Pousset: 'Une Nouvelle Analyse du Mobilier: matériaux et techniques du cabinet Gauthiot d'Ancier et de l'armoire de Thoisay-la-Berchère', in Erlande-Brandenburg, op. cit. (note 4), pp.107–13.



16. Cabinet.  
Burgundian, c. 1580.  
Walnut, oak, brass  
hardware (pulls and  
tacks), iron hardware  
(locks and hinges),  
paintings in carbon  
black and yellow  
ochre with gold  
powder, textile lining  
in central drawer, 307  
by 168 by 74 cm.  
(J. Paul Getty Museum,  
Los Angeles).



17. Armoire, from the château de Thoisay-la-Berchère. Burgundian, late sixteenth century. Walnut, oak, paintings in black, ochre and gold pigments, fragmentary remains of interior lining fixed by brass tacks, 175 by 133 by 50 cm. (Musée National de la Renaissance, Ecouen).

clearly date the Getty cabinet to the late sixteenth century and link it directly to the makers of the Besançon piece.<sup>9</sup>

The Getty cabinet was not always held in low esteem; in the late nineteenth century it was a celebrated object. Tracing its history over the past 150 years is instructive, revealing its place in historic collections, the decline in taste for furniture of this type, and changes to the cabinet's condition that contributed to the suspicions of later examiners. In 1846, the first published illustration and reference to the cabinet appeared in Edmond Du Sommerard's concluding part of his father Alexandre's *Les Arts au Moyen Age* (Fig.19).<sup>10</sup> By this date, the piece had already formed part of the famous collection of Louis-Fidèle Debruge-Duménil (1787–1838), who began purchasing medieval and Renaissance objects in earnest from about 1830.<sup>11</sup> There is scant evidence of Debruge-Duménil's sources, and recent studies have identified the reworking of French Renaissance furniture as early as the 1820s, so an early record of the cabinet would not ensure its authenticity.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The publication of this article coincides with an exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum entitled 'A Renaissance Cabinet Rediscovered', which opened on 22nd November 2005 and will run until December 2008.

<sup>10</sup> E. Du Sommerard: *Les Arts au Moyen Age*, V, Paris 1846, pp.203–04, pl.XIX.

<sup>11</sup> F. Arquie-Bruley: 'Debruge-Duménil (1788–1838) et sa collection d'objets d'art', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, classe di lettere e filosofia* 20, no.1 (1990), pp.211–48.

<sup>12</sup> T. Crépin-Leblond et al.: *Parures d'Or et de Pourpre: le mobilier à la cour des Valois*, Paris 2002, p.84, no.4.

<sup>13</sup> J. Labarthe: *Description des objets d'art qui composent la collection Debruge Duménil . . . , Paris 1847*, pp.751–52, no.1500; Arquie-Bruley, op. cit. (note 11), pp.244–48.

<sup>14</sup> Catalogue des objets d'art qui composent la collection Debruge-Duménil . . . , Hôtel des ventes mobilières, Paris, 1849, p.168, lot 1500. For Soltykoff, see C. Brennan: 'Prince Petr Soltykoff: an important collector of Medieval art', M.A. thesis (Bard Graduate

After Debruge's death, 2,400 objects were selected from a total of over 15,000 to form a private museum, curated by his son-in-law, Jules Labarthe, whose 1847 catalogue of the collection included the cabinet. The Russian Prince Petr Soltykoff (1804–89) purchased the entire collection soon afterwards for 350,000 francs.<sup>13</sup> A shrewd investor, Soltykoff decided to auction the collection until this figure was recouped, but the fact that he purchased the cabinet from his own sale for 5,150 francs suggests his admiration for the piece.<sup>14</sup> Soltykoff decided to resell his collection in 1861 and, as a speculative purchase, the Baron Achille Seillièvre bought the decorative art objects before the sale for the equivalent of around £72,000, a significant rise in value.<sup>15</sup> While the Soltykoff auction made little profit on the baron's investment, Seillièvre was able to reserve the finest pieces for his collection at the château de Mello, near Chantilly.<sup>16</sup> Remarkably, three albums in the Special Collections of the Getty Research Institute containing 113 photographs by Paul Berthier (1822–1912) document objects from the auction and include a picture of the cabinet (Fig.20).<sup>17</sup>

A comparison of the two images shows some obvious restorations, presumably made for Soltykoff.<sup>18</sup> The feet in the shape of lions were added and the base structure beneath the term figures was reworked; the current base is of poplar, a wood not used elsewhere on the piece. The figure scene in the centre of the crowning element in the 1846 lithograph was an invention of the print-maker; it is after a painting by Toussaint Dubreuil then belonging to Du Sommerard.<sup>19</sup> The carved panel now present is deceptively reproduced from a sixteenth-century panel now in the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, underlining the skills of nineteenth-century copyists.<sup>20</sup>

While in the Seillièvre collection, the cabinet aroused the interest of historians of French furniture. Alfred de Champeaux (1833–1903) and Edmond Bonnaffé (1825–1903) discussed the piece in several publications, and they were unanimous in their praise.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Bonnaffé, a critic and collector of Renaissance objects, was the first to propose a link with the Besançon cabinet. He also believed that the paintings on the Getty cabinet were by the same artist as those on the Besançon piece, although he described their condition as 'aujourd'hui bien effacés'.<sup>22</sup>

After his death, Seillièvre's collection was auctioned in May 1890. At a moment of relative weakness in the market, the cabinet was one of the costliest pieces of furniture in the sale at 40,000 francs.<sup>23</sup> Its exact fate is obscure, but documents from Duveen Brothers at the Getty Research Institute show that it crossed the Channel to England and subsequently

Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture, New York, 2003). The authors are grateful to Christine Brennan for her assistance.

<sup>15</sup> G. Reitlinger: *The Economics of Taste*, London 1963, II, p.110.

<sup>16</sup> Catalogue des objets d'art et de haute curiosité composant la célèbre collection du prince Soltykoff, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1861, lot 275. At the auction, the cabinet was valued at 12,500 francs.

<sup>17</sup> The albums bear the title *Objets d'art de la collection du Prince Soltykoff*, c.1861. They appear to have belonged to Seillièvre; they are lettered 'Château de Mello' on the spine.

<sup>18</sup> Soltykoff preferred his objects to have a 'complete' look; see Brennan, op. cit. (note 14), pp.59–64.

<sup>19</sup> Prévét, op. cit. (note 5), pp.118–19, note 32, explains the confusion over the contents of the frame in detail.

<sup>20</sup> The panel is from the Peyre bequest; inv. no.PE 1296.

<sup>21</sup> A. de Champeaux: *Le Meuble*, Paris 1885, I, pp.192–94, fig.41: 'le specimen le plus



18. Cabinet, once belonging to the Gauthiot d'Ancier family. Burgundian, c. 1581. Walnut, oak, paintings in black, ochre and gold pigments, one signed 'E. BRENDINUS F. 1581', 268 by 170 by 63 cm. (Musée du Temps, Palais Granvelle, Besançon).

arrived in the United States. Duveen's New York stock books record the purchase of the piece in June 1906 for \$16,500 from Davis Brothers.<sup>24</sup> 'Davis Brothers' were Richard and Leopold Davis, dealers based in Bond Street, whose firm had been prominent in the nineteenth century under the guidance of their father, Charles Davis (1849–1914).<sup>25</sup> Hardly any business records survive, but the most prominent English families used Charles Davis as their art dealer. Duveen gave the provenance of the Getty cabinet as belonging to the Duke of Marlborough after Baron Seilliére, and Davis had assisted the 8th duke in disposing of works of art.<sup>26</sup> Given this connection, it is

complet qui soit resté de l'art dijonnais'; E. Bonnaffé: 'Etude sur le meuble en France au XVIe siècle (se article)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1886), pp. 52–67; and *idem: Le Meuble en France au XVIe Siècle*, Paris 1887, pp. 166–70.

<sup>24</sup> Bonnaffé 1886, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Reitlinger, *op. cit.* (note 15), pp. 120–21; C. Mannheim: *Catalogue des Objets d'art de haute curiosité et de riche ameublement provenant de l'important collection de feu M. le Baron Achille Seilliére*, Paris 1890, pp. 80–81, no. 540.

<sup>26</sup> Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (hereafter cited as GRJ), Duveen Brothers Archive, microfilm box 10, p. 123; box 11, p. 117; box 16, p. 70. The stock book number for the piece is 26583.

<sup>27</sup> The authors are most grateful to Simon Jervis for providing them with a copy of 'Charles Davis, the 15th Duke of Norfolk and the formation of the collection of continental furniture at Arundel Castle' before its publication as an article in *Furniture History* 41 (2005), pp. 231–48.

<sup>28</sup> See Jervis, *op. cit.* (note 25). Future research may help to clarify the object's provenance; letters from Davis Brothers in the Duveen Brothers Archive suggest that it was in their stock for several years.



19. Pl. XIX from E. Du Sommerard: *Mémoires sur l'Art à l'époque moyenâgeuse*, Paris 1846.



20. Photograph of the cabinet at the Soltykoff sale, by Paul Berthier, 1861. (Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; inv. no. 90.R.35).

possible that the cabinet was purchased for Blenheim Palace during the refurbishment of the house after the marriage of Consuelo Vanderbilt to the 9th duke in 1895. This trans-atlantic link is not without irony, given the fact that Consuelo's tastes were shaped by those of her mother, Alva Erskine Smith Vanderbilt, whose 'Gothic Room' at Marble House, Newport, Rhode Island, was filled with medieval and Renaissance objects from the Parisian collection of Emile Gavet.

Duveen wasted no time in trying to find a home for the Getty piece, which he had reunited with another cabinet with a Seilliére, Soltykoff and Marlborough provenance.<sup>27</sup> He focused upon Clarence H. Mackay, an American collector who had expressed interest in furniture from the Chabrière-Arlès collection that Duveen sold to Henry Clay Frick in 1916. Mackay is little known as a collector today, but important works of art from his house, Harbor Hill at Roslyn, Long Island, now adorn American museum collections.<sup>28</sup> A letter from Mackay to Duveen, dated 19th March 1917, reports that he had been shown the cabinets for the 'Stone Room' of his house, but despite his admiration, Mackay could not find space for them.<sup>29</sup> Duveen was persuasive, however, perhaps by emphasising their provenance; a letter of 11th December 1918 included a memorandum of account, showing that the collector had agreed to take the cabinet for \$48,000, and referred to Mackay's interest in its provenance.<sup>30</sup> A series of photographs dating from the 1920s records the Mackay collection *in situ*, showing the cabinet in the Music Room of Harbor Hill (Fig.21).<sup>31</sup>

The cabinet stayed with Mackay for only a short period, for Wilhelm Valentiner (1880–1958), who catalogued the collection in 1924, thought it was a doubtful object. It is difficult to reconstruct the controversy, but in a letter of 6th June 1924 to Mackay, Duveen expressed dismay at discovering that Valentiner 'did not like' either cabinet, and that they would not be included in the catalogue. Duveen affirmed their quality with characteristic hyperbole: 'not only are these cabinets genuine – they are the two greatest cabinets in private hands in the universe. I really think that they are so wonderful that Dr Valentiner could not realise they were genuine'.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Valentiner and Mackay had been influenced by contemporary accounts of forgeries and a shift in taste at that moment towards early Italian furniture.<sup>33</sup> The damage done, Mackay returned the objects to Duveen in September 1924 for credit against a sculpture by Mino da Fiesole and a painting by Mantegna.<sup>34</sup>

Doubts about the cabinet clearly persisted; it remained with Duveen's until the sale of stock to Norton Simon, who subsequently lent it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It was later included in the Simon sale in 1971, where it was purchased for J.P. Getty for less than one twentieth of the price paid by Mackay.<sup>35</sup> Despite Getty's admiration for the piece, it was never exhibited in Malibu, and was instead put



21. Photograph of the Music Room at Harbor Hill, Long Island. Before 1924. (Photograph courtesy of the Department of Arms and Armor, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

on loan to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where David DuBon (1923–86), Curator of Decorative Art, was an enthusiastic scholar of Burgundian furniture.<sup>36</sup> In 1992, the cabinet returned to storage in Los Angeles. Examined by several curators and conservators in the decade prior to the opening of the Ecouen exhibition, the cabinet was thought problematic by all. Doubts over the style, construction, condition and finish of the object informed these opinions.

At an imposing three metres high by one and a half metres wide, but only seventy centimetres deep, the cabinet confounds any expectation that Renaissance furniture should be practical; the measurements identify its function as a 'parade' object, made to reflect the prestige of its owner. The sophistication of the joinery also created misgivings among examiners, perhaps due to long-standing assumptions about the nature of sixteenth-century cabinet-making. The structure consists of two discrete sections set one above the other, subdivided into locking cupboards, with a level of three drawers at the top of the lower case. All of the primary wood is walnut, and most of the secondary (construction) wood is oak. With the exception of the three upper doors, made of exceptionally wide single boards of walnut, the cases are formed of a complex arrangement of interconnected frame-and-panel units in both vertical and horizontal planes. In the late twentieth century, it was often assumed that the highly sophisticated joinery of the late 1600s to early 1700s in France was preceded by quite primitive joinery in the sixteenth century. Close comparison with other pieces, however, makes it apparent that the complex construction of the cabinet is in

<sup>27</sup> This cabinet was bought by Duveen from Charles Wertheimer. It was purchased for Getty, but deaccessioned in 1984. Photographs in the relevant file at the Getty show that it had similar lion feet, probably added for Soltykoff, but that it also had problematic restorations.

<sup>28</sup> S. Phyr: 'Clarence Mackay as an armour collector', in *The nineteenth Park Lane arms fair*, London 2002, pp.20–32.

<sup>29</sup> GRI, Duveen Brothers Archive, microfilm box 481, folder 2, letter of 19th March 1917.

<sup>30</sup> GRI, Duveen Brothers Archive, microfilm box 164, folder 1, nos.54–56.

<sup>31</sup> The authors are indebted to Stuart Phyr, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Curator in

Charge, Department of Arms and Armor, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for providing a copy of the photograph.

<sup>32</sup> GRI, Duveen Brothers Archive, microfilm box 482, folder 1, letter of 6th June 1924.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, R. Nobili: *The gentle art of faking: a history of the methods of producing imitations & spurious works of art from the earliest times up to the present*, London 1922. An enlightening bibliography on the subject of art forgery can be found in R.H. Benson et al., eds.: exh. cat. *Catalogue of a collection of counterfeits, imitations and copies of works of art*, London (Burlington Fine Arts Club) 1924, p.29. For Italian furniture, see Reitlinger, *op. cit.* (note 15), pp.253–54.

keeping with techniques employed in the manufacture of high-quality furniture of the time.

A present-day tendency to associate heavy forms, sharp carving and dense decorative detail with neo-Renaissance cabinetry perhaps explains why further suspicions arose. The decoration almost suggests nineteenth-century horror vacui: an abundance of motifs, including miniature architectural elements, draped heads, lion masks, laurel, vines, swags, palmettes (upright and inverted) and Vitruvian scrolls ornament the object. The delicate carving contrasts with the deeply carved male terms on the sides of the breakfront section, the satyresses, and the figure of Apollo in the centre, while the flat monochrome paintings of Cephalus and Procris in the niches of the two upper side doors and lower door of the storey are at odds with the rest of the decoration. Such variety is visually unsettling, exacerbated by the different treatment of each moulding and drawer front which simplify in progression towards the sides. The sides themselves are sober, emphasising the frontal orientation of the cabinet (Fig.22).

While such variety seems almost perverse, the arrangement of motifs on the two cases is nevertheless balanced.<sup>37</sup> The top-heavy structure is atypical, but paralleled in prints by Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau (c.1515–c.1585) and a cabinet at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, which has a sixteenth-century provenance.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the decorative richness is reflected in Mannerist art of the period, not least at Fontainebleau. Many of the carvings are based on sixteenth-century printed sources; the Apollo is after a print by Marcantonio Raimondi and the mouldings follow illustrations from Serlio's Fourth Book.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the paintings derive from wood engravings by Bernard Salomon for *La Metamorphose d'Ovide figurée*.<sup>40</sup> The upper left-hand painting is dated 1580 in the lower left corner.

Understandably, the cabinet's excellent condition raised concerns. In its present state, the piece seems impossibly well preserved, and has an artificial, uniform patina that suggests an attempt at deception.<sup>41</sup> In the context of the object's history, these worrying signs can be explained. An overall covering of pigmented wax may have been applied in the nineteenth century to simulate natural ageing and to mask the reworking of the base. This patina obscures dozens of meticulous, minute repairs to worn and abraded elements, which accounts for the suspiciously pristine appearance. The patination of the cabinet apparently happened after a complete stripping of the original finish, removing nearly all traces of gold-powder paint highlighting the figures and mouldings, which are still visible on the Besançon and Thoisy-la-Berchère objects. A nineteenth-century crimson velvet lining in the upper case presented further obstacles to earlier examiners, until the decision was taken to remove it in order to fully understand the cabinet.



22. The side of the cabinet in Fig.16.

In early 2002, it was felt that this step was justified because of the many questions surrounding the piece. The only certainties were the obvious restorations to the base, pediment and finish, while the cabinet's relationship to authentic examples remained ambiguous. A wide range of technical and scientific methods was employed, and the results formed a clear picture of an authentic and extraordinarily well-preserved example of French Renaissance workmanship, with only a few mid-nineteenth-century modifications.

The first test was to ascertain a date by dendrochronological analysis, a technique applicable to oak but not to walnut, and which had been used successfully by Didier Pousset to date and localise the secondary wood of the Besançon cabinet.<sup>42</sup> Working with Pousset, seventeen representative pieces of oak from the back and interior of the Getty cabinet were analysed using a combination of direct measurement and X-radiographic imaging. Happily, one small block of wood was

<sup>37</sup> These works can be identified as the *Virgin Annunciate* (inv. no.1943.4.71) in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the *Adoration of the shepherds* (inv. no.32.130.2) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

<sup>38</sup> Property of the Norton Simon Foundation, Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., New York, 7th and 8th May 1971, p.134, lot 193. A letter dated 31st January 1968 from Getty to Edward Fowles enquiring after the cabinet is in GRI, Duveen Brothers Archive, microfilm box 229, folder 1.

<sup>39</sup> D. DuBon: 'Hugues Sambin as an architect and designer of woodwork', M.A. thesis (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1959).

<sup>40</sup> Prévet made similar observations about the Besançon cabinet; see Prévet, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.97.

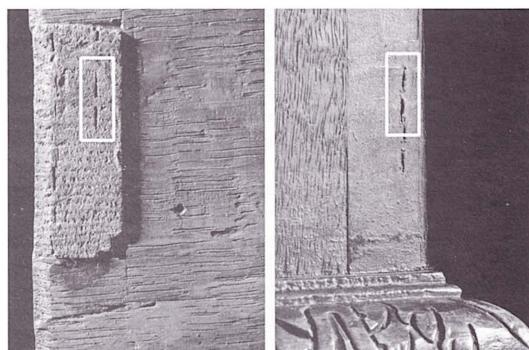
<sup>41</sup> D. Bostwick: 'The French walnut furniture at Hardwick Hall', *Furniture History* 31 (1995), pp.1–6.

<sup>42</sup> For example, S. Serlio: *Regole generale di architettura*, Venice 1537, pl.LXXXIII. For the Raimondi print after Raphael, see K. Oberhuber: *The Illustrated Bartsch*, XXVII, New York 1978, pp.29–30, no.334.

<sup>43</sup> *La Metamorphose d'Ovide figurée*, Lyon 1557, pp.106–08.

<sup>44</sup> Treatises on the production of fakes cite the application of wax 'encaustic' to create artificial age; see Nobili, *op. cit.* (note 33), p.28.

<sup>45</sup> At the time, Didier Pousset worked at the Centre Régional de Restauration et de Conservation des œuvres d'Art de Vesoul; see also François, Gérard and Pousset, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp.107–13.



23. Details of the cabinet in Fig. 16, showing bench dog marks on the oak of the proper left drawer (left) and the walnut of the lower case behind the drawer front (right).



24. Detail of the cabinet in Fig. 16, with the interior of the central drawer visible.



25. Juxtaposed details of the lining of the central drawer (above) and drawer front (below) of the cabinet in Fig. 16.

discovered behind the left drawer front, which contained its full sapwood sequence, allowing precise determination of the felling year. The results demonstrated convincingly that the oak came from a tree (or trees) cut down in Burgundy in the autumn and winter of 1574–75.<sup>43</sup> As wood has to season for several years before use, the results are in accord with the date of 1580 painted on the cabinet. The identification of the ring patterns of all seventeen pieces of oak within a single grouping suggested that the structure of the cabinet had not undergone dramatic modification or restoration, and offered persuasive evidence that at least the structure was authentic.

Because the Getty cabinet had been analysed by the same team of dendrochronologists who examined the Besançon cabinet, it was possible to compare data from both tests, revealing similar curves for the oak from both pieces of furniture. The match is in fact so close that it is likely that the wood for both came from the same tree. This startling discovery reinforced the likelihood of a link between the two pieces; the localisation of the wood's origin to Burgundy also lent credence to the probability that both cabinets were made in the region. The precision of dating and localisation ruled out the re-use of old wood by a nineteenth-century restorer or faker, who would have had no means to select wood of precisely the correct age and geographic origin.

To counter any suggestion that the primary wood of the cabinet was somehow worked onto an old oak structure, it was important to attempt to date the walnut with Carbon-14, or radiocarbon dating – an analysis not undertaken for the Besançon piece. Not as precise as dendrochronology, this technique nevertheless allowed the dating of wood from the Getty cabinet to within a two hundred-year period. Five small samples of wood were taken from different walnut elements, including the lower right term, which had provoked suspicion among experts as a possible replacement part because of its light colour and shortened scrolling arm terminations. The results revealed that all the samples have similar carbon profiles and that the walnut probably grew between about 1400 and 1600.<sup>44</sup> Although this evidence did not rule out the possibility that replacement parts were made with old wood, it supported the dendrochronological findings for the secondary wood. The results of scientific analysis strongly suggested that the cabinet was genuine.

The study was continued with a thorough technical examination; each part was inspected for clues that would suggest restoration or modification since construction, or that would establish authenticity. In general, most of the tool marks observed on the piece are consistent with sixteenth-century tools. It is also important to note that no evidence was found for earlier disassembly or the recarving of figures. Such modifications are usually detected during examination in laboratory conditions.<sup>45</sup> Particular emphasis was placed on

<sup>43</sup> D. Pousset: 'Etude dendrochronologique du cabinet Bourguignon, 71.DA.89', unpublished report (Centre Régional de Restauration et de Conservation des œuvres d'Art de Vesoul, 2003), pp.7–13.

<sup>44</sup> A.J.T. Jull: 'AMS radiocarbon results', two unpublished reports (National Science Foundation: Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Facility of the University of Arizona, 2002 and 2003).

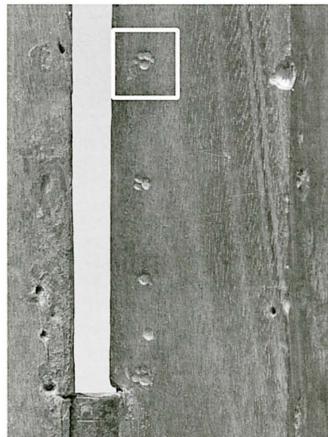
<sup>45</sup> An armoire at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (acc. no.1930-1-181) has been subjected to heavy restoration and shows examples of wholly and partially replaced elements, as well as recarved and re-planed original elements; A. Heginbotham:

'Examination Notes, PMA Cabinet 1930-1-181, October 2002', unpublished report (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Jull, *op. cit.* (note 44).

<sup>47</sup> S. Shore: 'Analysis of fabric lining to drawer in cabinet (71. DA.89)', unpublished report (Caring for Textiles, 2002); personal communication from A. Jolly (Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg); M. Von Bonnem: 'Investigation [HPLC-PDA; Burgundian cabinet, c 1580]', unpublished report (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, Amsterdam, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> A. Heginbotham: 'Alloy and metallography report, 71.DA.89, sample 17', unpub-



26. Detail of the interior of the upper case of the cabinet in Fig.16; the cabinet's proper right door is open and is seen on the left; the front corner stile, with impressions of the original tack heads, is seen on the right.

27. Juxtaposed details of paintings, at the upper proper left of the cabinet in Fig.16 (left, showing Cephalus being given gifts by Procris), and at the centre of the cabinet in Fig.18 (right, showing the goddess Ceres).



the walnut elements of the cabinet, as the positive results of Carbon-14 analysis applied only to a few elements. Of special interest was any evidence that would establish or refute a common origin between walnut elements and the oak structure. As the oak had been authenticated by dendrochronology, any walnut demonstrably fabricated alongside the oak could be considered original by association.

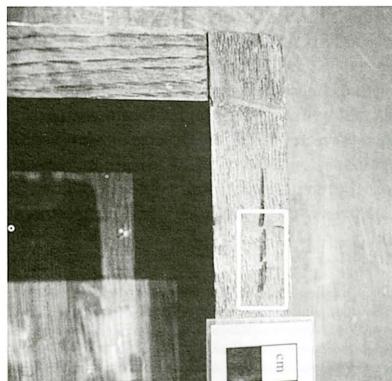
The identification of 'bench dog' marks on the cabinet proved fruitful. Bench dogs are small blocks of wood or metal, often made with teeth or textured surfaces, used to secure a piece of wood to a workbench for shaping. Placed within holes in the bench top, these blocks were tightened onto the ends of a board by a vice, frequently leaving clear impressions in the wood. In the Renaissance, bench dogs were handmade and left distinctive 'fingerprints'. If identical marks are found on different pieces of wood, it is highly likely that they were shaped on the same workbench. In the case of the Getty cabinet, identical bench dog marks were found on the oak and on nine separate walnut elements, including a door, drawer fronts, mouldings and on the upper plinth (Fig.23).

Examination of the textile lining of the central drawer (Fig.24) provided a further link between walnut and oak. While the authenticity of the drawer itself was not in question (the oak had been authenticated by dendrochronology and the walnut drawer front by its bench dog marks), the green satin-weave textile and the red *galon* border were subjected to a series of tests to assess their origins. Minute clippings were taken from frayed edges of the lining and sent for Carbon-14 analysis; the results indicated that the textile dated to between about 1400 and 1600.<sup>46</sup> The weave structure, loom width, fibre types and dyestuffs used in the manufacture of the fabric were also analysed. The findings were evaluated by two textile specialists, who found no reason to doubt the lining.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the rose-headed tacks fastening the textile (which match the carved rosettes on the central drawer front and vine

decoration on the upper side doors; Fig.25) were analysed for alloy and metallographic structure and were found to be consistent with sixteenth-century materials and manufacturing techniques.<sup>48</sup> As there is no evidence of a previous lining, it is probable that the drawer lining and tacks are of the period.<sup>49</sup>

This last point is significant when considered in relation to evidence found in the upper case; examination of the interior revealed that it had once been lined with the same fabric. Old tack holes run along the edges and corners of the case, following a quite different pattern to the holes made by the nineteenth-century lining of the case. Spaced the same distance apart as the tacks of the drawer, the old holes retained minute traces of green and red silk and linen fibres.<sup>50</sup> It became apparent that the same type of tack was used to attach the fabric in both places, because the impressions of the tack heads were still visible (Fig.26). The tack holes and associated fibres run over the surfaces of sixteen individual walnut elements of the upper case, including the doors, posts, side panels and lower mouldings, suggesting that all these parts are original.

Given Bonnaffé's comments that the paintings were effaced, or perhaps obscured, their condition was troubling. They were studied under infra-red and ultraviolet light and analysed with X-ray fluorescence (XRF) for signs of restoration or



28. Detail of the back of the proper left drawer of the cabinet in Fig.18.

lished report (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> The textile and tacks bear a striking resemblance to the probably original lining of a cabinet, dated 1591, in the Rijksmuseum (inv. no.BK-16643).

<sup>47</sup> A. Hegginbotham: 'Fiber identification report, 71.DA.89, samples 21, 22, 23', unpublished report (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2005).



29. Screen from the Chapelle du Saint-Esprit, Palais du Justice, Dijon, by Hugues Sambin and workshop. 1583. Walnut, 370 by 330 cm. (Photo: Arlen Heginbotham).



30. Door, known as the 'Porte du Scrin', originally from the Palais de Justice, Dijon, by Hugues Sambin. 1583. Walnut, 200 by 86 by 5 cm. (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; photo: Arlen Heginbotham).

anachronistic pigments, but no evidence emerged to indicate any problems. The painting is very close to the painted figures by Bredin on the Besançon cabinet (Fig.27). Perhaps Bonnaffé was referring to an obscuring layer of dirt, removed during subsequent restoration.

All the evidence suggests that the cabinet is authentic. While the base and the central panel of the crowning central element are replacements and the finish has been stripped and repatinated, the body of the cabinet from the upper plinth to the bottom of the lower case is intact. As such, it is an exceptionally well-preserved example of French Renaissance furniture.

The part of the cabinet which remains a problem is the frame of the crowning element. Present in 1846, the carving style of the frame is quite different from that of the rest of the piece, being less fluid and refined. This part bears remnants of an early varnish, not found on the lower section, suggesting that it is not original to the object. Confusing the picture, however, are the results of Carbon-14 analysis, which date the wood to between 1420 and 1630. The carving compares well to surviving woodwork of the period, suggesting that this element may have been taken from another object at a later date. The plinth below the frame is original, however, and may initially have been placed flush with the back of the object.

The Getty cabinet's relationship with other examples of Burgundian Renaissance woodwork and furniture helps to clarify this issue, and perhaps makes it possible to identify its owner. Close comparison of the cabinet with the Besançon

piece provided evidence that both objects were prepared in the same workshop. Technical analysis revealed extremely close similarities in layout and joinery, and identical bench dog impressions were found on the left drawer of the Besançon cabinet (Fig.28). Combined with the findings of dendrochronology and the close stylistic link between the two objects, this discovery prompted a re-evaluation of Bonnaffé's study of the Getty cabinet.<sup>51</sup> He proposed that the object could be identified with an item listed in the Gauthiot d'Ancier inventory of 1596: 'A cabinet of walnut, with a stepped-back section, the upper case larger than the lower, which is counterbalanced by two satyrs replete with a teeming mass of leaves for their ornament, followed by four terms, that is; two on the lower case and two above, having a panel of architecture where there is a figure in the middle, varnished, heightened with gold, having two paintings in bronze and one in the middle, with iron hardware; valued at 100 francs'.<sup>52</sup>

It seems plausible that this description refers to the Getty cabinet, and it is interesting to note that a crowning element is not mentioned.<sup>53</sup> Second only in value to the item identified with the Besançon cabinet, this object was located in the lower chamber looking onto the court of the house, near the main entrance – a suitable location for an ostentatious piece of carved furniture.

While the evidence suggests that the Besançon and Getty objects were produced in the same workshop and perhaps for

<sup>51</sup> Bonnaffé 1887, *op. cit.* (note 21), pp.166–68.

<sup>52</sup> 'Ung cabinet de bois de noulier, ayant retraité le corps dessus plus que celleuy d'embas, estant racheté pour rendre parade à ladite besoingne par deux satyres estant remplis de bouillons de feuille pour leur ornement, et de quatre termes suyvant, s'apour deux au corps d'embas et deux en hault, ayant ung pannéau d'architecture où il y a une figure au milieu, verny, haulsé d'or, ayant deux peintures de bronze et une au milieu, ferré; dehunement taxé cent francs'; transcription taken from Thirion, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.258.

<sup>53</sup> Crowning elements (variously *couronnement*, *coronement* or *coronnement*) are listed for nine out of seventeen cabinets and buffets in this inventory; in one instance, the lack of such an element is specifically noted.

<sup>54</sup> Barral, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.37; Erlande-Brandenburg, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.23–26 and p.80, pl.XII.

<sup>55</sup> Barral, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.36; Erlande-Brandenburg, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.23–26 and p.76, pl.VIII.



31. Exterior doors from the Palais de Justice, Dijon (removed 1903), attributed to Hugues Sambin and workshop, c.1583. Walnut, 343 by 204 by 6 cm. (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; photo: Arlen Heginbotham).



32. Dresser. Burgundian, c.1560–90, with later restorations. Walnut and oak, 143 by 107 by 47 cm. (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

the same patron, the problem of the identity of their maker remains unsolved. Although the Besançon cabinet is attributed to Hugues Sambin, it is important to reflect upon the grounds for this identification. The only works with a documented connection to Sambin and his workshop are the screen executed for the chapel of the present-day Palais de Justice in Dijon (Fig. 29) and a small door called the '*Porte du Scrin*' (Fig. 30), for which the master was paid in 1583.<sup>54</sup> A large door executed for the same building, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, is considered to be by the same workshop and of the same date (Fig. 31).<sup>55</sup> The use of ornament and the approach to figural carving in these works certainly relate to that of the Getty and Besançon cabinets, but there are clear differences in the variety and quality of carving.

Workshop practices presumably dictated the division of labour between specialist workers responsible for particular elements of a piece of furniture, such as term figures or ornamental carvings, and differences therefore seem logical, but they make attributions difficult. The upper part of a Burgundian dresser at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, dating to the late sixteenth century, demonstrates such a division of labour; the upper door panels are superior in quality to the rest (Fig. 32).<sup>56</sup> Although Sambin had a large workshop, which included his son David, the variety of hands evident from looking closely at these wood sculptures suggests that there were other unknown carvers with the requisite skills to execute the Getty piece. Further study of the woodwork of

the screen at the Palais de Justice in Dijon and examination for possible bench dog impressions could resolve the matter.

Other questions of attribution revolve around the possible designer of the Getty cabinet. It is certain that Sambin was a skilled designer and that he had a connection with Jean Gauthiot d'Ancier – in 1582, as a governor of Besançon, Gauthiot favoured Sambin's plan for the façade of a new Hôtel Consistorial.<sup>57</sup> Whether Sambin provided designs for furniture for Gauthiot d'Ancier at a moment when the family reached political prominence is moot; some authors have suggested that Pierre Chennevière, a Besançon furniture maker, could have executed the Besançon cabinet to Sambin's designs, although there is no evidence to support this claim.<sup>58</sup> In general, the decoration of the Getty cabinet follows a vocabulary which stylistically belongs in the region of Dijon, but not specifically with Sambin.<sup>59</sup> Illustrations from his *Ceuvre de la diversité des termes*, published in 1572, provided decorative sources for some pieces of furniture, but the influence is not direct in this case.<sup>60</sup> As the Getty cabinet bears paintings in the style of Bredin and is constructed from Burgundian oak, it seems most reasonable at present to describe it simply as a major piece from a workshop based in Dijon. Not simply a story of authentication, the rehabilitation of this cabinet through collaborative study indicates the potential value of further analysis of related works, on research into documentary sources in deepening our knowledge of the production and consumption of French Renaissance furniture.

<sup>54</sup> Philadelphia Museum of Art (acc. no. 1930-1-184); see Koeppel 1994, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.48–51.

<sup>55</sup> Erlande-Brandenburg, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.26.

<sup>56</sup> Barral, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.38 (entry by C. Gras); J. Thirion: 'Hugues Sambin', in J. Turner, ed.: *The Dictionary of Art*, London 1996, XXVII, pp.681–83; Prévost, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.95.

<sup>57</sup> Erlande-Brandenburg, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.29.

<sup>58</sup> H. Sambin: *Ceuvre de la diversité des termes, dont on use en architecture . . .*, Lyon 1572; H. Stéphane-Gulczynski: 'Hugues Sambin, L'Art de la Menuiserie et le Décor d'Architecture', in Erlande-Brandenburg, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.46–47. The well-known Arconati-Visconti armoire (Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no.OA 9969) has also often been attributed to Sambin on the very general grounds of similarities between his designs and the large-scale term figures on the front of the piece.

# THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE



## Decorative arts and design

Systems of ornament in the Far East and Europe: Chinese bird-and-flower design

The 'History of Noah': Brussels tapestries for the Spanish court

A Burgundian cabinet rediscovered at the Getty • A cameo of James I

Acquisitions of modern and contemporary furniture at the Victoria and Albert Museum

Michelangelo Titian Modernism Albers and Moholy-Nagy Rauschenberg Kelly Baselitz

Amber Ivories American silver