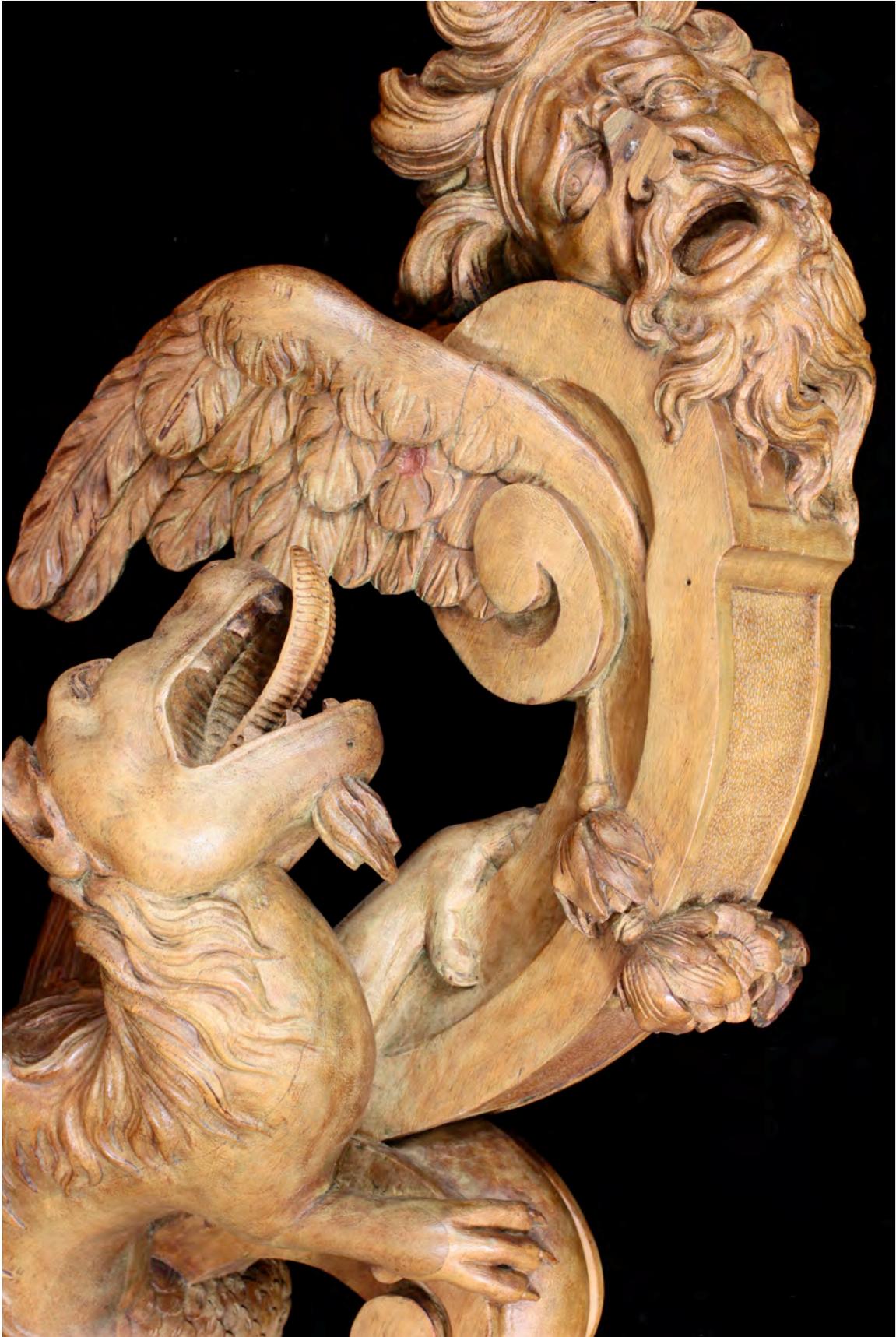


*Superb Régence carved limewood (tilleul) console
by Bernard Toro*



S-form legs rest on a lobed base and support a rectangular top. Magnificently carved large dragons seem to chase the terrified winged bearded satyrs at the top of the legs. A large scrolled acanthus leaf is carved onto the base of each leg.







An exquisitely carved mask of a grimacing Medusa, her hair alive with a writhing nest of snakes, centers the frieze. Her delicately incised eyes are enclosed in beautifully formed eyelids.



The lobed base has a protruding half-round central section carved with rounded scales flanked by recessed gadrooned panels. It supports a pair of large eagles, carved in the round, stooping to pick up eggs with their beaks.

[Small damage to the nose of the bearded figure on the proper left. Some of Medusa's snakes damaged. Tiny replacements. Marble top replaced.]

Height - 32" (81.3 cm.) Width - 45" (114.3 cm.) Depth - 24" (61 cm.)

Ex collection:

The *cabinet* of M. Clérian (Dr. Bruno Pons: J. Bernard Toro: *Archives de l'Art Français; Documents Inédits* ; Tome sixième, 1858-1860. Page 288. And in *Les Artistes Décorateurs du Bois* ; Volume I, Page 177.)

Marquis de Tressemanes (Aix)

William and "Babe" Paley (New York)

Construction

The console is carved linden (*Tilia europaea*), called limewood in England and *tilleul* in France. It is a favorite wood for carving, although not frequently used for French furniture-making. It is somewhat soft with a fine grain that can be smoothly carved in any direction. The most famous European sculptors who worked in wood often used limewood: Tilman Riemenschneider and Ignaz Günther in Germany; Grinling Gibbons in England and Aubert-Henri-Joseph Parent in France. The closely related American Linden (*Tilia americana*), or “basswood,” is favored by American carvers.

The construction of the piece is very unusual and differs from the venerable techniques taught to *menuisiers* (joiners) in 18th century France. In furniture, joined components that meet at 90° are typically connected using various butted or fitted joints, usually glued and fixed by pegs. Instead of classic joinery, the legs of this console are connected to the frieze by bolts that rise from the top of each satyr’s head, enter a hole in the platform, and are fastened with wing nuts. The legs are joined to the separate pedestal base with tenons on the ends of the legs that fit into mortises cut into the base.





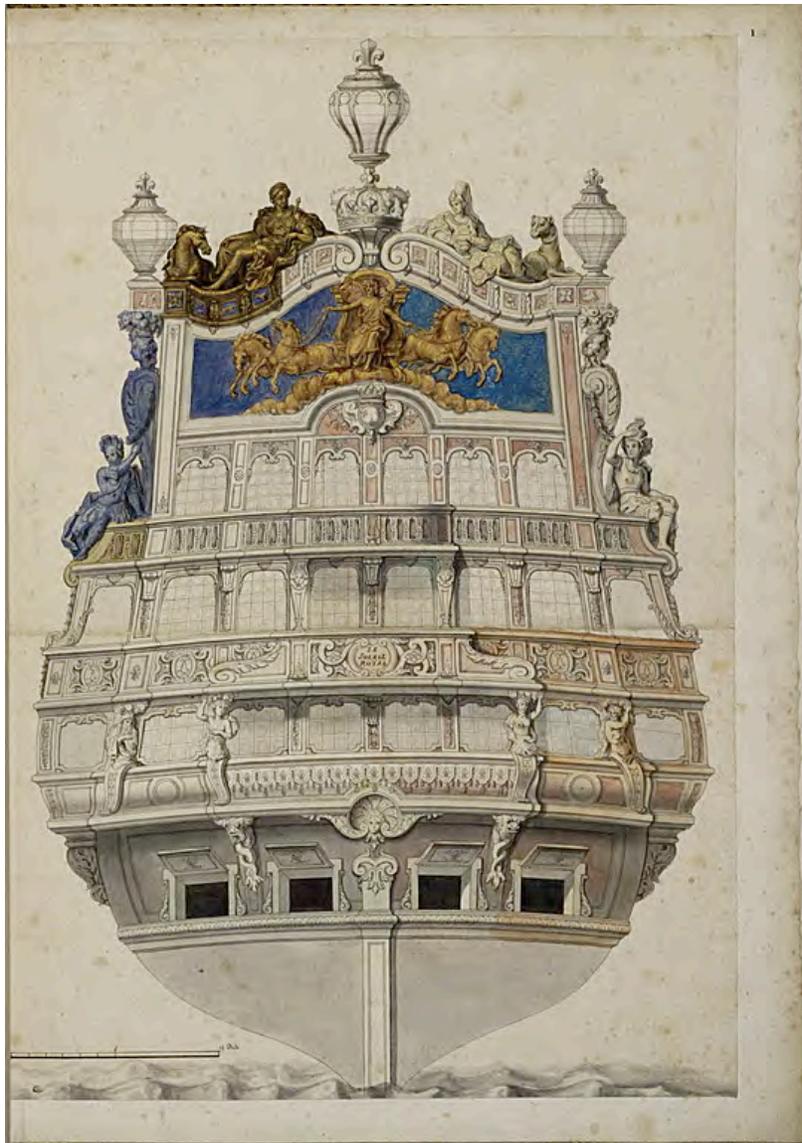


Jean-Bernard-Honoré Turreau, called Toro (1672-1731)

Bernard Toro was born in Toulon in 1672. He was the son of Pierre Turreau (1638-1675), a high-ranking sculptor at the royal shipyards in the port city. According to records, Toro worked at the shipyards starting at the age of 10, where he was possibly a pupil of Pierre Puget, one of the greatest French sculptors of the 17th century who headed the sculpture atelier at the shipyards from 1668-1679. This was an important enterprise with forty employees - master sculptors, sculptors, workers, and apprentices. Puget became preoccupied with improving a school which became an incubator for shipyard artisans. Drawing, modeling and shipbuilding techniques were taught to local children. (Philippe Auquier: *Pierre Puget décorateur naval et mariniste*; Ateliers Photomécaniques D.-A. Longuet, Paris, 1907. Page XV.) It seems probable that the young Toro honed his skills as a draughtsman and carver at this institution.

It is likely that the unusual construction of the console relates to shipbuilding, where bolts are used for fastening various components. A figurehead is bolted to the ship and the poop's sculptural decorations are separately carved and then bolted in place. The Swedish warship, the *Wasa*, sunk in 1628 and miraculously preserved underwater until its recovery in 1961, is the only extant 17th century ship. It has more than 700 separate attached sculptures.

At the instigation of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the powerful Controller-General of Finance (from 1665) and Secretary of the Navy (from 1668), the figureheads and the sterns of French warships were accorded great importance. Ships were elaborately decorated to project and glorify the power and majesty of the king. The greatest designers and sculptors - including Charles le Brun, the chief decorator of Louis XIV's Versailles; the great sculptor François Girardon; Jean Bérain, head of the *Menus Plaisirs du Roi*; and Pierre Puget ("the Michelangelo of France") all furnished plans.



Drawing by Jean Bérain of a ship's stern decoration

Voluminous correspondence, reaching as high as the king and his immediate advisors, discussed the aesthetics, cost and fabricators of the realizations. Drawings were made and discussed, followed by models, either in wax or wood, before the final execution. Since the average warship had a life of twenty years or so, it is astonishing that so much effort and expense went into their decoration. Later in the 18th century, Maurepas, the efficient and practical Secretary of the Navy, eliminated such elaborate work from French ships.

After his youthful work at the shipyards, Toro worked as a sculptor of decorative arts for the great families in the south of France, primarily in Toulon and Aix-en-Provence. Many works are attributed to him, but very few of these attributions are firm. Most of the documented work is in Aix, consisting, in great part, of architectural pieces such as the carved door Toro made for the hôtel d'Arlatan-Lauris, now in the Museum of Lyon. In 1715, he worked in Paris and came to the attention of the royal architect C. N. Lepas-Dubuisson. Toro is probably responsible for the stone overdoors at Lepas-Dubuisson's Paris hôtel at 120, rue de Bac.



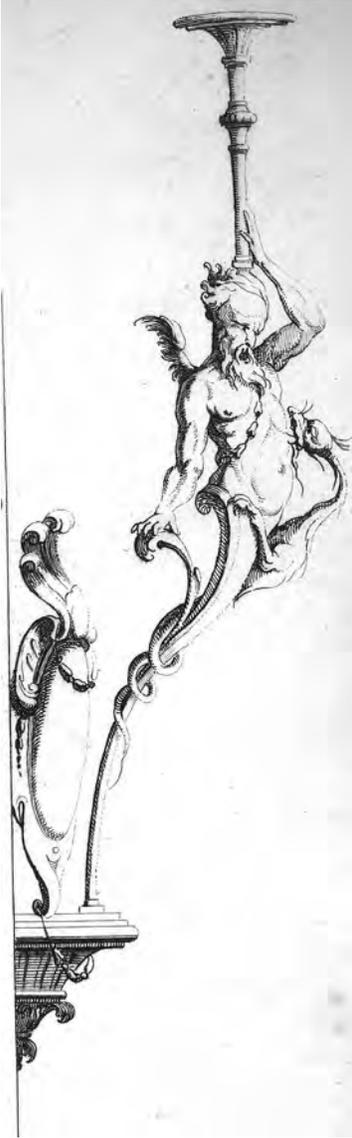
In 1718, Toro was named *Maître sculpteur au Port de Toulon*, the highly prestigious position Puget had held. Like his father, Pierre Turreau, he had a prickly personality and didn't work well with superiors. His father, described in a letter to Colbert as "argumentative, debauched and insubordinate," had been fired after he broke down a colleague's door and

attacked him with a sword because of a perceived slight. One wonders if Toro changed his name to distance himself from his notorious father.

In a 1728 letter to the *Ministre de la marine*, Toro was recognized as one of the greatest sculptors in France, but was called “*capricieux et fantasque*” (“capricious and unpredictable”). It was said that he thought too highly of himself. He refused to design and execute a model because he was offered less than the great Puget had received for a similar task. He became embroiled in a lawsuit with his greatest private benefactor in Aix, Boyer de Bandol, which lasted many years and seems as much a clash of egos as a serious legal dispute.

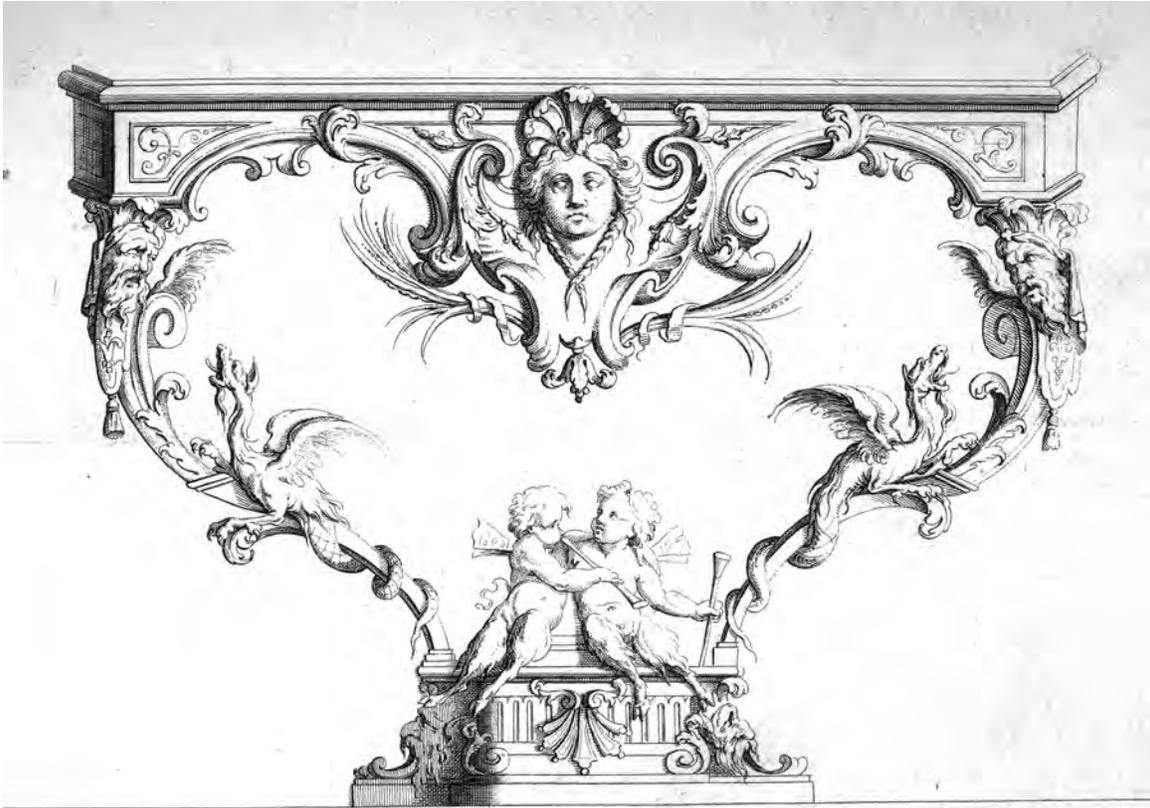
Toro was even more famous as a designer than a sculptor. There are hundreds of drawings extant in private and museum collections, all revealing a fantastic, almost frenzied, imagination. A large number of engravings after his designs were published and distributed all over Europe. They greatly influenced the origin and dissemination of the Régence style, where the older baroque transitions to rococo. His designs show an obsession with leering older men and satyrs (often showing their teeth and tongues), dragons, eagles, lizards, snakes, and beautiful women. The compositions are characterized by the dramatic interaction of the various subjects. The personas are always engaged, whether they are reacting to each other, something in the distance, or gazing directly at the viewer.





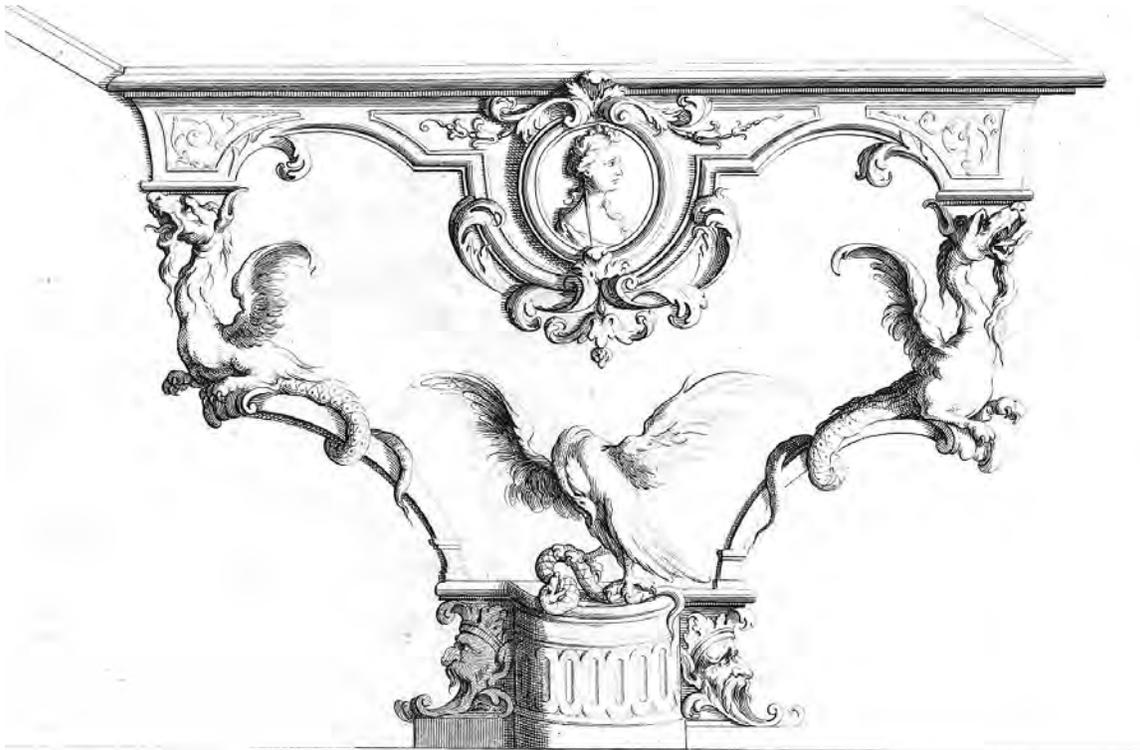


An engraving after Toro, from the *Livre de Tables de diverses formes* (published in 1716 by his Parisian patron C. N. Lepas-Du Buisson and engraved by Pierre de Rochefort) portrays a similar console with a leg nearly identical to the leg of the present console, but with differently proportioned carved figures. Baroque drama is joined to delicate rococo curves and scrolls to create a totally new object. The dragons not only react to the winged figures, they engage the abstract S-form legs by grabbing a scrolled protrusion with one claw and the leg itself with the other. They wrap their tails around the legs in the print and on the wood console. In the engraving, the sitting faun children hang their legs over the base; on the console, the hunched-over eagles don't merely pose on the base but pick up the eggs from it. The winged figures on the top of the legs actively balance the frieze on the tops of their heads.



The “construction” of the engraved console mirrors the construction of the wood console: the frieze is conceived as separate from the legs, which rest on the base without being integrated with it.

Another console from the series has the same “construction,” a similar shape, and an eagle, here pinning a snake to the base. Like the wooden console, each of the illustrated consoles has a lobed base with a protruding half-round central portion, but with bearded faces instead of gadrooning on the flanking recessed portions. The legs of virtually all other French Régence and rococo consoles are connected by a stretcher that the legs pass in order to reach the floor to support the piece. For Toro, they are inserted into a base which rests on the floor.



It was noted in the eighteenth century that works actually carved by Toro were neither painted nor gilded in order to avoid obscuring the details of his exquisite workmanship, which is true of the console. A Toro drawing of a cartouche bearing the coat of arms of the Dauphin is in the *Cabinet des estampes* of the *Bibliothèque nationale* in Paris. Its inscription remains a succinct and accurate analysis of his immense skill:

The Death of S(eigneur) Toro. The cartouche joined here was begun by S. Toro, master sculptor of the King's ships at Toulon, and could not be finished by him, having been afflicted by a stroke on January 28, 1731, which resulted in his death a few instants later. This sculptor worked wood with such great delicacy that objects he made, legs of tables, clocks and consoles were never susceptible to any gilding, and even placing paint on these pieces would be an error; all these works were entirely finished and he gave them all the perfection that his fingers and genius could provide.

[H. Vial, A. Marcel, A. Girodie: *Les Artistes Décorateurs du Bois* ; Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie, Paris 1912. Page 177.]

Literature : Dr. Bruno Pons : J. Bernard Toro. *Archives de l'Art Français; Documents Inédits* ; Tome sixième, 1858-1860. Described on page 288.

Léon Lagrange : Catalogue de l'œuvre sculpté, peint, dessiné et gravé de Bernard Toro. *La Gazette des Beaux-arts* ; 1869. Noted on page 12.

Léon Lagrange : Toro. *La Gazette des Beaux-arts* ; 12/1886. Described and illustrated on page 481

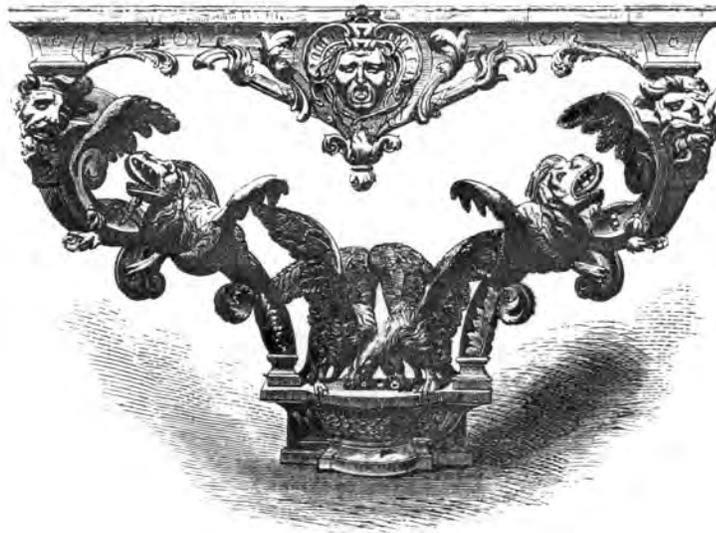
Charles Ginoux : Les sculpteurs Levray, Langueneux, Veyrier, Turreau dit Toro, Maucord prédécesseurs ou successeurs immédiats de Pierre Puget, 1639-1761. *Réunion des sociétés des Beaux-arts des Départements* ; 1890. Described on page 34.

Stanislas Lami : *Dictionnaire des Sculpteurs de l'école française sous le règne de Louis XIV.* Honoré Champion ; Paris 1906. Described on page 480. (Lami writes it had been in the collection of the *président* Boyer-d'Aiguilles.)

Henri Vial, Adrien Marcel and André Girodie : *Les Artistes Décorateurs du Bois* ; Bibliothèque d' Art et d' Archéologie, Paris 1912. Described in Volume I, page 177.

Illustrated: *La Gazette des Beaux Arts* ; 12/1886

In the article by Léon Lagrange on Toro, an engraving of this console is on page 481. (As is usual, this reverses the composition and it is interesting to note that the damage to the nose of one of the bearded figures must have occurred prior to 1886 since it appears in the engraving, but in the reversed position.)



CONSOLE PAR TORO.

Collection de M. le marquis de Tressemanes.



