



Reminiscences and Chabrettes - discoveries in British collections

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Museums across Europe hold numerous antique bagpipes, a treasure trove of information. Alongside many *Highland*, *Uilleann*, and *pastoral* pipes, French bagpipes feature prominently, due to their beauty, their perceived historical value, and the social classes they represent.

At the end of the 19th century, passionate collectors began amassing all sorts of exotic instruments, both in Europe and the United States, and most of these objects are now found in museums. These enthusiasts' knowledge was not

ethnographic. They were often passionate musicians, aristocrats, poets, painters, and cultured writers, but the instruments they collected were poorly identified or not identified at all. Like us, no doubt, their imaginations delighted in inventing poetic adventures around these objects, with fewer sources available than we have, but just as much passion. It is the Limousin bagpipes (*chabrettes limousines*) that I would like to discuss today, as several examples are held in collections in Great Britain.

E. de Bricqueville Collection. Royal College of Music, London.



Let's begin with the collection of Eugène de Bricqueville, two of whose Limousin *chabrettes* (or "*chabretas*", or "*cornemuses à miroirs*") were later acquired by museums.

The Comte of Bricqueville (1854-1933) was an aristocrat born in Avignon, Provence, but descended from an old Norman family. He was an organist at Versailles and a

renowned composer. Settling in Paris in 1880, he was the first to form an orchestra playing on historical instruments. Through this pioneering endeavor, he sought to rediscover the sound of early music, which had been completely forgotten by his time. He thus created the first chamber music ensemble on antique instruments, "La Couperin," where he can be seen playing the hurdy-gurdy. It seems his experiments with musettes de Cour were not very successful, as he held a rather negative opinion of those in his collection. He replaced them with a small oboe to play the musette parts. The Bricqueville collection is known through several photographs taken in France in the 1890s, and through an inventory he himself compiled.

Within a vast array of antique instruments, he owned only two bagpipes in 1886, according to his first inventory published in Avignon for the Académie du Vaucluse¹: the famous Béchonnet musette with a goat's head², and a chabrette. But his love of beautiful objects, and their supposed antiquity, led him to subsequently purchase other instruments: four musettes de Cour, a large Bourbonnais bagpipe which he called a "bombarde," a second chabrette, a Grande Cornemuse à Miroirs, and a mouthblown cabrette. All these instruments can be seen photographed at his home in 1890. For our generation of young and



enthusiastic “folkies”, the discovery of these photos in the 1980s was a revelation, opening up a world of mysteries for many of us. Personally, I have returned to these photos regularly for almost fifty years.

The second bagpipe, chronologically, that he added to his collection is the most interesting for us. It seems that Bricqueville began selling his instruments at the end of the 19th century. This beautiful bagpipe became part of the collection of George Donaldson (1845-1925) in London³. This wealthy English collector was well-known in France as an expert in antique furniture. He served on the juries of the Universal Expositions in Paris on several occasions, and President Carnot awarded him the Legion of Honour in 1892⁴. In 1894, Sir Donaldson donated his entire collection to the Royal College of Music in London, where it can still be seen today. It was quite easy to identify Bricqueville's bagpipe by comparing photographic sources.

I was fortunate enough to handle this magnificent object on several occasions, notably when we organized a major exhibition at the ATP Museum



in Paris in 1999⁵, where I was able to admire its exquisite craftsmanship. It is a large bagpipe that sounds in F, with a rather deep tone⁶. Bricqueville claimed it was played "during the reign of Louis XIII⁷," just as he dated his Béchonnet⁸ musette "to the reign of Louis XVI," and his cabrette⁹ to the 18th century." These assessments reveal the historical fantasies that led these wealthy bourgeois or aristocrats to imagine a historicity, echoing their "invention" of an ancient music.



No reference to popular circles appears in the Baron's writings, who saw these bagpipes as relics of the "Ancien Régime". Bricqueville was undoubtedly far from the truth, as this bagpipe, while certainly old, was made in the 18th century: when I held this instrument, I was able to decipher the date 1782, handwritten on the chanter. It is true that its aesthetics and organology evoke a bygone era, but folk instrument makers retained in their aesthetic codes the forms and techniques of previous centuries, which can mislead dating. This stylistic characteristic is also known for folk furniture. Its decoration is refined, made of pewter rings, horn and bone, and boxwood decorated with acid in small speckled dots. The head-stock is decorated with a

pewter monstrelion, with a circular mirror in its centre.

The maker Andrew Heywood, who sadly passed away too soon in 2015, was the first to inform me of the existence of this bagpipe, preserved at the Royal College of Music, where it was on display at the time. In 1981 at the Saint-Chartier Festival, Andrew showed me a very precise technical drawing of this chabrette, which no one else knew about. He generously gave me a copy and I am willing to make these drawings available to anyone who is interested, in friendly remembrance of Andrew Heywood.

We know of other models of chabrettes by the same maker, a good ten or so that, without doubt, can be attributed to him, which have been found in the Limousin region. One was played by a citizen who was a member of the Garde Nationale¹⁰ in Limoges in 1790 and has remained in the family. Another was found



in a drawer of a wardrobe at an antique dealer's in the small town of Compreignac! Lucky Félicie Verbruggen, who bought the old piece of furniture without knowing that this little marvel was hidden inside.

Several names of bagpipe makers in Haute-Vienne during the 18th century have been uncovered in the archives: Jean Vauzelle in Compreignac, "bagpipe maker" in 1743, and those discovered more recently by Maxou Heintzen¹¹: Jean Coutureaud (1724-1796) in Blond, listed as a "faiseur de musettes" in 1783; Pierre Fournier, "maître cornemuseur" in 1744; and Jean Fournier (1723-1796), "maître cornemuseur et tourneur" in 1761 in Aix-sur-Vienne.

I wish good luck to the researchers who will follow me in untangling the fascinating web of all these sources. The large chabrette, formerly in the Bricqueville and Donaldson collections, is now held in the reserves of the Royal College of Music in London¹² under the number RCM0069, and it is easy to obtain permission for a detailed examination.

E. de Bricqueville Collection. Tony Bingham, *At the Sign of the Serpent*, London.



The first bagpipe, chronologically, in the de Bricqueville collection is also known through photographs and the description the Comte gave in his 1886 catalogue: "Bagpipe. The drones, flute, and blowpipe are made of mottled yellow wood alternating with horn and ivory. The flute has, at its lower end, a kind of barrel pierced with holes, and enclosing a small iron key. The wooden piece to which the skin is attached is decorated with crystal cubes set in cut-pewter ornaments. This pretty little instrument dates from the time of Louis XIII¹³." It can be seen from various angles in 1890 in photographs of his collection.

It then passed to Baron de Léry, who put his entire collection up for sale in 1910. Baron Fernand Vidal de Léry (1857-1912) was an industrialist, music composer, and collector of antique instruments (hurdy-gurdies, bagpipes, etc.) but also... exotic fish. The catalogue for the sale of his instruments, dated June 10, 1910, describes 16 bagpipes, some of which are photographed. A general photograph of the collection allows us to identify the chabrette that belonged to Bricqueville in 1886. The descriptions accompanying the instruments in the sales catalogue are equally fanciful: the Grande Cornemuse à Miroirs¹⁴ (no. 463) is described as "a

very fine Scottish pibroch." Two musettes by Gaillard are also identified: No. 466 is described as "a very fine Louis XV musette, black wood and ivory, with two dolphins carved in horn. Pale yellow-green brocaded satin bag." "Ravishing." Item No. 469 is "a Louis XV musette in ivory. Pale green silk pocket with brocaded foliage." Three other musettes are dated "Louis XV¹⁵." It is clear that both aristocrats, de Léry and de Bricqueville, attribute their bagpipes to the Ancien Régime, the pre-Revolutionary era, without considering a possible folk origin. This "class-based perspective" is very revealing of the political leanings of these collectors, often monarchists. Their collections were showcases for their commitments.

The chabrette (no. 462) is a "Bagpipe. Bag in old gold silk. Horn, ivory and boxwood, metal rings." This chabrette disappears for a century, apparently never having been acquired by Donaldson, if we are to believe the inventory drawn up by E. Wells¹⁶. It was in 1978 that, alerted by a friend in London, I learned that a chabrette was being offered for sale by the instrument dealer Tony Bingham in London, in his Pond Street shop "*At the Sign of the Serpent*." In our correspondence¹⁷ Bingham offered it to me for £950.00, accompanied by a photograph. I later made the connection with the bagpipe in



the Bricqueville/de Léry collection by comparing the images. It was the same instrument, although the drone had disappeared in the meantime. But I was just starting my young musical career at the time, and I certainly didn't have £950.00 to spend on a historical instrument, except after saving for a long time. Unfortunately, within a few days, the bagpipe was bought by the Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments (MIM), which was enriching its instrumental collection.

Curator Hubert Boone arranged for the instrument to be transported to Belgium. But no sooner had it been stored in an office in Brussels than it was stolen the very same day!

And so this bagpipe remains lost. Perhaps it will reappear one day at some market or at the shop of an antique dealer unaware of its history. The only modern photograph we have is the one Tony Bingham sent me, which I am publishing here. Its boitier is distinctive, with a trapezoidal mirror on one side and four rectangular mirrors on the opposite side. The instrument appears to be of very refined craftsmanship.

Duncan Fraser Collection. Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

A third chabrette is held in a Scottish museum. This instrument comes from the collection of Duncan Fraser (1849-1920) and is now in the reserves of the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Access to this instrument is quite difficult. I had a brief glimpse of it in 1983 when ethnomusicologist Jean Jenkins invited *Lo Jai* to play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for her major exhibition, "*Man and Music*." However, photography was prohibited at the time. For a long time, I had only a few poorly lit photographs that Julian Goodacre had managed to take discreetly. But finally, last year, thanks to the kind cooperation of curator Margaret Wilson, I was able to obtain very clear, high-quality photographs.

The instrument is quite well documented, as Duncan Fraser talks about it at length in his famous work *Some reminiscences and the bagpipe*¹⁸ (1907). Rather than summarizing this adventure, I offer you the full text given by Fraser.

"Chalumeau was the French name for the Shepherd's Bagpipe, but the Bellows-Pipe they named "Musette".

I have three different forms of French Bagpipe, which are photographed here. The first two—one from Auvergne, the other from Bretagne—are blown by the mouth—the third is the famous Musette, or Bellows-Pipe of France, and is made entirely of ivory, with silver keys attached to the chanter, which has two octaves; the Pipe has six drones.

The first Pipe—the French Shepherd's Pipe or Chalumeau—came to me in rather a nice way.

You will notice that it has a drone placed alongside of the chanter, like its next neighbour, the Brittany Pipe; but it has also a second drone, inserted 'separately into the bag—evidently an after-thought on the part of its possessor. It is made of ebony and ivory, and a kind of spotted cane. The termination of the chanter is quite peculiar, and is an exact miniature, in bone, of the end of the large Calabrian pipe. The decoration is of lead, and a small mirror inserted into the stock is very 'Frenchy' in appearance.

This curious little Pipe is evidently in a transitional stage. The original drone is the one which lies alongside the chanter, where the drone in early days was always placed.

The advantage, however, of having the drone removed where it would not interfere with the fingering was evidently apparent to its owner, but his conservatism prevented him from altering the old arrangement, and so he simply added on a second drone. I said above that this French Bagpipe came to me in rather a nice way. It also came with quite an interesting story attached. Mademoiselle D... was a Frenchwoman, endowed with all that vivacity and nameless charm which is so characteristic of her race.

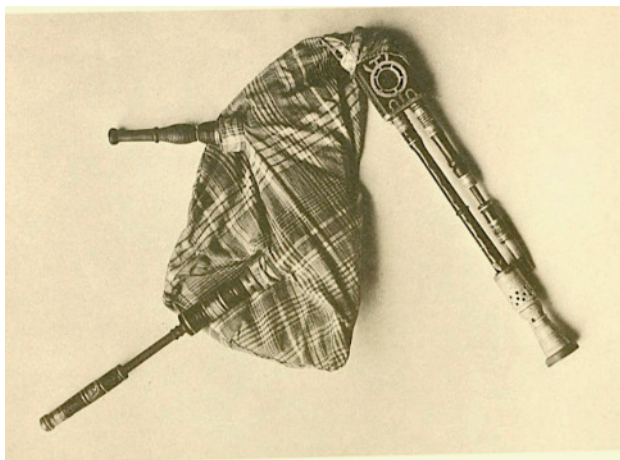
She had lived long enough in Edinburgh to learn something of the Highlander, from frequently seeing detachments of Highland soldiers marching in and out of the Castle. She told me that she loved the kilt, and adored the Bagpipe. I had the honour and pleasure of finishing her Highland education, by teaching her some Highland quicksteps. One day when shewing her my collection of Pipes, I pointed out to her the French Musette, with its beautiful ivory chanter, and its ivory case of drones, and she was astonished as well as gratified to think that the French had such beautiful "Pipes" in the old days. But she was more astonished to be told that the Bagpipe was still played in France.

"But no!" she said. "But yes!" I answered. "In Picardy among other places, and in Brittany, and," I suggested, "probably also in Auvergne, where we are told that the purest Celtic race of to-day exists." "Ah!" she said, "I may be going back to France some day, to the district of Auvergne, and I will listen for the Pipe. I promised long ago, to go back if ever my old nurse's daughter should happen to get married, and she is now quite grown up." In the following year, the expected wedding took place in Avignon, south of Auvergne.

Mademoiselle D..., true to her promise, was there; and when she returned, she brought back with her the little Bagpipe, with the two drones, which you see in the picture. Her story of the marriage reads like a description of an old Highland wedding. The bride's and bridegroom's parties came down from the hills in two separate processions, meeting for the first time that day at the church door. The one was headed by a fiddler, and the other by a piper. As Mademoiselle D... walked up to the church where the wedding was to be held, the first thing she heard was the sound of the Pipes"; her delight was unbounded. So, when the ceremony was finished in church, she spoke to the piper, and arranged with him to buy the Bagpipe, and take possession of it after the festivities were over. She also saw, at the dance, two little tin plates being handed round. The collections were for the musicians. The whole scene, in short, as related to me by Mademoiselle D..., reminded me of the weddings of my boyhood's days."

All of this warrants some commentary: one might assume that Fraser is confusing the word "chalumeau" with "chalémie," which Marin Mersenne uses in *Harmonie Universelle* to designate the "shepherd's bagpipe¹⁹." As for the location of his chabrette, Fraser, like Bricqueville, makes no mention of a Limousin origin for the instrument. The photographed chabrette is "a very old French chalumeau,

from Avignon, in France. A gift of Mademoiselle d'Artout," the caption accompanying the photo, thus completing his brief anecdote. However, one can question the reliability of Fraser's recollections. I leave it to English-speaking readers to verify all the writings contained in *Some Reminiscences...*, which are heavily imbued with

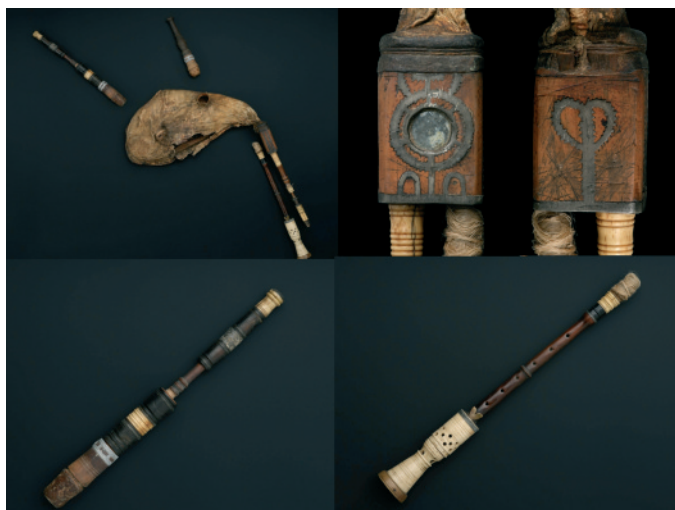


Ossian-esque Celticism, but the other information about the French bagpipes in his collection is perplexing. Only his comment on the musette de Cour is accurate: "A beautiful specimen of the Musette, or French bagpipe from the 17th century." But in the pages of his book, accompanied by photographs, one can read that his mouthblown *cabrette* is "a French Chalumeau, made in the 17th century, from the Basque country"! For a bagpipe made around 1870 in Paris, the description is quite amusing. Duncan Fraser's grasp of geography is rather hazy. Picardy, Brittany, Basque Country, Auvergne... and he seems to forget or confuse his Breton biniou, even though he includes a photograph of it in his book.

This story is therefore rather confusing: the chabrette he mentions was supposedly played near Avignon, and it was thanks to the goodwill of this young, clearly charming, French aristocrat that Fraser was able to acquire this rare instrument. He gives the young woman's full name a little later: Mademoiselle d'Artout. Is it possible that he is confusing Avignon with Limoges, or another town in the Limousin region? Avignon is, of course, located in Provence, and not in "southern Auvergne." As for his comments on the addition of the drone by the musician himself, they are fanciful. Given the large corpus of chabrettes that have been found (more than 130 specimens), we know that they all more or less conform to the same organological model, which is respected here. Fraser, for his part, attests to the instrument's popular use, with a fairly realistic description of a peasant wedding.

This chabrette (for that is indeed what it is) is less sophisticatedly made than those in the Bricqueville and Donaldson collections, but quite interesting nonetheless. We can clearly see a double reed in the photographs provided by Fraser. Its bass drone does not have a triple bore, but rather a simplified direct bore, which must sound a fifth above the stock drone. Its decoration is

rudimentary and rather clumsy, especially the decoration with a single mirror, which Fraser finds "very French." We can assume a late manufacture, probably from the end of the 19th century. I know of several quite similar examples that I would readily attribute to Elie Béjard²⁰, a maker I recently discussed in the pages of *Chanter*.



W. A. Cocks collection. Morpeth Chantry Museum of Bagpipes.



Finally, a fourth bagpipe is preserved at the Morpeth Chantry Museum of Bagpipes; it comes from the William Cocks collection. When I began my research, I was intrigued by a mention in Baines's book, *Bagpipes*²¹, where he describes French bagpipes as follows:

"Many are elaborately decorated, for instance with pieces of mirror glass set in a flat chanter-stock; and with lattice-work lead inlay on the drone." Some bass drones (e.g., in the Cocks collection) have a thrice-bored first joint, the bores connected in series, and in some chanter, hole VII is covered by a brass key, protected inside a barrel as on the zampogna, old shams, etc²²."

I had written to this great scholar, who replied that he was referring to a bagpipe from the Cocks collection, the Newcastle clockmaker who devoted a fine study to small pipes and Northumbrian pipes²³. But my conversations with

Anne Moore, the museum's curator, revealed that Cocks had obtained this chabrette... from Baines himself. "William Cocks acquired the chabrette via Anthony Baines in 1953. Baines had purchased the instrument from Puttick's Sale Rooms. (Puttick & Simpson was a London auction house).²⁴"

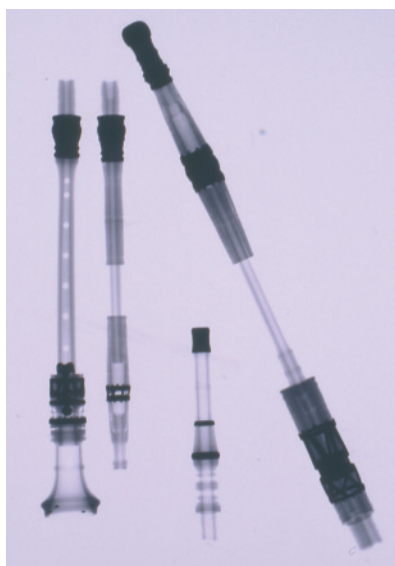
"I find that I did pay £6-10-0 for the French pipe, so that's alright, and I'm v glad you really want it. I was in Belfast, which is why I did not send it along as soon as I said I would.....

Someone told me that the "pewter" on these old French country made pipes is simply lead. The mirrors I imagine to be a rustic French "Victorian" I like the key having no pad (at least it looks as if it is meant to work without a leather or pad - a feature I've never seen before in a wind instrument). I suppose it comes from Auvergne or from la Vendee; or could it be from almost anywhere in 19th c France? I wish I knew something of French provincial museums. Nobody even seems to have visited one!

Yours sincerely A.C. Baines, "36 Redcliffe Close, Old Brompton road SW5 10 Aug.1953."

Baines's remark on the analogy with the bells and fontanelle of the zampognas is of the greatest interest, echoing an observation already made by Fraser. Cocks's bagpipe can be admired today at the Morpeth Museum²⁵. This type of chabrette belongs to the Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche style, although its Tetramorph stock (five mirrors representing Christ and the Evangelists) is by a different hand.

We know that there was an anonymous craftsman in the vicinity of this small town in the south of Haute-Vienne, of which we know of about ten examples, but whose name we have not been able to find with certainty. We carried out an X-ray analysis of this bagpipe during the "Souffler c'est Jouer" exhibition in 1999, which I show here.



My sincere thanks for their collaboration go to Andrew Heywood, Elise Morange, Félicie Verbruggen, Maxou Heintzen, Tony Bingham, Luc Monod, Margareth Wilson from the RMS of Edinburgh, Anne Moore from the Chantry Museum of bagpipes in Morpeth, and Karin Casier and Jane Moulder for their kind help in translation.

Notes

Eugène de BRICQUEVILLE, « Catalogue des Instruments de musique anciens qui composent la collection formée par M. Eugène de Bricqueville », *Mémoires de l'Académie du Vaucluse*, tome V, Avignon, 1886.

² This unusual musette is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, having been purchased by Miss Crosby-Brown around 1900. It can be viewed in the

museum's database:<https://bit.ly/Chanter256>

³ Elizabeth WELLS, « The Donaldson collection in the Royal College of Music Museum of Instruments, London », *Musique-Images-Instruments* n° 9, *Les collections d'instruments de musique, 2e partie*, CNRS ed., Paris, 2007, p. 102-125.

⁴ Elizabeth WELLS, « The Donaldson collection... » *op. cit.* 111.

⁵ Florence GETREAU, Eric MONTBEL, *Souffler c'est Jouer. Chabretaires et cornemuses à miroirs en Limousin*, Catalogue de l'exposition du MNATP à Paris, Saint-Jouin-de-Milly, Modal, 1999.

⁶ Claude Girard made an excellent copy of it, which I play today and which can be heard on my latest CD, *Chabretas*#2.

⁷ I would like to remind our English readers that Louis XIII reigned from 1610 to 1643.

⁸ Joseph Béchonnet, « fabricant de musettes à Effiat », 1821-1900.

⁹ Benoit Amadieu, facteur de cabrettes, 1804-1877.

⁰ The Garde Nationale was composed of citizens charged with defending the Revolution. A Garde Nationale existed in Limoges from July 1789 to July 1790. The *chabretaire* Jean Grosbras (1762-1822) lived in Isle and is mentioned several times among the National Guardsmen gathered to celebrate the young Republic. (Letter from Elise Morange, his descendant and owner of his chabrette, March 4, 1999).

¹ Letter from J.F. "Maxou" Heintzen, July 15, 2024.

² You can also consult the museum's database under this reference:

<https://bit.ly/Chanter257>

³ Eugène de BRICQUEVILLE, « ... », *Mémoires ... op. cit.*

⁴ After having long been the property of the French antique dealer Jean-Pierre Samoyault, curator of the Château de Fontainebleau, this Grande Cornemuse à Miroirs is now owned by Jean-Michel Renard.

¹⁵ *Catalogue des Anciens Instruments de Musique [...], composant l'Ancienne collection de M. le baron de Léry [...]*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 14-16 juin 1910, p. 41-42.

¹⁶ Elizabeth WELLS, "The Donaldson collection..." *op. cit.*

⁷ Letter from Tony Bingham, 13 janvier 1978.

⁸ FRASER Duncan, *Some reminiscences and the bagpipe*, W.J. Hay, Edinburgh, 1907, p243-246

⁹ Marin MERSENNE, *Harmonie Universelle*, 1636, « Expliquer la Chalémie ou cornemuse des bergers », p. 283.

²⁰ Elie Béjard, 1870-1960. See MONTBEL Eric, "In the steps of Elie Béjard, urban chabretaire and shooting star", *Chanter Magazine* vol. 39, n° 1, Spring 2025. The Bagpipe Society.

² BAINES Anthony, *Bagpipes*, Oxford, Pitt Rivers museum, 1960, University press, ré-édition 1995.

²² *Id.* p. 105.

²³ COCKS William, *A Tutor for the Northumberland Half-Long Bagpipes*, Oxford University Press, 1925.

²⁴ Email from Anne Moore, April 9, 2024.

²⁵ N° MOPBM:94. Visible on the Museum's database, curiously classified as a "cabrette" <https://bit.ly/Chanter258>