



## Cabinet on Stand, attributed to André Charles Boulle

### Cabinet on Stand

Attributed to André Charles Boulle,  
furniture worker  
French, about 1675–1680  
Gelatin silver print  
Oak **veneered** with **ebony**, **pewter**,  
tortoiseshell, **brass**, **ivory**, horn, and  
various woods; with drawers of snake  
wood; painted and gilded wood  
figures; bronze mounts  
7 ft. 6 1/2 in. x 4 ft. 11 1/2 in. x 2 ft. 2  
1/4 in.  
77.DA.1



### Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see? What kind of object is this? (*A cabinet on stand.*)

What do you notice about how it is decorated? What lines do you see? What shapes? Do any of these lines or shapes form patterns? What colors do you see?

What do you think the cabinet is made of? What do you see that makes you say that? What do you think it was used for? What do you see that makes you say that?

If you owned this cabinet, what would you put in it?

The large figures supporting the cabinet—Hercules and Hippolyta—are associated with strength. On the central cabinet door, the cockerel of France is shown standing above the symbols of the Holy Roman Empire (*the eagle*) and Spain (*the lion*). What do you think this cabinet is meant to communicate? (*The symbolism is meant to communicate France's military victory.*)

What words would you use to describe this cabinet? How does this description differ from the realities of a military victory?

It is thought that Louis XIV might have given this cabinet as a gift to an ambassador from another country. What would this cabinet communicate to the person who received it? (*The cabinet could be showing off or asserting France's power or wealth.*)

## ***Cabinet on Stand*, attributed to André Charles Boulle**

### **Background Information**

This large cabinet on stand is one of a pair (the other is now located in a private collection in Scotland). It is decorated with **marquetry** of ebony, pewter, tortoiseshell, brass, ivory, horn, and various woods. The designs primarily show birds and flowers. The front of the stand is supported by two figures representing the Greek mythological heroes Hercules and Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, both of whom represent strength and bravery.

In its lavish decoration and propagandistic imagery, the cabinet celebrates the military victories won by **Louis XIV** during his reign. The marquetry on the central door of the cabinet shows the cockerel of France standing triumphant above the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire and the lion of Spain and the Spanish Netherlands. This symbolizes France's victory over the combined forces of these countries in the Dutch War of 1672–78. In addition to the symbolism on the marquetry panel, a portrait medallion at the top of the cabinet shows Louis XIV flanked by military trophies.

The flowers along the top of the cabinet are called **fleurs-de-lis** (flowers of the lily). They are the **symbol** of the French monarchy and make it clear that this piece was a royal commission. Although no mention of the work is made in the king's inventories, it is possible that the cabinet and its nearly identical twin were intended as royal gifts.

### **About the Artist**

André Charles Boulle (French, 1642–1732)

André-Charles Boulle was christened by his contemporaries as “the most skillful artisan in Paris,” and his name is synonymous with the practice of veneering furniture with marquetry of tortoiseshell, pewter, and brass. Although he did not invent the technique, Boulle was its greatest practitioner and lent his name to its common name: *boulle* work. Boulle also specialized in floral marquetry in both stained and naturally colored wood. Many of his designs are illustrated in a book of engravings published around 1720.

Before 1666 Boulle was awarded the title of master cabinetmaker; in 1672 Louis XIV granted him the royal privilege of lodging in the Palais du Louvre. In the same year, he achieved the title of cabinetmaker and sculptor to the king. This new title allowed him to produce furniture as well as works in gilt bronze such as chandeliers, wall lights, and mounts for furniture. Although strict guild rules usually prevented craftsmen from practicing two professions simultaneously, Boulle's favored position allowed him protected status and exempted him from these requirements.