

Recent Acquisition on Etruscan Vases



James Christie, *A disquisition upon Etruscan Vases; displaying their probable connection with the shows at Eleusis, and the Chinese feast of lanterns, with explanations of a few of the principal allegories depicted upon them* (1806)

Reference Number: SPEC Y80.5.129

The pre-Roman culture of Etruria, a region of Central Italy roughly equivalent to modern Tuscany, flourished between the eighth and first centuries BC. The complex Etruscan culture absorbed much from Ancient Greece, including the techniques of Greek vase painting.

This early 19th-century study of Etruscan vases was written by James Christie (1773–1831), son of the founder of the famous firm of auctioneers, who took over the business on his father's death in 1803 and moved to Christie's current headquarters at 8 King Street, London in 1823.

Christie became interested in painted Greek vases through his friendship with the connoisseur and collector Charles Townley (1737-1805), and the illustration (right) was drawn from a vase in Townley's collection.

In a chapter 'Of Fish, and the allegory of Angling', Christie reproduces the scene at the start of this highlight, taken from a vase in the collection of Thomas Hope (1769-1831).



It depicts 'Hercules, distinguishable by lion's skin and quiver, kneeling on a rock in the centre, Neptune angling on a rock behind him, and Hermes seated to the right, reaching forward the caduceus'.

Christie's folio text was finely printed with a double-page plate (missing in most copies), 16 full-page engraved plates and five vignettes. Originally printed anonymously in 1806 in a limited edition of 100 copies, the *Disquisition* was privately circulated to Christie's friends, with his presentation inscription. The University of Liverpool's copy (which is complete with all the illustrations) was presented to William Baker, Esq, and has the armorial bookplate of Sir Edward B. Baker. A later owner, Peter Isaac, published his lectures on the book's printer, William Bulmer (1757-1830) in 1984. The contemporary binding is appropriately decorated with a Greek key border design in black, a common decorative feature on Greek pottery.

Other notable owners of the original presentation copies include the Hon. Mrs Damer, a sculptor, to whom Horace Walpole bequeathed Strawberry Hill; Christie's fellow auctioneer William Sotheby, and Sir John Soane, the architect and collector.

References:

University of Liverpool , Special Collections & Archives website:
<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>

