

Highlight

A Marble Vase from the “Cabinet de Monsieur Crozat”

By Joffrey Nogrette



Fig. 1: A MARBLE AMPHORA WITH RELIEF DECORATION. H. 50 cm. Marble. Roman, Late Republican, 1st cent. B.C.

Price on request

The Maison Crozat in Rue Richelieu, Paris, housed one of the most important private art collections at the beginning of 18th century. Its owner, the wealthy financier Pierre Crozat (1665-1740) was a major figure in artistic patronage, notably fostering the careers of artists like Antoine Watteau.

The connoisseurs admitted to this museum *avant la lettre* could admire works by Titian, Raphael, Rubens and Rembrandt, most of which are now in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. There was also a fine collection of Roman sculptures including, as its centerpiece, the Girardon Bacchus, now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. In the main gallery of the house (fig. 2), “several vases and urns made in Rome, along with other rare pieces” were displayed between the paintings. The vase featured in this essay (fig. 1) was likely one of them. Published and illustrated

in 1752 by the Comte de Caylus in the first volume of his *Recueil d'antiquités* (fig. 3), this marble vessel was brought back from Rome by Crozat following his stay in Italy between September 1714 and June 1715.

After Pierre Crozat's death in 1740, his house was bequeathed to his nephew, the Marquis du Châtel. When he died ten years later, the collection of sculptures, busts and marble vases that deco-



Fig. 2: Nicolas Lancret, *Concert in the Gallery of the Maison Crozat*, ca. 1738, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek München. Public Domain.

Highlight



Fig. 3 : Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, pl. XCVIII. Public domain.

rated the house was sold in a public auction, and the Comte de Caylus bought our vase along with three others. He did not keep it for long, as by 1752, the date of the publication of the first volume of his *Recueil d'antiquités*, he had already passed it on to his friend and fellow connoisseur Pierre-Jean Mariette.

These two men belonged to Pierre Crozat's close circle. A leading antiquarian of his time, Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières-Grimoard de Pestels de Lévis, Comte de Caylus (1692-1765) (fig. 4), helped to pave the way to modern archaeology. His most remarkable work is the *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques,*



Fig. 4: Portrait of the Comte de Caylus by Alexander Roslin, ca. 1752-1753, National Museum in Warsaw. Public domain.

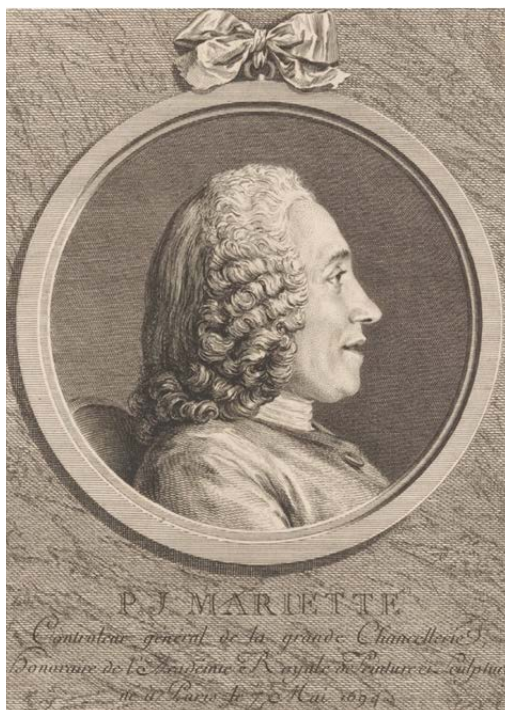


Fig. 5: Portrait of Pierre Jean Mariette, 1765, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Public domain.

grecques et romaines, published in seven volumes between 1752 and 1767. With its meticulous descriptions and illustrations, it aimed to make his vast collection of ancient artefacts accessible to the scientific community.

The name Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) (fig. 5) is no less renowned in the historiography of art. Heir to a dynasty of printers, publishers and art dealers, he primarily collected graphic arts (a large part of his collection is now in the Musée du Louvre) and was regarded as a leading authority in the field. His posthumous sale in 1775 reveals that he also collected antiquities, though on

a smaller scale. On this occasion, the "Crozat vase" was sold to the prominent auctioneer and art dealer Alexandre-Joseph Paillet (1743-1814). Its whereabouts were then lost.

When it reappeared on the Parisian art market in 2011, its prestigious provenance had sunken into oblivion. It was reported as being with a French family of château owners since the 1920s.

Since its discovery on Italian soil and its subsequent journey through various French collections, the vase has undergone several changes in appearance, starting with the loss of the upper neck and the high vertical handles that were still present when Caylus depicted the vessel. It is unclear whether these parts were original or later additions. However, it is certain that the foot is a modern reconstruction from the 18th century or earlier. In fact, it does not match the typology of the vessel, which mimics the shape of a Panathenaic prize amphora. Instead, the restorer referred to the bases of large marble kraters, well-known since the Renaissance, such as the Borghese Vase.

In its present state, the vase is approximately 50 cm high. The neck and shoulder are decorated with a tongue pattern separated at the bottom by darts. Beneath this motif runs a band decorated with acanthus scrolls. Four frontal figures carved in low relief, occupy the register that encircles the body. Two representations of Eros, whose legs take the shape of acanthus leaves, alternate with two depictions of a vegetal goddess dressed in a tunic and whose lower body terminates in a lotus flower. Both hold acanthus scrolls in each of their outstretched hands.



Fig. 6: Pilaster capital from Didyma, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Ma 2779.

These plant divinities are part of an iconography that appeared in the second half of the 4th century B.C. The feminine type can be found in the corners of the well-known pebble mosaic floor of room E in the “oikos” of the palace at Aigai, as well as in the architectural decoration of certain temples in Asia Minor, for instance the Temple of Artemis Leucophryene in Magnesia on the Maeander or the Temple of Apollo in Didyma (fig. 6). The posture is reminiscent of that of the Oriental Potnia Theron, which can be equated to an early form of Artemis.



Fig. 7: Roman candelabrum base, inv. no. 2564, Galleria dei Candelabri, Vatican Museums, © Fabrizio Garrisi, Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0 (original photo altered).



Fig. 8: Marble amphora, inv. no. 1519, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, © Jamie Heath, CC BY-SA 2.0 (original photo altered).



Fig. 9: Marble amphora, inv. no. 1518, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, © Jamie Heath, CC BY-SA 2.0 (original photo altered).

The vegetal Eros motif probably appeared later. Six “Neo-Attic” candelabra from the Julio-Claudian period bear this figure on their bases (fig. 7). They were found in the 18th century near Sant’Agnese Fuori le Mura, and five of them are now housed in the Candelabra Gallery at the Museo Pio Clementino, Rome.

In terms of shape, size and secondary decoration, the Crozat amphora belongs to a group of three other votive marble amphorae, marked on the shoulder with the dedication “CHIO D(edit) D(onum)”, “Chio has offered this gift”. They were found by Eliseo Borghi in 1895 during excavations on the site of the sanctuary dedicated to Diana Nemorensis, near the shores of Lake Nemi. These three vases, now divided between the Penn Museum in Philadelphia and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, bear a different main decoration: a pair of griffins attacking a doe on the Philadelphia amphora; two satyrs quarrelling around a crater (fig. 8), and a horse race contested by a young satyr and an Eros (fig. 9), for the Copenhagen amphorae.

These three vases, to which we must add our own, likely all come from the same “Neo-Attic” workshop, which must have been active somewhere between the Late Hellenistic and

Early Imperial Period. The fact that they follow an old Greek tradition of crafting solid vases, combined with a shape reminiscent of those awarded to winners of the Panathenaeic Games, strongly suggests that the sculptors were of Athenian origin.

1. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. Ma 337.
2. “... une galerie très riche, ornée de plusieurs vases et urnes faits à Rome, & d’autres pièces rares”, Anon. (Claude-Marin Saugrain), *Les Curiositez de Paris...* Paris: 1742, p. 212.
3. On “Akanthos figures” linked to Artemis, cf. WEBB, Pamela A. *Hellenistic Architectural Sculpture: Figurative Motifs in Western Anatolia and the Aegean Islands*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, pp. 32-33; and KAHIL, Lilly, “Artémis” in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II, Zurich and Munich, Artemis Verlag, 1984, nos. 265-267, p. 629.
4. BLANC, Nicole, GURY Françoise, “Eros / Amor, Cupido” in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II, Zurich and Munich, Artemis Verlag, 1984, nos. 128-131, p. 973.
5. On the “CHIO Dedication”, cf. ROMANO, Irène Bals, *Classical Sculpture: Catalogue of the Cypriot, Greek, and Roman Stone Sculpture in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, pp. 146-159.
6. Philadelphia, Penn Museum, inv. no. MS3446.
7. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, inv. nos. 1518, 1519.