

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

French School, 18th Century

Antique Roman fragments studies on a sarcophagus

Pen, ink and wash on paper

18.2 × 28.4 cm; 7 3/16 × 11 3/16 in.

Provenance

Louis Bongard (1921–2008), architect, his collector's stamp on the verso (Lugt 6176);
French private collection.



This refined sheet brings together several studies after antique Roman sculptural and architectural fragments, arranged compositionally with the logic of a repertory.

Across the upper register are three variations on architectural supports or altar-like forms: two framed structures articulated by columns, friezes, garlands and figural reliefs, and, at centre, a curved pedestal-like element enriched with winged figures and floral ornament. Against it, it lies a profile of an emperor-like bust, represented in relief and partially damaged. The artist's interest lies above all in the grammar of antique decoration: twisted shafts, mouldings, *putti*, winged *genii* and festoons are carefully extracted and recombined.

The lower register is dominated by a continuous garland frieze, carried by standing winged youths and filled with fruit, flowers and foliage. Its measured alternation of figure and ornament suggests close study of Roman sarcophagi, cinerary altars or architectural reliefs, objects that were central to eighteenth-century antiquarian taste. For what concerns the technique employed by our anonymous artist, pen defines contour and detail, while grey wash gives depth to the mouldings and establishes the projection of the objects on a shallow ledge.

The sheet belongs to the culture of the Grand Tour and the academic study of antique ornament, when artists, architects and designers copied ancient fragments both as records and as a source for modern invention.

A particularly pertinent comparison may be made with the antiquarian practice of Jean Barbault (c. 1718 - 1762), whose engraved repertoires of Roman monuments, altars, *cippi*, sarcophagi and bas-reliefs gave wide currency to this mode of studying the antique as a sequence of selected fragments (see for example fig. 1).

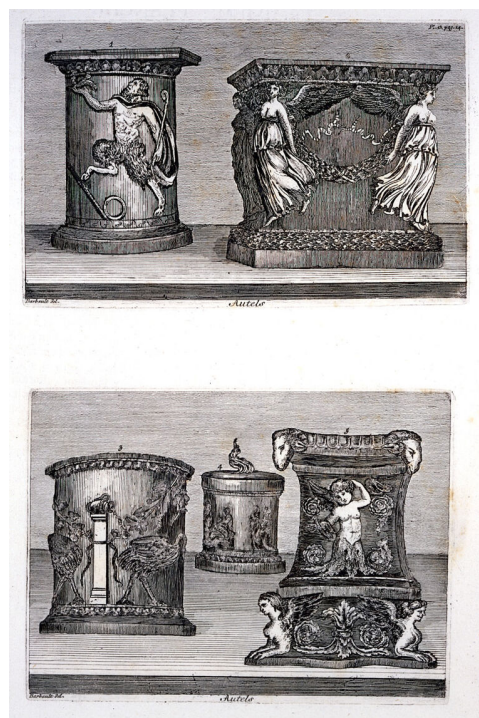


Fig. 1. After Jean Barbault, *Five Ancient Roman Altars*, between 1760 and 1769, etching. London, Wellcome Collection.