

TOMASSO BROTHERS

FINE ART



Francesco Righetti (1749-1819) (Attributed to)

Monumental cast of an important antique cinerary urn in the Vatican Museum, circa 1805

Bronze

115 cm (45 ¼ in.) high
35.5 cm (14 in.) long at base

This monumental urn is a bronze cast of an important 4th century AD cinerary urn, now located in the Galleria dei Candelabri of the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican. The ancient, marble original arrived at the Vatican between 1775 and 1792 and differs from the present one only in that it bears an inscription that originates from the sepulchral stele of Aurelius Victore. The ancient marble vase was found in 1633 in the area of the Mausoleum of Elena in Torpignattara.

It is likely that the author of the present urn was the great Roman bronze caster Francesco Righetti. According to his catalogues and inventory, Righetti cast versions of both the Medici and Borghese vases and, in 1794, intended to make further copies of other works the Vatican Museum. It is therefore possible that this vase was a direct result of this project. In 1789 Righetti began to run his own foundry and so became able to cast larger, more complex bronze pieces such as this one. It should also be noted that as a result of his appointment as head of the Vatican foundry in 1805, it is likely that Righetti would have had privileged access to the Vatican's collection.

The antique vase, or urn, became one of the most iconic objects of the neoclassical period. This most ancient form rose to popularity through the activities of antiquarians and collectors such as Sir William

Hamilton, the Comte de Caylus, Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Johan Joachim Winckelmann. Neoclassical interest in the aesthetic and decorative potential of antique vases was fuelled largely by the designs of Piranesi, who published a number of his folios in Rome in the second half of the 18th century. Piranesi's flamboyant, antique-inspired inventions influenced countless goldsmiths and bronze casters, the most brilliant of which was no doubt Francesco Righetti.

Walter F. Becker was an important British businessman, who in the late nineteenth century moved to Italy to expand his shipping business. In 1890 he jointly founded the company Pierce, Becker & Ilardi, which soon possessed the most impressive fleet in the country. Becker made a huge fortune and furnished his late seventeenth century Villa in the hills overlooking Turin with outstanding works by artists such as Canaletto, Guardi, Tintoretto, Poussin, Picasso, Giambologna, della Quercia, Arnolfo di Cambio and Boulle.

Provenance:

Villa Becker, Walter F. Becker collection, Turin