

A pair of Italian neoclassical bronze vases. The vases, after antique roman prototypes, share the same composition- ribbed domed covers over a relief frieze with female masks at each side, with gadroons below resting on a round plinth decorated with a laurel band. The relief decorations with sacrificial tools and bucrania included a eagle with spread wings on Jupiter's lightning, lion heads, ox skull, Gorgons, the rayed Medusa, all arranged in a differing composition on each vase.

Circle of the Valadier workshop.

Rome, ca. 1811

Height: 10,5 in. (25 cm)

Diameter: 8 in. (21 cm)



The present pair of bronze vases are an important testimony of the impact that the excavations of the Roman Forum had on the Roman artistic production of the early nineteenth century. In 1811, during the Napoleonic rule in Italy (1809–14), Giuseppe Valadier and Giuseppe Camporese were commissioned with the conservation of the most important archeological sites in Rome. Their proposal envisaged not only the demolition of some medieval buildings, but also the undertaking of a series of excavations in the areas of the Forum and the Palatine. Throughout the centuries, debris had almost reached the capitals of the three remaining columns of the temple of Vespasian and Titus, at the foot of the Capitoline hill. The 1811 excavations freed the remains of the building, allowing the recovery of the fragments of the entablature, which are now recomposed in the gallery of the Tabularium, in the Capitoline Museums (Fig.2).

The present pair of vases present the same iconographic elements of the entablature of the Temple of Vespasianus. This suggests that the vases must have been made in a period close to the excavations and by someone who had access to and close knowledge of the architectures that were being unearthed. This is why we attribute them to the circle of Giuseppe Valadier, the superintendent of the project, and heir to one of the finest manufactories in Rome, which had been founded by his father Luigi Valadier in the previous century. Giuseppe Valadier is recorded to have appropriated the same iconographic elements in a series of drawing in pen, ink and watercolor in the Museo Napoleonico, in which he reinterprets the architectures of the Forum in designs for what must have been *deserts* in precious marbles and gilded bronze. In a drawing in particular, he quotes the iconographic elements of the present vases (fig.1).

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 fueled largely by the designs of Piranesi, who published a number of his folios in Rome in the second half of the 18th century (some plates of which present important similarities with the

present vases). Piranesi's flamboyant, antique-inspired inventions influenced countless goldsmiths and bronze casters.

Comparative Literature:

Alvar Gonzalez- Palacios, *I Valadier, L'album dei disegni del Museo Napoleonico*, Palombi Editori, Roma, pp.78; 82 (fig.1); 91.



Fig.1 Luigi Valadier, pen, ink, watercolor on paper inv. MN 8619



Fig.2 Tabularium of Temple of Vespasianus