



Bound for Jean-Claude Fauconnet de Vildé. Height of binding 170 mm

Gersaint, Edmé François

Paris 1694 – 1750 Paris

Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, et autres curiosités naturelles.

Paris, Flahault & Prault, 1736

DUODECIMO (165 × 95 mm), (90)ff. signed a⁴ A–B⁸ C⁴ D⁸ E⁴ F⁸ G⁴ H⁸ I⁴ K⁸ L⁴ M⁸ N⁴ O⁶ and paginated 1–6 (*i.e.* 8) 1–167 (5), plus engraved title-frontispiece by Claude Duflos after François Boucher (the print in first state, of three).

PROVENANCE Jean-Claude Fauconnet de Vildé, Conseiller de la ville de Paris (appointed in 1733; d. *circa* 1765), binding¹ — Jean Fürstenberg (1890–1982), exlibris *Ex Musaeo Hans Fürstenberg*,² sold in 1974 to — Otto Schäfer (1912–2000) — Sotheby's, 'The Collection of Otto Schäfer, Part IV: the Hans Fürstenberg Collection of Eighteenth-Century French Books', London, 7 December 1995, lot 249 — Reiss & Sohn, Auktion 118, Königstein im Taunus, 22 April 2008, lot 1654

Headband abraded, otherwise in very good state of preservation.

BINDING contemporary French calf, gilt arms of Jean-Claude Fauconnet de Vildé on covers.

THE AUTHOR of this work was a merchant with a boutique on the Pont Notre-Dame in Paris, who from about 1732 began to promote the vogue for collecting shells (conchylomania), dealing in them and amassing large collections.³ In June 1734 Gersaint had organised an auction containing a 'Cabinet de Coquilles' imported from Holland, followed on 3 December by a sale of shells from collections in Holland, Flanders, and Paris (both auctions were held without printed catalogues). The *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles* was printed for Gersaint's third sale of shells, his first *grande vente publique*, commenced on 30 January 1736, in which 450 lots of shells and 132 of Surinamese insects and reptiles

¹ Eugène Olivier, Georges Hermal and R. de Roton, *Manuel de l'amateur de reliures armoriées françaises* (Paris 1924–1935), no.1654.

² *Das Buch als Kunstwerk, Französische illustrierte Bücher des 18. Jahrhunderts aus der Bibliothek Hans Fürstenberg*, catalogue of an exhibition held in Schloß Ludwigsburg (Stuttgart 1965), p.150 (this copy).

³ Yves Laisus, 'Les Cabinets d'histoire naturelle' in *Enseignement et diffusion des sciences en France au XVIIIe siècle*, edited by René Taton (Paris 1964), pp.667–668, 671; Emma C. Spary, 'Rococo readings of the book of nature' in *Books and the sciences in history*, edited by Marina Frasca-Spada and Nicolaus Jardine (Cambridge 2000), pp. 261–262.

were offered. According to a contemporary note in another copy, all these curiosities were the property of ‘M. Guichard, militaire, et au sieur Gersaint son ami’.⁴

To recruit connoisseurs to the collecting of marine naturalia, Gersaint prefaces the catalogue with ‘Observations sur les Coquillages’ (pp.1–29), in which shells are elevated to the status of works of art, and described as a source of inspiration for architects, sculptors, and painters; by a ‘Liste des Principaux Cabinets’ (pp.30–45); and by a list of the authors who have described shells (pp.46–61). His tactic seems to have worked: among buyers of shells in the sale were the aristocratic collectors Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville, Jean de Julienne, Antoine de La Roque, and Louis Quentin de Lorangère, and two enthusiastic amateurs, Gaillard (purchaser of thirty-five lots, including four of insects) and Sévin (thirty-nine lots). The sale realised more than 6600 *livres*, with each shell selling on average for 15 *livres* (the top lot 67 ‘une grande huître extrêmement baroque et presque noire en dehors et en dedans’ fetched 75 *livres*).⁵

The engraved title-frontispiece is a still-life of shells and coral, designed by François Boucher, and engraved by Claude Duflos.⁶ ‘Placed at the head of the catalogue, the frontispiece provides a condensed illustration of the collection and its decorative potential, while identifying Gersaint as the source of Rococo chic’.⁷ Boucher himself became a leading collector of shells (he purchased at least three lots of shells in Gersaint’s auction of La Roque’s collection in 1745) and his own catalogue contains a eulogy by the auctioneer, Gersaint’s colleague Pierre Rémy, celebrating him as a man of taste.⁸ The interconnections of collectors of shells, patrons, and designers of Rococo architecture and decoration, and their role in gaining acceptance of the Rococo as a style, deserve investigation.⁹

⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Estampes, Yd 5d; see Guillaume Glorieux, *À l’enseigne de Gersaint: Edme-François Gersaint, marchand d’art sur le Pont Notre-Dame, 1694–1750* (Seysssel 2002), p.361.

⁵ Glorieux, *op. cit.*, pp.362, 446–447, 562–576: ‘Clients intervenant dans les ventes publiques dirigées par Gersaint’.

⁶ Bibliothèque nationale, *Inventaire du Fonds Français: Graveurs du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1955), VIII, p.59 no.23. The plate was restruck in 1737 and 1744 with the inscription beneath altered or erased; see *Regency to Empire: French Printmaking 1715–1815*, catalogue of an exhibition held in Baltimore, Boston and Minneapolis ([Baltimore] 1984), p.92.

⁷ Andrew McClellan, ‘Watteau’s dealer: Gersaint and the marketing of art in eighteenth-century Paris’ in *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), pp.446–447 and fig. 7.

⁸ Spary, *op. cit.*, p.262.

⁹ Alastair Laing, ‘French ornamental engravings and the diffusion of the Rococo’ in *Le Stampe e la diffusione delle immagini e degli stili*, edited by Henri Zerner (Bologna 1983), pp.115–116, 126.



Left Engraving by Claude Duflos after a design by François Boucher

REFERENCES Gabriel Peignot, *Répertoire bibliographique universel: contenant la notice raisonnée des bibliographies spéciales publiées jusqu'à ce jour* (Paris 1812), p.246; Hermann August Hagen, *Bibliotheca entomologica. Die Litteratur über das ganze Gebiet der Entomologie* (Leipzig 1862), p.314 no. 25; Pierre M. Conlon, *Le siècle des lumières: bibliographie chronologique, 1730–1736* (Geneva 1984), p.528

Bound with

Gersaint, Edmé François

Paris 1694 – 1750 Paris

Catalogue raisonné d'une collection considérable de diverses Curiosités en tous Genres, contenues dans les Cabinets de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson.**Paris, Jacques Barrois & Pierre-Guillaume Simon, 1744**DUODECIMO (165 × 95 mm), (128)ff. signed π^2 a⁶ b² A–T⁶ V⁴ and paginated (4) 1–13 (3) 1–234 (2).

THE SECOND WORK in this volume is Gersaint's sale catalogue of the collections gathered by Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson (d. 26 July 1744), divided for sale in nine sections, comprising shells, insects, and animals stuffed or in preserving fluids; scientific instruments, pharmaceutical apparatus, and machinery; ornamental turning, bronzes, porcelain, clocks, and other works of art; pictures and prints; and furniture. The 966 lots were removed from the owner's townhouse, the Hôtel de Lude, fabulously decorated by Jacques de Lajoue, with painted depictions of the cabinets, and were offered in March and April 1745 (furniture and objects 'de moindre conséquence' had been sold in December 1744 and January 1745 without a catalogue).¹⁰

One of the highest prices in the sale (1100 *livres*) was paid by Madame de Pompadour for a *pot-pourri* in porcelain which Bonnier de la Mosson had acquired from the prince de Condé.¹¹ George-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, bought many shells and insects (thirty-one lots and twenty-eight lots respectively); other persistent buyers were Michel-Ferdinand d'Albert d'Ailly, duc de Chaulnes; Crozat de Thiers; Crozat de Tugny; Carl-Gustav Tessin; the amateurs Dupin, Foissac, Hénin; and the dealer Joseph-Gabriel Agard. Gersaint himself purchased fifty-four lots, including a marble table with a sculpted base (lot 939: 1060 *livres*) and a unicorn's horn (lot 369: 72 *livres*), for a total of 7813 *livres*.¹²

¹⁰ The cabinet of Bonnier de la Mosson is the subject of a large literature; see Glorieux, *op. cit.*, especially pp.367–370, 558–561 (schedule of the sale).

¹¹ Glorieux, *op. cit.*, p.318

¹² Glorieux, *op. cit.*, pp.315, 576.

Some copies of the catalogue are illustrated by the Boucher-Duflos frontispiece for the *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles* of 1736, with its text appropriately modified.

REFERENCES Leopoldo Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato dei libri d'arte e d'antichità posseduti dal conte Cicognara* (Pisa 1821), no. 4406; *Universal Catalogue of Books on Art* (London 1870), p.661 (Bodleian Library copy); Jacob Lewine, *Bibliography of eighteenth century art and illustrated books, being a guide to collectors of illustrated works in English and French of the period* (London 1898), p.95 (erroneously dated 1754); Henri Cohen, *Guide de l'Amateur de Livres à Gravures du XVIIIe siècle*, revised by Seymour de Ricci (Paris 1912), no. 206; *The Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection. A Catalog of the Gifts of Lessing J. Rosenwald to the Library of Congress, 1943 to 1975* (Washington, DC 1977), no. 2536; Pierre M. Conlon, *Le siècle des lumières: bibliographie chronologique, 1743–1747* (Geneva 1987), p.158

