

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Attributed to François Mazois
(Lorient 1783 – 1826)

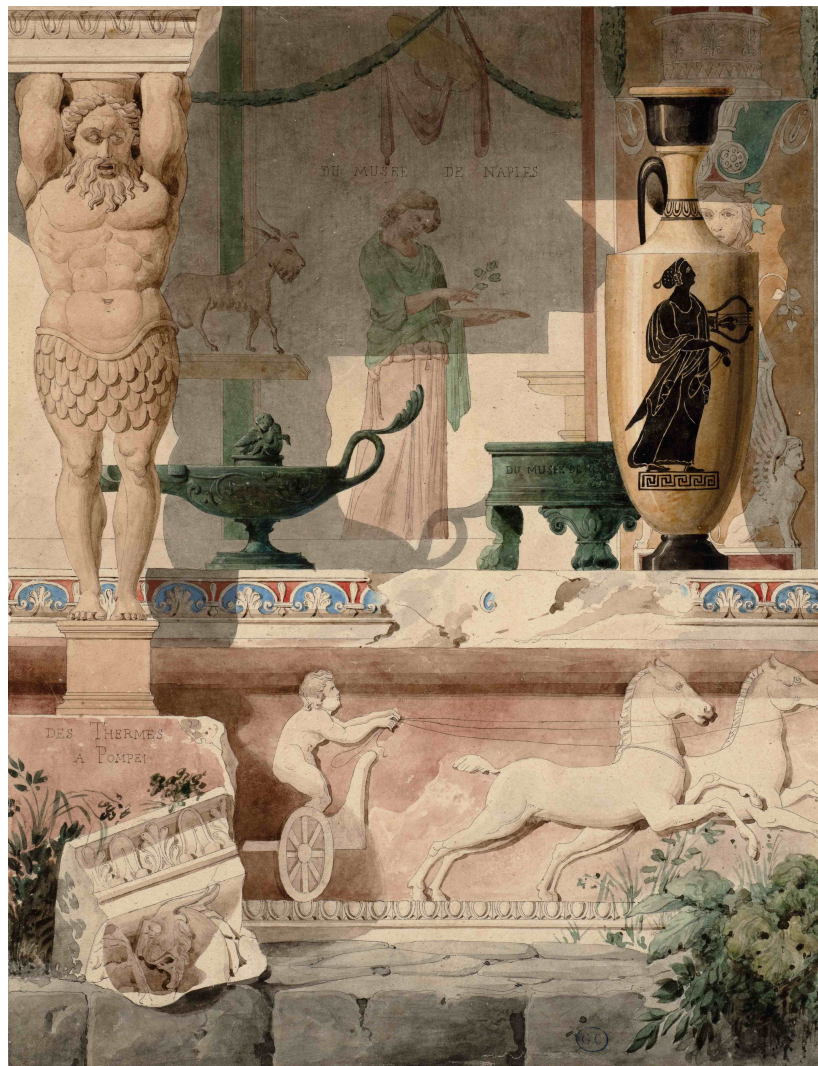
Capriccio of Antiquities and Architectural Fragments from the Naples Museum

Watercolour and pencil

9 5/8 x 7 5/8 in. (24.5 x 18.5 cm.)

Inscribed (lower left and upper centre): *DES THERMES A POMPEI* and *DU MUSEE DE NAPLES*

Stamped with the collector's mark 'GC' (Lugt.11420¹).



¹ According to Lugt (*Marques de Collections*, Amsterdam 1921, p. 201, no. 11420), the collector's mark has not been identified, but the collector was very probably French and the mark is found quite frequently on architectural drawings.

This exquisitely executed watercolour *capriccio* showing a *mélange* of elements from Pompei and Herculaneum is attributable to François Mazois, who was one of the most gifted pupils of Charles Percier. Mazois played a key role in the early nineteenth-century excavations of the two ancient cities, recording the appearance of the former in a magisterial double-folio publication, *Les Ruines de Pompéi* (fig. 1), which appeared in three volumes during the second decade of the nineteenth century, with the second volume (and a third volume appearing posthumously) completed by François Chrétien Gau (1790 – 1853). Of all the early nineteenth-century architects to visit Pompei, Mazois was certainly the most deeply immersed in recording the archaeology and providing imaginative reconstructions of how the buildings might have appeared in Roman times. He also provided scholarly texts to accompany the plates in his book which discussed aspects of Roman life. Unusually for the time, Mazois was interested not just in the monumental buildings but in the ordinary domestic architecture, its furnishings and decorations and what these revealed about Roman social life.

After working for Ledoux and Vaudoyer, in 1803 Mazois became a pupil of Charles Percier who was to prove to be a most inspiring mentor. In 1806 and 1807 he unsuccessfully entered the competition for the Prix de Rome, but, despite these disappointments, his talents were recognised by the painter François Gérard. Mazois continued to receive much encouragement from Percier and when his friend, Achille Leclerc, won the Prix de Rome in 1808, Mazois decided to accompany him to the Eternal City where he met the architect Pierre-Adrien Pâris, a mentor of Charles Percier's. Paris had supplied drawings of Pompei and Herculaneum for the Abbe de St Non's *Voyage Pittoresque* and was later to collaborate with Mazois in recording the excavations there. Mazois was also taken up by Lecomte, the Neapolitan court architect who introduced him to Caroline Murat, the Queen of Naples.

This introduction was to prove very fruitful and, as a result of the Queen's favour, Mazois was allowed privileged access to the excavations at Pompei. There he spent two years, between 1809-11, studying the archaeological sites and producing numerous drawings which bore fruit in his *magnum opus*, the *Ruines de Pompéi*, the first two volumes of which were published between 1809-1811 and were dedicated to the Queen, who gave him 300 francs as a reward for his labours (fig. 1).

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, the excavations of Pompei and Herculaneum proceeded at a snail's pace and access to the sites was very restricted. Mazois's master Charles Percier, for example, was not allowed to inspect the excavations when he visited in the summer of 1790 and one British grand tourist who was given access complained that he was shown through gloomy passages by a guide with a flaming torch and that it was an experience 'fitter for a mole than a man'. Most eighteenth-century artists and architects, therefore, who did plunder motifs from Pompei and Herculaneum, such as Robert Adam in the Drawing Room at Syon Park, were reliant on the engravings in *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, a publication, which, despite the name, reproduced some of the wall-paintings from both ancient cities, as well as highlights from the objects which had been transferred to the Royal Archaeological Museum. This may have been the inspiration behind the Pompeian set design of Cupid's Palace, which was drawn by Charles Percier in 1793 for the Palace of Cupid in Pierre Gardel's opera *Psyché*. Not until the 1820s did Pompei take

hold on the imaginations of French architects at the École des Beaux-Arts, who had, by then, far greater access to the excavations than their predecessors leading to a flowering of grand competition projects for the ‘*restauration*’ (imaginary reconstruction) of the temples and forum of the ancient city and, even then, it was the grand public buildings rather than the private houses which captured their attention.

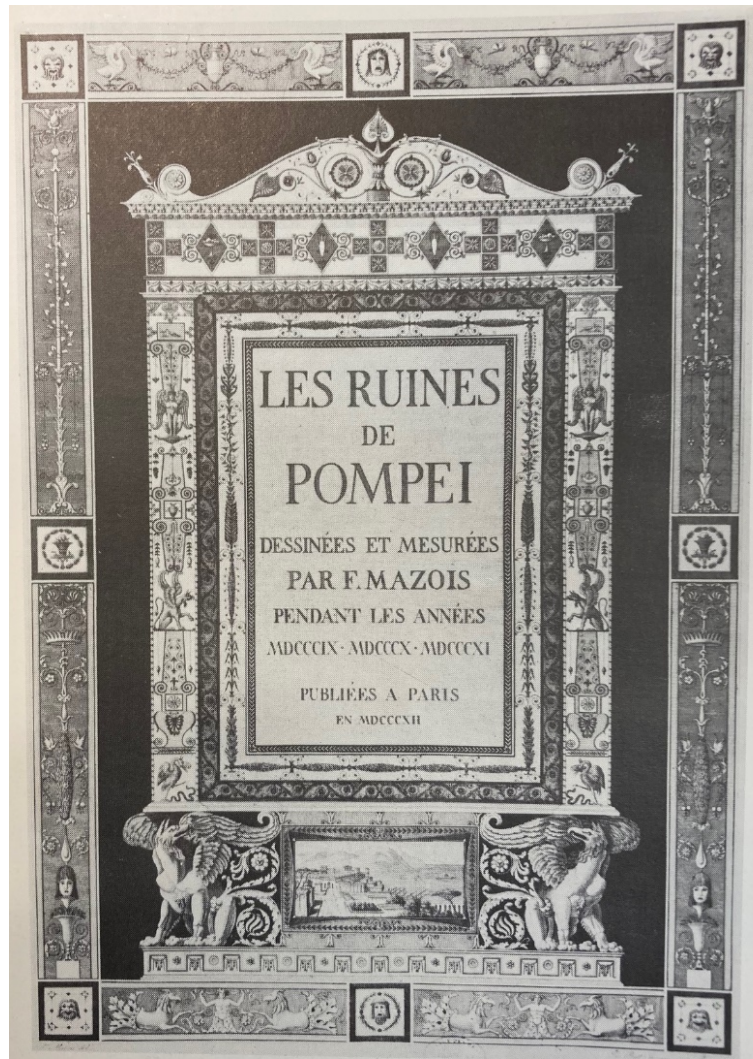


Fig. 1. Frontispiece to Volume 2 of Mazois’s *Les Ruines de Pompéi* (1812)

François Mazois was fortunate in being in Pompei at a time when there was a great acceleration in the pace of excavations driven by the determination and financial resources of his munificent patron Caroline Murat. During a period of a few months in 1813, the workforce doubled from 300 to over 600. This led to some spectacular discoveries in the area round the Forum which provided material and inspiration for the third volume of Mazois’s *Ruines de Pompei*. Mazois was also a seminal influence on the young architects at the École des Beaux-Arts and his ‘*restauration*’ of the Temple of Isis in the Forum, shown in an unpublished drawing in the collection of the École des Beaux-Arts (fig. 2), looks forward to the grand polychromatic paper projects of the 1820s.



Fig. 2. François Mazois, ‘*Restauration*’ of the Temple of Isis, Pompei, Cabinet des Dessins, École des Beaux-Arts, Paris

The present watercolour, possibly conceived as a trial frontispiece for a projected publication and probably dateable to the 1810s or early 1820s, also draws inspiration from the recent excavations in the Pompei Forum, in this case the Baths. It has a refinement and sophistication comparable with the successful competition drawings from the École des Beaux-Arts and the French Academy in Rome of the 1820s. However, while these academic competition drawings tend to be cool exercises in pure architecture which correctly observe all the rules of architectural drawing, our watercolour plays around with these conventions with a wit and capriciousness which recalls some of the designs for the frontispieces of the *Les Palais, maisons et autres édifices modernes dessinés à Rome*, 1798, by Mazois’s master Charles Percier.



Fig. 3. Charles Percier, *Design for a frontispiece for Les Palais, maisons et autres édifices modernes dessinés à Rome*, 1798

As with the frontispieces of Percier (fig. 3), there is a witty interplay between sculptural, architectural elements, which seem to come to life. The Telemon figure, for example, casts a sly sideways glance at the painted Greek lady on the capriciously oversized Lekythos vase, who has been rendered almost to the same scale as her giant male counterpart. The Greek lamp is also scaled up disproportionately. There is also, as Jean-Paul Garric observed of Percier's early drawings inspired by antiquity, an oscillation between 'the evocation of depth - notably by means of cast shadows and gradations of value from extremely bright to quite dark - and the flattening effect produced by the side-by-side juxtaposition of delicately rendered antiquarian motifs'.²

Though in the present drawing, as in those of Percier, the flattening effect caused by the overlapping frieze-like motifs is mitigated by the subtle use of washes rendering cast shadows.

Our watercolour brings together the architectural and sculptural elements of the Pompei baths showing giant Telemon figures, a Pompeian mural painting and a bronze cauldron and lamp, the latter very close to examples illustrated in *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, whose quirky shape with the feathery handle evidently appealed to Mazois because similar lamps were used as vignettes in *Les Ruines de Pompéi* (fig. 4). This refined and witty watercolour harks back to the examples of Percier and is in a tradition which began with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, whose engravings of Pompei, published by his son Francesco, were to influence so many later architects and artists who were inspired by this miraculously preserved and rediscovered Roman city.

We are indebted to Professor Jean-Philippe Garric for suggesting the attribution of the present drawing to François Mazois.

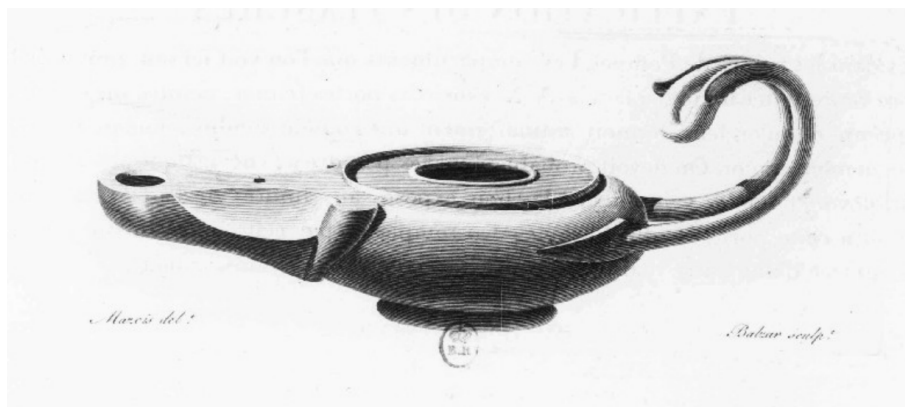


Fig 4. Roman lamp similar to the one shown in the present watercolour, published by Mazois as a vignette for *Ruines de Pompéi*

² See J.-P. Garric, 'Graphic Art as Matrix' in *Charles Percier, Architecture and Design in the Age of Revolutions*, Yale 2016, p. 111.