



African & Oceanic Art, Antiquities and Natural History (598)

Tue, 5th May 2020, Live Online

Lot 89

Estimate: £8000 - £12000 + Fees

RED FIGURE BELL KRATER ATTRIBUTED TO PYTHON PAESTUM, C. 340-330 B.C.

Painted terracotta, the obverse with a youthful Dionysos holding a *thyrsos*, replete with long hair falling to his shoulders, wearing a wreath and a mantle wrapped around his lower body and resting on his arm, he holds forth a *phiale* towards Silenos who is depicted nude with full beard and similarly carrying a *thyrsos*; the reverse with two draped youths with dotted hems, one seemingly presenting a sprig to the other; a horizontal wave pattern forming the ground below, above the scenes a wreath of laurel beneath the rim, palmettes and floral motifs below and framing the handles

36.5cm tall

Provenance:

Max van Berchem (1863 – 1921), Switzerland

Jorg Baron von Bistram, Bad Reichenhall, Germany

Private collection, United Kingdom

Note:

The vase painter Python is one of only two such artists from ancient Italy whose names have survived on extant works. His workshop was located roughly fifty miles south of modern Naples in the port city of Paestum, styled by its Greek founders after the sea god Poseidon. Alongside his tutor (and possible relative) Asteas, Python produced works purely in the red-figure style, largely conforming to traditional mythological and Dionysian scenes.

Only two signed works by Python are known and both reside in institutions: one in The British Museum (1890,0210.1) and the second in the Paestum Museum (21370). This rare piece is from a wider but still limited corpus of unsigned works attributed to him.

A vessel designed for the mixing of wine and water at a *symposion*, it is unsurprising that this bell krater is painted with a series of Dionysian scenes so beloved of the Magna Graecian communities. In the earliest years of colonization, pottery had been imported from Greece, indeed at Paestum there is considerable evidence of 6th – 5th century Athenian and Corinthian wares brought from across the Mediterranean. However, by the 4th century many cities had begun to produce painted pottery of their own, these workshops produced at a stunning rate and began to export around the immediate region. The painted scenes produced by these new workshops remained tied to the Greek heartland, focusing on a distinctly Greek visual vocabulary.

Paestum was no exception and by the second half of the 4th century the Asteas-Python workshop was flourishing, with both individuals signing their names in Greek. Works such as the present example acted to reinforce a sense of Greek identity to those who resided so far from the Greek mainland.

For another unsigned work of similar style also attributed to Python, please see; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 1976.11.5.