The Mandarin of Tourane with his pipe-bearer

William Alexander

£ POA



REF: 2669

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Description

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William Alexander (1767-1816)
The Mandarin of Tourane with his pipe-bearer

Signed with initials & dated '95 and with inscription verso: Mandarin of Toron [sic] with Pipe bearer
22.2 by 17.5cm; 8 ¾ by 6 ¾ in.

Provenance:
Roger Makins, 1st Baron Sherfield (1904-1996);
Private collection, USA

Literature:
Sir G. L. Staunton, An authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China, London 1796, pl. 16

Engraved:
By James Caldwall, 12 April 1796, for Sir G.L. Staunton, An Authentic Account… 1976, pl. 16

Alexander is likely to have studied under Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1759-1817) (see nos. 15-16), before enrolling at the Royal Academy Schools in 1784. It was probably through Ibbetson that Alexander was recommended for the post of junior draughtsman in Lord Macartney's embassy to China in 1792-4, Ibbetson having turned the role down for himself. This extended visit provided a lasting source of inspiration for Alexander and provided the bulk of images of China and its people that were available to the British public. Indeed for over fifty years, his images of China were widely borrowed by book illustrators and by interior decorators in search of exotic themes.

Between 26th May and 16th June 1793, Macartney's Embassy anchored off Tourane (Da Nang, southern Vietnam). On 3rd June, a number of important dignitaries visited the ship and Alexander recorded in his Journal: `This morning a Mandarine from court…came on board to see our ship…with another of inferior rank who sat a few minutes while I made a slight sketch of him… I persevered in keeping the sketch, so he went out in a huff' (S. Legouix, Image of China; William Alexander, London, 1980, p.9).

Alexander executed individual sketches of the 'Inferior Mandarin' and his 'Pipe-bearer' of 'Cochin China' both dated 1793, see Sotheby's 1 April 1976, lots 5 & 6, with the latter is now in Maidstone Art Gallery. Alexander combined the two portraits into the present drawing, which was the model for plate 16 in Staunton's Account. John Barrow observed that the pipe-bearers not only carried their masters' pipes, tobacco and betel but invariably acted as homosexual companions to their mandarins (John Barrow, Travels in China… London, 1804, pp. 149-50). Aeneas Anderson remarked on the unusual dress of the Cochin Chinese servants wearing trousers 'tucked up to the knee and no shoes or slippers; their legs were entirely naked' (Aeneas Anderson, A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, London, 1795, p. 51).

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