

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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Contact: Jill Potterton 020.7752.3121 (jpotterton@christies.com)

THE EARLIEST SURVIVING PHOTOGRAPHS OF GREECE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

*Important Daguerreotypes by Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey from the Archive
of the Artist*

Tuesday 20 May 2003 at 6.30pm



Rome, 1842, Temple de Vesta
Panoramic daguerreotype
Estimate: £50,000-70,000

London – Christie's Photographs Department in London is delighted to announce a single owner sale of the most important selection of daguerreotypes ever to appear at auction. The sale, which is expected to realize in excess of £1.5 million, comprises 86 unique photographs by Joseph-Philibert de Prangey (1804-1892), many of which are the earliest surviving images of the subjects depicted.

Christie's
8 King Street, St. James's, London SW1Y 6QT
phone 44.207.389.2664 fax 44.207.839.7026
www.christies.com

An artist and historian of Islamic architecture, Girault de Prangey was one of the founders of the Société Historique et Archéologique de Langres, the town of his birth in France. From 1832–33, this remarkable man travelled extensively in Spain painstakingly documenting the grandeur and detail of the Moorish architectural legacy. His earliest photographs date from 1841 when he experimented with Daguerre's invention in the grounds of his villa.

The rare selection of daguerreotype photographs to be offered at Christie's on 20 May feature architectural views, landscapes and even portraits from his extended travels in the Mediterranean and the Near East between 1841 and 1844. Many, such as the views of Greece, Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, are without doubt the earliest surviving photographs from these lands, conjuring up the romance and exoticism of the Orient with depictions of swaying palms, the Nile, the Bosphorus and the beggars on the streets of Cairo.

Girault de Prangey's work appears to have been a private passion and his daguerreotypes were apparently never exhibited or exposed to the public gaze during his lifetime. While he was not the first photographer to explore the Near East, the work of others before him no longer exists. This is all the more extraordinary as he never married and had no heirs. On his death, the villa was abandoned, and the gardens and buildings soon suffered neglect. It is to a neighbouring landowner, who acquired the derelict villa after the First World War, that we owe the rediscovery of these gems of early photography.

This landmark sale at Christie's will offer connoisseurs and enthusiasts not only of photography, but also of architectural history and topography, the first opportunity to study, appreciate and acquire unique images by this early master of photography. Individual estimates in the sale will range from £1,000 to £150,000.

Sale highlights include:

Rome, 1842, Temple de Vesta, panoramic daguerreotype (Estimate: £50,000–70,000)

Karnac, Pylône, daguerreotype, n.d. [1842–43] (Estimate: £90,000–120,000)

Jerusalem, 1844 G[ran] de Mosquée, prise du palais du Pacha, daguerreotype (Estimate: £80,000–100,000)

Constantinople, Surudjé, daguerreotype. n.d. [1843] (Estimate: £9,000–12,000)

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*Email images available on request
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