

CHRISTIE'S

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LA DESCRIPTION DE L'EGYPTE **THE MOST EXTRAVAGANT OFFICIAL PUBLISHING ENTREPRISE EVER ACCOMPLISHED LEADS CHRISTIE'S AUCTION OF BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS IN PARIS**

BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS **The Michel Wittock collection – Part IV**

11 May 2011



Description de l'Égypte,
23 volumes, folio, large folio and elephant folio,
in the original mahogany display case
Estimate : €500,000-700,000

Paris - Christie's proudly announces the sale of the Michel Wittock Collection, Part IV, which will be held in Paris on May 11. As well as an exceptional copy of the famous *Description de l'Égypte*, bound by Jean-Joseph Tessier in polished and richly decorated calfskin, the collection includes a

fine selection of French literature in master bindings from the late XIXth to the XXIst century, by or after design by Marius-Michel, Rose Adler, Pierre Legrain, François-Louis Schmied and Paul Bonet. Jean de Gonet is represented in a unique selection of more than 30 examples ranging from 1977 to 2006.

Collection Michel Wittcock, Part IV

Jean-Joseph Tessier and the Description de l'Égypte

The highlight of the sale is the *Description de l'Égypte*, 23 volumes in their original mahogany display case, which is expected to realize €500.000 to €700.000. This is the first edition of this monumental publication, which is considered to be the foundation of modern Egyptology: a virtually complete set of the large paper issue, printed on woven paper with handcoloured ornithological plates. The *Description de l'Égypte* is the most extravagant official publishing enterprise ever accomplished. After his nomination to the command of the Egyptian campaign (1798-1801), Napoleon appointed a considerable staff of scientists, artists, architects and others, including eminent names such as Monge, Barraband, Redouté and Vivant-Denon, with a brief to undertake a comprehensive description of the country's flora, fauna, monuments and architecture. The resulting mass of information was encapsulated in this seminal publication which began in 1803 but was not completed until 1830 - despite intervening changes of regime in France and elsewhere it was completed without interruption. The final work would include more than 900 engraved plates and is still arguably the most ambitious and sought-after work in the field of Egyptology.

The present copy is bound by the Parisian binder Jean-Joseph Tessier, a specialist in large format bindings who was recommended by the publisher: the binding is richly tooled in blind and gold, using tools specifically cut for the decoration of the *Description de l'Égypte*.

This copy belonged to Jean-Joseph Courvoisier (1775-1835). Exiled after the French Revolution, he returned to France in 1803 where he pursued a career in public administration and was eventually appointed minister of justice (8 August 1829 - 19 May 1830). A concomitant of Courvoisier's nomination to the post was the gift of this lavish copy of the *Description de l'Égypte*, presented by the minister of the interior with the royal authority of Charles X.

Auction : 11 May 2011 at 10:30am and 3pm
Public Exhibition : 7, 9, 10 May 2011
Christie's Paris – 9 avenue Matignon 75008