Jason (unique Engraver's Proof iia)

James Mallord William Turner R.A

£290



REF: 1210

Height: 20.8 cm (8.2")

Width: 28.9 cm (11.4")

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Framed Height: 34 cm (13.4")

Framed Width: 48 cm (18.9")

Description

This Engraver’s Proof of ‘Jason’ - almost certainly unique - was made by J M W Turner with his friend, the mezzotint engraver Charles Turner, to be one of the seven subjects in the first part of the artist’s ‘Liber Studiorum’, the unfinished series of prints he published from 1807 onwards to place his major pictures in their proper classifications, or 'departments' of art as Andrew Wilton describes them in 'Turner and the Sublime'. The purpose of this printer's proof would have been to establish how close the mezzotint engraver, Charles Turner (no relation, but a fellow student at the Royal Academy Schools) was getting, with his mezzotint additions to the artist’s etching, to the final effect that the artist sought. The proof, made with dark brown ink, beautifully displays Turner's crisp etched lines and the high contrasts he was seeking to add drama to the scene. Turner based an initial sepia watercolour design of ‘Jason’, and consequently this print, on a painting he showed at the Royal Academy in 1802, titled 'Jason, from Ovid's Metamorphosis'. Although a mythological subject, Turner had his friend letter it ‘H’ for Historical, being the earliest work in this classification made for the 'Liber Studiorum'. In his 1924 ‘Catalogue Raisonné’ of the Liber project, the successor of W G Rawlinson’s 1878 'Turner's Liber Studiorum, a description and a catalogue', A. J. Finberg lists 91 plates, of which many were produced in multiple states. Turner was meticulous in the development of the prints and demanding of his collaborators, usually etching the plates himself then poring over the Engraver's Proofs (as Finberg describes them), and continually altering them in search of perfection. The soft copper plates did not produce many fine images, reportedly wearing out after twenty to thirty prints were taken, and therefore had to be regularly re-engraved to keep up the quality Turner demanded. There are therefore numerous states and proofs of Liber plates in existence.Although it has been annotated in pencil in the margin 'F.6.iii', indicating that it is Finberg's third state of this print, which also accords with Rawlinson's third state, it is in fact a perhaps unique Engraver's Proof (to use Finberg's terminology) recording the transition from the second state (ii) to the third (iii). We should probably therefore label it iia. Indeed, there is a letter 'A' written in pencil in what may be a contemporary hand - possibley of the engraver or printer - on the back of fthe proof at the edge of the plate (visible in photographs). Also on the back of the sheet, in the top left corner are some pencil marks that look like they may be numbers, perhaps the second one a '3". If so, they are perhaps reminiscent of the shape of numbers in Turner's Liber notes sketchbooks.In his progress to the third state the engraver had re-positioned and made the ‘H’ smaller, amended the lettering below the image and adds the dimensions of the oil painting, as well as carrying out Turner’s instructions for changes to the images. Having pulled this proof it was cl...

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