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A rare Regency period painted and gilded circular bookcase with Chinese lacquer panels

REF 748

English

Height: 31 ½ in (80cm)

Diameter: 25 ¼ in (64cm)

PROVENANCE

The Horlick Family

£ 135000

DESCRIPTION

The circular top elaborately painted in gouache with classical scenes, a temple and figures within tablets bordered by vitruvian scrolls and a pierced brass gallery with a lidded central compartment; the three tiers of bookshelves below divided by panels of Chinese export lacquer depicting temples and figures in exotic landscapes raised on carved and gilded paw feet.

This extraordinary bookcase has a distinguished provenance of the Horlick family. Sir James was a passionate collector of Chinoiserie and a noted connoisseur. Sir James formed his collection during the first half of the twentieth century, furnishing Achamore House on the Isle of Gigha, in the western Scottish Isles. The collection was the subject of an article by the then editor of the *Connoisseur*, L.G.G. Ramsay, 'Chinoiserie in the Western Isles, the Collection of Sir James and Lady Horlick', in June 1958. Many of the pieces were purchased from renowned dealers of the time and these were complemented by some of the most important and spectacular English japanned furniture of the eighteenth century including the magnificent commodes by Thomas Chippendale formerly at Harewood House and a secretaire from the collection of the Viscount Bearstead.

This bookcase was owned by Lady Jane Shillaber Horlick, (née Martin) who married Sir Ernest Burford Horlick, 2nd Baronet, (1880–1934), on December 31st 1902. Sir Ernest was the brother of Sir James Horlick (who was eventually to succeed him as 4th Baronet). This bookcase is typical of the taste of Sir James Horlick. Given the close family connection, it seems almost certain that it formed part of his collection at some stage. The distinctive form of the bookcase and painted decoration to the top derive from a number of classical influences, most notably the etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) whose output had a widespread impact on the Neo-classical taste that emerged in the last quarter of the 18th century. The shape of the bookcase takes inspiration from Piranesi's illustrations of ancient Roman altars (see John Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, San Francisco, 1994, Vol. II, pls. 650 and 990), whilst the ruins depicted on the top are after a Piranesi etching of the ancient city of Paestum (op. cit., pl. 720). The other prominent composition is after Guido Reni's, *Aurora and the Chariot of the Sun driven by Apollo*, which is flanked by copies of Domenichino's *Cumaeen Sybil* and Guercino's *Persian Sybil*.