

A fine pair of Italian carved giltwood banquettes, on fluted legs of conical form with carved acanthus leaves and ornamental motifs, rosette decoration above the six feet, each upholstered with a modern geometric fabric. The seat rail of one bench incised VIII, the other incised XI?

Genoa, Circa 1780.

Height: 18,89 in. (48 cm)

Width: 62,2 in (158 cm)

Depth: 22,83 in. (58 cm)



Provenance:

Palazzo Serra, Genoa, from early 1780s until before the Second World War.
Palazzo Grazioli, Rome.

Comparative examples from the same suite of six known pieces:

Sotheby's, *A Piedmontese Villa, The Contents of Vigna Corte Di Bonvicino, Moncalieri (Turin)*, 17 November 2009, London, lot 127; chairs en suit, *ibid.*, lots 128–129.

Literature:

A. Gonzalez-Palacios, *Il Mobile in Liguria*, Genova, 1996, p. 316.

The present pair of banquettes comes from a suite of seating furniture known to consist at least of six benches and ten chairs. They are documented to have been realised for Palazzo Serra, one of the grand aristocratic palaces of Genoa, where they remained until the early 20th century. In his *Il Mobile in Liguria*, Gonzalez-Palacios illustrates the chairs and three of the banquettes, which had by then arrived in the Villa of Corte Buon Vicino, near Turin. The remaining three banquettes arrived in Palazzo Grazioli, Rome, and eventually entered the European market. The present pair comes from this latter group of three.

The rich decoration of the banquettes is in line with the lavish taste characterizing Genoese decorative arts from the 1770s onwards, a taste promoted by architects such as Simone Cantoni (1739–1818) and Andrea Tagliafichi (1729–1811). Tagliafichi in particular, who was fully aware of the most innovative trends in contemporary Europe, can be credited with the most original inventions adopted by Genoese

designers and cabinetmakers of the period. He collaborated with Charles de Wailly (1730–98), one of the most renowned figures of French Neoclassicism, on the occasion of the latter's stay in Genoa from 1771 for the decorations of the great hall "Salone del Sole" of Palazzo Spinola. It is there that Tagliafichi first integrated the more restrained elements of Luis XVI style into the late-Baroque opulence typical of Genoese interiors.

This banquettes are a good example of such kind of Neoclassical elements that were to become a typical trait of furniture produced in and around Genoa in the late eighteenth century.

The formal features of our set are in line with furnishings attributed to artisans active in Genoa at the end of the Eighteenth century, who were engaged in the refurbishment in the 'Greek taste' of the rooms of the greatest aristocratic palaces of the city.

The Serra Palace was built from 1562 for the banker Baldassarre Lomellini, after a design by Giovanni Ponzello, «chamber architect» of Genoa and designer of Palazzo Tursi, belonging to Niccolò Grimaldi, Baldassarre's son-in-law.

It changed hands as early as the end of the 16th century, first passing into the hands of the Salvago family and then, in 1770, into the hands of Marquis Cristoforo Spinola, ambassador of the Republic of Genoa to France, who commissioned the Genoese Emanuele Andrea Tagliafichi, assisted by the famous French architect Charles De Wailly, to renovate it, in order to update its appearance according to the emerging neoclassical taste.

After a decade of work, Spinola, having moved to France, sold the building to Marquis Domenico Serra in 1780. In 1917 it was then purchased by the shipowner Tito Campanella.

Considered one of the most particular buildings in Strada Nuova, during the Second World War the bombings completely destroyed most of the second noble floor with the faboulus 'Salone del Sole'. The palazzo Baldassarre Lomellini, also known as palazzo di Cristoforo Spinola or palazzo Campanella, is located in via Garibaldi at number 12 in the historical centre of Genoa, included on 13 July 2006 in the list of the 42 palaces inscribed in the Rolli di Genova that became World Heritage by UNESCO on that date.

Condition report:

Minor retouchings to historical marks, chips and scratches to the gilding. The joints are sound and sturdy. Evidence of old very minor woodworming, which appears to be no longer active. In overall very good condition.