

An early-Neoclassical pair of Italian carved and cream-painted poplar wood consoles, each with a molded *faux-marbre* wooden top painted in imitation of *Cipollino* marble, above a frieze with scrolled cartouches.

Probably by Ignazio Marchetti (1715–1800), after a model by Ennemond Alexandre Petitot (1727–1801).

Parma, third quarter XVIII

Height: 20,8 in. (53 cm)

Width: 18,9 in. (48 cm)

Depth: 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (37,5 cm)



Studio essay by Dott. Enrico Colle, Stibbert Museum Director, Florence 2026.

The present consoles rest onto a clover-shaped support terminating with a studs on the lower end and, on the upper one, with a double scroll supporting the top, painted in imitation of *Cipollino* marble. The original shape of these pieces seems to recall those decorative designs of the burgeoning Neoclassicism that had precociously developed in Parma thanks to the arrival of the architect Ennemond Alexandre Petitot (1727–1801). Petitot had arrived in the Ducal capital from France to serve the new Bourbon dynasty. Made court architect, he was in charge to not only renew the architectures and decorations of the ducal residences but also found a Fine Art Academy able to attract within the borders of the State the best artists then active on the Italian peninsula and in France (E. Colle, *Il mobile neoclassico in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1775 al 1800*, Milano 2005, pp. 227–231).

The peculiar Parmesan declination of Neoclassicism can in fact be ascribed to Petitot. It is a Neoclassicism founded on the rigorous precepts dictated by French Enlightenment, merged with Piranesi's taste for antiquity, "composito e bizzaro" (composite and bizarre), resulting in architectures and ornaments that were to anticipate the models of Jean-Francois Neufforge (1714–1791) and Jean-Charles Delafosse (1734–1789). In order to achieve his original designs (fig. 1), other than directly from ancient monuments, Petitot studied the declinations of the antique mediated by sixteenth-century masters, among whom Giulio Romano was then considered the absolute model.

A reverberation of the ornamental extravagance found in some of Petitot's drawings for furniture can be seen in the particular shape of the double scroll, which in turn seems derived from stylized cartouches called, in the sixteenth century, *rollwerk* or metal cartouches. By the early seventeenth century, these shapes gave birth to that particular decorative style known with the name of "auricolare", where scrolled motifs go through a monstrous metamorphosis becoming a little more than a thin, stretched membrane, as can be seen in the works of Pietro Tacca (1577–1640) and Francesco Susini (1585–1653).

From the 1730s onwards, Parma became a vibrant center for intellectuals and artists, and such a convergence of minds determined, together with the renewal of the arts, also a new productive impulse that was to materialize, as far as the creation of interiors is concerned, in the springing of new cabinet-makers' workshops. Among these, deserve a mention those of Odoardo Panini, Ignazio Marchetti e Francesco Galli who, moving away from the rocaille motifs popular at the time, translated into practice the precocious Neoclassical ideas of Petitot. And it is to one of these artisans that it will be possible to attribute the present pair of consoles, which present important similarities, for example, with the clover-shaped decorations realized by Galli in 1785 to decorate the pediment of the wardrobes of the sacristy of the Church of Sabbioneta (fig. 2) (G. Bertini, 'Un'opera ignorata di Francesco Galli', in *Metè Arquati*, vol. 13, 1977, pp. 2-5) or, more likely still, with the works of Marchetti, the artisan who more regularly than others translated into matter the designs of the court architect with the same finery in the carving that can be found also on the present consoles.

The present consoles, furthermore, present important similarities with another pair (part of a larger set of furnishings for a side chapel) attributed to Marchetti on the base of archival sources (fig. 3). Slightly larger in size, but equally painted in imitation of marble, those consoles were realized for the Church of San Quintino, Parma, in 1786. They can be interpreted as a product of a more mature Neoclassicism, whilst ours, from which the others seem closely derived, represent in all likelihood the earliest design, providing a rare testimony of early Neoclassicism at the Bourbon court of Parma and Piacenza.



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

Fig.1 A. E. Petitot, Design for a pedestal

Fig.2 F. Galli, Detail of the wardrobes of the sacristy of the Church of Sabbioneta.

Fig.3 I. Marchetti, Console (part of a pair) in carved and faux-marbre painted wood, 1786, Parma, Church of San Quintino.