

A North Italian fruitwood, walnut, ebony , boxwood, tulipwood and kingwood microcarving portrait relief miniature attributed to Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo (1745-1820), depicting a standing Mars with cuirass, feathered helmet and sword, holding a spear with his right and a shield on his left hand, within an oval in an octagonal interlacing frame with beads and carved flowerheads to the corners, in a rectangular beaded frame, inscribed in a glazed ebony frame with carved flowerhead in each side and each corner.
Turin, 1785 Circa



Related Mars portrait by Bonzanigo are the later one in Turin, Museo Civico of Palazzo Madama (fig.1), but mostly are one of the eight divinity portraits depicted on the only pair of console tables (fig.2) documented to him (payment the 2en of June 1787) in Stupinigi Royal Castle and one in the Trofeo Militare (fig.3), in Venaria Royal Castle, Turin, (dated 1785).

Height: 8,38 in. (21,3 cm)
Width: 7,4 in. (18,8 cm)

Conditions: Few losses including MARS micro sculpted wood inscription, few restorations.

Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo (1745-1820):

Bonzanigo, together with Piffetti and Maggiolini, is considered one of the most outstanding furniture makers and carvers of the late 18th century with his pieces inspired by the sculptural as well as the architectural disciplines.

Works attributed to Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo have traditionally represented the best Italian neo-classical furniture ever sculpted. His work is characterized by the departure from the traditional Franco-Piedmontese School of furniture inlay and cabinet-making in favour of the more predominant use of carving, a technique which Bonzanigo took to a truly formal apotheosis especially in the works realised for the Royal family.

Born in Asti in 1745, first son of Giovanna Margherita Burzio, Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo settled in Turin 1773. The following year he was elected to the Compagnia of San Luca. He worked for the Savoy Court for the next twenty years as a sculptor, wood-carver and cabinet-maker. In 1787, he was appointed official wood-carver to Victor Amadeus III, King of Savoy and remained in the position until the French invasion in 1796. In the accounts of the royal family, he is recorded as having supplied numerous stools, chairs, armchairs, benches, sofas, screens, beds and mirrors as well as many ornamental panel and chests of drawers for the Royal Palace in Turin and for the royal residences at Moncalieri, Rivoli, Stupinigi and Venaria.

His reputation grew in no small part due to the extraordinary quality of his wood carvings in light wood and ivory, the so-called '*microsculpture*', which were highly sought after. In 1815, after the fall of Napoleon and the return of the Savoy family to Italy, he was re-instated as royal sculptor. His justly deserved reputation was such that on his death in 1820, the *Gazetta Piemontese* wrote '*la bell'arte dell'intaglio ad altissimo grado di perfezione con quarant'anni di assidue cure...*'

Literature:

- Claudio Bertolotto, Vittoria Villani, *Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo: Intaglio minuto e grande decorazione*, Lindau, 1990, p.202 fig.31.2; and Tav.XIX.
- Arnaldi di Balmi, Merlotti, *Il «trofeo militare» di Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo*, Allemandi, 2011
- Franca Dalmasso e Claudio Bertolotto, Palmieri in *Cornici di Bonzanigo*, Antologia di Belle Arti, Il Neoclassicismo, III, Turin, 1992, pp. 80-84.



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3