

A North Italian Restauration Ormolu Centerpiece as part of a larger *surtout de table*, attributed to Luigi Manfredini, after a design by Pelagio Palagi. Milan, Circa 1830.

Height: 19.29 in. (49 cm)

Diameter: 11.61 in. (29.5 cm)

The present stand (**fig.1**) in sculpted and gilded bronze is characterised by a tray decorated by a vine garland in high-relief, supported by a central shaft surrounded by three dancing putti depicted as bacchants, their heads adorned with grapes. It can be attributed to the renowned Manfredini manufactory in Milan, and was probably made after a design by Pelagio Palagi (1775-1860), the painter and designer working for the Savoy court.

Under the Restoration, the workshop of the Manfredini brothers was already famous throughout Europe.¹ As documented by their nephew Achille Viscardi, the Bolognese artisans established in Paris “a workshop for casting and gilding metals, as well as for goldsmith works, clockmaking, etc.” (“uno stabilimento di fonderia, oreficeria, doratura di metalli, orologeria, ecc.”) that became so famous as to attract the patronage of Eugène de Beauharnais, Napoleon’s adopted son. As Viceroy of Italy, in 1806 Eugène de Beauharnais invited the Manfredini brothers to move to Milan and establish the Eugenia manufactory. The invitation was accepted by the brothers, who moved to Lombardy bringing with them French artisans specialised in different techniques of working metal. Other than a workshop producing fine objects in gold, silver and bronze, the Manfredinis established in Italy also a school to train artisans to deliver the varied and sophisticated commissions the family-based workshop received.

Francesco Manfredini died in 1810, followed in 1823 by his brother Antonio. The last brother, Luigi, thus founded a partnership with his brother-in-law Giovan Battista Viscardi, called Luigi Manfredini e Compagno.²

The Manfredini workshops were originally located in what had been the Convento della Fontana, outside Porta Comasina in Milan. However, in 1823 the workshop working on “details in gold, silversmith works and gilded bronze” (“minuterie d’oro, di argenteria e di bronzi dorati”) was moved to the city centre, in Piazza San Paolo, in what was then the thriving Corsia de’ Servi.

The Manfredinis were always up-to-date with the latest stylistic trends, often employing renowned artists to design their objects. Such is the case with Pelagio Palagi, whose collaboration with the Milanese workshop can be dated back to at least 1820, when “two canisters containing the most different animals modelled from life, supported by a rich[ly decorated] pedestal, made in the Manfredini manufactory after a drawing by Pelagio Palagi” (“Due cesti ripieni di vari animali formati sul vero, sostenuti da un ricco piedistallo, eseguiti nella Fabbrica

¹ Enrico Colle, Angela Griseri, Roberto Valeriani, *Bronzi decorativi in Italia*, Milano, 2001, p.305

² Colle *et al.*, 2001, p.306

Manfredini sul disegno di Pelagio Palagi”) were recorded to have been exhibited.³ These are now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Edoardo de Pecis bequest, 1827, **fig.2**), and a second version of them, cast at a later date and offered to Carlo Alberto of Savoy, king of Sardinia, has been identified by Alvar Gonzales-Palacios in the collection of the Quirinal Palace in Rome.⁴

From 1832, the collaboration between Manfredini and Palagi became very solid, leading to the production of both public monuments in bronze (such as the 1834 monument to Francis I of Austria in Graz and the 1843 equestrian sculpture of Carlo Alberto in Casale Monferrato), and smaller, but equally monumental, pieces such as the famous desserts.⁵

The present stand can be related to a centrepiece in gilded bronze with a base with three winged lions supporting three bacchantes, today in the Civiche Raccolte d’Arte Applicata, Castello Sforzesco, Milan (**fig.3**). Both the present piece and the piece in Milan have triangular bases, one supported by lions, the other by lion paws; both support three figures, proper bacchantes in one case, putti in the guise of bacchantes in the other. Originally discovered by Enrico Colle, the piece in the Civiche Raccolte d’Arte in Milan has been further studied by Benedetta Gallizia di Vergano, who identified it as a work made after a design by Pelagio Palagi in collaboration between the Manfredinis (pedestal and tray) and the Strazza and Thomas manufactory (figures).⁶ Both pieces can be closely related to Palagi’s designs for a dessert for the Savoy court.

Furthermore, the base of the present stand is characterised by lion paws and garlands similar to those in Palagi’s design for a three-tray stand (**fig.4**).⁷ A further evidence of Palagi’s role as the designer for our work can be found by comparing

³ Achille Viscardi, *Discorso pronunciato nella festa della Mutua Società Operaia Manfredini in occasione dell’inaugurazione del busto in rame battuto a Luigi Manfredini titolare della Società l’8 febbraio 1880*, Milano 1880; ⁴Archiginnasio Comunale di Bologna, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Fondo Pelagio Palagi, inv. N. 2286

⁴ Alvar Gonzalez-Palacios, *Il Tempio del gusto: Roma e il regno delle Due Sicilie*, vol. 1, Milano 1984, pp.257-8, fig. 569

⁵ In a letter dated 14 August 1833, Luigi Manfredini writes to Palagi asking for a sketch of a monument representing the Holy Roman Emperor *all’eroica*, Archivio di Stato, Bologna, Fondo Manoscritti Pelagio Palagi, C.11, 67. The monument to Carlo Alberto was casted by Giambattista Viscardi, Luigi Manfredini’s son-in-law, whilst the model was made by Abbondio Sangiorgio, one of Pelagio Palagi’s closest assistants. For the desserts, see the parterre in gilded bronze for a table sitting one-hundred guests, commissioned in about 1820 by Archduke Ranieri for the Royal Palace in Milan; the table service in gilded bronze commissioned by the Melzi family (Viscardi 1880, p. 12); and a centrepiece made for the Archduke Maximilian of Austria in 1827. Finally, the Bundesmobiliensammlung in Vienna holds in its collections a stand with the allegories of Lombardy and Venice with an Imperial eagle dating to 1838 (Colle et al., 2001, p. 360, illustrated).

⁶ Colle et al., p. 362, n.103; Benedetta Gallizia di Vergano, “Nuovi documenti per i Manfredini”, in *Rassegna di studi e notizie*, XVI, Milano 2002, pp. 239-245

⁷ Bologna, Fondo Pelagio Palagi, n. 2273

the present piece with a major dessert commissioned by the Savoy court, today known only through two large drawings. As Giuseppe Beretti wrote, “nothing is known of this dessert, which, due to the quality of the hand of the extant preparatory drawings and the style of the ornaments -characteristic of the late-Empire, already informed by a historicist, at times neo-rocaille, taste- can be related to Pelagio Palagi’s output of the second half of the 1830s, when the Royal Palace in Turin was being redecorated at great expense” (“nulla sappiamo di questo dessert che per la qualità della stesura grafica del progetto e per il carattere dell’ornato di un Impero già di sapore storicistico, a tratti neo-rocaille, appare riconducibile al lavoro del Palagi della seconda metà degli anni Trenta dell’Ottocento, epoca degli impegnativi lavori per la decorazione del Palazzo Reale di Torino”).⁸

Other sources that might have influenced the design of the present stand can be found in the work of Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751–1843) and of Domenico Moglia (1780–1862).⁹ Moglia in particular, who succeeded Giocondo Albertolli (1742–1839) as teacher of ornato at the Accademia di Brera, published in 1838 his *Collezione di soggetti ornamentali* (or *Collection of decorative models*), a book which attests to the popularity of Empire decorations late into the 19th century, when eclecticism was already becoming popular.

⁸ Giuseppe Beretti, “*La manifattura dell’Eugenia dei Fratelli Manfredini*”, in *Gli splendori del bronzo: Mobili e oggetti d’arredo tra Francia e Italia 1750-1850*, exhibition catalogue, Torino, Fondazione Accorsi, 2002-3, edited by G. Beretti, A. Cottino, B. Galizza di Vergano, L. Melegati, Torino 2002, p.27, table 79

⁹ Ottomeyer, Proschel, *Vergoldete Bronzen*, Monaco 1986, vol II fig. 5.16.2 e fig. 5.16.12 5

Comparative example:

- Achille Viscardi, Discorso pronunciato nella festa della Mutua Società Operaia Manfredini in occasione dell'inaugurazione del busto in rame battuto a Luigi Manfredini titolare della Società l'8 febbraio 1880, Milano 1880.
- Alvar Gonzales Palacios, Il Tempio del gusto. Roma e il regno delle Due Sicilie, vol. 1, Milano 1984, pp. 257-258.
- Ottomeyer, Proschel, Vergoldete Bronzen, Monaco 1986, vol II, fig. 5.16.2 e fig. 5.16.12.
- Enrico Colle, « Pelagio Palagi e gli artigiani al servizio della corte sabauda », in Arte a Bologna. Bollettino dei musei civici di arte antica, V, 1999, pp. 59-109.
- Enrico Colle, Angela Griseri, Roberto Valeriani, Bronzi decorativi in Italia, Milano, 2001
- Fernando Mazzocca, Alessandro Morandotti, Enrico Colle, Milano neoclassica, Longanesi, 2001
- Benedetta Gallizia di Vergano, « Nuovi documenti per i Manfredini », in Rassegna di studi e notizie, vol. XVI, Milano 2002, pp. 239-245.
- Arnaldo Turricchia, Luigi Manfredini e le sue medaglie, Roma 2002.
- « La manifattura dell'Eugenia dei Fratelli Manfredini », in Gli splendori del bronzo. Mobili e oggetti d'arredo tra Francia e Italia 1750-1850 (Torino, Fondazione Accorsi, 27 settembre 2002-2 febbraio 2003) a cura di G. Beretti, A. Cottino, B. Galizza di Vergano, L. Melegati, Torino 2002, p. 27 passim.
- Alessandra Imbellone in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani – volume 68 (2007), voce « Manfredini ».
- B. Gallizia di Vergano, « Candelabri per l'uso della Corte. Da Parigi a Milano, i primi anni di attività dello stabilimento dell'Eugenia », Rassegna di Studi e di Notizie, vol. XXXIII, a. XXXVII, Milano 2010, pp. 219-234, fig. 2.

We would like to thank Dr. Bertrand De Royere for the present text.



Fig.1 Luigi Manfredini e Compagno, gilded bronze Centrepiece, 1830s.



Fig.2 Luigi and Antonio Manfredini, after a design by Pelagio Palagi, Centrepiece, 1820 ca., Milan, Pinacoteca



Fig.3 Luigi Manfredini and Strazza & Thomas Manufactory, after a design by Pelagio Palagi, gilded bronze Centrepiece, Milan, Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata del Castello Sforzesco.

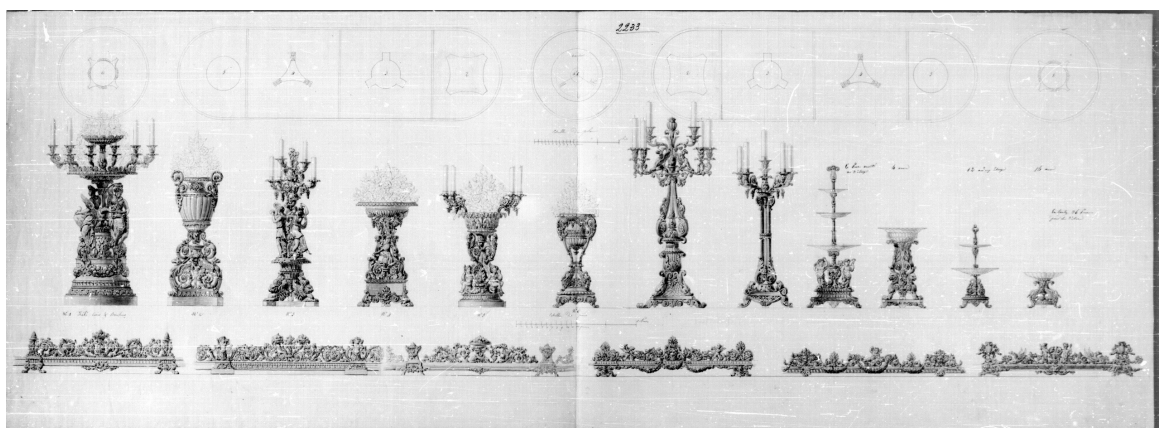


Fig.4 Pelagio Palagi, Designs for a dessert, pen and black ink over graphite, with watercolour on white paper, Archiginnasio Comunale di Bologna, Gabinetto disegni e Stampe, Fondo Pelagio Palagi, inv. 2233.