

A highly important and very fine North-Italian Neoclassical console table, cream painted and micro carved in parcel gilt with original *Grigio Valdieri* marble top, probably executed for a Chinese room for The Royal Savoy Crown. Attributed to Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo (Asti 1745–1820 Turin). After the design of G.B. Piacenza (1735–1818).

Inscribed below the marble top with an inventory number in black paint "73".

Turin, 1790 Circa

Height: 37,5 in. (95 cm)
Width: 60,25 in. (153 cm)
Depth: 26 in. (66cm)



Literature:

- Roberto Antonetto, *Il Mobile piemontese nel Settecento, Vol.1 Le Firme*; Umberto Allemandi, Turin, 2010, p. 361; pp. 376–379.
- G. Ferraris, *Giuseppe Bonzanigo e la scultura decorativa in legno a Torino nel periodo neoclassico (1770–1830)*, Turin, 1991.

Console table in microcarved walnut and poplar wood, with a rounded marble top with concave sides, above an egg-and-dart border, the frieze centred by a female mask flanked by guilloche with a patera at each corner flanking scrolled brackets on beaded square tapering legs carved with guilloche on toupie feet.

The present console table is a fine example attesting to the apogee of the evolution of Neoclassicism that interested the arts in Italy, and in Turin more in particular, since the early 1770s. The high quality of its woodcarvings suggests that this is the work of a skilled master carver active for the Savoy court in the years when Royal residences were being renovated according to the new stylistic trends inspired by the Antique, most probably to be identified with Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo.

The interest in French stylistic trends in Piedmont originally manifested in the interior decoration of Savoy royal residences under the reign of Carlo Emanuele III (1701–73). It continued under the rule of his son Vittorio Amedeo III (1726–96), who ascended to the throne in 1773. The dynastic links of the house of Savoy with the French and Spanish crowns and with the Dukes of Parma fostered the development of the Piedmontese Court style into an international Neoclassicism. This found its full realisation in the 1780s with the renovation of several rooms in the Turin Royal Palace, the Stupinigi Castle and the palaces at Moncalieri, Venaria, Racconigi and Rivoli. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century this court style assumed a more defined identity, fully in line with the Louis XVI style, in the works of the

architects Francesco Valeriano Dellala di Beinasco (1731–1803), Filippo Castelli (1738–c. 1820), and Carlo Randoni (1785–1831); the carver-decorators Ludovico Tesio (1731–82), Leonardo Marini (fl. 1760–1806) and Giuseppe Piacenza (1735–1818) with the master carver Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo (1745–1820), like in our case.

The center of the frieze, carved with a female mask, seems to be derived by designs for mirror cymatium by Carlo Randoni who worked alongside G. Piacenza before he became his successor as Royal Architect.

In this regard please note the only documented two drawers commode by G. M. Bonzanigo, after a recorded design by Piacenza, created for the boudoir of the Duchessa D'Aosta at the second floor of the Turin Royal Palace, where similar six female masks are carved on top of the pillars, as the identical upper frame and the related intertwined ribbons in front the two drawers¹ (Fig.1).

This motif of intertwined ribbons found all around the legs of the present console could be also found in the window frames in the Duchess of Aosta's Apartment on the top floor of the Turin Royal Palace (Fig.2). Those are documented as being made by Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo in 1790.²

The striking of the projecting rear sides and related richer pilasters strip can be found on a pair of commodes by Francesco Bolgié also designed by Piacenza, which are in the second-floor apartment of the Turin Royal palace.³

Related to the singular form of the grey *Bardiglio* marble top (coming from the Royal Savoy cave in Valdieri, Cuneo) and the oval neoclassical decorations on the top of the pillars, is another, earlier console table, designed by Piacenza for Bolgié (now in the Palazzina di Caccia di Stupinigi, Museo dell'arredamento e dell'ammobiliamento, salotto dell'Appartamento di Levante, Nichelino, Turin, Fig.3).⁴

¹ R. Antonetto, *Il Mobile piemontese nel Settecento*, Vol.1, p. 361.

² G. Ferraris, *Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo*, Turin, 1991, pp. 53 and 79.

³ R. Antonetto, op. cit, Vol.1, pp. 376–79.

⁴ R. Antonetto, op. cit, Vol.1, p. 389.



Fig. 1 G.B. Piacenza and G.M. Bonzanigo, commode, Villa Tremezzo, Como.



Fig. 2 Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo, detail of the carvings in the Apartment of the Duchess of Aosta in the Turin Royal Palace.



Fig.3 Gilded and carved console table. Palazzina di Caccia Stupinigi.

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 '*microsculture*', 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...*'.