

An important Italian carved and giltwood Console table, with a rectangular peperino top with Roman ancient *alabastro a pecorelle* veneer.

Florence, late Eighteenth century

Height: 40,5 in. (103 cm)

Width: 61,8 in. (157 cm)

Depth: 31,4 in. (80 cm)

Provenance: by repute Principi Centurione Scotto Genoa.

Condition: just cleaned, minor restorations to the original top.

The present table in carved and gilt wood was realised in the late Eighteenth century to support a precious top of so-called *alabastro a pecorelle*. This rare kind of alabaster owes its name to the white and pink concentric concretions on a deep red background characterising it, which result in a visual effect not dissimilar from that of sheepskin, hence *pecorelle* (sheep).

This piece was most likely produced in the 1790s by Florentine craftsmen close to the Lorraine court. The monumental legs of the table terminating with a capital in the shape of acanthus leaves bear undeniable affinities with those of a semi-circular console table in the collections of Palazzo Pitti (fig.1). Likewise, the head on the upper side of the capitals is the same as those found on another piece in Palazzo Pitti (fig.2).

The carved decoration of the skirt in the shape of coils of acanthus leaves terminating in two griffins facing each other at centre can be found in many other pieces produced in Florence in the last quarter of the Eighteenth century, such as in the pelmets and monumental mirror designed by Lorenzo Dolci for the Grand Dukes of Tuscany (fig.3).

These motifs were very much indebted to English models, which in the late Eighteenth century were known to Tuscan craftsmen mostly through the etchings from Thomas Sheraton's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book*, of 1793 (fig.4).

Such a distinctive English influence on Florentine decorative arts under Ferdinand III of Tuscany could be evidenced already in inlaid marble tops with designs inspired by Robert Adam's designs and can be further witnessed in the seats made by Carlo Toussaint for Palazzo Pitti, which can be compared to furniture designed by Odoardo Wyndham, a prolific wood carver active in those years in Naples, Rome and Florence, as well as in console tables with 'square' legs decorated with low reliefs by Luigi Gelati and in pieces designed by the aforementioned Lorenzo Dolci – all designers very much aware of contemporary trends in the decorative arts from the rest of Europe (E. Colle, *I mobili di Palazzo Pitti. Il primo periodo lorenese 1737 – 1799*, Firenze 1992, pp. 140–144, nn. 67, 71–72).

The present console table fully exemplifies the Florentine production of the Neoclassical period, when Italian – especially Tuscan – architects and cabinetmakers were striving for that ‘good taste’ (buon gusto) that would surpass once and for all the excesses of Rococo.

Enrico Colle



Fig.1 Console table, Florence, circa 1797 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti)



Fig.2 Console table, Florence, 1790–1800 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti)



Fig.3 Lorenzo Dolci, detail of a mirror frame, 1798 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti)

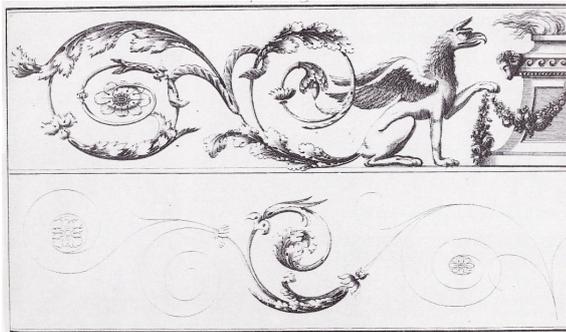


Fig.4 Thomas Sheraton, table from *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's DrawingBook* (London, 1793)