

A Southern-Italian Neoclassical side table, in blue and cream painted pinewood and gilt pastiglia, supporting a rectangular slab of ancient Egyptian porphyry, surrounded on three sides by a giltwood carved border, the skirts decorated with a frieze with a profile portrait of Seneca on the front and six gilt lion masks in correspondence of the corners, on square tapering legs.

Kingdom of the two Sicilies, probably Palermo, last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Related tables can be found in the Royal Palace in Palermo, the Palazzina Cinese in the park of the Favorita, and formerly in Villa Palagonia, Bagheria. The 'Palagonia' consoles in particular (one of which today in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London) present important stylistic similarities with the present console, especially in the shape of the legs. If the 'Palagonia' consoles, however, are adorned with plaques of *verre églomisé* in imitation of precious marble, the present example supports authentic ancient porphyry.

The pastiglia decorations have been the object of minor 'refreshments'.

Height: 33,46 in. (85 cm)

Width: 37,79 in. (96 cm)

Depth: 20,07 in. (51 cm)

As attested by its extraordinary quality, the porphyry of the present table most likely comes from one of the archaeological sites around Naples, capital of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, where excavations had begun in the first half of the eighteenth century and had continued uninterrupted well into the nineteenth. These were sponsored by the Bourbons who, during the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy, resided in exile in Palermo.

This slab is of that kind of intensely-red porphyry, sprayed with small white dots, sometimes referred to as Gebel Dokhan porphyry, after the name of the Egyptian quarry from where it was extracted. In antiquity, the Gebel Dokhan quarries were exclusive property of the Emperor. In Rome and in the other cities of the Roman empire, such porphyry was therefore used exclusively to decorate mansions belonging to the Emperor and his immediate family.

