

A magnificent pair of Piedmontese light-blue painted and carved baroque Console Tables, with the original alabaster marble tops (alabastro fiorito from Busca), probably after the design of Filippo Juvarra, (Messina, 1678–Madrid, 1736) on cabriole legs joined by similarly carved stretchers, with moulded edges above an elaborately carved pierced frieze, with scrolling acanthus leaf, the sides with ribbon-bound foliage, above C-and S-scroll supports carved with acanthus leaves, and decorated with different elaborate leaves joined by carved triangular stretchers and carved at centre with entwined serpents, on three scrolled lion paw feet.

Turin, First quarter 18th Century

Height: 35 in. (89 cm)
Width: 64 in. (163 cm)
Depth: 25 in. (63 cm)



Provenance:

Possibly originally made for Villa della Regina, Turin;
By repute, presented by the Royal house of Savoy family to the Gaj di Montarsiolo, Turin;
Famiglia Beria, Turin.

Litterature:

- Agostino Pedrini, *Il Mobilio, gli ambienti e decorazioni nei secoli XVII e XVIII in Piemonte*, Industria libreria tipografica editrice 1953, p.193 fig.358.
- R. Antonetto, *il mobile Piemontese nel Settecento*, Vol.II, Umberto Allemandi editore, 2016, pp.12 fig.6; 209 fig.12;.
- Arturo Midana, *L' arte del legno in Piemonte nel Sei e nel Settecento*, Itala ars Torino, 1925, p. 70, tav.109. Foto Augusto Pedrini.

The richly carved motifs of this pair of impressive console tables relates to other Piedmontese consoles produced in the first quarter of the 18th Century. The extraordinary quality of the carving, visible down to the stretcher, reaches its pinnacle in the delicate foliate mouldings of the front rail and in the leg with two C-scrolls forming an S-scroll, graceful yet exuberant at the same time.

The table's ornamentation epitomizes the Baroque style dictated in Turin by Filippo Juvarra, First Architect to the King of Sicily, Duke of Savoy, the man charged with the transformation of Savoy's capital following the creation of the Kingdom of Savoy in 1714 (before Savoy was a Duchy).

The present pair of console tables are extraordinary for their design, workmanship and use of materials. The *alabastro fiorito* di Busca, commonly

referred to as *onice di Busca*, used for the original tops, is of a rare variety that was excavated in quarries controlled by the Savoy crown. The same semi-precious stone was used for pieces of furniture realised for the Royal residences of the Venaria Reale, the Villa della Regina and the Palazzina di Caccia at Stupinigi, other than for chapels and funerary monuments commissioned by the Savoy, most notably the Basilica of Superga designed by Filippo Juvarra in 1715 and erected between 1717 and 1731. *Alabastro di Busca* was used also for tabernacles (in the side columns) documented as the earliest works commissioned to the royal cabinetmakers Pietro Piffetti and Luigi Prinotto.

Similarly, the distinctive pale blue of the console tables is in line with the decorative schemes adopted by the Savoy for the decoration of their residences. Whereas furniture pieces commissioned for city residences were normally gilded, and those commissioned for country residences were painted in yellow lacca, those commissioned for court residences just outside of Turin were painted in this characteristic cinder blue, or Savoy blue. This is the case of much of the decorative schemes at Stupinigi, at the Venaria Reale and, most notably, the Villa della Regina.

These elements avail the hypothesis that the present pair of console tables are to be related to a high commission directly commanded by, or very close to, to the crown, and their design is to be attributed to the court architect Filippo Juvarra (born March 7, 1678, Messina, Sicily – died January 31, 1736, Madrid, Spain).

Filippo Juvarra was an architect and stage designer who achieved fame throughout Europe during the early part of the 18th century. Born in Messina to a silversmith, Juvarra first trained in the art of drawing in his father's workshop. At the age of 26, he moved to Rome to perfect his training as an architect under Carlo Fontana. In those years (1703–14), he started operating as a stage designer at the court of Cardinal Ottoboni, for whom he designed several *scenografie* for the theatre in the Palazzo della Cancelleria. In the same capacity, he also worked for the queen of Poland Maria Casimira, for her theatre in the Palazzo Zuccari, Rome, and for the Holy Roman emperor Joseph I for the opera *Giunio Bruto*. Although his major works were in Italy, he also designed the palace at Mafra for John V of Portugal (1719–20) and provided designs for Augustus the Strong at Dresden.

In 1714 Juvarra was appointed architect to Vittorio Amedeo II, who had ascended to the throne of Sicily in that year. Following the war of Succession to the Spanish throne, Sicily was annexed to the Duchy of Savoy, with Vittorio Amedeo being appointed with the title of King. The creation of a Royal title for the Savoy prompted a renovation of the city of Turin and the building of residences in and around the city to match in splendour the high title of the dynasty. After some early important military commissions in Sicily, Juvarra moved to Turin, taking charge of the general renovations. The most famous examples are perhaps the Church of Superga (1715), and the extensive renovation of the

Reggia di Venaria Reale, as well as the palace chapel, the church of Sant'Uberto. Juvarra was responsible for designing not only city plans, palaces, and sumptuous spaces to be used for state events, but also pieces of furniture, mirrors, frames, carriages and other pieces of decorative arts, thoroughly shaping culture and identity at the Savoy court.

As the director of the renovation of court palaces under the Savoy, Juvarra's took an active interest in furniture: the decorative arts were a design field that he always frequented with great interest. The National Library and the Royal Library in Turin hold a large collection of autograph drawings by Juvarra of designs for furniture, mirrors, benches, stuccoes, and whole interiors. It was from 1730, however, at the behest of the new King Charles Emmanuel III, that the "Royal Architect" took care of the creation of some extraordinary environments which are still preserved today. For one of them, the King's Cabinet, three beautiful presentation drawings remain in the Sella Foundation in Biella in which, in addition to the stucco decorations, Juvarra specifies the shape of the two consoles surmounted by shelves for the use of library that complete it. Those pieces were eventually realised by the royal cabinetmakers Pietro Piffetti and Francesco Ladatte between 1731 and 1734 and survives still in situ to this day, being counted among the masterpieces of eighteenth-century European furniture (fig.1).

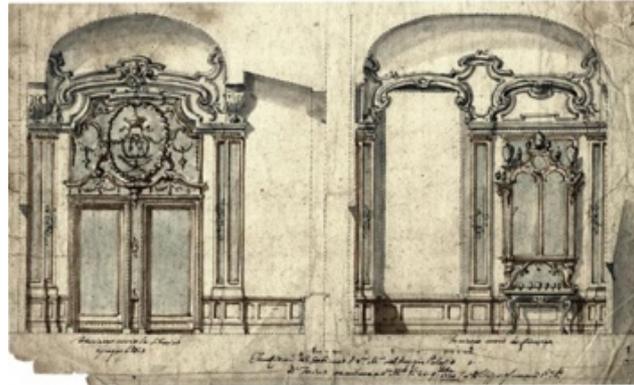


Fig.1 Filippo Juvarra, *Elevazione del Gabinetto di S.a M.a nel Reggio Palazzo di Torino*, c.1730 (Biella, Fondazione Sella, Fondo Maggia, n.548)

Whereas in his early years in Turin, Juvarra's style was characterised by a static, classicising taste derived from his Roman formation (e.g. San Filippo Neri, 1715; Superga, 1717; Palazzo Madama, 1718), later on he gained more confidence, adopting a more personal style, in which his experience as a stage designer was thoroughly digested and fully reinterpreted. His later work is noted for its concept of space—light and airy spaces producing a fluid, elegant effect. These late works rank among the finest examples of the early Rococo style in Italy. This is true not only of his architecture, but also of his furniture.

Although we can observe a consistency of motifs in Juvarra's furniture designs (the same kind of garlands, recurring scrolls, etc.), the conception of the piece changes dramatically over time: the static, imposing architectural design of the 1710s will evolve into light, playful, airy solutions towards the 1730s (see figs.2–3). Stylistically, the present pair of console tables can be placed in between these two extremes: the heaviness of the first phase has already disappeared, and we are moving towards that playful lightness of the later years. Chronologically, they can be placed around 1720.



Fig.2 Filippo Juvarra, console table, carved wood painted in yellow lacca, c.1715 (Burzio archives).

Fig.3 Filippo Juvarra, corner table with cabinet and mirror, c.1730–40 (Burzio archives).

Although the exact design for the present pair of consoles has not been identified for now, the present pieces are consistent with Juvarra's style, as it evolved through time, and present the same decorative motifs recurrently adopted by the architect. For example, the present important similarities with some sheets of an album of drawings by Juvarra held in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. It is possible that those drawings have been realized and collected over an extended period of time, and their dating and destination are not always certain. This nonetheless, a page of the album represents an elaborate design for a carriage (fig.4) presenting the same motifs as the present consoles: the structure is almost identical, the C- and S-scrolls are similarly placed, the organization of shapes in space, the taste that is moving towards the airy lightness of the 1730s but is not there quite yet.

Juvarra's personal repertoire of shapes and motifs found in both pieces, together with the precious use of materials, leave little doubt about the creation and destination of the console tables presented here.



Fig.4 Filippo Juvarra, design for a carriage, c.1720 (New York City, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no.69.655)

The Villa della Regina is a palace just outside the city of Turin and the name by which the complex has remained known derives from the fact that it was the residence of the Savoy queens during the eighteenth century. The property was built as a private villa with its own vineyard, hence its alternative name of Vigna di Madama.

Originally built by the House of Savoy in the early 17th century, in 1692 La Villa passed to Anne Marie d'Orléans, niece of Louis XIV of France and wife of Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy. She chose it as her favorite residence after entrusting its renovation to Filippo Juvarra, who took care of every aspect of the interior and exterior, including the smallest decorations. The villa was thus updated in full harmony with the taste of the time, a place of delight and leisure; the court often stayed there for the entire month of September.

Polyxena of Hesse-Rotenburg did some work in the main saloon of the building when she became the owner of the villa in 1728 at the death of Anne Marie.

The palace was dismissed as a court residence after the unification of Italy. In 1869 it was donated to a charitable institution looking after the education of young girls. As it had been done with other royal residences after the unification of Italy, the Savoy dismantled much of the interiors dispersing the pieces that had been originally designed for those spaces.