

An Important Royal Piedmontese Centre-Table *en Commode* made in 1788 for the personal use of King Vittorio Amedeo III of Savoy by Giovanni Battista Galletti, the immediate successor to Pietro Piffetti as principal cabinet-maker to the King (*Primo ebanista di S.R. Maesta*) on the latter's death on 6th May 1777.

The rectangular top with rounded corners with a central oval reserve bearing a complex trophy symbolising the triumph of love comprising a crossed quiver and flaming torch with Cupid's bow on a laurel branch and two doves in ivory, one clasping a bunch of grapes, the trophy on an amaranth ground within a pear-wood reserve with kingwood spandrels and cross-banding in various woods, the front and back of the piece ornamented with similar trophies within reserves with greek-key panels above and below, the sides decorated with oval foliate rosettes, the front with a slide above two drawers *sans traverse* fitted for a collection of veneer samples, the right hand side with a frieze drawer with ink and sander compartment, the rounded corners decorated with garlanded *flambeaux*, on turned tapering legs, the fluting simulated in scorched sycamore veneers with ormolu ring-capitals and *toupie* feet with casters.

Height: 73 cm

Width: 57,5 cm

Depth: 44 cm

Provenance:

The House of Savoy, Recorded Document of the payment in 29 January 1789 and in 1788 R.R.C. Royal Books.

French Private Collection.

Published related document in G.Ferraris, Pietro Piffetti e gli Ebanisti a Torino, 1678-1838, a cura di Alvar Gonzales Palacios, Torino 1992, Pag.239, Document N.46.

Comparative Literature:

V.Viale, Mostra del Barocco Piemontese, Turin 1963, Vol.III, pl.233

E.Baccheschi, Mobili Intarsiati, Gorlich Milan,1964, pag. 70

R.Antonetto, Minusieri ed Ebanisti del Piemonte, Turin, 1985, pagg.344.349

G.Ferraris, Pietro Piffetti e gli Ebanisti a Torino, 1678-1838, a cura di Alvar Gonzales Palacios, Torino 1992, Pagg.175..187

R.Antonetto, Il Mobile Piemontese del Settecento, Allemandi, Turin 2010, pagg.283; 297.

The present table-commode is a highly accomplished and characteristic work by Galletti and one of the finest and best documented masterpieces of late 18th century North Italian furniture in the Louis XVI taste. The two drawers each have five divisions, which originally contained veneered plaques with samples of precious woods. The upper drawer contained samples from the Americas, the lower drawer samples of all 78 different woods found in the Kingdom of Savoy, Nice and Sardinia and effectively served as an Encyclopaedia of the materials available for the art of cabinetmaking. It was a significant acquisition for Vittorio Amadeo III who like Louis XVI, the brother-in-law of his daughter, Maria Giuseppina, was a passionate amateur craftsman who enjoyed working in wood and ivory.

The invoice in the Savoy archives in Turin reads as follows:

1789 GENNAIO 23

<Nota di Ebanista fatta da me sottoscritto nell'anno 1788 d'ordine e per uso proprio di S R M come segue

Per aver fatto e composto una Tavola, a comod della raccolta de' legni del paese, coll'ossatura di legno noce, samblata a mortasa, nelli montanti, con gambe a piramide, guarnite di metallo dorato, placate all'intorno di ebano negro, incannalite di legni del paese, con due tiratori, samblati a coda di rondine, e fondi messi a batuta, samblati a linguetta, lustrati di dentro, e fuori, con cinque divisioni per cadun tiratore, con sua escrizione, incisa nell'avorio sopra dette divisioni per cadun tiratore, uniforme all'indirizzi graziatemi da S.M., la detta tavola ha (sotto)il coperchio della raccolta d'America, il sotto della medesima placcati di n.78 qualita' di diversi legni del Piemonte, Sardegna, Savoia, Nizza, e contorni, li detti legni e tavola sono contornati di ebano negro uniforme al coperchio, cioè per giornate, legni, avorio impiegato

256

E provvisto per la formazione della medesima

310,10

/

Per aver provvisto n' 2 serrature, per li due tiratori di detta tavola montate a vite, che si smontano, pulite a oglio dentro, e fuori, con chiave forata, e anello cesellato

24

fermate a vite in bosco,convenute

Lire12

caduna importano

24

334,10

Torino a 3 Gennaio 1789 Gio' Galletti Lodovico Bo
(RRC, 1788)

Giovanni Battista Galletti (Venaria Reale 1735- Turin 1819)

The life and work of this important *ebanista* remain somewhat shrouded in mystery, but recent research has added to our knowledge. He was born at Venaria Reale close to Turin and operated his workshop there until 30 May 1777. A fortnight after the death of Pietro Piffetti on 16th May he moved to the centre of Turin to take up his post at the Royal Court as *Ebanista del Re* in succession to Piffetti. He was given a salary of 300 Liras and housed with his wife and seven children in the Palazzo del Università dei Minusieri where Piffetti was lodged and he worked before him. It is clear that he had been an active supplier to the court before he took up the post of first cabinetmaker in 1777 (there are significant recorded payments the Court from 1771 onwards). However, the documents relating to various court commissions make it difficult to confirm his responsibility for pieces that may previously have been attributed, almost certainly erroneously, to Piffetti. From the time of his appointment as *Ebanista del Re* until his retirement in 1818 a year before he died, his production for the royal houses of Savoy and Aosta intensified and included a wide variety of furniture types, some pieces manifesting highly innovative mechanical solutions. Documented pieces by him are to be found in the Royal Palace of Turin and at Stupinigi.

The present table together with other documented pieces confirm Galletti's status as one of the most significant figures in the emergence of neo-classical taste in Piedmontese furniture. With Ignazio and Luigi Ravelli (father and son working in Vercelli) and Giuseppe and Francesco Maggiolini (also father and son but working in Lombardy in Parabiago, close to Milan) his technically impeccable work is a reference point for Italian marquetry furniture inspired by Parisian prototypes. Various items are recorded in the court day-books including pieces '*con gambe a piramide*', greek key ornament, dentil friezes and oval tops. There is also a demi-lune table with '*trofeo gravato in avorio sopra il coperchio*', presumably similar to the present table. A secretaire now in the Royal palace in Genoa commissioned by Vittorio Amadeo four years earlier in 1784 has identical legs and very similar marquetry although without the use of ivory.

As was customary, such furniture was subject to approval by the court architect Carlo Piacenza who together with Randoni and Marini was responsible for the evolution of the distinctive and highly expressive Piedmontese neo-classical style with its elaborate carved, gilded and painted *boiseries* executed most notably by Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo but also by other exceptional master carvers including Giuseppe Gianotti. In this context it is interesting to note that the outstanding carved painted and gilded oval room in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Museum No. W.5 -1955) (Fig 1.), which is almost certainly the product of a collaboration between Piacenza and Gianotti in Turin, notwithstanding its traditional attribution to Lombardy, has, as the central ornament of its parquet floor, a rosette of striking similarity to the rosette on the sides of the present table (Fig.2). As it was customary for the court *ébénistes* to be involved in the production of floors – indeed Piffetti was responsible for a number of parquet floors in the Palazzo Reale and elsewhere - it is possible that further

research may reveal that Galletti was responsible for making such floors and perhaps even this one.



Fig. 1



Fig.2