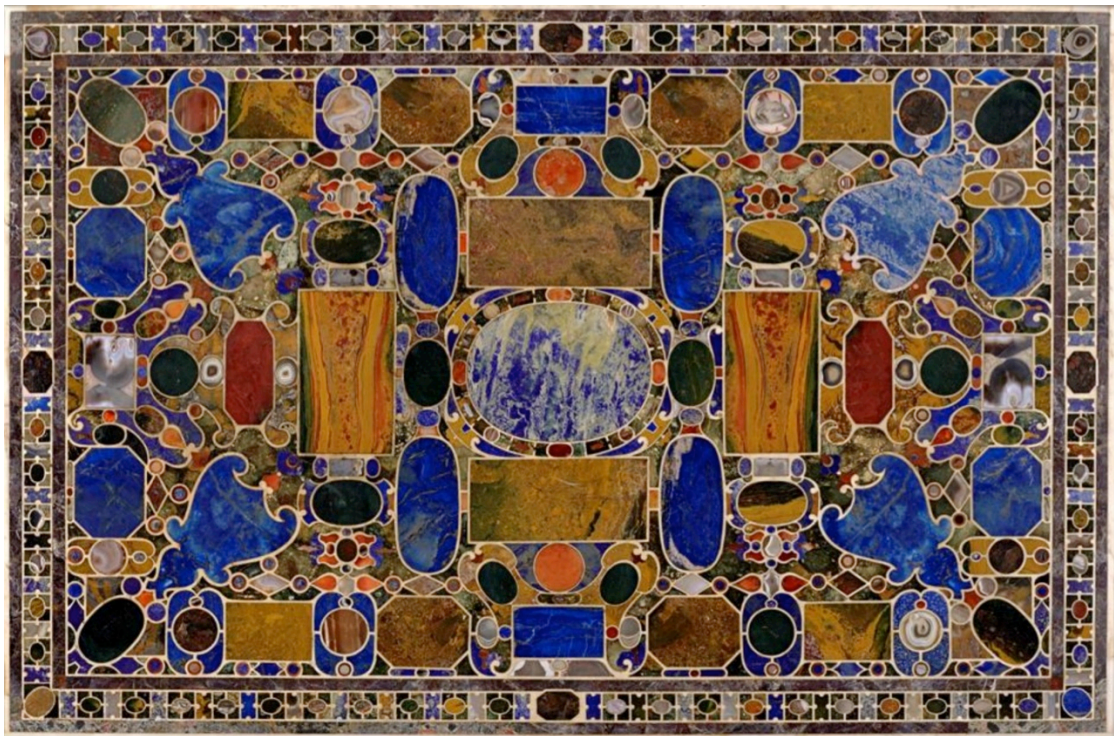


ROBILANT+VOENA

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**The Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici Table-Top**  
**"Il Tavolino di gioie"**

Florence, circa 1568-1577

Almost certainly executed by Bernardino Porfirio da Leccio (documented 1557-1588),  
designed by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574)

Hardstones (*Pietra Dura*) set into a white marble support

Now on an English 17<sup>th</sup> century style giltwood stand

*Length: 160 cm. (63 in.) Width: 107 cm. (42 1/8 in.) Depth: 8 cm. (3 1/8 in.) (the table top)*  
*Length: 141.5 cm. (55 11/16 in.) Width: 87 cm. (34 1/4 in.) Height: 70.5 cm. (27 3/4 in.) (the stand)*

## **Inventory research by Dr.Enrico Colle, as total confirmation of our attribution.**

### PROVENANCE

Made for Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r. 1574-1587), as described by Vasari in the 1568 edition of his *Lives*; recorded after his death in 1588 in the Casino di San Marco, Florence

Inherited on Francesco's death by his illegitimate son, Don Antonio de' Medici (1576-1621), recorded in 1621 still in the Casino di San Marco

On his death, reverts to the main Medici possessions of Francesco's great-nephew, Ferdinando II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r. 1621-1670), and subsequently recorded in 1638 and 1663 in the Pitti Palace, Florence

By descent to Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, Electress of the Palatinate (1667-1743), who bequeathed the Medici collections to the Tuscan state in 1737

Francesco II Stefano of Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r.1737-1765), recorded in 1761 in the Pitti Palace

His son, Leopoldo I of Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r.1765-1790), recorded in 1771 in the Pitti Palace

His son, Ferdinando III of Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r.1790-1801), recorded in 1793 in the Pitti Palace, and in 1800 in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

Ludovico I of Bourbon-Parma, King of Etruria (r.1801-1803)

His son, Ludovico II of Bourbon-Parma, King of Etruria (r.1803-1807), recorded in 1805 in the Palazzo Vecchio and shortly afterwards in the Pitti Palace, inventory number 2970 as inscribed on the back of the table-top

Elisa Bonaparte, Grand Duchess of Tuscany (r.1807-1814)

Ferdinando III of Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r.1814-1824), recorded in 1815 and 1819 in the Pitti Palace, inventory number 290

His son, Leopoldo II of Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Duke of Tuscany (r.1824-1859), recorded under number 480 in 1829, under number 860 in 1846, and in 1858 in the Pitti Palace

Transferred to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence, in 1858

Sold by the Italian State in 1870 to "*Guglielmo Spencer*" (William Blundell Spence (1814-1900)), for 47000 Lire, almost certainly on behalf of Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess (later 1<sup>st</sup> Duke) of Westminster (1825-1899), photographed in July 1889 in the gallery of Grosvenor House, Mayfair, London, and by descent

Sold by the Executors of Hugh Richard Arthur Grosvenor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Westminster (1879-1953), Sotheby's London, 10 July 1959, lot 166

Sold Finarte, Rome, Palazzo del Drago, Via delle Quattro Fontane, 10-12 December 1975, lot 279 Antichità Alberto di Castro, Rome, by whom sold in 1976 to

European Private Collection until the present day

With Burzio & Robilant + Voena Galleries, London

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Alvar González-Palacios, *Mosaici e Pietre Dure*, II. Firenze – Paesi Germanici – Madrid, Milan, 1982, p. 14 (ill.)

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Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori*, vol. 3, Florence, 1568

Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Itinerarium Florentiae*, 1586, unpublished manuscript, Bologna University Library, MS 136/11

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Filippo M. Tuena, 'Appunti per la storia del commesso romano: Il 'franciosino' maestro di tavole del cardinale Giovanni Ricci', in A. González-Palacios (ed.), *Antologia di Belle Arti*, Rome, 1988, pp. 54-69

Suzanne B. Butters, '"Una pietra eppure non una pietra": pietre dure e le botteghe medicee nella Firenze del Cinquecento', in G. Fossi and F. Franceschi (eds.), *La Grande Storia dell'Artigianato*, III: *Il Cinquecento*, Florence, 2000, pp. 133-185

Maria Alberta Zuffanelli, 'L'Opificio delle pietre dure e le sue diverse sedi: trasferimenti e vicende costruttive dal secolo XVI al secolo XIX', *OPD Restauro*, no. 17 (2005), pp. 317-332

Anna Maria Giusti, '"La pietra non mai abbastanza lodata" nella manifattura Granducale di Firenze', in V. Conticelli et al. (eds.), *Lapislazzuli, Magia del Blu*, exh. cat., 9 June – 11 October 2015, Museo degli Argenti and Museo di Storia Naturale, Florence, Livorno, 2015, pp. 101-109

## A STARTLING DISCOVERY

*"Ha dato sua Eccellenza principio ancora a fare un'tavolino di gioie con ricco ornamento per accompagnarne un'altro del Duca Cosimo suo padre..."*

(His Excellency [Francesco de' Medici] has also caused a beginning to be made with the executing of a table with precious stones, richly adorned, as an accompaniment to another belonging to his father, Duke Cosimo...)

-Giorgio Vasari, 1568.



Portrait of Francesco de' Medici, mid-1560s, by Bronzino, Private collection, NYC.

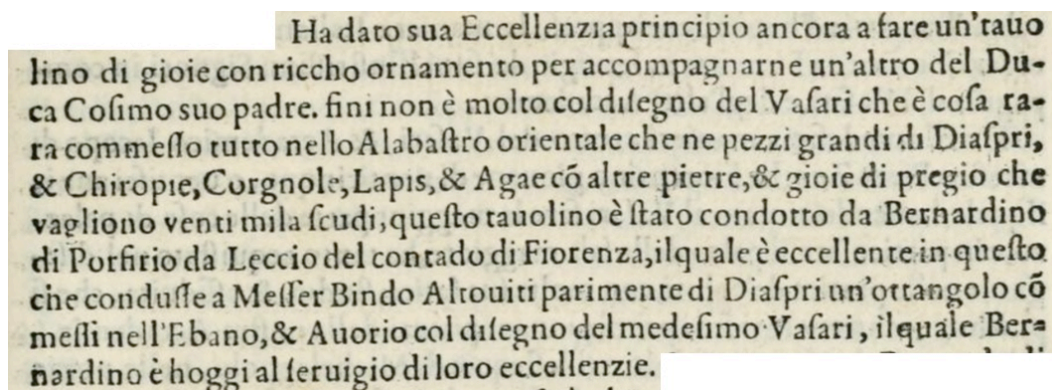
*“Veramente bellissima cosa da vedere, fatta di pezzi di corniuola, di elitropia, de lapis, diaspro, di agata et d’altre molte pietre, molto ben commesso, et è estimata una cosa molto rara... et non è ancora finita”*

(Truly a most beautiful thing to see, made of pieces of carnelian, heliotrope, lapis lazuli, jasper, agate and many other stones, very well set together and esteemed a most rare thing... and it remains unfinished)

- Hercole Cortile, Ferrarese Este ambassador,  
Casino di San Marco, Florence, 1575

## INTRODUCTION

Previously only known through a tantalising mention in Vasari’s *Lives* and two brief contemporary sightings, new discoveries by Enrico Colle in the Medici-Lorraine records have confirmed that this table-top is in fact the one made in Florence for Francesco I de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. (A publication by Dr.Enrico Colle it will coming soon)



(His Excellency [Francesco] has also caused a beginning to be made with the executing of a table with precious stones, richly adorned, as an accompaniment to another belonging to his father, Duke Cosimo, finished not long ago after the design of Vasari, which is a rare work, being of oriental alabaster all inlaid with great pieces of jasper, heliotrope, cornelian, lapis lazuli, and agate, with other stones and jewels of price that are worth twenty thousand *scudi*. This table was executed by Bernardino di Porfirio of Leccio in the neighbourhood of Florence, who is excellent in such work, and who made for Messer Bindo Altoviti an octagonal table of ebony and ivory inlaid likewise with jaspers, after the design of the same Vasari; which Bernardino is now in the service of their Excellencies.)<sup>1</sup>

A truly iconic work of art, a masterpiece in all decorative art field, the table-top is composed entirely out of hardstones (*pietra dura*), making it exceptionally rare. Only two others are known, including the Prado one cited in note 2 below. The vast majority of Roman 16<sup>th</sup> century table-tops are made with coloured marbles which are softer and easier to cut. Additionally, the Francesco I de’ Medici top is the only one of the three to retain its 16<sup>th</sup> century appearance with the original borders and the inlaid apron below.

This top has fascinated the leading scholars in the field starting with Alvar González-Palacios who first saw it at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Westminster’s 1959 Sotheby’s auction and published it for the first time in 1982.<sup>2</sup> Two important articles by Filippo Tuena, in 1988 and 1990, raised the possibility that the Westminster table might in fact be the one commissioned by Francesco de’ Medici.

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<sup>1</sup> Vasari 1568, vol. 3, p. 871

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the bibliography listed above. More recently, Anna Maria Giusti, the foremost authority at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence, reiterated González-Palacios’s conclusion of a Roman origin for the piece and its close similarity to the other great table-top given to Philip II in 1587. Finally, Simon Jervis in his magisterial study of Roman *pietra dura* in English collections supports this attribution and relates the table to a series of pen and ink designs by Giovanni Vincenzo Casale, circa 1570.



The Florentine archival evidence confirms that this table-top was recorded in the Medici collections as early as March 1588 when it appears in the Casino de San Marco in an inventory taken after the death of Francesco. Its subsequent history down to its disposal in 1858 is confirmed in a series of detailed descriptions in Medici and then Lorraine documents which is set forth below.

#### ATTRIBUTION

Tuena in 1988 explored correspondence between the leading patron of cut-stone specialists in Rome, Cardinal Giovanni Ricci (1498-1574), and the Medici secretary, Bartolomeo Concini. Early in 1568 the two were in earnest discussion about a table to be made for Francesco de' Medici, then the heir to the Grand Dukedom of Tuscany. This project, in all likelihood, would appear to be the very same referred to later that year by Giorgio Vasari in the second edition of his *Lives*. According to Vasari, we know that the table was started in 1568. Two further contemporary accounts confirm that it took many years to be made, most likely due to the difficulty in obtaining the rare hard stones. What is unusual about the design of this table is the large size of the lapis lazuli panels, which were especially hard to obtain.<sup>3</sup>

In 1575 the Duke of Ferrara's ambassador to Florence, Hercole Cortile, visited the Casino and later recorded that he had been shown a table which was:

*Veramente bellissima cosa da vedere, fatta di pezzi di corniuola, di eliotropia, de lapis, diaspro, di agata et d'altre molte pietre, molto ben commesso, et è estimata una cosa molto rara... et non è ancora finita*<sup>4</sup>

(Truly a most beautiful thing to see, made of pieces of carnelian, heliotrope, lapis lazuli, jasper, agate and many other stones, very well set together and esteemed a most rare thing... and it remains unfinished)

A year later, Nicolas Audebert of Orléans, on an educative trip through the Italian peninsular, visited the Casino and left this superlative description of the table:

*Il ne fault oublier à veoir la maison où le grand Duc faict travailler en pierreries, et là veoir la table de marbre couverte de pierres pretieuses rapportées ensemble, ce qui n'est encores achevé, et combien qu'il y reste peu neantmoins ne se peult – ce dict on – parfaire pour quarante mil escutz*<sup>5</sup>

(One must not omit to view the house where the Grand Duke has gemstones worked, and see there the marble table covered in precious stones set together, which is not yet finished. However little remains [to be done], nevertheless it cannot be, I say, brought to perfection for [less than] 40,000 scudi)

This indicates work was still in progress in early October 1576. Anna Maria Giusti recently re-published these notices,<sup>6</sup> which provide a *terminus ante quem* of c.1577 for the top now located in the inventories.

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<sup>3</sup> For the table made for Cosimo I, Vasari was supplied with larger pieces of lapis direct from Ducal supplies. On 19 March 1562, he wrote: "*Mando in questa un modanetto di carta perché V.E. Ill.ma ci mandi per il tavolino otto pezzi di lapislazuli di questa grandezza*" (I enclose a card mould for Your Most Illustrious Eminence to send us for the *tavolino* eight pieces of lapis lazuli of this large size); cited in Tuena 1990, p.143. Vasari indicated a cost of 20000 Scudi for it, half amount than our top ten years before)

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Butters 2000, p. 153

<sup>5</sup> Audebert 1981, vol. I, p. 259

<sup>6</sup> Giusti 2015, p. 109, n. 4-5.

A third, and hitherto unpublished, sighting of the table in the Casino is recorded by the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, in June 1586:<sup>7</sup>

*Tabula alia quadrangularis ex multis hisque diversis marmorum generibus contexta in basi et ad latera ex cyano, ametisto, eliotropio orientali, achate et aliis preciosissimis lapillis longitudine 8 dodrantum latitudine 5 cum dimidio tanta diligentia coniuncta ut videatur continuus unicusque lapis*

(Another rectangular table, inlaid in the base and on the sides with these many and various types of marble: *cyano* [lapis lazuli]<sup>8</sup>, amethyst, oriental heliotrope, agate and other extremely precious stones, 8 *dodrans* long by 5.5 wide,<sup>9</sup> joined together with such great care so as to appear continuous and only of stone)

The table-top belongs to the same group of works as the one referred to by Vasari as commissioned by the banker Bindo Altoviti and, like the one owned by Cosimo I, executed to his design by Bernardino Porfirio da Leccio (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – Giorgio Vasari and Bernardino Porfirio da Leccio, Ebony table-top inlaid with precious stones and ivory, before 1557. Rome, Banco di Roma Collection

In design, the Francesco I de' Medici top is most similar to another in the Hermitage also considered Florentine (fig. 2), which has on occasion been discussed in connection with Vasari's summary of the Medici *tavolino* commissions. What distinguishes this one, and takes it out of the reckoning, is its being on a wooden, and not marble, support.

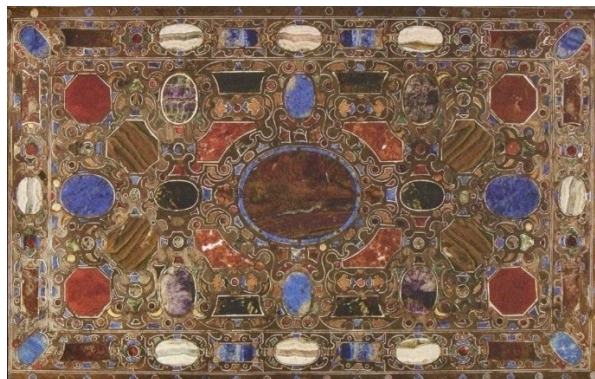


Fig. 2 – Wooden (ebony) table-top inlaid with *pietre dure* and ivory fillets. Florentine, third quarter 16<sup>th</sup> c. St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum

<sup>7</sup> Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Itinerarium Florentiae*, 1586, ff. 51v.-r.

<sup>8</sup> *Historia Naturale di Ferrante Imperato...*, Venice, 1672, p. 545: “*Del Cyano, cap. XL | Nel che manifestamente veggiamo, come innanzi habbiamo detto, che la pietra Lazulea fusse da gli antichi chiamata sotto il nome di Cyano...*” (On Cyano, chapter 40 | In which we clearly see, as we have said before, that the Lazulea stone was called by the ancients Cyano)

<sup>9</sup> The *dodrans* in the Roman system of measurements equalled  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a foot. These dimensions thus approximate to this table's, with their width-length ratio of 1:1.45 pleasingly close to its actual 1:1.495

A third important comparanda – the only other exclusively *pietre dure* top known from the 16<sup>th</sup> century – is the one still located in the Pitti Palace, within the Museo degli Argenti (fig. 3). Interestingly, it is inscribed on its reverse with the number 859 (fig. 4), sequentially adjacent to the '860' assigned to the Francesco I de' Medici table in the 1846 inventory reproduced below. Tuena in 1990 thought that stylistically this one was closer to Buontalenti than Vasari.<sup>10</sup>



Figs. 3 and 4 – Table-top inlaid with *pietre dure*, Florence, c.1570-1585. Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Museo degli Argenti, and the inventory number inscribed on its revers

#### MEDICI-LORRAINE PROVENANCE

This table-top is first sighted in 1575 and again in 1577 by visitors to the Casino di San Marco (figs. 5-7). This villa near the eponymous monastic complex in the city's northern reaches was newly-erected in Mannerist style around 1570 by Bernardo Buontalenti, on the site of the quattrocento Medicean sculpture gardens. Constructed for Francesco de' Medici, it served as a laboratory for scientific experimentation and, from 1588, a first home to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure.



Fig. 5 – Florence in the time of Francesco I de' Medici:<sup>11</sup> 1) The San Marco district, centred around the Dominican monastery (see enlargement below); 2 – The Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens

<sup>10</sup> Tuena 1990, p.144

<sup>11</sup> Stefano Buonsignori, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1584 (revised 1594)



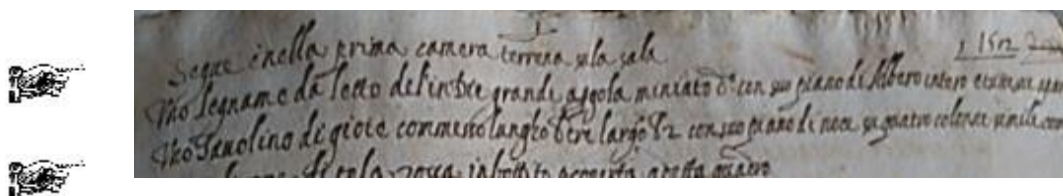
Figs. 6 and 7 – The San Marco district in 1584. On the map's key #49 = "Casino del Gran D.", and Bernardo Buontalenti, Portal decoration of Casino di San Marco, Florence, 1570-74

We know from the eye-witness accounts that Francesco's table, coeval with the building, was therefore probably constructed for the space indicated in the inventory records in which it first appears, little more than a decade later. It must also be noted that throughout the two-and-a-half century inventory trail which follows, the table's base amazingly remains unchanged, testament to its pre-eminent prestige within the rooms it graces:

### Casino di San Marco, 1588 Inventory

*Inventario della Guardaroba della Casa e del Palazzo del Casino, a custodia di Piero Elmi cominciato oggi questo di' 8 di Marzo 1587*

(Inventory of the Wardrobe of the House and Palace of the Casino, in the custody of Piero Elmi, begun today, 8 March 1588<sup>12</sup>)



*Segue nella prima camera terrena*  
(In the following ground-floor room)

*Uno tavolino di gioie commesso lungo B. tre largo B. 2 con suo piano di noce su Quattro colonne simile commesse d.o [dorato?]*

(An inlaid jewelled table, 3 *braccia* long by 2 *braccia* wide, with its walnut stand on four columns, similarly inlaid, and gilded(?))

It next appears in an inventory of the estate of Francesco's illegitimate son, Don Antonio de' Medici (1576-1621), taken in the year of his death

### Casino di San Marco, 1621 Inventory

*Inventario degli oggetti appartenenti all'eredita' di Don Antonio de' Medici 1621*  
(Inventory of objects appertaining to the estate of Don Antonio de' Medici, 1621)

*Nella sesta cam.ra che segue allato alla Galleria*  
(In the sixth room which runs alongside (?) the Gallery)

*Un tavolino di marmo commesso con pietre fine con Lapis, diaspri, Crognole Agata et simile a' ovati, et altri scompartimenti, con suoi piedi, et ornament di noce profilato d'oro lungo tre b.a in circa*

(An inlaid marble table with fine stones, with lapis, jasper, carnelian, agate and similar, oval-shaped and in other compartments, with its legs and decoration of walnut filleted with gold, around 3 *braccia* long)

<sup>12</sup> Until 1750, the Florentine year ended on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation



These early inventories' dimensions are approximate but clearly evoke the proportions of this table-top. The three and two *braccia* given above equate to 175 and 117 cm (versus the top's actual 160 x 107 cm). Measurement will become successively more precise over time – in the next inventory entry, for instance, the length is more accurately stated as 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  *braccia* (163 cm).

This next record is from a general inventory compiled for the Medici Grand Duke, by this stage Ferdinando II. Here, the table is taken *from* the Casino, as Don Antonio's possessions, inherited personally from his father Francesco, are re-incorporated into the Medici family collections

### Casino di San Marco, 1618-1624 Inventory

*Inventario Generale di S.A.S. 1618-1624*  
(General Inventory of His Serene Highness, 1618-1624)

*Un tavolino di marmo commisso con pietre fine cioe' lapislazziri corniole, agate e diaspri e alter pietre simili in diversi scompartimenti lungo B.a 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  con piede di noce, a telaio a balaustri torniti tocchi d'oro h.ti [havuti?] dalla Galleria del Casino a 15 Aprile 1621*

(An inlaid marble table with fine stones, i.e. lapis lazuli, carnelian, agate and jasper, and the like, in various compartments, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  *braccia* long, with its legs a framework of turned walnut balusters, touched with gold, had from the Casino's Gallery on 15 April 1621)

It next appears, and will continue to do so – excepting a brief period in the *guardaroba* during the years of French occupation – for over two centuries, in inventories of the Palazzo Pitti, the seat of Medici, and later Habsburg-Lorraine, Grand Ducal power in Tuscany. Acquired and enlarged by the Medici in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, with the creation of apartment wings, courtyard, grotto and the renowned Boboli gardens, it was extended laterally and internally redecorated from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

The first of these inventory citations, in 1638, is so extraordinarily precise, in its numbering, descriptions and measurements of elements, that there can be no doubt whatsoever that it refers to this table-top:

### Pitti Palace, 1638 Inventory

*Inventario di tutti I Mobili che sono nel Palazzo de' Pitti di S.A.S. in consegna a Biagio Marmi cominciato questo di 26 Feb. 1637*

(Inventory of all furniture in His Serene Highness's Pitti Palace entrusted to Biagio Marmi, begun 26 February 1638<sup>13</sup>)

*Nella quarta camera dell'appartamento nuovo verso la piazza di SAS*  
(In the fourth room of the new apartment overlooking His Serene Highness's piazza)

*Un tavolino di pietre commesse con più e diversi spartimenti tutti proffilati di filetti di marmo bianco, con cinque aovati di lapislazzero in mezzo, e 4 pezzi di lapislazzero simile in forma di vaso, con seangoli e quadri dell'istesso lapislazzero, con fregetto attorno largo braccia 0/6 listrato dalle bande d'amatista o pietra simile, con cornice di marmo intorno, commesso nel fregio di essa corniole, lapislazzeri e altri diaspri, con sua piedi a telaio di noce a balaustro, con profili d'oro, lungo braccia 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  largo braccia 1  $\frac{3}{4}$*

(An inlaid stone table, with multiple and various compartments, all delineated with fillets of white marble, with five ovals of lapis lazuli in the middle, four vase-like pieces of similar lapis, hexagons [a slight inaccuracy, they are actually eight-sided] and quadrangles, likewise of lapis, with a surrounding frieze 0/6 in width, bordered by bands of amethyst or similar stones, and that framed around by marble; inlaid in the frieze are carnelian, lapis and other jaspers. With its legs a framework of balustered walnut, with gold insertions. 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  *braccia* long by 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  *braccia* wide)

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 12, about the Florentine calendar

The 'new apartment' in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century comprised the extension of the palace's left-hand side. The 'fourth room' indicated, assuming a ground floor placing (as throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century), would be the *Salotto dipinto dal detto Colonna*, in today's Museo degli Argenti, named after Michelangelo Colonna (1604-87), who frescoed this part of Ferdinando II's *quartiere estivo* from November 1637 (Room G; fig. 8).

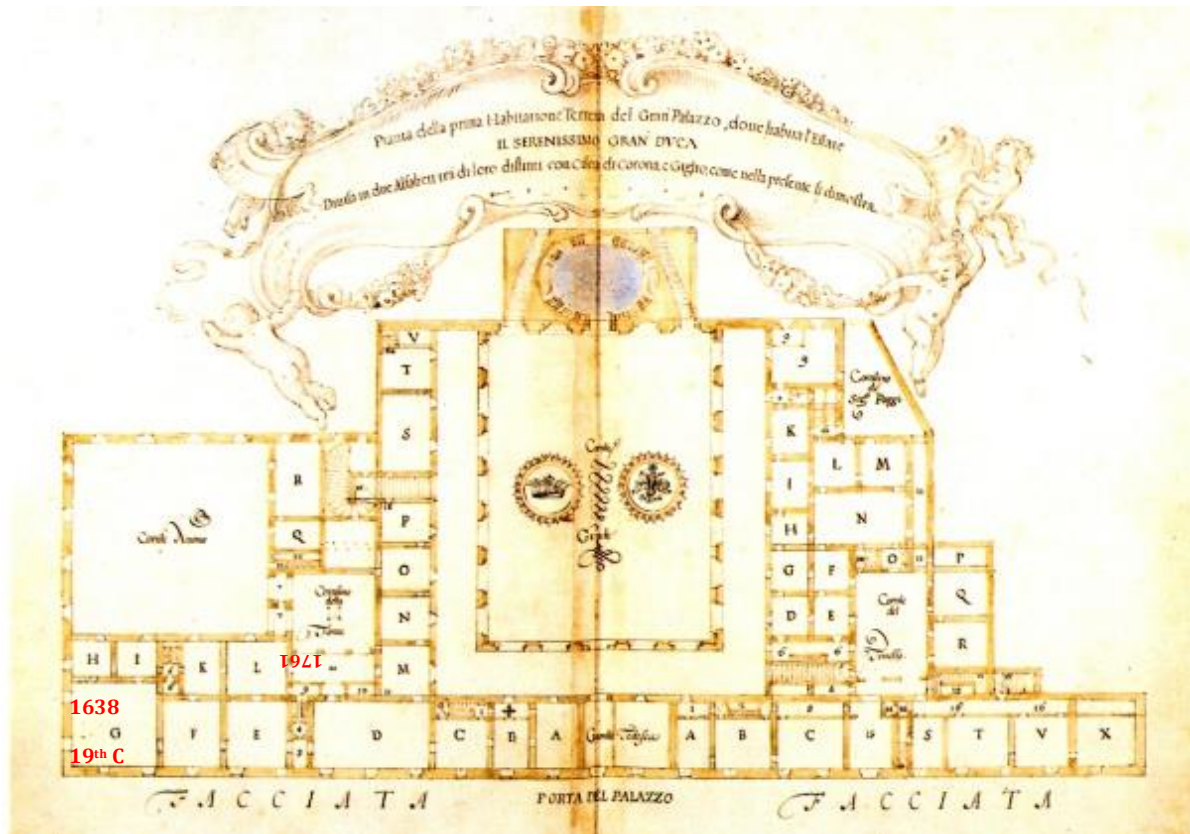


Fig. 8 – Ground floor of the Pitti Palace, 1663

The next inventory citation locates the table on the palace's third floor, amongst the rooms designated for the Grand Duke's children, most likely in the *Camera di Audienza* (Room D; fig. 9):

### Pitti Palace, 1663 Inventory

*Inventario di tutti i mobili che si ritrovano nel Palazzo di Pitti di S.A.S. consegnati a Jacinto Maria Marmi nuovo Guardaroba, 1663*

(Inventory of all furniture found in His Serene Highness's Pitti Palace entrusted to Jacinto Maria Marmi, the new [Master of the] Wardrobe, 1663)

*Camera che segue per audienza del Ser.mo Principe con la porta sul ballatoio... Appartamento del Se.mo Principe Cosimo Terzo e Ser.ma Principessa Sposa*

[[In the] room which follows, for audiences of the Most Serene Prince, with the door onto the landing, [in the] apartment of the Most Serene Prince Cosimo III and the most Serene Princess his wife)

*Una tavola di pietre dure commesse lavorate a spartimenti, di piu', e diverse pietre, cioe' lapislazzero orientale, Agate, Corniole et alter con piedi torniti di noce a balaustro filettati d'oro lungo B:a 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  larga B:a 1  $\frac{5}{6}$*

(An inlaid *pietre dure* table worked into compartments, with multiple and various stones, i.e. oriental lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian and more besides, with turned, balustered walnut legs filleted with gold. 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{5}{6}$  braccia wide)

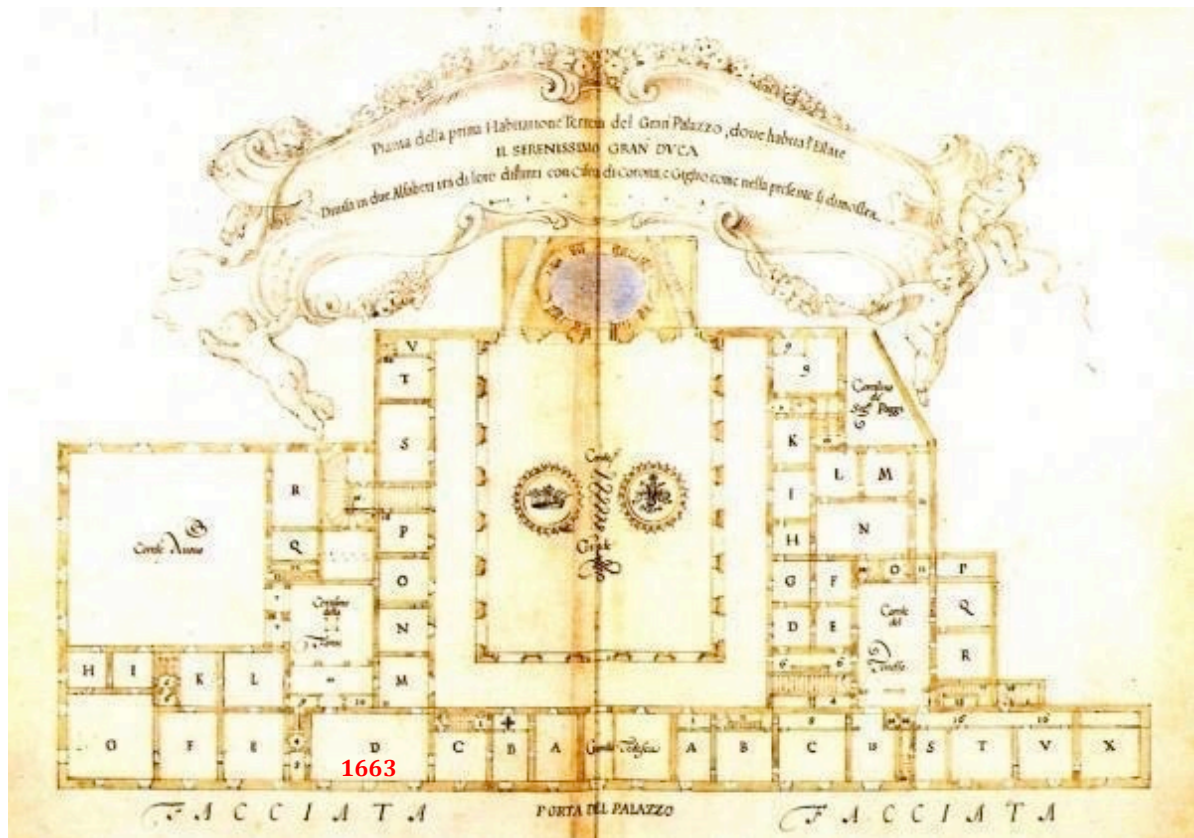


Fig. 9 – Third floor of the Pitti Palace, 1663

When the table is next clearly identified, in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, it has been returned to the ground floor, in one of the rooms of the present-day Museo degli Argenti which faces onto the unfinished courtyard, most likely in the *Camera del Consiglio* (Room L; fig. 8):

### Pitti Palace, 1761 Inventory

*Inventario de I Mobili e di tutt'altro che si ritrova nell'Imperial Palazzo de'Pitti di Firenze fatto per la consegna a Carlo Gilles Guardaroba del medesimo a tutto il di' 30 maggio 1761*

(Inventory of furniture and all else found in the Imperial Pitti Palace of Florence, completed for Carlo Gilles [Master of the] Wardrobe there, 30 May 1761)

*Quarta Camera che segue con cortile non finito... Appartamento detto Granducale, dove abitava il Serenissimo Duca Gio. Gastone*

([In the] fourth room which follows, with the unfinished courtyard... [making up part of the former] so-called Grand Ducal Apartment, where the Most Serene Duke Gian Gastone resided)

*Una tavola di marmo bianco impiallacciata di Lapis, Agata di Francia, diaspro di Sicilia, Diaspro Orientale, e Corniole Lunga B: a 2.  $\frac{3}{4}$  larga B: 1.  $\frac{5}{6}$  Con suo piede di noce con Quattro colonne tornite, con tre balze di velluto Cremisi contornate di frang:na di Seta, e Oro, e tutta macchiata fod: e di tela*

(A white marble table veneered with lapis, French agate, Sicilian jasper, oriental jasper, and carnelian, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{5}{6}$  braccia wide, with its feet of walnut with four turned columns, with three crimson velvet flounces edged with a little fringe (*frangina?*) of silk and gold, all of which are stained and lined (*foderate*) with cloth



Ten years later, the table has been moved to today's *Sala dell'Iliade* at the extreme left end of the *piano nobile*, named after its early-19<sup>th</sup> century frescos (Room E; fig. 10):

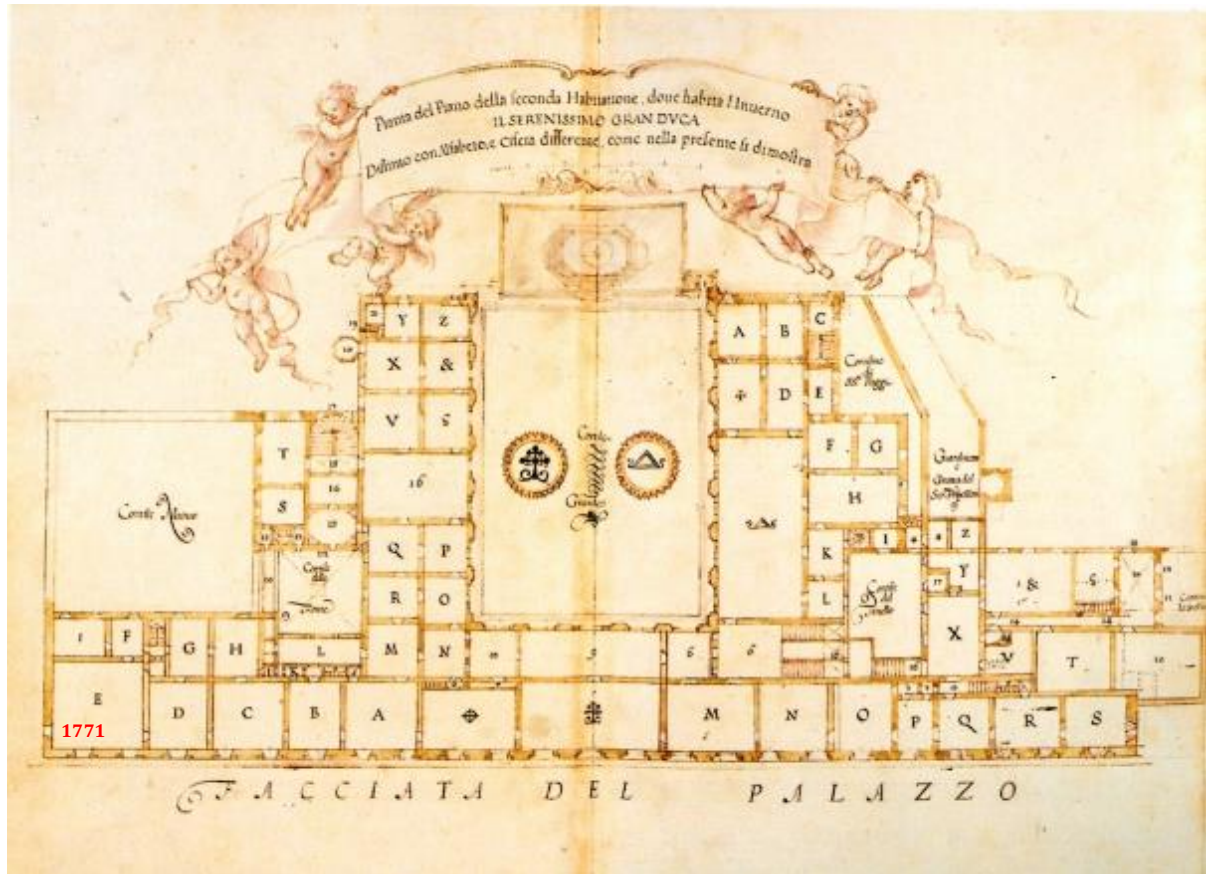


Fig. 10 – Second floor (*piano nobile*) of the Pitti Palace, 1663

### Pitti Palace, 1771 Inventory

*Inventario del R. Palazzo de' Pitti 1771*  
(Inventory of the Royal Pitti Palace, 1771)

*Sesta stanza detta de Novissimi con due finestre sulla Piazza e Terrazzino di Boboli*

[[In the] Sixth room, called 'of the Novissimi',<sup>14</sup> with two windows overlooking the piazza and terrace of the Boboli Gardens)

*Una tavola di marmo bianco in forma quadra, tutta commessa nel piano di Pietre dure diverse, cioe' Lapislazzuli, Agate, corniole, e alter, a formelle, e ovati di piu' grandezze, lunga B:a 2.14 lunga B:1.16 con piede di noce a colonnette tornite*

(A white marble, square-shaped table, its surface entirely inlaid with various *pietre dure*, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, and more besides, moulded and in ovals of great size, 2 <sup>14</sup>/<sub>20</sub> braccia long by 1 <sup>16</sup>/<sub>20</sub> braccia wide, with walnut columnated legs)

Twenty years on, the table remains on the *piano nobile*, most likely behind the famous suite of rooms decorated by Pietro da Cortona:

<sup>14</sup> *Novissimi* here refers to the *Sala dell'Iliade's* late-17<sup>th</sup> century decoration, on the theme of death, judgement, heaven and hell (the Four Last Things).



### **Pitti Palace, 1791 Inventory**

*Inventario dei Mobili e Biancheria del Real Palazzo Pitti 1791*  
(Inventory of furniture and linen in the Royal Pitti Palace, 1791)

*A di 25 settembre 1793?/Stanza che segue Seg:a di N:o 143... Retro Quartiere a quello detto di Pietro da Cortona compost di Otto stanze...*

(25 September 1793? / [The] room which follows, designated as number 143 [located in the] quarters behind that called 'by Pietro da Cortona' composed of eight rooms)

*Una Tavola di marmo bianco in forma quadra tutta commessa nel piano di Pietre dure diverse cioe' Lapislazzuli, Agate, Corniole, e alter, e formelle e ovati di piu' grandezze, lunga B:a 2. 14 larga B: a 1.16 con piedi a colonnette torniti, tinti bianchi, e filettati d'oro.*

(A white marble square-shaped table, its surface entirely inlaid with various *pietre dure*, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, and more besides, moulded and in ovals of great size, 2  $\frac{14}{20}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{16}{20}$  braccia wide, with walnut columnated legs, painted white and filleted with gold)

With the French Revolutionary occupation of Florence, the table enters a period of *guardaroba*:

### **Palazzo Vecchio, 1799 Inventory**

*Inventario dei mobili e tutt'altro che esiste nelle Stanze del Magazzino della R.Guardaroba Generale, 1799*

(Inventory of furniture and all else in the storerooms of the Royal Wardrobe General, 1799)

*A di' 28 Marzo 1800 Stanza a Terreno per uso gia' del Magistrato Supremo*  
(On 28 March 1800, the ground floor room once used by the Supreme Magistrate)

*Una Tavola Quadrilunga di marmo bianco commessovi pietre dure diverse cioe' Lapislazzuli, Agate, Corniole..a formelle, e ovati da B:a 2  $\frac{4}{5}$  E B:a 1  $\frac{4}{5}$ , e suo piede a colonnette intelaiato tinto bianco e filettato d'oro*

(An oblong quadrilateral table of white marble, inlaid with various *pietre dure*, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, etc., moulded and oval-shaped, 2  $\frac{4}{5}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{4}{5}$  braccia wide, with carved columnated legs, painted white and filleted with gold)

### **Palazzo Vecchio, 1804 Inventory**

*Inventario dei mobili e tutt'altro che esiste nelle stanze del Magazzino della R.Guardaroba Generale, 1804*

(Inventory of furniture and all else in the storerooms of the Royal Wardrobe General, 1804)

*A di' 22 detto (1805) Stanza a Terreno/ Per uso gia' del Magistrato Supremo*

(On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the said month, 1805, the ground floor room once used by the Supreme Magistrate)

*Una tavola quadrilunga di marmo bianco commessovi Pietre dure cioe' lapislazzuli agate, corniole ecc. A formelle e ovati da B.2  $\frac{4}{5}$  per B..a 1  $\frac{4}{5}$  e piede a colonnette intelaiato bianco e filettato di Oro*

(An oblong quadrilateral table of white marble, inlaid with various *pietre dure*, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, etc., moulded and oval-shaped, 2  $\frac{4}{5}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{4}{5}$  braccia wide, with carved columnated white legs, filleted with gold)

Once the table returns to regal use in the Pitti, the inventory citations are itemised numerically, and happily, throughout the first two-thirds of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these inventory numbers match those written on the top's underside (fig. 11).

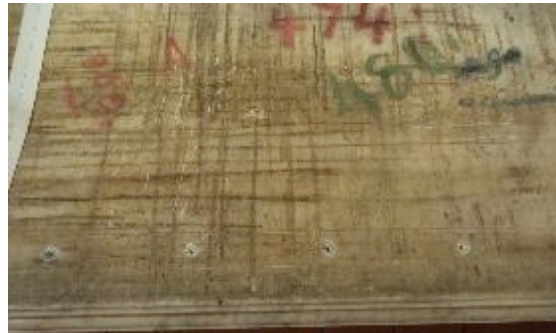


Fig. 11 – Part of the table-top's reverse

**Pitti Palace, 1804 Inventory, n.2970 (fig. 12)**

*Una tavola quadrilunga di marmo bianco commessovi Pietre dure cioè lapislazzuli, agate, corniole a formelle e ovati ... e piede a colonnette intelaiato bianco e filettato ... guasto*

(A white marble rectangular table, inlaid with moulded and oval pietre dure, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian... and [with] carved white columnated feet, filleted... damaged)



Fig. 12 – Inventory no. 2970 on the underside of the table-top

From 1815, we can locate the table precisely in all subsequent inventory records. It is placed on the ground floor, in one of the audience chambers named after Michelangelo Colonna (Room G, fig. 8):

**Pitti Palace, 1815 Inventory, n.290 (fig. 13)**

*Inventario dei Mobili e Biancherie dell'I. e R. Palazzo Pitti alla consegna del Guardaroba medesimo 1815*

(Inventory of furniture and linen of the Imperial and Royal Pitti Palace in the custody of the [Master of the] Wardrobe, 1815)

*Stanza che segue dipinta dal Colonna con finestra alta sulla Piazza e segnata di N. 12*

(The following room painted by Colonna with a tall window over the piazza, and numbered 12)

*290 Una Detta quadrilunga di marmo bianco lunga B 2 e soldi 16= larga B 1 e soldi 16 commessovi di pietra dura cioè, Lapis lazzoli Agate corniole a formelle e ovati, con piede a colonnetta intagliato tinto bianco e filettato d'oro*

(290. A white marble rectangular [table], 2  $\frac{16}{20}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{16}{20}$  braccia wide, inlaid with moulded and oval pietre dure, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, with carved columnated feet coloured white, and filleted in gold)

**Pitti Palace, 1819 Inventory, n.290 (fig. 13)**

*Inventario dei mobili, Generi Nobili, Biancheria, Rami, Ottoni esistenti nei nell'I e R.Palazzo Pitti 1819*

(Inventory of furniture, noble products, linen, copper and brass in the Imperial and Royal Pitti Palace, 1819)

*Stanza che segue dipinta dal Colonna con finestra alta sulla Piazza segnata di N. 12 / =13=*  
(The following room painted by Colonna with a tall window over the piazza, numbered 12 / =13=)

*480 a c. 20. 290. Una Detta quadrilunga di marmo bianco lunga B.a 2 soldi 16 larga B.a 1 soldi 16 commessovi di pietra dura, cioè Lapislzzuli, Agate, corniole a formelle e ovali, con piede a colonnetta intagliato, tinto bianco, e filettato d'oro*

(480 a c. 20. 290. A white marble rectangular [table], 2  $\frac{16}{20}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{16}{20}$  braccia wide, inlaid with moulded and oval pietre dure, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, with carved columnated feet coloured white, and filleted in gold)



Fig. 13 – Inventory no. 290 on the underside of the table-top

**Pitti Palace, 1829 Inventory, n.480 (fig. 14)**

*N. 13 / Stanza dipinta dal Colonna con finestra alta sulla Piazza segnata nel Vecchio Inventario di N. 12*

(No. 13 / Room painted by Colonna with a tall window over the piazza, numbered 12 in the old inventory)

*480 Una Tavola Quadrilunga di Marmo bianco lunga B:a 2 per  $\frac{3}{4}$  larga B:a 1  $\frac{5}{6}$  commessovi di Pietre dure, cioè lapislazzuli, Agata, Corniole, Sardoniche Orientali Laorate a formelle ovali, con Piedi a Colonneta intagliato tinto bianco, e filettato d'oro. 290*  
(480 [new number] A white marble rectangular table, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  braccia long by 1  $\frac{5}{6}$  braccia wide, inlaid with pietre dure, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, and oriental onyx, fashioned into oval moulds, with carved columnated feet coloured white, and filleted in gold. 290 [old number])



Fig. 14 – Inventory no. 480 on the underside of the table-top

**Pitti Palace, 1846 Inventory, n.860 (fig. 15)**

*Stanza N. 24 / Con finestra sulla Piazza dipinta da Colonna segnata nel Vecchio Inventario di N. 13*

(Room no. 24 / With a tall window over the piazza, painted by Colonna, numbered 13 in the old inventory)

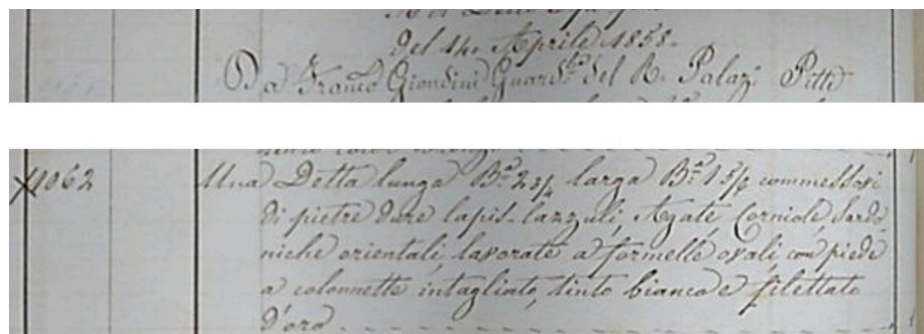
*860 Una detta lunga B. 2 e 3/4 larga B. 1 e 5/6 commessovi di pietre dure, lapislazzuli agate, corniole sardoniche orientali, lavorate a formelle ovali con piedi a colonnetta intagliato tinto bianco e filettato d'oro. 480*

(860 [new number]. A [white marble rectangular table], 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> braccia long by 1 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>6</sub> braccia wide, inlaid with pietre dure, i.e. lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, and oriental onyx, fashioned into oval moulds, with carved columnated feet coloured white, and filleted in gold. 480 [old number])



Fig. 15 – Inventory no. 860 on the underside of the table-top

Finally, in April 1858, it leaves the Pitti Palace and is transferred to the Galleria dei Lavori (now the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Via Alfani), which under its director Antonio Landi had been physically embellished in advance of an official visit by Grand Duke Leopoldo II in June of that year:<sup>15</sup>



**Moved to the Galleria dei lavori (now the Opificio delle pietre dure) in 1858**

*1858, 14 aprile In credito per Giustif: N 1308 e N. 600 passata all'Inventario della Galleria dei Lavori alla consegna del direttore Landi Giustii. N. 1308*

(14 April 1858, in credit to account for: N 1308, and N. 600 has passed over to the Galleria dei Lavori inventory, on its delivery to the director Landi, accounted for. N. 1308)

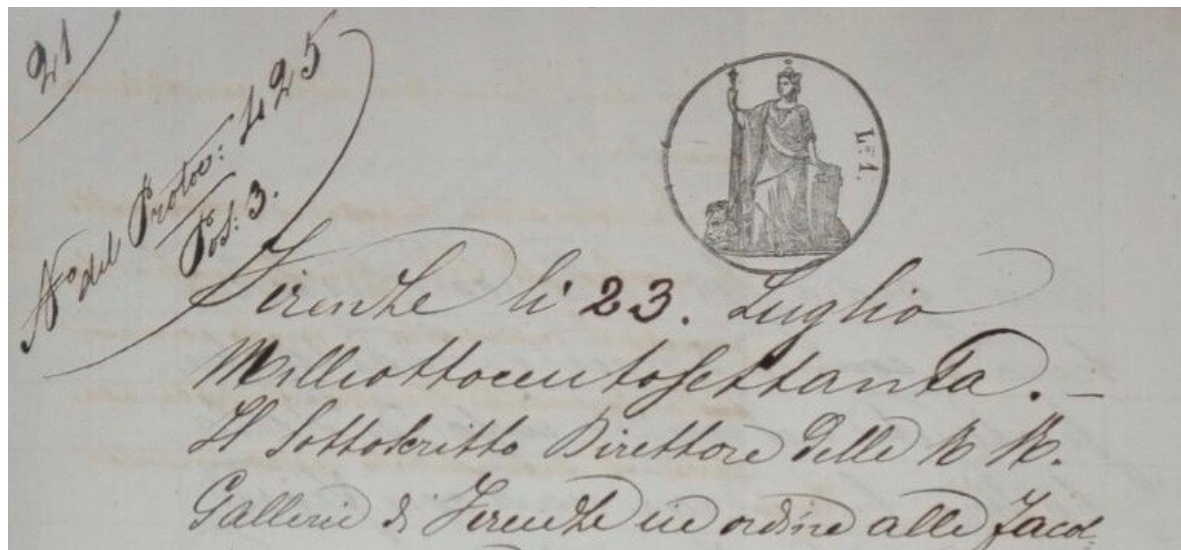
From this point on, wider political events overtake the fate of our table. As the Italian *Risorgimento* (unification) unfolds, the new state authorises its sale. In 1870, with the annexation of Rome to the Kingdom of Italy and the ending of Florence's status as its capital, the

<sup>15</sup> Landi had been director from 1853, and began the restructuring of the manufactory's headquarters the following year, as explained in Zuffanelli 2005, pp. 324-9.



sale of the table-top by the Opificio to the Anglo-Italian artist and dealer William Blundell Spence – the bill made out to “Guglielmo Spence” – is authorised by the new state.

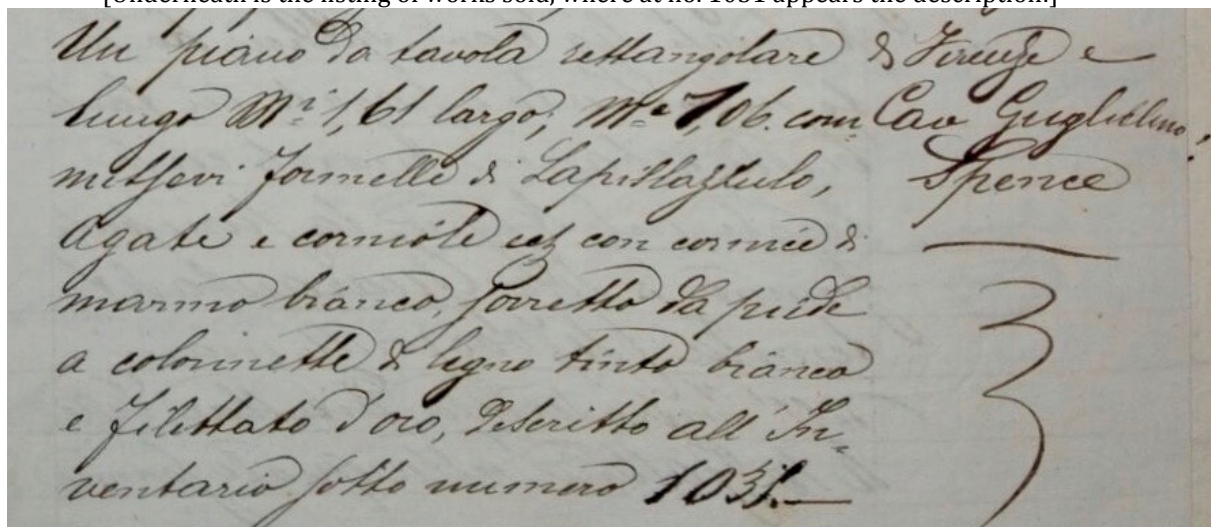
**Gallerie Fiorentine, 23 July 1870, no. 1031**



*Vendita di oggetti in Pietre Dure. / Il Signor Ministro delle Finanze ha autorizzato il Ricevitore Demaniale di Firenze a riscuotere da Lei le lire 47 mila prezzo degli oggetti in pietre dure vendute al Signor Guglielmo Spence. / Prego di eseguire il versamento della somma ragguagliandomene per mio governo. / Il Ministro G. Cantoni*

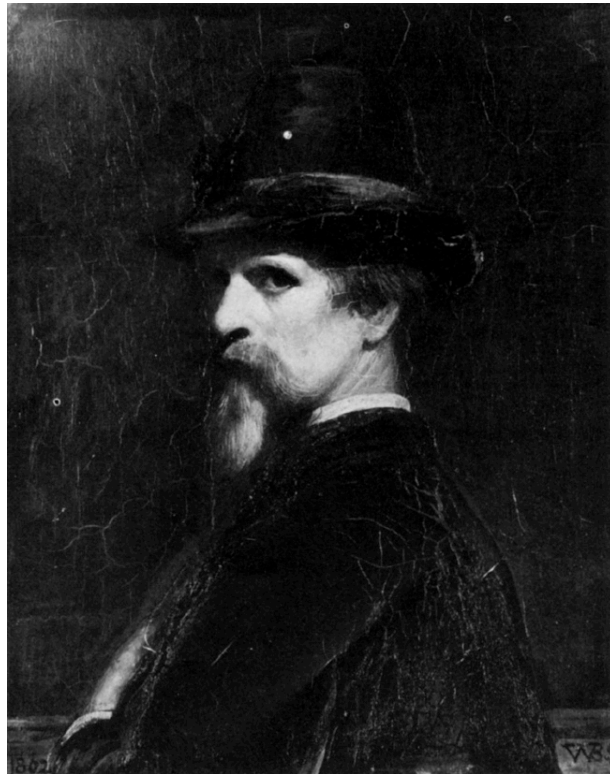
(Sale of objects in pietre dure | The Finance Minister has authorised the Receiver of Florentine State Property to collect from you the 47,000 lire, the price of the objects in pietre dure sold to Mr. Guglielmo [William] Spence | Please pay the sum, informing me of it for my good governance | The Minister G. Cantoni)

[Underneath is the listing of works sold, where at no. 1031 appears the description:]



*Un piano di tavola rettangolare lungo m.i 1,61 largo, m.i 1,06 commessovi formelle di lapislazzulo, agate e corniole ed con cornice di marmo bianco, sorretto da piede a colonnette di legno tinto bianco e filettato d'oro, descritto all'Inventario sotto numero 1031*

(A rectangular table-top, 1.61m long and 1.06m wide, inlaid with moulded pieces of lapis lazuli, agate and carnelian, enframed in white marble, supported by columnated wooden legs, coloured white and filleted in gold, described in the inventory under number 1031)



William Blundell Spence, *Self-portrait*, 1862. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

After a peripatetic Continental upbringing and artistic training, Spence moved permanently to Florence in 1836, and soon after began to deal in Old Masters. In 1860, a large inheritance allowed him to purchase the Villa Medici in the surrounding Fiesole hills, a splendid setting befitting his status as the leading British *marchand-amateur* active in the city, which has been amply documented by John Fleming in a pair of *Burlington Magazine* articles published in 1979. Throughout the *Risorgimento* years, he hosted leading collectors, and figures representing London's great museums, supplying them with important paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts. Spence counted Hugh Lupus Grosvenor (1825-1899) amongst his many aristocratic clients. In 1870 alone, he sold the then 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Westminster portraits by Moretto, Moroni, Titian and the painting of Grand Duke Francesco II's dogs and dwarf in the Boboli Gardens by Tiberio di Tito.<sup>16</sup> It now seems likely that the acquisition of the Francesco I de' Medici table-top was made on behalf of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess.

#### GROSVENOR PROVENANCE

The table next appears illustrated in England, 19 years later, in the possession of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Westminster (figs. 16 and 17). When was photographed in the gallery of Grosvenor House, in July 1889, the year in which the Duke electrified his palatial home in London's Mayfair district (fig. 18). The early 1870s had seen the then 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Westminster extensively renovate the house, with furniture and furnishings supplied by Holland and Sons to the value of some £6,481. This table-top was acquired specifically in order to amplify the magnificence of the Grosvenors' enlarged and modernised London seat.

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<sup>16</sup> Fleming 1979, III, p. 570, n. 25



Figs. 16 and 17 – John Everett Millais, *Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Westminster (1825-1899)*, 1872 (Collection of the Duke of Westminster), and the arms of the Grosvenor Dukes of Westminster



Fig. 18 – The Gallery, Grosvenor House, Mayfair, London, in July 1889; detail of the table at left



The table passed directly from the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke to his grandson, Hugh Richard Arthur Grosvenor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Westminster (1879-1953). Educated at Eton, and following service in both the Boer and First World Wars, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke became known for his sociable affairs, counting Coco Chanel amongst his many lovers (fig. 19). On his decease, then-record death duties of £18m led to a sale of his property, held by Sotheby's in 1959, where this table appeared as lot 166.



Fig. 19 – The 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Westminster and Coco Chanel, 1924

November 2017, New York and London,

LUCA BURZIO and STEPHEN WRIGHT.

#### APPENDIX – PITTI PALACE FLOORPLANS

The floorplans reproduced in figs. 8-10 above are taken from:

Iacinto Maria di Francesco Marmi, *Norma per il guardarobba del Gran Palazzo della citta di Firenze dove habita il Ser.mo Gran Duca di Toscana*, Florence, n.d. [1663]

The key employed, but not here reproduced for the sake of brevity, is that compiled in: Sergio Bertelli, 'Palazzo Pitti dai Medici ai Savoia', in Anna Bellinazzi and Alessandra Contini (eds.) *La Corte di Toscana dai Medici ai Lorena: Atti delle Giornate di Studio, Firenze, Archivio di Stato e Palazzo Pitti, 15-16 dicembre 1997*, Florence, 2002, Appendix V, pp. 77-92.

Marmi's floorplans can be confidently dated to 1663 as follows:

- Marmi is described in the 1663 Pitti inventory as the 'new' Master of the Wardrobe
- The room marked 'R' on the left-hand side of the third floor is that of the 'bambino' Prince Ferdinando's room. The eldest son of Grand Duke Cosimo III, Ferdinando was born in August 1663
- Whereas there are no rooms designated for Principe Gian Carlo, the second son of Grand Duke Cosimo II, who died in January 1663, there are several for Princes Mattias and Leopoldo, Cosimo II's third and fifth sons, who were both still alive at this time



