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A Polychrome Marble Intarsia Table With Bronze Trapezophoroi

Intarsia of Sicilian jasper, *nero di Belgio*, *giallo di Siena*, Carrara white, *pavonazzetto*, and *verde antico*; bronze base

Naples (tabletop) and Rome (base)

Early 18th century (tabletop) and late 19th century (base)

78 × 155 × 75 cm (30¾ × 61 × 29½ in.)



The word *trapezophoron*, literally “table-bearer,” from the Greek τράπεζα (table) and φέρειν (to carry), is said of a table leg, most often in marble or bronze, carved in the form of a lion, panther, or griffin head. Among the Romans, these tables with *theriomorphic* — that is, whose support takes the form of an animal, from the Greek θηρίον (wild beast) and μορφή (form) — *trapezophoroi* were frequently used to display vases and were accordingly known as *mensae vasariae* (vase tables).



The intarsia tabletop.

The *mensa vasaria* with winged lion protomes, found behind the impluvium of the *domus Cornelia*, the house of Cornelius Rufus at Pompeii, is among the finest examples of the type. The bronze base of the present table, however, replicates the *trapezophoroi* of yet another antique model, a tripod held in the Naples Archaeological Museum, whose expressive, shaggy lion heads spring from a powerful paw, the skin of which curls away in a pattern reminiscent of the acanthus leaf. This tripod — itself a *mensa vasaria*, and one of the finest of its kind, according to Overbeck — was likewise discovered at Pompeii, this time in the *triclinium* of the *Haus des kleinen Mosaikbrunnens*, the *Casa degli Scienziati*, excavated between 1839 and 1845. The casting of this base is almost certainly Italian work of

the late nineteenth or early twentieth century; it reproduces the antique faithfully, though with a slight elongation in height.

These bronze *trapezophoroi* support a marble top of considerably earlier date, predating both their casting and the discovery of the Pompeian *mensae*. It is a re-use of an *antependium* with *intarsia* of flowers and foliated scrolls combining Sicilian jasper, *nero di Belgio*, *giallo di Siena* and Carrara marble as well as *pavonazzetto*, the whole framed in *verde antico*. The *intarsia* is in all likelihood an early eighteenth-century work and has undergone some discreet restoration.

LITERATURE

See Overbeck, *Pompeji in seinen Gebäuden*, Leipzig, 1884. On the use, in the eighteenth century, of *verde antico* frames for *piani di tavolo*, see Roettgen and González-Palacios, *The Art of Mosaics: Selections from the Gilbert Collection*, Los Angeles, 1984. On *nero di Belgio* and the other marbles, see Borghini, *Marmi antichi*, Rome, 2004.

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