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A Pair of Bronze *Tazze* with *Bucrania* Friezes

Patinated bronze, the plinths inset with plaques of steatite or
albarese and brass

Italy

Early 19th century

32 x 26,5 x 26,5 cm (12.6 x 10.45 x 10.45 in.)



This pair of cups, or *tazze*, almost certainly belongs to the orbit of either the Manfredini in Milan or the Valadier in Rome — both workshops fluent in casting bronze friezes of *bucrania* and *encarpa* whose modeling and chasing rival the one running around the flared rim of each cup. That frieze is expertly worked here, its *encarpa* — the swags of flowers and fruit — treated individually, and so asymmetrically.

Luigi Manfredini became a master of the *bucrania*-and-*encarpa* motif in bronze. Eugène de Beauharnais, then Viceroy of Italy, had invited him and his brothers to Milan to found a workshop capable of rivaling the luxury bronzesmith work of Rome and Paris. His masterpiece was a bronze tripod after the much-copied example from the Temple of Isis at Pompeii, presented to Napoleon and Marie-Louise in 1811 and subsequently repeated in several versions — at least six of them at the Bavarian court by the close of the nineteenth century,¹ one at the Hofburg, one at Pavlovsk.² The medallion set into the bottom of each cup reinforces the connection: a three-quarter Pallas Athena in *mezzo rilievo*, helmeted in the Corinthian manner, bearing the aegis bordered with interlaced serpents and the *gorgoneion*. This is the type of the Pallas of Velletri — unearthed in Rome in 1797 and received in Paris with great ceremony in 1803,³ the very years in which the Manfredini are documented in the city.⁴ The goddess is flanked by the initials “L. M.” in relief against a broad matte ground and encircled by an ouroboros. Those initials answer to the mark of Luigi Manfredini, who signed in this way on occasion — as on two candelabra delivered to the Palazzo Reale in Milan.

The Valadier, however, used the same motif no less freely: first in the Salone d’Oro of the Palazzo Chigi in Rome, and again on a pair of candelabra now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. The strongest parallel is at the Palazzo Borghese. There, for a series of plinths now in the Sala Egizia, Luigi Valadier cut a

frieze very close to the one on these cups — the ribbons, or *vittae*, that bind the fruit swags passing first across the brow of each *bucranium*, vanishing behind it, then rising again to loop around each horn.⁵ The stone of the substantial molded plinths supporting the two cups may strengthen this Roman reading, the Valadier having possibly used a comparable stone for a reduction of the *Artemis of Ephesus*.

NOTES

1. Viscardi, 1880, p. 10
2. D’Aglia et al., 2008, p. 181
3. Haskell, 1981, p. 284 *sq.*
4. Colle, 2001, p. 290
5. Coliva, 2019, no. 5, p. 196

LITERATURE

See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique. The Lure of Classical Sculpture. 1500-1900*, New Haven, 1981, Enrico Colle, *Bronzi Decorativi in Italia. Bronzisti e fonditori italiani dal Seicento all’Ottocento*, Milan, 2001 ; Andriana D’Aglia et al., *Ricordi dell’Antico. Sculture, porcellane e arredi all’epoca del Grand Tour*, Milan, 2008 and Anne Coliva et al., *Valadier. Splendore nella Roma del Settecento*, Milan, 2019.

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