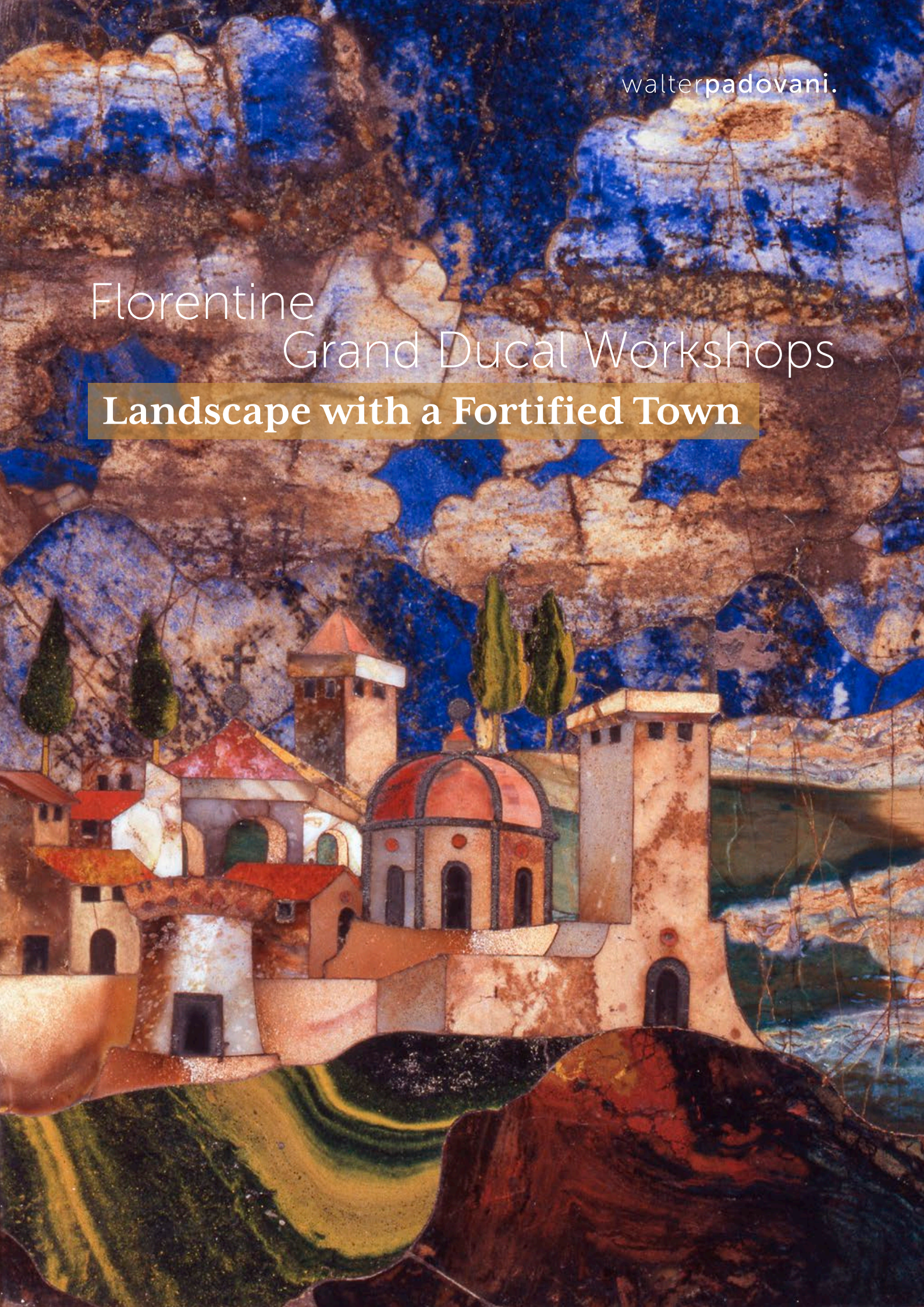


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Florentine  
Grand Ducal Workshops  
**Landscape with a Fortified Town**



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Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops

*Landscape with a Fortified Town, 1610 ca.*

Hardstones (Persian lapis lazuli, agate, red and green Sicilian jasper, striped green-and-yellow Sicilian jasper, Bohemian jasper, Corsican jasper, chalcedony, black paste of powdered marble);

22 × 35 cm (without frame), 32 × 45 cm (with gilt-bronze frame with insets of red Cypriot jasper)

PROVENANCE: Liverpool, Gillaird & Kidson, c. 1880; London, Sotheby's, *European Works of Art and Sculpture Including "The Dancing Faun" by Adrien de Vries*, 7 December 1989, lot 286; Europe, private collection.

The hardstones *commesso* depicts a rural landscape dominated by a wide sky rising above gently rolling Tuscan hills, punctuated here and there by clusters of cypress trees. Slightly off-centre stands a tree set on a rocky

outcrop, with a small lake visible behind it. On the left appears a small, fortified town, enclosed by high walls, a tower, and a bastion; among its

I. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops,  
*Landscape with a Fortified Town, c. 1610*



2. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops, *Landscape with a Fortified Town*, detail, c. 1610

buildings, a church with a *campanile* and an adjacent octagonal structure—possibly a baptistery—topped by a ribbed dome are the most distinctive elements (figs. 1, 2).

The scene is assembled from thinly cut hardstones, each slab meticulously shaped to fit the composition and selected for its inherent chromatic and textural qualities. As Agostino del Riccio observed as early as 1597, the «various fantasies and caprices that nature devises in stones»<sup>1</sup> were precisely what drove stonecutters, mosaicists, and even painters to the quarries to study these «marks» and choose the most suitable materials.<sup>2</sup> The *pietre dure* technique—exceptionally intricate

and sophisticated—required the coordinated efforts of several highly specialised artists and craftsmen, most of whom were either native to Florence or had settled in the capital of the Grand Duchy.

Although the practice of inlaying hard and soft stones dates back to antiquity,<sup>3</sup> its fullest revival in early modern Europe occurred in Florence.<sup>4</sup> The first Grand Dukes—Cosimo I de' Medici, and even more so his successor Francesco I—cultivated a pronounced taste for such objects, thereby stimulating the proliferation of workshops established to meet courtly demands. The formal creation of the *Galleria dei Lavori* at the Uffizi, instituted by Ferdinand I de' Medici through a patent letter dated

1 Agostino del Riccio, *Istoria delle pietre*, Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 230, [1597], ed. in transcription, Memofonte, 2007, online only, fol. 12r.

2 Claudia Przyborowski, in *Splendori di pietre dure: l'arte di corte nella Firenze dei granduchi*, exhibition catalogue (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, 1988–1989), ed. by Annamaria Giusti, Florence 1988, p. 120, cat. 19.

3 For a concise overview of the subject, see Wolfram Koeppe, *Mysterious and Prized: Hardstones in Human History before the Renaissance*, in *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), ed. by Wolfram Koeppe, Annamaria Giusti, New York 2008, pp. 2–11.

4 Annamaria Giusti, *Roman Inlay and Florentine Mosaics: The New Art of Pietre Dure*, in *Art of the Royal Court* 2008, cited in note 3, pp. 12–27.



3-4 Francesco di Gaspero Salina or Camillo di Ottaviano Porfirio (after a design by Bernardino Poccetti),  
*Tuscan Landscapes*, 1608. Florence, Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure.



3 September 1588,<sup>5</sup> placed these numerous Florentine workshops under a single administrative framework, effectively transforming them into Grand Ducal manufactories directly dependent on the Medici court.<sup>6</sup>

The style of the present *commesso*, together with the specific assortment of stones employed, aligns with the most characteristic productions executed in Florence in the early seventeenth century. More specifically, the composition recalls the so-called *Tuscan Landscapes* (figs. 3, 4), two panels created by

Francesco di Gaspero Salina or Camillo di Ottaviano Porfirio after a drawing supplied to the *Galleria dei Lavori* in 1608 by the renowned painter Bernardino Poccetti (1548–1612).<sup>7</sup> Now housed in the Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure but originally commissioned for the ciborium of the altar in the Cappella dei Principi at San Lorenzo, these pastoral scenes share not only stylistic parallels in the rendering of elements such as trees and hills, but also notable affinities in the choice of stones used to represent comparable natural features.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Zobi, *Notizie storiche sull'origine e progressi dei lavori di commesso in pietre dure che si eseguono nell'I. e R. stabilimento di Firenze*, 2nd ed., Florence 1853, pp. 162–165.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the bibliography already cited, see also Annamaria Giusti, *Pietre Dure. The Art of Semiprecious Stonework*, English ed., Los Angeles 2006, pp. 47–108.

<sup>7</sup> A. Giusti, in *Art of the Royal Court* 2008, cited in note 3, p. 152, cat. 27 (with previous bibliography).



Moreover, the firmly constructed perspective of the townscape reflects early seventeenth-century Florentine visual culture, as does the typology of the fortified architectural complex. Throughout his career, Poccetti regularly supplied designs for mosaicists, some of which were executed after his death. One such case is the panel of *The Fall of Manna*, assembled in hardstone by Giovanni Battista Sassi—nephew of Bernardino and Cristofano Gaffurri—in 1620, eight years after Poccetti's death (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> Sassi's precious work, commissioned as

the central piece of the *paliotto* for the high altar of San Lorenzo in Florence, was flanked by two additional scenes: *A Landscape with Grape Harvesters* (fig. 6) and *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (fig. 7).<sup>9</sup> Although more heavily animated by figures, these rural views echo Poccetti's style and share affinities with the *Tuscan Landscapes*. Comparison between the present *Landscape* and the San Lorenzo mosaics—datable to the 1610s—is therefore highly relevant for placing the execution of the work discussed here in early seventeenth-century Florence.



5. Giovanni Battista Sassi (after a design by Bernardino Poccetti, before 1612), *The Fall of the Manna*, 1620. Florence, San Lorenzo, High Altar, Antependium.

<sup>8</sup> Annamaria Giusti, in *La Cappella dei Principi e le pietre dure a Firenze*, ed. by Umberto Baldini, Annamaria Giusti, Annapaula Pampaloni Martelli, Milan 1979, pp. 301–302, cat. 123.1.

<sup>9</sup> Annamaria Giusti, *Sotto il segno dei Medici*, in *La fabbrica delle meraviglie. La manifattura delle pietre dure a Firenze*, ed. by Eadem, Florence 2015, pp. 22–23.



6-7. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops, *A Landscape with Grape Harvesters* and *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1610-20.  
Florence, San Lorenzo, High Altar, Antependium.

At the Galleria Borghese in Rome there is a group of hardstone plaques that may have entered the collection by 1633.<sup>10</sup> Such works held a clear appeal for Cardinal Scipione Borghese, whose interest in *commessi* is documented from at least 1612.<sup>11</sup> Within this group of six, two landscapes

are especially noteworthy: one depicting *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (fig. 8), the other tentatively identified as *The Promised Land* (fig. 9). In 1971, Sara Staccioli compared these mosaics with the *Tuscan Landscapes* and, more specifically, with the flanking scenes of the San Lorenzo's *paliotto*. Beyond their overall ar-



8-9. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops (?), *The Promised Land* and *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1610-20. Rome, Galleria Borghese.

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Iommelli, in *Meraviglie senza tempo. Pittura su pietra a Roma nel Seicento*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Galleria Borghese, 2022), ed. by Francesca Cappelletti, Patrizia Cavazzini, Rome 2022, pp. 238-239, cat. VI.9-VI.10.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Staccioli, in *Opere in mosaico, intarsi e pietra paesina*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Galleria Borghese, 1971), ed. by Sara Staccioli, Rome 1971, p. 17.



10. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops, *A Landscape with Grape Harvesters*, detail, 1610–20. Florence, San Lorenzo, High Altar, Antependium.



11. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops (?), *The Promised Land*, detail, 1610–20. Rome, Galleria Borghese.

rangement and selection of stones, the *Grape Harvesters* of the Florentine panel are strikingly close to the two figures carrying grapes in the Borghese plaque of *The Promised Land* (figs. 10–11). On these grounds, Staccioli proposed that the two Borghese mosaics were produced in Florence, within the grand-ducal workshops.<sup>12</sup> She further distinguished these likely Florentine works from two other plaques—*A Landscape with the Penitent Magdalene* and *A Landscape with a Washerwoman*—which she regarded as Bohemian, based on their stylistic traits and characteristic stones. These she attributed to the workshop of Cosimo and Giovanni Castrucci.<sup>13</sup> Trained in Florence but active in Prague at the imperial court of Rudolf II, the Castrucci were among the leading specialists in hardstone mosaic.<sup>14</sup> Cosimo is documented in Prague from 1595 until his death in 1602, and his son Giovanni appears as a permanent resident from 1605 onward.<sup>15</sup> Some of Staccioli's ideas have recently been revisited by Antonio Iommelli, who assigns all six Borghese plaques to the Castrucci workshop, adding to the four previously discussed two further *commessi* of a lesser quality and divergent style.<sup>16</sup> His proposal rests on the idea that the Castrucci maintained Italian «branches», likely in Florence and possibly also in Rome, which continued to operate after their move to the imperial court of Prague.<sup>17</sup> The current state of research does not allow a precise reconstruction of the organisation of the Castrucci workshop, which in any case developed multiple family branches across Europe. It is worth noting, however, that in 1611 Giovanni was invited, unsuccessfully, to return to Florence to assume the position previously held by the Caroni brothers at the Grand Ducal *Opificio*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16–21, cat. 5–6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16–21, cat. 7–8.

<sup>14</sup> On the Castrucci workshop, see Rudolf Distelberger, *The Castrucci and the Miseroni: Prague, Florence, Milan*, in *Art of the Royal Court*, 2008, cited in note 3, pp. 28–39.

<sup>15</sup> For the family, see also Jarmila Krcálová–Kirsten Aschengreen Piacenti, *Castrucci*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. XXII, Rome 1971, consulted online.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Iommelli, 'Petrae volant, scripta manent': tracce di pietre in casa Borghese nel XVII secolo, in *Meraviglie senza tempo* 2022, cited in note 10, pp. 103–114.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*, in *Meraviglie senza tempo* 2022, cited in note 10, pp. 238–239, cat. VI.9–VI.10.

<sup>18</sup> Piacenti 1971, cited in note 15, online.



12-13. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops, *Landscape with a Fortified Town*, detail of the frame, c. 1610

Documents from March 1617 (common style) record complaints from the Florentine administration regarding the incomplete execution of several works commissioned from Castrucci for the Cappella dei Principi, subsequently assigned to his son, Cosimo the Younger, for completion.<sup>19</sup> Further archival material, mostly dating to 1617–18, reveals that after Giovanni's death many

of his valuable hardstones were sold to Cosimo II de' Medici by the artist's son-in-law, Giuliano di Piero Pandolfini, himself an accomplished mosaicist.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, documents published by Costantino Bulgari indicate that seventeenth-century Rome was also home to the goldsmith and jeweller Giovanni Battista Castrucci and his sons Francesco and Silvestro, who were certainly related to the

<sup>19</sup> Distelberger 2008, cited in note 14, p. 32.

Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASFi), *Mediceo del Principato*, 4954, unnumbered (26 March 1616; Florentine style): «I believe I have already written to Your Most Illustrious Lordship that Marquis Georg Friedrich of Baden, who once sent some horses to the Grand Duke [Cosimo II de' Medici], was seeking the title of Highness. And a certain Filippo Hainofer, whom I understand to be a gentleman of Augsburg in his service, has written to me about this. [...] As for the works that [Giovanni] Castrucci had for the service of this Chapel, the Grand Duke is content that his sons [including Cosimo Castrucci] should finish them, especially as soon as the brother-in-law [Giuliano di Piero Pandolfini] will arrive here from Milan».

<sup>20</sup> ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 4954, unnumbered (21 October 1617): «[...] Your Most Illustrious Lordship recently submitted to the Grand Duke [Cosimo II de' Medici] the matter concerning the jaspers that the son-in-law [Giuliano di Piero Pandolfini] of [Giovanni] Castrucci wished to sell. [...] His Highness has commanded me to inform Your Most Illustrious Lordship that, since the stones fall into many price categories, he would appreciate receiving a more detailed list, specifying how many stones there are in each category and what their sizes are; and, if convenient, a small sample of each type might be sent. [Vincenzo] Giugni also recalls that, in fixing prices, as much moderation as possible should be shown, for His Highness has no need to buy costly stones, having recently received many from different parts of the world, especially jaspers of exceptional beauty. According to the distinctions Your Most Illustrious Lordship has sent me, the stones fall into four categories—four prices—of one, two, three, and four scudi per pound. And thus we await information as to how many pounds there are of each category, although, as said above, some indication of the size of the pieces is also desired [...]»

ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 4954, unnumbered (3 February 1618): «[...] As for those stones belonging to the son-in-law [Giuliano di Piero Pandolfini] of [Giovanni] Castrucci, of which, if I recall correctly, Your Most Illustrious Lordship sent the samples, I can say only that His Highness [Cosimo II de' Medici] has given them to the *cavalier* [Vincenzo] Giugni and I thought he had already issued some instructions there. When I now inquired of his son, Signor Niccolò, he told me that nothing suitable for the Gallery [of the Uffizi] was found among them and that they would only be interested, if available, in some pieces of *plasma* or other stone with a fine green colour [...]»





14. Giovanni Campi (after a model by François Duquesnoy), *Bacchanal of Putti*, 1649–50. Rome, Galleria Borghese.

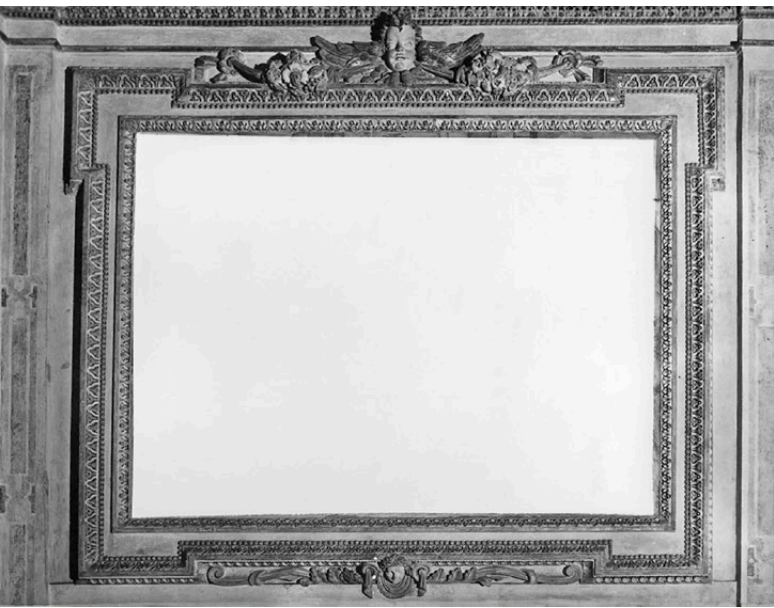
Florentine branch of the family, although the precise nature of the relationship remains unclear.<sup>21</sup>

One distinctive feature of the present *Landscape* is its original gilt-bronze frame with insets of Cypriot jasper, surmounted by a hanging piece composed of intertwined scrolls and a central cherub's head (figs. 12, 13). This refined creation bears a close stylistic and typological affinity to the frame of the *Bacchanal of Putti* in the Galleria Borghese, ex-

ecuted around 1649–50 by Giovanni Campi after designs by François Duquesnoy (fig. 14).<sup>22</sup> As far as current knowledge allows, such a frame type finds no direct counterpart in Florentine production of the early Seicento, whereas related objects appear within Roman culture of the same period. Regardless of the differing materials, a comparable type of frame may be identified, for instance, among the gilded stucco decorations of the Cappella del-

<sup>21</sup> Costantino Bulgari, *Argentieri, gemmari e orafi d'Italia. Notizie storiche e raccolta dei loro contrassegni, con la riproduzione grafica dei punzoni individuali e dei punzoni di Stato*, 6 vols., Roma 1958–1974, I, 1958, p. 264.

<sup>22</sup> M. G. Barberini, in *Galleria Borghese. Catalogo generale. I. Scultura moderna*, ed. by Anna Coliva, with the collaboration of Vittoria Brunetti, Rome 2022, pp. 200–203, cat. 37. The similarities between the frame of the *Landscape* discussed here and that of the *Bacchanal of Putti* in the Galleria Borghese were first noted by Walter Padovani and Svetlana Barni.



15. Anonymous stucco worker (possibly Roman), *Frame*, c. 1613.  
Rome, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Chapel of the Madonna of Loreto.



16. Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops, *Landscape with a Fortified Town*, detail of the back, c. 1610

la Madonna di Loreto in Santa Maria in Aracoeli, where the painter Marzio Ganassini worked around 1613, assisted by an anonymous decorator responsible for the ornamental elements (fig. 15).<sup>23</sup>

The early provenance of the *Landscape* remains unknown, though a fragmentary late-nineteenth-century label on the reverse provides some clues (fig. 16). The partially preserved address «13 South John» and the truncated word «Liverpool» correspond to the premises of Gillaird & Kidson, active there in 1879–80.<sup>24</sup> Founded by James Gillaird and later reshaped into an antiquarian gallery by his versatile partner Henry Edwin Kidson—collector, *marchand-amateur*, and celebrated chess

player—the business remained active until 1910.<sup>25</sup> The *commesso* resurfaced on the English market in 1989 at the Sotheby's sale that also included Adriaen de Vries's *Dancing Faun*, now at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup>

The *Landscape* survives in excellent condition. Beyond the overall integrity of the stones and the gilding of the bronze elements, the work retains its original black paste of powdered marble, applied in low relief to sharpen certain contours, such as the structure of the domed building glimpsed amid the chalcedony cluster of houses. The preservation of this marble paste is rare, as the material is highly susceptible to wear and surface abrasion.

<sup>23</sup> Marina Carta, Laura Russo, *Santa Maria in Aracoeli*, Rome 1988, pp. 134–136.

<sup>24</sup> *The Commercial Directory and Shippers Guide*, 11th ed., Liverpool 1879–1880, p. 398.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly's *Directory of Liverpool & Birkenhead*, Liverpool 1894, II, pp. 154, 158; Gore's *Directory of Liverpool & Birkenhead*, Liverpool 1900, I, p. 47; III, p. 1609. For additional biographical information, see *The British Chess Magazine*, vol. 27, pp. 143–144 especially; Henry E. Kidson was the father of the folk musician Frank Kidson, who in his youth worked as a landscape painter (see Dennis Child, *Painters in the Northern Counties of England and Wales*, Leeds 1994, 2nd ed. 2002, p. 121).

<sup>26</sup> *European Works of Art and Sculpture Including "The Dancing Faun" by Adrien de Vries*, auction catalogue (London, Sotheby's), 7 December 1989, lot 286.



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