



Five Centuries: Furniture & Works of Art inc. Property of the Earls of Crawford & Balcarres (609)

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Lot 500

Estimate: £3000 - £5000 + Fees

ATTRIBUTED TO GIUSEPPE PIAMONTINI (ITALIAN, 1664-1742) BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

terracotta

27cm high, 15.8cm wide, 15.5cm deep

Provenance: The Earls of Crawford and Balcarres, Balcarres House, Fife, Scotland

Note: Giuseppe Piamontini was a close follower, only twelve-years younger, of Giambattista Foggini (1652-1725), founder of the school of Florentine late Baroque sculpture, which flourished under the last members of the dynasty of Medici Grand-Dukes [Kader 1996]. He studied in the short-lived, but effective, Medici Academy founded by Cosimo III in Rome between 1681 and 1686. When he returned to Florence, the heir-apparent, Gran Principe Ferdinando (1663-1713), took a special interest in Piamontini, perhaps partly because they were almost the same age, and commissioned from him many sculptures, the first, when the sculptor was only fourteen.

When a bronze cast of this type of group first came to light in 1974, paired with another of *Venus and Cupid* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, inv. nos. 1974.18.1/2), it was attributed, though without firm evidence, to G. B. Foggini (1652-1725), Court sculptor to the Medici Grand-Dukes. But, in the light of a signature discovered on a full-size marble group of the latter dated 1711 and signed by Piamontini, this rapidly changed in favour of the latter. The present model however continued to be associated by some with Foggini, until, in 1991, a marble version dated 1732 and signed by Piamontini was discovered by Bellesi [author of the most recent publication of 2019]. While this settled their authorship, the wide discrepancy of date between the marbles is puzzling, but it may be due only to the varying demands of particular patrons for expensive renderings in marble. Whether the two compositions were born together as a pair, or one was made to match the other, remains to be determined.

As to the present working model, it may be compared with one in terracotta for the *Venus and Cupid* in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Schlegel 1978 pp. 154-56; Pratesi 1993, pl. 433): from the Elector of Brandenburg's *Kunstammer* in Berlin Castle, and with remains of gilding (which indicates that it had been displayed as though it were a – more valuable - gilt bronze), it was catalogued in 1930 as 'French 18th century': indeed, specialists still perceive a strong French influence on Piamontini's, as opposed to Foggini's, sculptures, perhaps owing to some cross-fertilisation between the two foreign 'national' academies in Rome during his youthful training there.

The Berlin group is a 'presentation model' in terms of its busy detailing and high finish, as is corroborated by its elegant, all

but royal, provenance, whereas the present piece has the experimental look of a working sketch-model (*bozzetto*), with some parts more refined than others, notably round the back, which is not fully modelled, but hollowed out to assist in firing in the kiln.

Even so, there are some ravishing details that clearly reflect modelling by hand with a stylus and the sculptor's fingers, such as the mask and swags of laurel that are applied to the classical vase into which Ariadne is pressing a bunch of grapes: the elderly, male face is strongly characterised, but has a look of worry and effort as he supports the weight of the laurel in his teeth. The expression on this face is close to the shouting masks on the cuirasses of a set of four busts of Roman Emperors by Piamontini in the Pitti Palace (see Bellesi, 1991, pls. 32-36).

The proper left hand of Bacchus is delicately modelled with angular knuckles and neat fingernails; while the strap that runs diagonally across Ariadne's bosom has also been fashioned separately in a strip of moist clay and then applied. None of these details is blunted by the casting process, as would be typical of a reproductive terracotta. Furthermore, the 'wounds' at the necks of both figures are sharp, as with a real break from after the creation of the figures: this reveals that the heads and necks were never hollow, as, again, would be typical of a reproductive terracotta. Finally, the underside of the base clearly still shows the way in which it was built up out of sausages of clay, squashed down on to the work-surface, and that wedges of clay have been added underneath to raise and level the angle of the figures above while it was all still moist and in 'the leathery state'. One can see exactly the same spontaneous and workmanlike process recorded on the underside of a model created about 150 years earlier by Piamontini's great predecessor Giambologna, in preparation for his monumental group of *Florence Triumphant over Pisa* in the Bargello Museum, Florence (see also C. Avery, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture*, Oxford 1987, pp. 62-67).

- Lyon & Turnbull wish to thank Dr. Charles Avery, independant Art Historian and former Deputy Keeper of the Department of Sculpture at the V&A Museum for research and note on this lot.

Literature:

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Montagu, "Some small sculptures by Giuseppe Piamontini" in *Antichità Viva*, xiii/4, 1974, pp. 1-19, see esp. p. 11 [cited as 'Montagu 1974']

U. Schlegel, *Die italienischen Bildwerke des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts...*, Berlin 1978, pp. 154-56 [cited as 'Schlegel 1978']

Bellesi, "L'antico e i virtuosismi tardobarocchi nell'opera di Giuseppe Piamontini" in *Paragone*, XLII, N.S., 28(497), July 1991, pp. 29-32, pls. 48-52 [cited as 'Bellesi, 1991']

Pratesi, *Repertorio della scultura fiorentina del Seicento e Settecento*, Turin, 1993, pp. 55-56 and Plates 432-35 [cited as 'Pratesi, 1993']

A Kader 'Piamontini', in J. Turner [ed.], *The Dictionary of Art*, London 1996, vol. 24, pp. 696-97 [cited as 'Kader 1996']

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Sculpture in Florence under the Last Medici, Uffizi and
Palatine Galleries, Florence, 2019, pp. 238-41, nos.44-45;
Biographies, pp. 591-95, no. 24 [cited as 'Bellesi, 2019']