The Stupinigi Library’s boiserie: two centuries of changes and adjustments.

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The boiserie’s history and restoration

Two rooms of the Stupinigi Library ("Biblioteca" and "Antibiblioteca") are currently furnished with boiserie that do not belong to the original decoration. The boiserie of the Library and Private Archives of His Majesty was originally created for the Royal Palace in Turin in 1739 by the cabinet-maker G. B. Ugliengo under the direction of the royal architect Benedetto Alfieri. It was moved to Moncalieri Castle in 1843 and since 1852 it has been located in the "Palazzina di Caccia di Stupinigi": upon arrival, the cabinet-maker Gabriele Capello known as "Moncalvo" adjusted both structure and decorations.

Historical residences were frequently altered during the years and their artefacts were moved different locations. The conservation of these objects requires careful consideration that take their history into account: the aim is not necessarily to return to the original appearance, but to preserve a uniform aspect, referring to the most recent documented version.

Transfer to Stupinigi and reassembly by Gabriele Capello

In 1852 Capello assembled the boiserie with the purpose of matching all of the surfaces avoiding a "patched" effect. Making distinction between the original elements and Gabriele Capello's alterations has been the main objective of our study. Our methodology is based on the identification of wooden species and of the different gilding decorations and colours.

WOODEN SPECIES

According to historical documents, the boiserie were originally made of natural wax-polished walnut, with gilded decorations. The picture on the left shows the top of a pillar, presently not visible: during Capello's arrangement both the upper frame and the carvings were lowered. Gabriele Capello planned to lacquer all of the boiserie, so that he didn't require the same wooden species for the integrations. The picture on the right shows that he used conifer wood, which was less expensive than walnut.

GILDINGS

Capello also did not use original materials also for the gilding of his integrations. The picture on the left shows a capital with its original gold foil finish. The picture on the right shows the 19th century integrations made by using a metallic bronze coloured pigment with a resin based binder, covered by a second layer of the same pigment with a protein based binder.

The restoration project

The restoration project is driven by the assessment of all historical, technical and stylistic data, using scientific examination (x-ray fluorescence and cross sections). Our aim is to keep the present colouring (which reflects the 1852 style) and to remove traces belonging to later maintenance, in order to restore a consistent aesthetic uniformity all round.

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