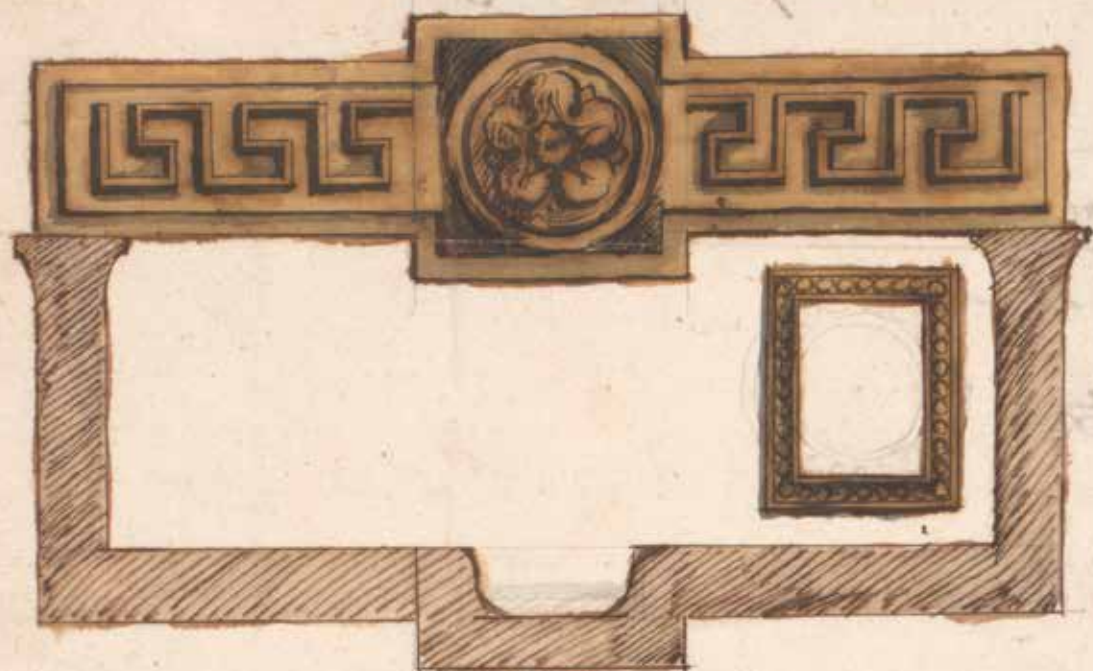


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# Short Notice

## Two Drawings by Valadier in Amsterdam

• ALVAR GONZÁLEZ-PALACIOS •

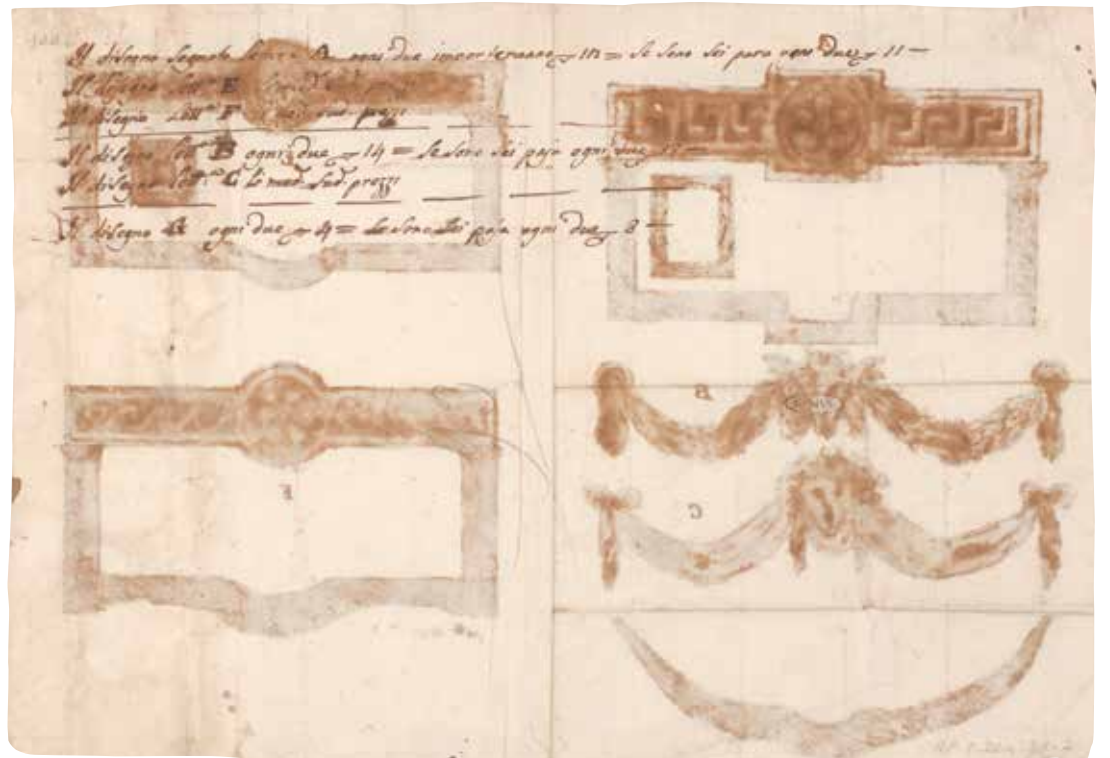
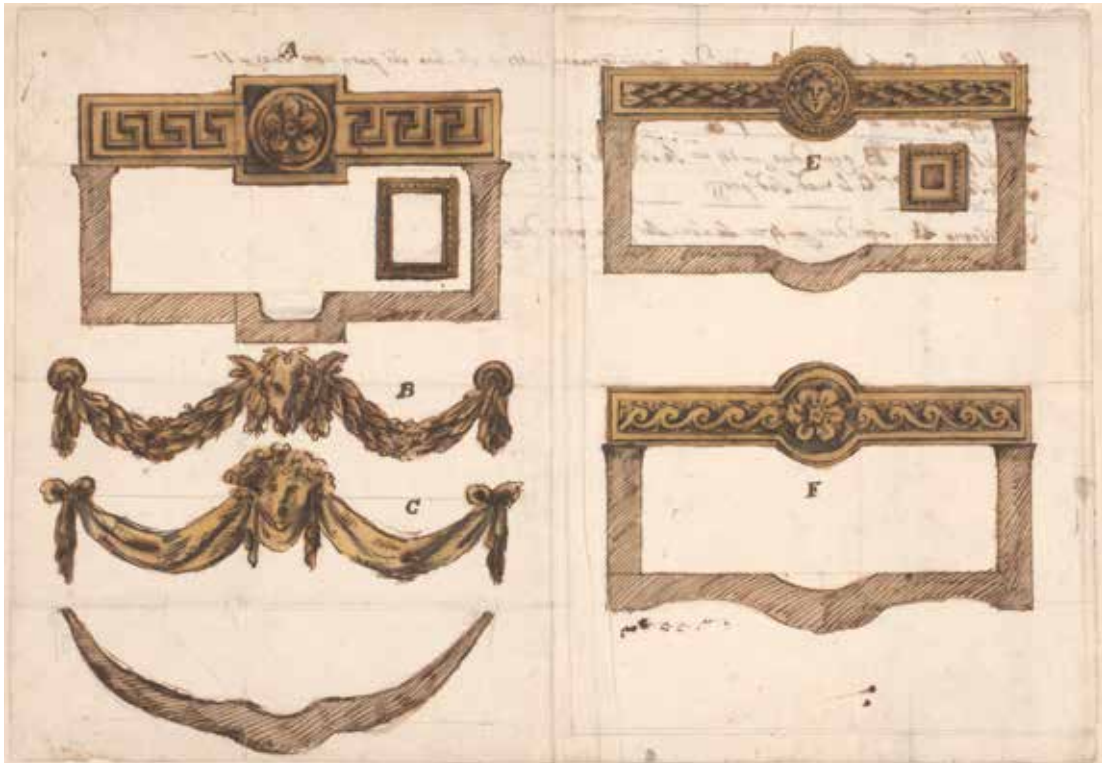
The two splendid drawings by Valadier that were recently acquired by the Rijksmuseum have long been known to me (figs. 1-4).<sup>1</sup> They come from a large group of sheets from the Valadier workshop that appeared on the London art market, with the Artemis Group, many years ago.<sup>2</sup> Originally this ensemble belonged together with an album containing a considerable number of drawings in the Pinacoteca Civica in Faenza. Recently, over a hundred Valadier drawings were rediscovered at the Museo Napoleonico in Rome;<sup>3</sup> it may be assumed that these three assemblages, together consisting of over 2,000 drawings, have a shared origin.

Luigi Valadier (1726-1785) was born in Rome, but his father, Andrea, came from Aramont in the Provence in France. A goldsmith and bronze founder, Andrea Valadier had settled in Rome by 1720. He succeeded in establishing a flourishing workshop there, first in via del Pellegrino and subsequently in piazza di San Luigi dei Francesi. Following his death in 1759, his work was continued by his two sons, Luigi, the eldest, and Giovanni (1732-1805), the second-born. Both proved to be highly talented craftsmen. Around 1762 Luigi, who may be considered the greatest Italian goldsmith of the eighteenth century, moved with his

< Detail of fig. 1

family to via del Babuino. In 1785 he took his own life; his son, Giuseppe (1762-1839), continued the workshop for more than a quarter of a century, not without a certain reluctance as his personal preference incited him to turn to architecture.

The graphic production of Luigi and Giuseppe Valadier has been relatively well studied, but the workshop drawings vary greatly in quality and are clearly the work of numerous hands. Both Luigi and Giuseppe were very successful, attracting major commissions from Rome as well as other capital cities. They counted among their clients the popes Benedict XIV, Clemens XIV, Pius VI and Pius VII, the Elector-Palatine Carl Theodor, cardinals, princes and important Spanish and South American sanctuaries. Luigi Valadier employed a large number of artists and craftsmen and among the collection of drawings under discussion here – the exact history of whose composition remains unknown – it has been possible to distinguish the hand of a silversmith with an easily recognizable style, Giuseppe Bettati (c. 1700-1777).<sup>4</sup> A fine drawing by Bettati originating from the Valadier workshop, which shows two variations of the design of a rococo cartel clock, is now in the Rijksmuseum (see acquisition 13 on pp. 171-72). Several other sheets, spirited in invention and in handling,



< Fig. 1  
 ATTRIBUTED TO  
 LUIGI VALADIER,  
*Five Drawer Handles,*  
 c. 1784.  
 Pen and brown ink,  
 yellow, buff and grey  
 wash, 272 x 390 mm.  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 inv. no. RP-T-2014-39-2;  
 purchased with  
 funds from the  
 Decorative Art Fund/  
 Rijksmuseum Fonds.

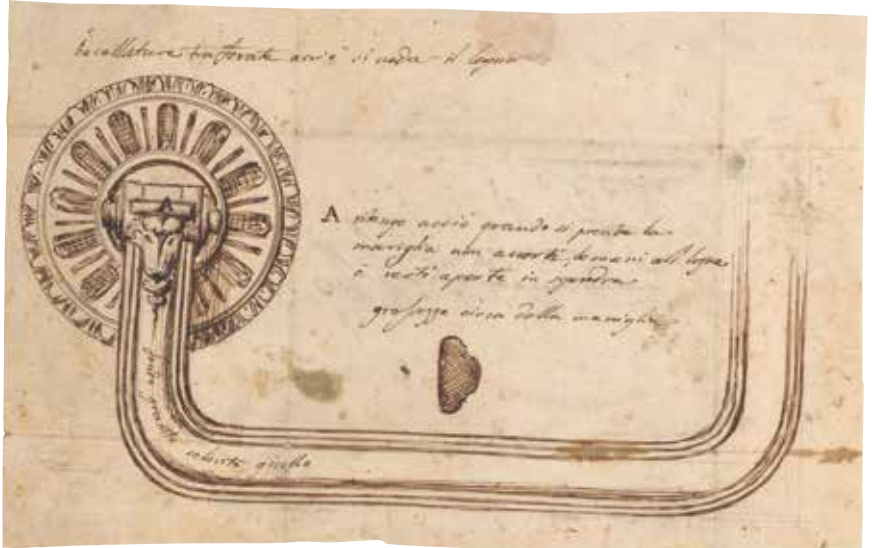


Fig. 3  
 ATTRIBUTED TO  
 GIUSEPPE VALADIER,  
*Design for a Handle,*  
 c. 1785.  
 Graphite, pen  
 and brown ink,  
 153 x 239 mm.  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum,  
 inv. no. RP-T-2014-39-1.

Fig. 4  
 The reverse of the  
 drawing in Fig. 3.



< Fig. 2  
 The reverse of the  
 drawing in Fig. 1.

are actually signed by Luigi Valadier, and there are also a number of drawings bearing the name of the son, Giuseppe. Some of the latter are clearly dated 1779, when Giuseppe was only seventeen years old.

Besides works in silver and gold, objects in a large variety of materials were executed in the workshop of Luigi Valadier, under supervision of the master. For example, he is well known for a number of *surtouts de table* (called *deser* in Rome) made for several famous patrons. One of those table decorations, sold in 1777 by the Maltese ambassador in Rome, the Bali de Breteuil, to Catherine the Great, is now in the Hermitage.<sup>5</sup> Breteuil immediately bought another *surtout*, even more richly fashioned, from Valadier, which after his death was sold at auction in Paris in 1785. It was acquired by the Prince of the Asturias, the future Charles IV of Spain, and is now divided between the Royal Palace and various museums in Madrid.<sup>6</sup> Another equally sumptuous *deser*, executed for the nephew of Pius VI, Duke Braschi, is in the collection of the Louvre. These confections are made of coloured marbles, *pietre dure* and gilt bronze; the one made for Duke Braschi incorporates fragments from Roman antiquity, carefully restored to create an aesthetic unity.

Luigi Valadier excelled in the beautiful and inventive mounting of antique cameos from the papal collections, which contained incomparable examples. The most important ones were taken in 1798 by the French army and are now divided between the Louvre and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.<sup>7</sup> In his capacity as a bronze founder and restorer of ancient metalwork and marbles, Luigi Valadier restored and adapted a famous bronze table by Alessandro Algardi for one of his most ostentatious patrons, Prince Marcantonio Borghese; for the same prince he designed and executed two tables with twelve-sided porphyry tops

and gilt bronze enrichments. A few years ago I was able to identify the two porphyry candelabra made to stand on this table, which feature gilt bronze reductions of famous statues of antiquity. The prince placed these works of art in the gallery on the ground floor of the Palazzo Borghese in Campo Marzio; they are today divided between the Villa Borghese on the Pincio and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>8</sup> Valadier also created gilt bronze mounts for furniture, such as a pair of commodes for the Villa Borghese and another for the town palace of the same family, all made in Rome by the French cabinet-maker Ivo Livinec and now all in private collections.<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of his life he personally supervised the execution of four magnificent cupboards for the Museo Profano in the Vatican by the cabinet-maker from the Tyrol, Andrea Mimmi, who actually worked on them in Valadier's studio. The goldsmith made the gilt bronze mounts for these pieces with his own hands.<sup>10</sup> The two drawings in the Rijksmuseum relate to work of this kind, as they show mounts for furniture.

The first one (figs. 1-2) shows a number of variously designed drawer handles, probably intended for chests of drawers, with the specifications of their cost in *scudi romani* (s) on the back. These read as follows:

*Il disegno segnato lettera A ogni due importeranno s 12 = Se Sono Sei para due s 11*  
*Il disegno lett<sup>a</sup> E li med. sud. prezzi.*  
*Il disegno lett<sup>a</sup> F li med. sud. prezzi*  
*Il disegno lett<sup>a</sup> B ogni due s. 14 = Se Sono Sei paja ogni due s 13*  
*Il disegno lett<sup>a</sup> C li med. sud. prezzi*  
*Il disegno G ogni due s 4 = Se Sono Sei paja ogni due s 3*  
 [the design actually does not show any pattern marked G]<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, the prices varied according to the complexity of the model and the number of pieces calculated. The models designated B and C, which include animal or human heads, were the costliest. They represent a some-

what earlier taste than the three others which are of geometric outline with a Greek fret, a running dog and a laurel pattern. The spirited hand apparent in the heads in designs B and C is reminiscent of some drawings signed by Luigi Valadier, but also has some affinity with a small number of drawings of this kind that may perhaps be attributed to Giuseppe Barberi (1746-1809); however, the artistic personality of Barberi remains difficult to grasp, especially as his ornamental drawings in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York have not yet been adequately published.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the Pinacoteca di Faenza there is a drawing showing two designs for drawer handles with lions' heads at their centre, which in my opinion may be attributed to Luigi Valadier and which ought to be considered together with the Rijksmuseum drawing (fig. 5).

The second drawing at the Rijksmuseum (figs. 3-4) also carries numerous inscriptions. Along the top it says:

*bacellature traforate acciò si veda il legno*  
and at the centre

*A ritengo acciò quando si prende la maniglia*  
*non accosti le mani all legno e resti aperta in squadra.*

Above the cross-section of the handle:  
*grossezia circa della maniglia*  
and on the handle itself:  
*fondo granito colorito giallo.*

The drawing, which was folded to be sent as a letter, has on its reverse the address:  
*All' Illmo Sig Sig Prone Lustmo*  
*Il Sig<sup>e</sup> Ant<sup>o</sup> Ercoli nella Bottega*  
*della Arg in piazza di Spagna*  
*Roma*<sup>13</sup>

As recorded by Costantino Bulgari, the great historian of Roman silver, Antonio Ercole, a silversmith from Fano, was working as a journeyman in Rome by 1773. In 1782 he and his wife were living in via del Babuino near the Corso. Apparently, in 1791 Giuseppe

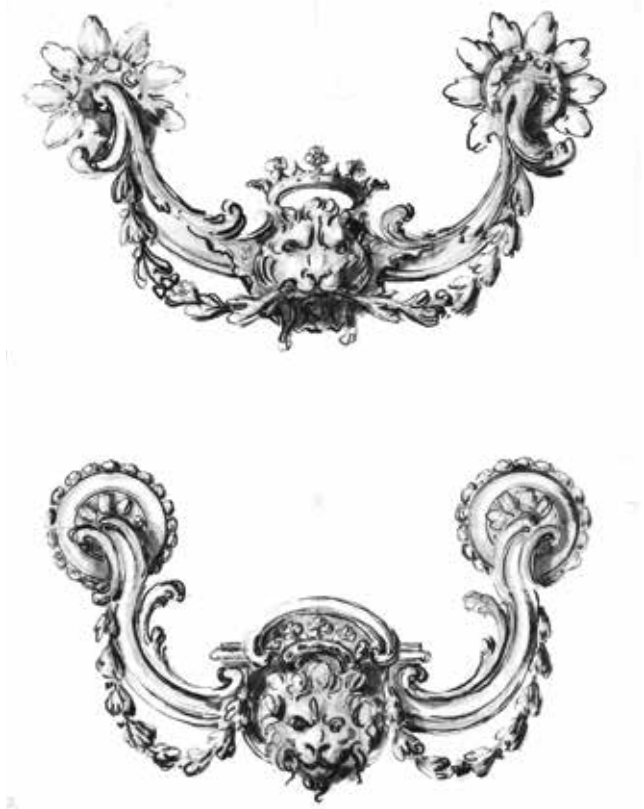


Fig. 5  
ATTRIBUTED TO  
LUIGI VALADIER,  
Design for Two  
Handles, c. 1770-80.  
Faenza, Pinacoteca  
Civica.

Valadier was to pay twenty-one *scudi* for Ercole's admission as a master goldsmith; subsequently, on 28 July 1793, Valadier presented him as the *ministro*, or director, who was in charge of his workshop, and on 25 August Ercole was elected master goldsmith.



Fig. 6

UNKNOWN ROMAN CABINETMAKER, THE MOUNTS FROM THE WORKSHOP OF LUIGI VALADIER, *Commode*, c. 1784-85. Veneered with padouk, rosewood and other woods, mounts of gilt bronze, marble top, h. 94.5 x w. 134 x d. 66.5 cm. Private collection. Photo: © Christie's Images Limited, 2014.

In 1798 he died, only fifty years old, in the house in via del Babuino where Giuseppe Valadier himself also lived. The facts assembled by Bulgari do not clarify if Ercole was already working in the Valadier workshop during Luigi's lifetime; this is certainly possible as in 1782, when Luigi Valadier only had another three years to live, Ercole was living close to the workshop in via del Babuino.

Let us now inspect the drawing itself. The handle represented resembles those employed by Luigi Valadier on the sides of a pair of commodes made by Ivo Livinec in 1784 or 1785 for Prince Borghese, to adorn the Room of Paris and Helena at the Villa Borghese.<sup>14</sup> As indicated on the drawing, the pattern of their backplates is partly open, 'so that the wood is visible'. But the Valadier workshop actually produced some handles that exactly

correspond to the design in the drawing. They were employed on the sides of a pair of commodes recently offered at auction (figs. 6-7)<sup>15</sup> and on the doors made by the Valadiers in the Cathedral in Spoleto (figs. 8-10). Interestingly, on the handles as executed the suggestion of a ram's head, clearly present in the drawing, merely occurs as the result of a play of shadows on the acanthus leaves.



Fig. 7

WORKSHOP OF LUIGI VALADIER, handle of the commode in Fig. 6. Photo: © Christie's Images Limited, 2014.



*Fig. 8*  
GIUSEPPE VALADIER,  
pair of doors in the  
cathedral of Spoleto,  
1786.  
Photo: Carla Fendi.

*Fig. 9*  
Detail of the doors in  
Fig. 8.

*Fig. 10*  
A handle on the doors  
in Fig. 8.





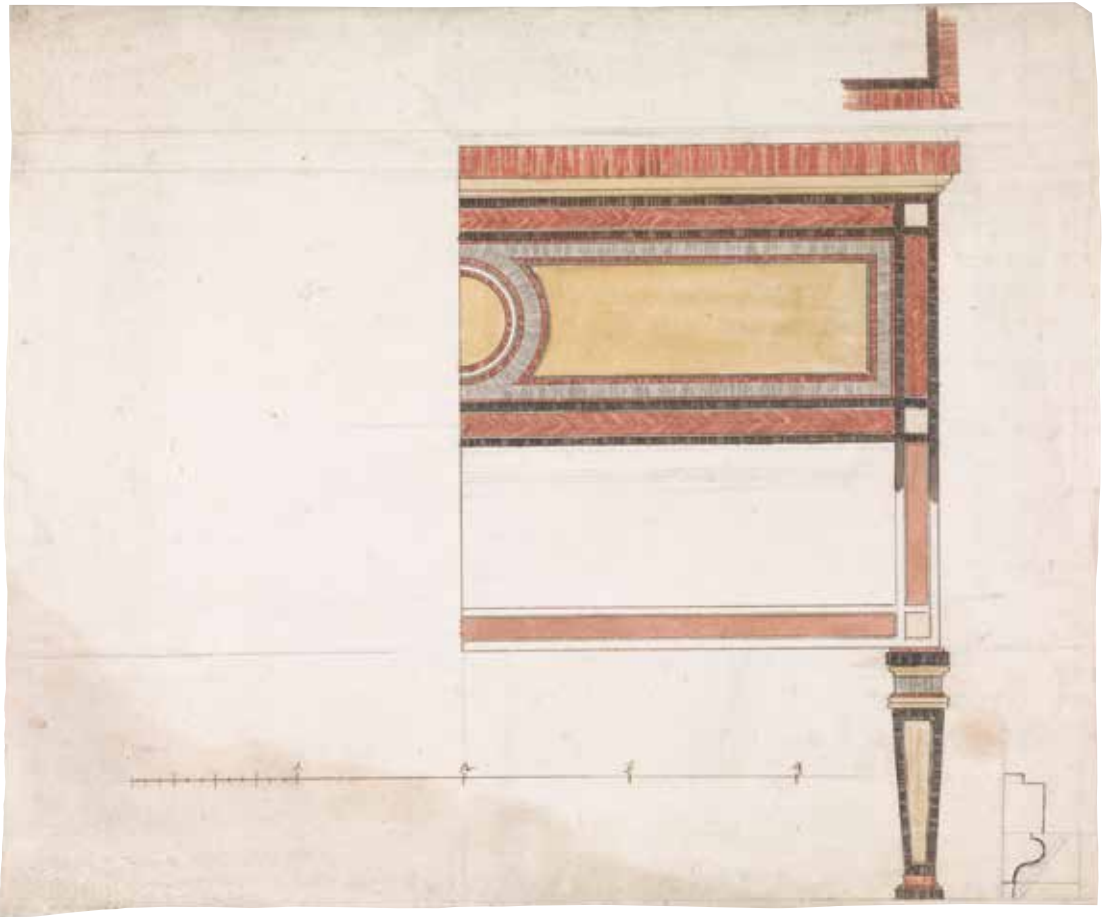
Two drawings connected with the Valadier workshop show commodes of the type illustrated here. A fully finished one, which also depicts the mounts, is in Faenza; the second, only showing the work to be done by the cabinet-maker, is now in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 11).<sup>16</sup>

The work at Spoleto Cathedral was planned between 1784 and 1785, as transpires from a number of drawings preserved at Spoleto and from documents published in 1962, but it took some years to complete.<sup>17</sup> However, the documents and drawings are solely concerned with Giuseppe Valadier, who was often at Spoleto during these years; as indicated earlier, his father Luigi died on 15 September 1785. Closely observing the drawing in Amsterdam, I now tend to propose

that this is by Giuseppe; it has a directness and accuracy characteristic of his work.

The design was probably sent to Ercole by Giuseppe Valadier while he was in Spoleto, preparing the lengthy work on the Cathedral. He had already travelled to the city several times before and built a villa for the Pianciani family at Terraia, designing both the building and the outlay of the garden.<sup>18</sup> In 1784 he was only twenty-two years old, but as we have noted, his signature already occurs on some designs dated 1779 for various *deser* that were being finished in the paternal workshop. By contrast, at the Duomo in Spoleto, Giuseppe would himself be called upon to supervise the execution of his designs.

Fig. 11  
UNKNOWN  
ROMAN ARTIST,  
*Design for a  
Commode*, c. 1780-85.  
Graphite, pen and  
brown ink, water-  
colour, 347 x 423 mm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.  
RP-T-2015-42-39;  
purchased with funds  
from the Decorative  
Art Fund/  
Rijksmuseum Fonds.



## NOTES

- 1 Provenance: Valadier workshop; Artemis Group, London; private collection; sale, Paris (Sotheby's), 7 November 2013, nos. 48 (RP-T-2014-39-1) and 49 (RP-T-2014-39-2); purchased with funds from the Decorative Art Fund/Rijksmuseum Fonds (RP-T-2014-39-2), 2013. Alvar González-Palacios, *Il gusto dei Principi. Arte di Corte del XVII e del XVIII secolo*, Milan 1993, vol. 1, p. 225 ('Studi a Villa Borghese') and vol. 2, p. 231, fig. 457.
- 2 The earliest publications on the Valadier designs in London are *Valadier: Three Generations of Roman Goldsmiths*, exh. cat. London (Artemis Group) 1991; *Valadier. Sacro e profano*, exh. cat. Florence (Artemis Group) 1991; Elspeth Moncreiff, 'Valadier Workshop Drawings: The Discovery of a Goldsmith's Archive', *Apollo* 133 (1991), pp. 315-19; see also John Winter, *The Drawings of Luigi Valadier (1726-1785)*, exh. cat. London (Trinity Fine Art Ltd.) 2011. From the group of Valadier drawings with Artemis, which passed to Trinity Fine Art Ltd., London, the Rijksmuseum has acquired around 50 sheets, ranging from workshop sketches to finished presentation drawings (see fig. 11).
- 3 Alvar González-Palacios, *I Valadier. L'album dei disegni del Museo Napoleonico*, Rome 2015.
- 4 John Winter, 'Further Drawings from Valadier's Workshop: The Silver Designs of Giovanni Bettati', *Apollo* 133 (1991), pp. 320-22. Apart from the drawing of a cartel clock (see acquisition 13 on pp. 173-74), the Rijksmuseum has a design for a tabernacle by Bettati (RP-T-1980-55).
- 5 V.K. Makarov, *Vari-Coloured Semi-Precious Stones in the Collection of the Hermitage*, Saint Petersburg 1938 (in Russian); *Italian Decorative Arts in the Collection of the Hermitage*, exh. cat. Saint Petersburg (State Hermitage Museum) 1985 (in Russian).
- 6 Alvar González-Palacios, *Las colecciones reales españolas de mosaicos y piedras duras*, exh. cat. Madrid (Museo del Prado) 2001, pp. 210-33, no. 40. Various drawings relating to this *surtout* are in the Museo Napoleonico in Rome, see note 3.
- 7 Alvar González-Palacios et al., *Luigi Valadier au Louvre ou l'Antiquité exaltée*, exh. cat. Paris (Musée du Louvre) 1994; Alvar González-Palacios, *Arredi e ornamenti alle corte di Roma 1560-1795*, Milan 2004, pp. 367-401.
- 8 González-Palacios 2004 (note 7), pp. 340-55.
- 9 González-Palacios 1993 (note 1), vol. 2, pp. 230-32, figs. 451-61; sale, London (Sotheby's), 10 June 1998, no. 63.
- 10 Alvar González-Palacios, 'Gli armadi del Museo Profano', in *Il Museo Profano dalle origini al tempo di Pio VI* (in print).
- 11 The design marked letter A each pair will come to s 12 = when there are six one pays s 11 the pair / The design letter E the same prices noted above / The design letter F the same prices noted above / The design letter B each pair s 14 = when there are six one pays s 13 for each pair / The design letter C the same prices noted above / The design G each pair s 4 = when there are six one pays each pair s 3.
- 12 On Barberi, see Richard P. Wunder, *Architectural and Ornamental Drawings of the 16th to the Early 19th Centuries*, exh. cat. Michigan (University of Michigan Museum of Art) 1965, nos. 73-99; Rudolf Berliner, 'Zeichnungen des römischen Architekten Giuseppe Barberi', *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Künste* 16 (1965), pp. 165-216.
- 13 Backplates pierced so that one sees the wood / A I expect that when one grasps the handle one does not touch the wood and that it remains at a right angle / about the size of the handle / granulated ground coloured yellow / To the most illustrious / Mr Ant<sup>o</sup> Ercoli in the workshop / of the goldsmith in piazza di Spagna / Rome.
- 14 González-Palacios 1993 (note 1), vol. 2, p. 230, fig. 452.
- 15 Sale, London (Christie's), 3 December 2014, no. 30.
- 16 Provenance: Valadier workshop; Artemis Group, London; Trinity Fine Art Ltd., London; purchased with funds from the Decorative Art Fund/Rijksmuseum Fonds, 2015; inv. no. RP-T-2015-38-39. González-Palacios 1993 (note 1), vol. 2, p. 231, fig. 459. See for all particulars the note by the present writer in the sale catalogue listed in note 15.
- 17 Angelo Marinucci, 'Disegni inediti del Valadier per il Duomo di Spoleto', *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura* 49-50 (1962), pp. 23-28.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 24.