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ON SOME FLORENTINE "CASSONI,"  
illustrating ancient Roman legends

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BY

Prof. Ch. HUELSEN, D. Litt.



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It is difficult to realize, in what an extraordinary degree arts and crafts were united in the merry old Florence of the Quattrocento. No distinction was made between an academic artist and a good craftsman; most of the famous painters and sculptors even began their career in a goldsmith's or a wood-carver's shop; many of them, when they had come to fame and success, still stuck faithfully to their humble handicraft while producing their noble works of art. Antonio Pollaiuolo for instance, at the same time that he was occupied with the marvellous bronze monument for Pope Sixtus in St. Peter's, had a goldsmith's shop in Florence. Domenico Ghirlandaio, the painter who was reported « to have enough imagination and energy to cover all the city walls around Florence with frescoes », at the same time kept a bottega for all kinds of artistic craftwork. And he recommended, as Vasari tells us, his young men « to accept every commission which happened to be given in the shop, even if it were only baskets for women or such like, so that nobody would have to go away unsatisfied from his bottega ».

No wonder therefore that artistic taste took possession of the household furniture. There were in the beginning of the XV. century so many painters in Florence, that it was quite impossible for them to earn their living solely by working for the churches and other monumental buildings, so they naturally turned to the ornamentation of household goods. One of them, a certain Dello Delli, born about 1404, had the clever idea of devoting himself to a speciality of this kind. Vasari tells

us that « in that time it was usual in all the houses of the citizens to have big wooden *cassoni* with ornaments on the covers and pictures on the front »; and often there were coats-of-arms in the corners or elsewhere. On the inside, the *cassoni* were lined with linen or cloth, to keep woollen clothes and other precious things therein. In the front there were usually some illustrations of fables from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid and of other poets; or of episodes from the history of Rome and Greece; or of hunting, tournaments, love-stories and whatever the owner liked to have. Not only the *cassoni* were painted in this manner, but also benches, couches, balustrades and other domestic ornaments; and not only ordinary painters (*non mica plebei*), but very excellent masters also were not ashamed to do such work. « Some fine specimens done by famous hands are » says Vasari « to be seen not only in the houses of the Medici family, but also in those of other noble families in Florence ». But as no fashion lasts for any length of time, the custom of painting *cassoni*, however well done and costly, was not of long duration. « Now » says Vasari « it is usual to have richer ornamentation, with gilded carvings in walnut-wood, which have a more showy effect. Dello, who was the first to introduce into this branch of art accuracy and good workmanship, painted for Giovanni dei Medici the entire decoration of a room, and an exceedingly delicate and beautiful thing it was. He was assisted, we are told, by young Donatello, who with his own hand did some of the reliefs in stucco and gesso belonging to the decoration ».

It is true that modern scholars have criticised this statement of Vasari's. It is impossible for instance to believe that Donatello, born 1386, in his youth assisted Dello, who was born 1404 (1). It is nevertheless certain that about this time the fashion of having furniture artistically painted spread in Florence, and there are many pieces of such furniture left to us; we have a large stock especially of *cassoni* in the museums and private collections. Naturally many of them are by *pittori plebei*, as Vasari calls them, and more interesting for the scenes they represent than for their artistic execution. About the subjects they represent we see that Vasari's statements are exact. There are many scenes of Holy Scripture, of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, of Greek and Roman history and of daily life. I wish to speak to you about some less-known pictures of this class, illustrating the *Aeneid* of Virgil and some legends of the early times of ancient Rome.

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(1) See Milanesi's notes to the *Vita di Dello* (Vasari II, p. 155, ff.). As Dello went out of Italy in 1429 to work in Spain, and returned only in 1446, his activity for artistic furniture must be attributed either to his very first, or to his last years.



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1. 2. Cassoni in the Jarvis Collection at New Haven. 3. Cassone in the Kestner Museum at Hanover.



It should be noticed, that cassoni as a rule were not single pieces, but two of them always belonged together, so that the pictures of the first were continued on the second. Such is the case in all the cassoni mentioned in the following pages.

The first pair of cassoni exists in the Jarves Collection of Yale University, New Haven, Conn. This collection was formed by Mr. James Jackson Jarves, American consul at Liverpool fifty years ago, who had the taste and the ability to collect pictures of the Trecento and the Quattrocento, at a time when the « Praeraffaelliti » were held in very low esteem. Amongst many precious paintings of this epoch, the Jarves Collection contains four beautifully painted cassoni (1), two of which may be quoted amongst the oldest Renaissance illustrations of Virgil's Aeneid. These illustrations are very closely connected with the splendid miniatures illustrating the famous Virgil Codex in the Biblioteca Riccardiana at Florence, which was written and illuminated for the Medici family about 1450. The author of these wonderful miniatures has not signed his name; they are believed to be the work of Benozzo Gozzoli or one of his best pupils (2). These compositions were not therefore the invention of the cassone-painter, but copied out of the same model-book as that of the miniaturist of the Codex Riccardianus, or a very similar one.

On the first cassone (see plate I, n. 1) we see Juno coming to the god Aeolus, with the command to cause a storm on the Tyrrhenian sea in order to destroy the Trojan navy (Virgil. *Aen.*, I, 50-80). The god is sitting in his cavern like an anchorite of the Thebaid in old Florentine pictures: this part of the painting corresponds exactly with the miniature in the Codex Riccardianus Lib. I n. 2 (3). Aeolus complies with the desire of the goddess: the centre of the cassone is occupied by the

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(1) See the article of F. Rankin in the Burlington Magazine, vol. XI (1907), p. 131 ff., where three of the cassoni are reproduced by photography. The catalogue of the Jarves Collection (by Mr. Russel Sturgis) attributes the pictures to Paolo Uccello.

(2) This affinity was noticed by Dr. Werner Weisbach in his learned monograph on Pesellino (Berlin, 1901, p. 16) and by Miss Mary Logan in an interesting article: *Compagno di Pesellino* (*Gazette des Beaux Arts*, ser. III, vol. 26, 1901, p. 334 f.). For the chronology of the miniatures it is important, that in several of them the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi is represented in construction or finished. Owing to the fact that this residence of the Medici family was begun in 1444 and finished about 1452 (Warburg, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistor. Instituts zu Florenz*, I, pag. 85; Limburger, *Gebäude von Florenz*, p. 110), the date of the miniatures must correspond approximately to the same space of time.

(3) As the Codex Riccardianus has no numeration of the folios, I quote the miniatures counting separately those of each book.

picture of the storm. The artist has tried to render as nearly as possible the terrifying description of Virgil (I, 89-91):

. . . . ponto nox incubat atra  
 intonare poli, et crebris micat ignibus aether  
 praesentemque viris intentant omni mortem.

But from the right, Neptune is approaching on his car in order to quiet the waves (v. 145-147):

levat ipse tridenti  
 et castas aperit Syrtes et temperat aequor  
 atque rotis summas levibus perlabitur undas.

The representation of the car of Neptune with its four wheels and the god sitting on it certainly differs widely from the antique style, but it is exactly like the miniatures of the Riccardianus which correspond to this scene (Lib. I, nr. 3, 4, 5).

The ship of Aeneas, separated from his companions, is then landing in Africa: there, the hero, accompanied by the *fidus Achates*, meets his mother Venus, disguised as a hunting nymph. The goddess informs her son about the coast on which they have landed and its inhabitants. (cf. the Riccardiana miniature Lib. I, nr. 12). After this she gives him the augurium described by Virgil in the verses 393-400:

*aspice bis senos laetantis agmine cyenos  
 aethera quos lapsa plaga Iovis ales aperto  
 turbabat caelo; nunc terras ordine longo  
 aut capere aut captas iam despectare videntur.  
 Ut reduces illi ludunt stridentibus alis  
 et coetu cinxere polum cantusque dedere:  
 haud aliter puppesque tuae pubesque tuorum  
 aut portum tenet, aut pleno subit ostia velo.*

Having thus comforted the two heroes, Venus

*rosea cervicē refulsit  
 et vera incessu patuit dea.*

These verses (Aen. I, 402 seq.) form the subject of the last scene on the first cassone: the same scene is represented in a very similar way in the miniature Riccard. Lib. I, n. 15 (see the photograph in the above-mentioned article of Miss Logan p. 335).

The painter of the cassoni in his composition has taken some liberties, because the scene which begins the pictures of the second cassone

(see plate I, n. 2) in the recital of Virgil precedes the last two scenes on the first one. Here we see Aeneas hunting on the coast of Libya exactly as it is described by Virgil (I, 184-193):

*tres littore ceruos*  
*prospicit errantes: hos tot armenta sequuntur,*  
*a tergo, et longum per callis pascitur agmen.*  
*Constitit hic, arcumque manu celeresque sagittas*  
*corripuit . . . . .*  
*nec prius absistit, quam septem ingentia victor*  
*corpora fundat humi, et numerum cum navibus arquet.*

In the Riccardianus there is a miniature (Lib. I, nr. 7) which corresponds in all essentials with the cassone painting.

The scene in the middle, the most elaborate one of all, represents Aeneas meeting Dido at Carthage in the temple of Juno. Aeneas introduces to the queen his companions, whom he had found here again after having been separated from them by the storm:

*sic fatus, amicum*  
*Iliova petit dextra, lacvaque Serestum*  
*Post alios, fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum.*  
*(Aen. I, 610-612).*

The locality of the meeting, the temple of Juno at Carthage, is often represented in the Codex Riccardianus (I, 20, 21, 23, 24). It is of the shape of hexagonal (or rather octagonal) baptisteries, as we see often represented in Florentine pictures of the xiv and xv centuries, but instead of the slender Gothic column and the ogival arches, the roof is supported by fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals. The lower part of the interior walls is decorated with vaulted niches: above them there is a series of reliefs, given to illustrate Virgil's description (*Aen. I, 455-493*). The middle scene corresponds exactly to v. 483, 484:

*Ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros*  
*Exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles.*

The scenes to the right and to the left would be very difficult to explain from the cassone picture itself: but the miniatures in the Riccardianus (Lib. I. n. 19), being illustrated by the names, noting every single person, gives us the certainty that the scene to the left represents the last fight between Achilles and Hector; on the right, the wooden horse, placed on wheels, is carried into the town by the deluded citizens of Troy.

To the right of the temple we see the construction of the walls of Carthage; the name of the town is carefully marked on the top of the second tower to the right. We see the workmen, answering to Virgil's description:

*pars ducere muros  
molirique arcem et manibus subvolvère saxa,  
pars optare locum tecto, et concludere sulco.*

In the Codex Riccardianus several miniatures represent the construction of the town; in I, 16 for instance, we see the workmen digging the ground, just as in our picture; there is also a bull's skull lying on the ground, alluding to the *byrsa* or skin of a bull used for measuring the circumference of the town. Of special interest is the great engine which is carrying stones to the top of the wall. It is three stories high and rests on wheels; in the middle story there is the mechanism for the movement, composed of screws and cog-wheels. The same engine is represented in the Riccardianus, I, 23.

The artist did not continue the love-story of Aeneas and Dido: he proceeds instead at once to the last books of the Aeneid. As the illustration in the Codex Riccardianus ends with the fourth book, we cannot continue the comparison between the two series. Close to the walls of Carthage, there is the sea with a sailing ship. The other part represents the coast of Latium, and the banks of the Tiber, where the Trojans have landed. Aeneas and his companions are dining, as it is described in *Aen.* VII., 109 sq. instead of tables *adorea liba per herbam subiciunt epulis* and as the scanty provisions are insufficient to still their hunger, they begin to eat also the *liba*:

*Heus! etiam mensas consumimus*

says the young son of Aeneas, Iulus; and his father recognizes that in this way the mysterious oracle, which was given to him by Anchises, has been fulfilled:

*cum te, nate, fames ignota ad litora vectum  
accisis coget dapibus consumere mensas  
tum sperare domum.*

Above this scene, we see the well known augurium of the pig with the thirty young pigs, which indicated to Aeneas the spot to be chosen for the construction of Lavinium. It may be noticed, that according to Varro « *huius suis ac porcorum etiam nunc vestigia apparent Lavini, quod et simulacra eorum aenea etiam nunc in publico posita, et corpus matris ab sacerdotibus quod in salsura fuerit, demonstratur* (*de r. r.*, II, 49).

In the upper corner to the right, we see finally the city of Rome, the last and most important Trojan colony, as it was called in ancient times. This view of Rome is a very curious one, and of high interest for the history of Roman topography (1). The most important monuments represented in it are: the Pantheon or S. Maria Rotonda; the Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Ponte S. Angelo, the Capitol with the Senator's Palace and the church of Aracoeli; the Colosseum and the Column of Trajan. All these monuments are represented with a remarkable amount of detail: on the Pantheon, for instance, is indicated the inscription, and the niches in the rear of the portico; the Palazzo del Senatore has two lateral towers with pinnacles, and a few steps leading to the main entrance. Before the church of Aracoeli the steps are separated in several divisions, as they really are. One detail finally which deserves consideration is the big wheel you see on the outside of Castel S. Angelo. It signifies an engine destined to carry up to the top of the castle ammunition and provisions: the exact place of it is indicated in the beautiful drawing of Giuliano da Sangallo, Cod. Barb. fol. 35. Here we see at the north side of the great rotunda a similar engine for this purpose; it may be that it was replaced, in the time of Pope Alexander VI, by the curious lift still existing, which lands one in the anticamera of Paul III. Anyhow, the artist who painted this cassone had an exact idea of the Roman monuments he represented, even if the choice was not his own, but was taken from some pre-existing perspective plan of the city, as we shall see later.

But I leave for a moment the illustration of the view of Rome, in order to show you some other Florentine pictures of the same school and relating to the same legends; these are two cassoni now preserved in the Kestner-Museum at Hanover.

In the first of them (plate I, n. 3) we see the Trojan ships on the coast of Libya; in the background (upper margin of the picture) there are Aeneas and Achates meeting Venus, who appears to them in the guise of a hunting nymph. Then, we see Aeneas and Achates walking towards Carthage, and the meeting of Aeneas and Dido in the temple of Juno. The artist has imitated, on the whole, the same model as in the Jarves cassone: but he was careful to vary his drawing in some details, making for instance the niches in the interior not vaulted, but rectangular, and giving to the pilasters and the architrave a different

(1) This view of Rome, the upper part of which cannot be seen on the photograph from which our figure, plate I, 2 is taken, has been reproduced in a larger size and in colours, in the *Bullettino Comunale* 1911, tav. I.

shape; further, the big engine for carrying stones is found, not on the right, but on the left of the temple, beside a large building of stone, which is none other than the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi (see p. 468 note 3). We see then the servants of Dido carrying the gifts of the queen to the Trojan ships (*Aen.*, I, 632-635):

*nec minus interea sociis ad littora mittit  
viginti boves, magnorum horrentia centum  
terga suum, pinguis centum cum matribus agnos.*

Besides the ships, there is Venus talking to her son Cupid and ordering him to make Dido fall in love with Aeneas (*Aen.*, I, 656 sq.) These two scenes correspond exactly to the miniatures of the Codex Riccardianus I, 25 and 26.

The narration is continued on the second cassone (not reproduced on our plates, but published in the *Bullettino comunale*, 1911, tav. II) with the banquet of the queen, described in *Aen.*, I, 697 sq. Dido with Aeneas and Achates is sitting at table under a beautiful baldachin on a terrace, to which four steps lead up; the Trojans and the Tyrians are standing at two other tables in the lower part of the hall. The statues in the niches, the rich silver-plate on the buffet to the right give an idea of Florentine decoration about the middle of the Quattrocento. This scene occupies the whole left side of the picture: to the right there is the fatal hunting-party described in the fourth book of the Aeneid. We see the queen going out of the palace, and greeting the young Iulus, who is on horseback; behind the queen

*auro insignis et ostro  
stat sonipes, ac frena ferox spumantia mandat.*

(*Aen.*, IV, 134-135). Above this scene, there is the hunt itself: beaters with sticks are driving the game out of the thicket; a boar is surrounded by the hunters; and finally on the upper corner to the right we see the famous

*speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem  
deveniunt*

and here ends the account of Aeneas' "gestes".

That the two pairs of cassoni we described came from the same Florentine bottega, is perfectly clear by the conformity of the pictures in style, in composition and in so many details. For the same reason, we can refer to the same origin a third pair of cassoni, of which one still remains in Italy, while the other has emigrated from the continent. The subjects illustrated in these two pictures are not taken from poetry,



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1 Cassone in the R. Pinacoteca at Turin.

2 Cassone in the Staedel Gallery at Frankfort.



but from Roman history: they are the war between Romans and Gauls in 390 B. C., the capture of the city, and the flight of the Vestal Virgins to Caere.

The first cassone (plate II n. 1) is now preserved in the Royal Pinacoteca at Turin (attributed to Paolo Uccello). The artist has taken as a guide the narrative of Livy, or of one of his condensers, perhaps Florus, and followed him faithfully as he followed Virgil in the above-described pictures. We see to the left a city, which ought to be Clusium, but is very similar to Florence, with its Cathedral, the Baptistery and the Campanile. The Gaulish army is standing under the walls of the town. On the left of the composition seems to be represented the misdeed of the Roman ambassador Q. Fabius who *evectus extra aciem equo duce Gallorum per latus transfixum hasta occidit* (Liv., V, 36).

In the middle of the foreground there is the battle between Roman and Gaulish cavalry at the Allia: the ensigns of the first bear the well-known S. P. Q. R., those of the others a cock (*gallus*). In the middle-distance there is a similar battle between Gaulish and Roman infantry. In both instances, the Romans are defeated: only the *subsidiarii* on the top of the hill are resisting, others are flying to the Tiber, and swimming through the river on horseback; others are retiring on Rome, and *ne clausis quidem portis urbis in arcem confugiunt* (Liv., V, 38).

The narration is continued on the second cassone (see plate IV.), now in the University Gallery at Oxford (1). The Gaulish warriors have entered the town: the old senator Papirius, awaiting the enemies on his curule chair, motionless as a statue, is murdered by one of them (Liv. V, 42). The Romans are flying across the river, either swimming or on horseback; in the foreground, we see two women with their children crossing the bridge. Beyond this bridge, we see the Flamen Quirinalis and the Vestal Virgins carrying the statues of the Penates and other sacred implements (*sacra inter se onere partito ferunt via, quae a Sublicio ponte ducit ad Janiculum*; Liv. V, 40). Here, we have to note a curious detail, which proves that the painter does not derive his tale directly from Livy: the Vestal Virgins are represented barefooted. This detail — an absurd one — is not to be found in Livy, but in the rhetorically exaggerated narrative of Florus (I, 7), who tells that *virgines simul ex sacerdotio Vestae nudo pede fugientia sacra comitantur*. Fortunately, the poor priestesses have not to go very long on their painful way: when they are on the *clivus* leading to the top of the Janiculum (near

(1) I am indebted to the kindness of Mrs A. Strong, for a beautiful photograph of the Oxford Cassone, which is published for the first time on plate IV.

Porta San Pancrazio), they meet a good man, a plebeian, Lucius Albinus, who is conveying his wife and children on a carriage towards Caere (Cervetri). When Albinus sees the Virgins walking with the heavy sacred objects, he orders his family to descend, and takes the Flamen and the Virgins into the carriage. This scene, described with charming naïveté, occupies the centre of the picture. To the right, we see the arrival of the cortège at Caere, where the priestesses at once begin to worship the goddess Vesta in a circular temple, as they did at Rome.

The same close connection as in the historical narrative on the two cassoni pictures we can observe in the two views of the city of Rome, which appear in the upper corner to the right of the Turin cassone and to the left of the Oxford picture. Both together form an almost complete view of Rome, which of course is derived from the same original as the one we saw on the Jarves cassone, but completes it in a very remarkable way. In the centre of it there is also the Capitol, but the palace of the Senator is not represented, only the church of Aracoeli with the steps. Before the Colosseum we see (on the Turin cassone, plate II., n. 1) a huge tower three stories high: this is the Torre delle Milizie; before the tower, a kind of triumphal arch. The comparison with other perspective views of Rome, especially that of the Codex Redianus (De Rossi, *Piante* tav. IV.) gives evidence that we have here to understand the Arch of Gallienus on the Esquiline. Above this, a large façade and two campanili indicate perhaps the basilicas of the Lateran and of S. Croce (1).

On the Oxford Cassone (see plate IV) the most conspicuous monument is the Pantheon (without its inscription, but with a curious indication of the mediaeval campanile on the summit of the portico); to the left, on the margin of the picture, a *colonna istoriata*, which owing to its position must be that of Marcus Aurelius. The column is decorated, like that of Trajan on the Jarves Cassone, with reliefs representing fighting scenes: these, however, have nothing to do with the real reliefs of the columns, but seem to be taken from some sarcophagus representing the battle between Lapithes and Centaurs (2). Between the Pantheon and the column appears a basilica with a campanile and a semicircular apse, perhaps the church of S. Silvestro in Capite. Of especial interest is the repre-

(1) I have to correct, on this occasion, some statements I made in the *Bullettino Comunale*, 1911, p. 17, 18, before I was able to examine a photograph of the Oxford Cassone.

(2) In one of the Riccardiana miniatures, representing the destruction of Troy (lib. II, n. 15), there is, in the middle of the burning town, a column decorated with similar reliefs.



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1. 2. Cassoni in the Colonna Gallery at Rome.



sensation of the Moles Hadriani, which does not appear, as in the Jarves Cassone, in its mediaeval state, but as it was restored by the imagination of artists and antiquarians of the Quattrocento. We see the square basis, decorated with bucrania and garlands: on each side, a huge door leads to the interior of the monument. In this respect it resembles almost the figure on the plan of the Codex Radianus, drawn in 1474 by a Florentine nobleman, Alessandro Strozzi (De Rossi, *Piante*, p. 99). Finally, to the right, are indicated the pyramid of Caius Cestius, and two campanili; the latter are not characteristic enough to give them any special name.

The views of Rome upon the cassoni at Yale, Turin and Oxford are of special interest for the topography of the city (1). It is easy to understand that they are not created by the cassone painter himself, but derived from a more ancient original; and we are able to say with some probability what this original has been. There must have been a very elaborate perspective view of Rome, made in the XIII. century or even a little before, of which many copies are still preserved in manuscripts and pictures. The most important of these copies are the fresco paintings of Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico at Siena, painted about 1414; a miniature in a manuscript of Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo*, in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, executed in 1447; several illuminated initials in manuscripts of *Augustinus de Civitate Dei*. The last and most complete copy may be the above-mentioned plan in the Codex Radianus (1474). All these copies are of the Quattrocento: but that the type of plan was invented much earlier is ascertained by the representation of Rome on the famous golden bulla of the Emperor Louis the Bavarian at Aix-la-Chapelle (1330) and by a fresco in the upper church of Assisi, painted by Giovanni Cimabue about 1280. Professor Strzygowski therefore supposed Cimabue to have been the author of the plan, drawn by him in a visit to Rome about 1270; but this statement to me seems impossible. The so-called plan of Cimabue cannot be considered the work of an artist, but rather of a miniature-painter or a topographer. I believe that the original is still older than Cimabue, and goes back to a plan made in the beginning of the XIII. or the end of the XII. century, perhaps in the reign of Innocent III. or Honorius III., when the *Liber Censuum*, the great register of all the belongings of the Roman church, was made by order of the Roman Curia.

So much about the view of ancient Rome; let us now return to

(1) On these points I have spoken with more detail in the *Bollettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*, 1911, p. 13-22.

the Florentine cassoni. The six of them already mentioned belong all to the middle of the xv. century; but the fashion of painted furniture lasted much longer than that. Other works of the same kind, with similar representations, mark by their style the wonderful progress which the art of painting had made in Florence between 1450 and 1490. Two beautiful specimens of such later cassoni are preserved in the Stædel Gallery at Frankfort a'M. One of them represents the deed of Horatius Cocles; the second one, published for the first time on p. II, 2, the history of Mucius Scaevola. We see to the left, the Etruscan camp, with the richly decorated tent of King Porsena in the foreground; the young Roman hero kills the king's secretary instead of the king himself, and is conducted to punishment by the soldiers. But he raises the admiration of Porsena by the heroic fortitude with which he puts his hand into the burning fire, and so he gains the deliverance of his native city. The city of Rome is represented in the upper corner to the right, in a very detailed manner; but it is easy to see that this view is perfectly different from those we mentioned above. The point of view is not as in those from the north, near Porta del Popolo or the Monti Parioli, but from the east. The ancient monuments are more numerous, and represented with remarkable fidelity. The study of Roman topography has passed from the epoch of the mediaeval *Mirabilia* to the humanistic period of Poggio and Biondo. And in this case also we can say, that the perspective view was not of the cassone painter's own invention, but copied from a very elaborate plan or view of Rome, executed about 1480, perhaps by a pupil of Leo Battista Alberti. The original of this plan is lost, but we have numerous copies, amongst which a great picture in the Museo Civico at Mantua and the woodcuts in Hartmann Schedel's (1493) and Sebastian Muenster's (1549) chronicles are the most important (1).

Finally I may call the attention of my hearers to two beautiful cassoni paintings, existing in the Colonna Gallery at Rome. The pictures were formerly attributed to Cosimo Roselli or to Domenico Ghirlandaio, but they are now believed to be the work of a pupil of Domenico Bartolomeo di Giovanni (2). The first picture (plate III, n. 1), represents the rape of the Sabine women in the Circus Maximus. The Circus itself

(1) See my article *Di una nuova pianta prospettiva di Roma del secolo XV*, in the *Bullettino Comunale* 1892 p. 38-47.

(2) See the article of Dr. B. Berenson, *Burlington Magazine* I, 1903, p. 7 ff. It is interesting to see, in what a naïve manner the artist makes use of the same antique monuments for representing the city of Jerusalem in his picture of the massacre of the Innocents (Florence. *Ospedale degli Innocenti*)



CASSONE IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM AT OXFORD

(BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE VISITORS)

*By Janus - Rome.  
 Mosaic a copy of the part of the original work 1846*

is represented in a very naïve way: the little chariots on which the young Romans are racing do not at all resemble an ancient Roman bigae or quadrigae, but rather one of those small and low chariots used in the painter's time for the race in Piazza S. Maria Novella in the days of Carnival. In the background we see several monuments of Rome, the Pantheon, a *colonna istoriata*, the Torre delle Milizie and an obelisk. These are no longer primitive mediaeval drawings such as we saw before, but real architectural drawings, carefully made.

The second cassone (plate III, n. 2) represents the reconciliation between the Romans and the Sabines. Here the artist has decorated the background with curious figures of abrupt mountains, very unlike the seven hills of Rome. Below, we see the walls of Aurelian with the Porta Ostiensis and the pyramid of C. Cestius, the Colosseum and the arch of Constantine.

In both these cassoni, the artistic execution is far superior to the naïve productions of the time of Dello Delli or Paolo Uccello. There is more life in the groups, more refinement in the perspective, etc. But we see that Florence at the end of the Quattrocento was not less fond of ancient Rome than at the beginning. Therefore nearly all the great artists went from their home to the eternal city in order to study the monuments of ancient glory and beauty. Giuliano da Sangallo began his studies, as he says on the title-page of his large sketch-book, at Rome as a boy of 13 years. Simone del Pollaiuolo returning from Rome to his native town was so full of marvels of the golden city that he was regarded as a very Chronicle of them, and got the nick-name of «Cronaca» which he bore throughout his life. The citizens of Florence were always very much interested in frescoes, in pictures, or even engravings of Rome and its monuments. This mutual relation between Florence, the city of painting, and Rome, the city of antiquities, has been a very important factor for the evolution of the Renaissance. And as one of its characteristic features we may consider the modest craftsman's work, the cassoni and the furniture to which I have called your attention in these pages.

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