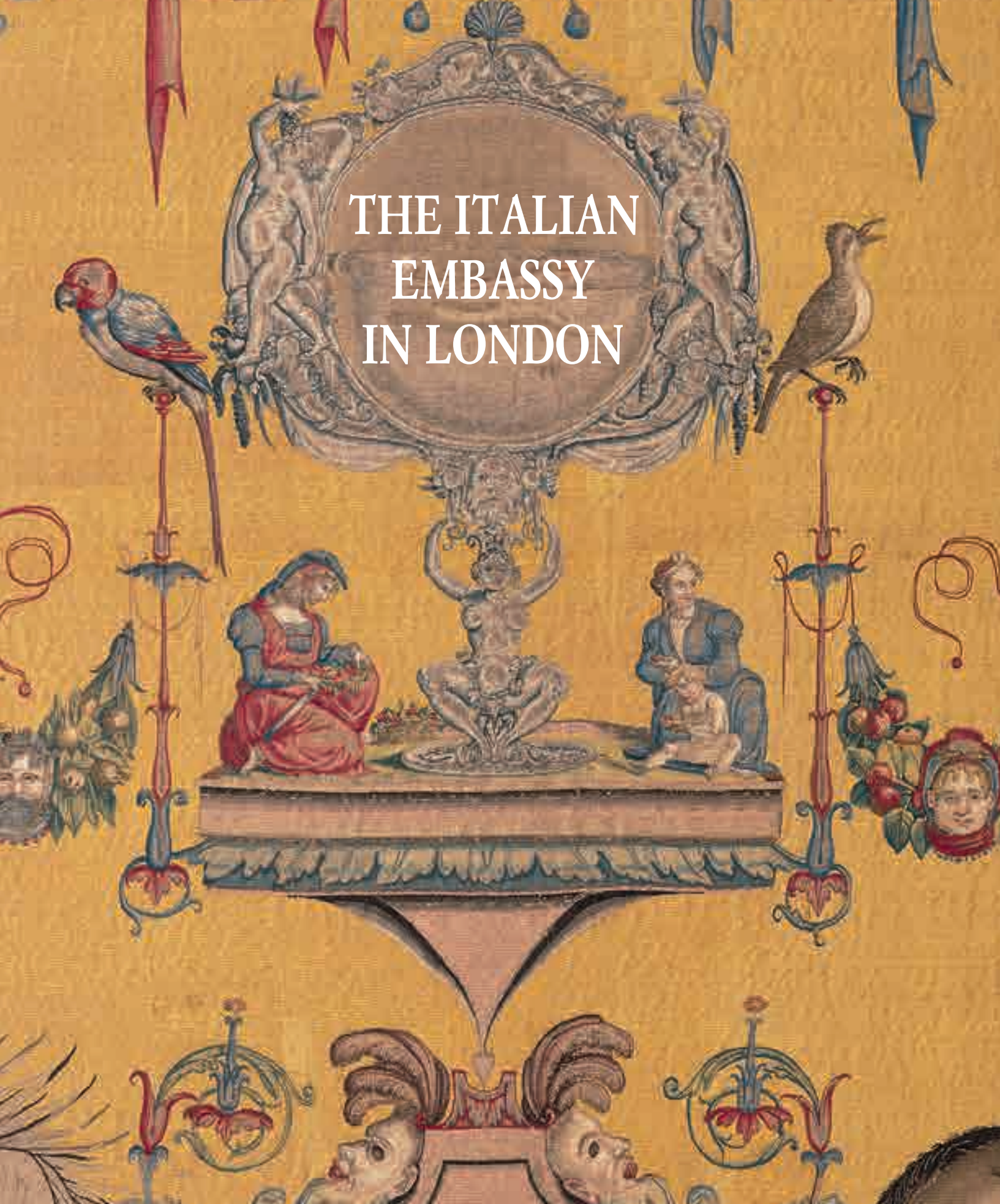
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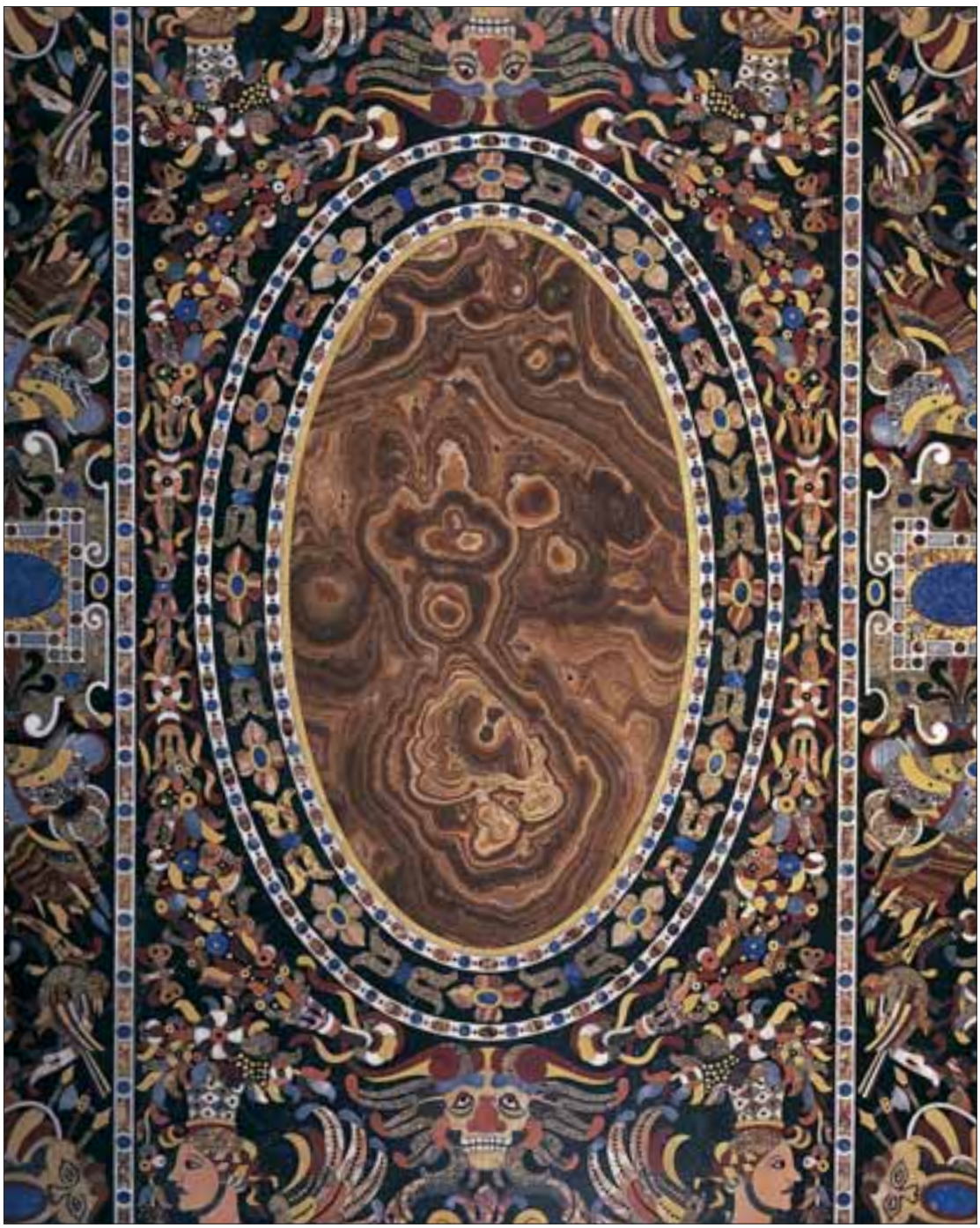


FOREWORD

The affectionate urging of many friends, both English and Italian, whom I have had the pleasure of entertaining at the Italian Embassy in London, have convinced me to publish a new, updated version of this well-received, and well-appreciated, book.

Indeed, as a young Secretary in the 1960s (London was my first posting abroad) I had already noted that the harmony of the building's architecture and the richness of its furnishings were the objects of great admiration.

The Residence of the Italian Ambassador is the only building in Grosvenor Square to retain, intact, the original Georgian structure from the beginning of the 18th century, when it was built as the residence of the Earl of Effingham. The building is, in fact, held in such regard that the British Georgian Society sends every year a delegation of members to visit.

The building contains Italian masterpieces as well as fine works by English painters, in a way representative of the close links enjoyed by the two countries over the course of centuries.

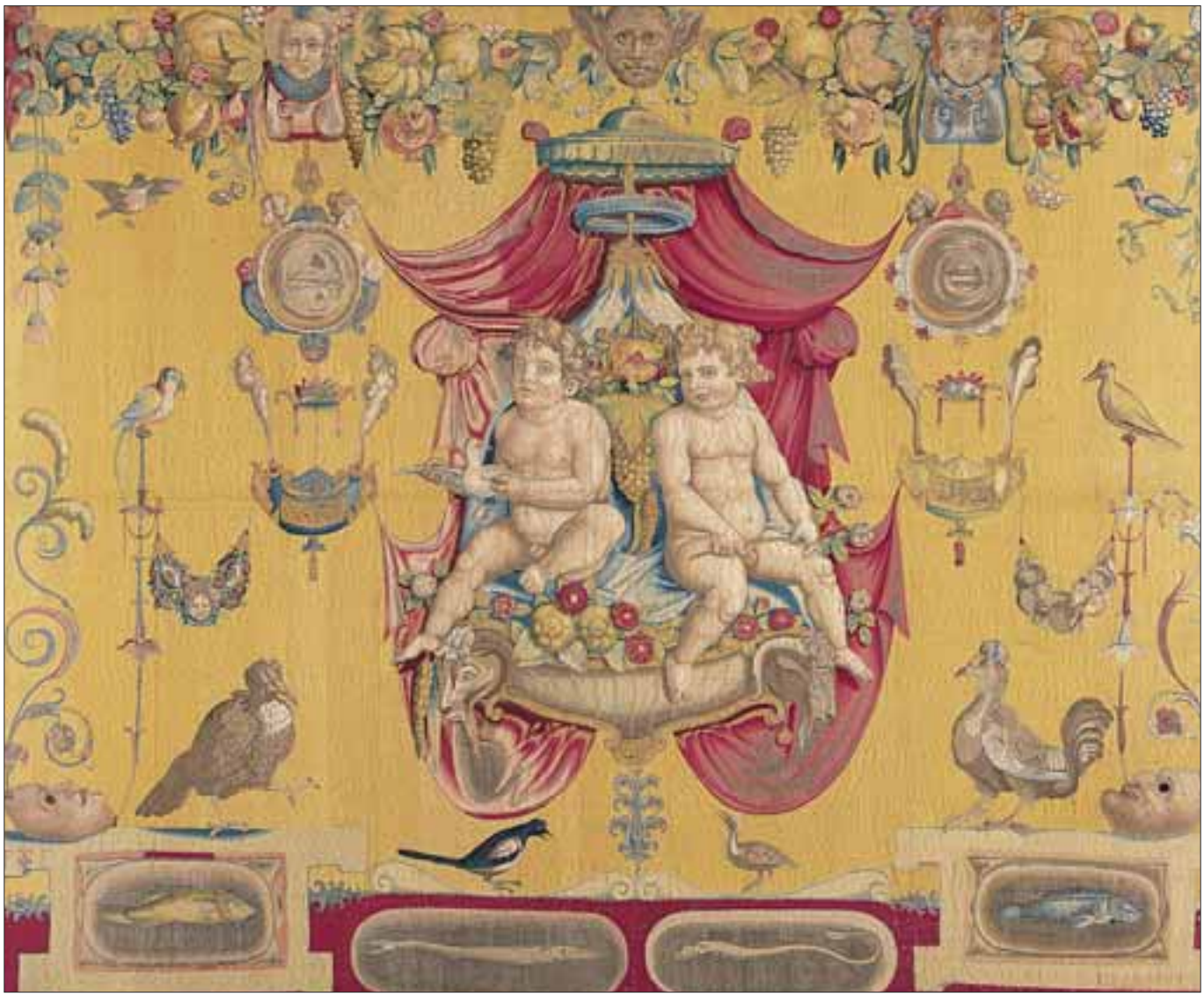
The Italian Embassy in London, one of the most beautiful of Italy's Diplomatic Residences, assumes the role of a magnificent visiting card and at the same time acts as a precious working tool for the Head of Mission. During my tenure I have thus been encouraged to host events as diverse as economic and cultural soirees, from political meetings to purely social gatherings; and the house is, naturally, always open to our community.

The Residence, however, is not only an institutional venue, but also the Ambassador's home. I have therefore tried to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, adding to the existing furnishings my own, more modest belongings, gathered in the course of a wandering life spent under various latitudes.

Many of the objects contained in this house have been photographed for this revised volume which, I hope, will be for many a pleasing memento of a visit to London; or, indeed, of a meeting with Italy's Ambassador to the Court of St James's.

London, November 2002

Luigi Amaduzzi



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WISH TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO
MERLONI ELETTRODOMESTICI
WHOSE GENEROUS HELP MADE THIS WORK POSSIBLE

MY WARMEST THANKS ALSO TO THE AUTHOR
OF THE TEXT, DR. CARLO MILANO
AND TO THE PHOTOGRAPHER, MR. EDWARD HOPLEY

The Italian Embassy at No. 4 Grosvenor Square is a very fascinating place both for its art collection and for the history of the building in which it is housed.

The land occupied today by the square and the surrounding area were once part of the Manor of Ebury, which belonged to Westminster Abbey, and later came into the possession of the Crown.

James I sold it in 1623 to private purchasers, and then in 1626 the Manor of Ebury was bought by Hugh Audley, who at his death passed it to his wife, Mary Davies. She later married Sir Thomas Grosvenor, whose son, Sir Richard, started the development of the area around 1710.

Sir Richard's plans were ambitious. In his mind, Grosvenor Square had to be one of the largest in London, extending over six acres of land. Its buildings had to be both imposing and elegant, all part of a harmonic architectural plan that had to be set along the four sides of the square.

The East flank (where the Embassy is located) was originally designed in 1725 by the Scottish architect Colen Campbell (1676-1729), but his ideas were never transformed into reality. A drawing by Campbell showing the Neo-Palladian characteristics of his project still exists in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

It is unclear why the plan by Campbell was discarded, but work began on the site in 1725 under the direction of John Simmons. No. 4, the house at the centre of the East side, therefore the most important of it, was finished in 1728, and the construction of the whole group of seven houses was completed by 1735.

No. 4 was larger than the other buildings and had a prominent centre crowned with a pediment. Some of the decorative elements were repeated on the end houses, which gave to the block the aspect of a single palatial building[1].

The façade.

[1] J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 7th ed., Harmondsworth, 1983, p. 388.

Despite the exceptional position and the beauty of the architecture, the building of the Italian Embassy failed to sell, until in June 1739 Simmons resorted to making it a raffle prize.

The new owner was Francis Howard, 1st Earl of Effingham, doubtless in trust for the first tenant, Edward Howard, 9th Duke of Norfolk, who lived in it until 1741. In February 1742 Lord Effingham sold the house for £ 5,500 to Thomas Watson-Wentworth, Earl of Malton, later 1st Marquess of Rockingham, who decided to alterate it profoundly, particularly by changing the arrangement of the interior and by adding plastered ceilings.

His son, Charles, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham and Prime Minister in 1765 and in 1782, used No. 4 Grosvenor Square as his home from 1751 until his death in 1782, and then passed it to his nephew, William Wentworth, 4th Earl Fitzwilliam, who resided there for fifty years.

Lord Fitzwilliam was an important politician of his time. He held the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1795 for only eight days, after which he was dismissed by Pitt, annoyed by his resolute stand in favour of immediate measures to implement the Catholic Emancipation. He put large sums of money into the house, spending for example £ 3,986 in 1785.

The Fitzwilliams renovated the house again in 1872 and in 1902, adding an extra floor and a rear extension linked with the buildings on Three Kings Yard where the Chancery is today.

In 1931 the 7th Earl Fitzwilliam surrendered the lease back to the Grosvenors, and on the 25th of March of the same year Hugh Grosvenor, Duke of Westminster, granted a 200-year lease to the Italian State[2].

The Italian Embassy was then at No. 20 Grosvenor Square – a house which no longer exists – having been there since 1890.

The origins of the Italian Legation to the Court of St. James's can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century.

Then, Italy was divided in a number of small States, one of which, the Kingdom of Sardinia (ruling over today's Piedmont, Liguria, and of course Sardinia), was beginning to play an increasingly important role on the international scene despite its modest dimensions. Close relations between Turin, the capital of the Kingdom, and London were kept and grew stronger under Prime Minister Cavour.

Detail of one of the tapestries with the river Arno and the Medici coat-of-arms in the ballroom.

[2] For more information about the history of the house and of the square, see A.I. Dasent, *A History of Grosvenor Square*, London, 1935, pp. 50-58, and 188-189, and F.H.W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London*, vol. XL, *The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair*, part II, The Buildings, London, 1980, pp. 119-121.

Detail of a 19th century lamp in the Adam Room.

The Sardinian legation was in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn Fields, in today's Sardinia Street. Nothing remains of that building, except a painting representing *The Descent from the Cross* in a church in Kingsway[3].

The friendship and links between England and the Kingdom of Sardinia were confirmed and intensified after the official visit of Vittorio Emanuele II to Queen Victoria in 1856. In 1859 Turin sent one of his foremost diplomats, Marchese D'Azeglio, as a Minister Plenipotentiary to London.

Through an ambitious and clever policy of alliances and wars orchestrated by Cavour, the Kingdom of Sardinia became in 1861 the Kingdom of Italy, with Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy as its Sovereign.

Shortly afterwards the Legation moved to 49 Grosvenor Street, and in 1876 it became an Embassy, with Luigi Menabrea, who succeded Carlo Cadorna, as the first Italian Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

The crucial importance of the Embassy in London for the new State is confirmed by the fact that out of the ten Ambassadors who held the post in the following thirty years (Nigra, Corti, Di Robilant, Tornielli, Ferrero, De Renzis, Pansa, Tittoni, Di San Giuliano, Imperiali), five had already been, or were later to be, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the post of Ambassador was held by Giacomo De Martino, Pietro Tomasi Della Torretta, Antonio Bordonaro, and Dino Grandi, who supervised the new decoration of No. 4 Grosvenor Square, inaugurated on 21 April 1934.

The last Ambassador before the Second World War was Giuseppe Bastianini, then the Embassy was closed from July 1940 to December 1944, when it was reopened by Count Nicolò Carandini. Since then the Ambassadors have been Tommaso Gallarati Scotti, Manlio Brosio, Vittorio Zoppi, Pietro Quaroni, Gastone Guidotti, Raimondo Manzini, Roberto Ducci, Andrea Cagiati, Bruno Bottai, Boris Biancheri, Giacomo Attolico, Paolo Galli, Luigi Amaduzzi.

The political and diplomatic significance of the Embassy in London was such that, as mentioned before, the Italian Government decided in the 1930s to renovate the interiors of the new premises and to decorate them with a superb collection of masterpieces coming from Italian museums[4].

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[3] N. Pevsner - B. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: London. The City of London; the City of Westminster*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.

[4] On this further architectural alteration of the house, see F.H.W. Sheppard (ed.), *op. cit.* , p. 121.

The paintings, furniture, and works of art, were selected by the Soprintendenti of Rome, Milan, and Florence, Hermanin, Modigliani, and Tarchiani, and the core of the objects shipped from Italy was the collection of Riccardo Gualino, which had just been donated to the State.

It was intention of the Government that the collection of the Italian Embassy in London should represent all periods and all regional schools, and should contribute to raising the image of Italy in Britain. Such indeed was the aim also of the "Italian Exhibition" held in 1930 at the Royal Academy, probably the most extraordinary display of Italian art ever organized[5].

Among the paintings of the Embassy were a *Madonna* by Luca Signorelli in the entrance hall; a terracotta by Mino da Fiesole of a *Madonna and Child*, a *Crucifixion* by Giovanni Boccati, a *Madonna* by a pupil of Pesellino, and a *Study of two Angels* by Spinello Aretino, all in the Morning Room; the *Venus of the Turtle* by Sebastiano del Piombo on the landing of the first floor; a Botticelli *Venus*, the *Madonna of the Cherries* by Cosimo Tura, Titian's *Leda*, and the *Maria dè Medici* by Bronzino in the Venetian Drawing Room; a *Portrait of a Man with a Flower* by Antonello da Messina, and *Mars and Venus* by Veronese were both on the first floor, as well as *The Ford* by Rubens, a *Madonna and Child* by Ambrogio de Predis, a *Venetian Senator* by Titian, and *The Village Street* by Ruysdael.

All of these paintings were returned to Italy after the war and, especially the Gualino collection which has been given back to the Galleria Sabauda in Turin. Many attributions, too, have changed, and for example the *Venus* is now considered a copy after Botticelli, or the Tura has been assigned to Ercole de Roberti, but in any case the impact of the collection displayed in 1934 must have been quite remarkable[6].

The collection as it is visible today is a combination of objects that were in the original furnishings of 1934, such as the tapestries woven after the cartoons by Bachiacca in the Dining Room, and others which have been sent from Italy or bought by the Italian State after the Second World War.

The view on Grosvenor Square from the entrance door.

[5] On the "Italian Exhibition" and on the opening of the new Embassy, see F. Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum. Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition*, New Haven and London, 2000, pp. 107-127.

[6] On the shipping of the Gualino collection to London and its return to Turin, see R. Tardito Amerio - A. Imponente, *La donazione Gualino alla Galleria Sabauda*, in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti . Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino*, exhibition catalogue, Turin, 1983, pp. 38 et seqq.., and particularly pp. 38-42.

1. The Entrance Hall.

2. The central part of the *pietra dura* table top in the Entrance Hall.

The entrance hall welcomes the visitor with its ample space and sober atmosphere, and allows him to admire the magniloquent staircase, probably the most significant architectural feature of the house. *(fig. 1)*

The hall is dominated by an imposing marble table at the centre. Its top comes from the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, and is one of the finest examples to be seen in London of the *commesso di pietre dure*, a technique of cutting and inlaying marbles and rare stones that was developed in Florence and then spread to Rome and across Europe. *(fig. 2)* Pietra dura objects could take years to be made, and were very sought-after by Sovereigns and collectors. Therefore, they were frequently used as diplomatic gifts, particularly by the Medici, who in the sixteenth century founded the still existing Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the grand-ducal workshops. Here the most renowned *commessi* were produced using the rarest marbles from quarries and antique ruins and semi-precious stones.

This table top has a very elaborate polychrome decoration with a large oval slab of *alabastro fiorito* in the middle. Tens of different types of coloured marbles are cut in countless pieces arranged in various ornaments. Sphynxes, grotesques, and garlands are displayed within the large frame that runs along the edge of the table, and in the section around the oval centre.

The style of this top suggests that it was made in the early decades of the seventeenth century, quite probably in Rome rather than in Florence.

An eclectic and refined taste is shown by the other furnishings of the entrance hall. They include a large Flemish tapestry representing the *Departure for the Hunt (fig. 3)* and a North Italian *cassone* on the left wall, and a painting with *Knights in Battle* attributed to the Neapolitan seventeenth century painter Carlo Coppola together with a commode from the Veneto on the right wall.

3. *The Departure for the Hunt*, Flemish tapestry in the Entrance Hall.

4. The Morning Room.

An arch divides the entrance hall from the staircase. To the left is the large and bright Morning Room, with the windows opening on to Grosvenor Square. *(fig. 4)*

The eye is immediately caught by the two monumental paintings hanging on the North wall. They are *Landscapes*, one with women washing clothes, the other with travellers, both by the Genoese painter Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749). *(figg. 5-6)*

A rare artist in British collections, Magnasco developed a very personal style of painting and a peculiar choice of subjects that made him famous, especially in Milan, where he spent most of his life.

These two canvases, which date to around 1719-1725, are typical of the painter and were originally part of a group of four that was in a church in Gravedona in Lombardy. The other two are a pair of smaller size and they represent landscapes with Capuchin friars. They are now in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan[7].

Besides the large paintings by Magnasco, the decoration of the Morning Room is very rich. On the West wall (towards Grosvenor Square), one can see a panel with the *Nativity* by the Lombard painter Bernardino Luini (1480-1532) *(fig. 7),* and then on the South wall, over an austere early-18th century commode again from Lombardy, one of the most precious paintings in the collection, the *Battle of the River Allia* (near Chiusi), fought between Romans and Gauls in 390 BC and carefully described by Livy, whose words seem to be reflected in this exceptional painting. *(figg. 8-9)*

The panel is the front of a Florentine cassone of the Quattrocento and is part of a pair. The pendant is in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and it depicts a later event in the same war, the death of the Roman Senator Papyrius and the flight from Rome of the Vestal Virgins.They were both painted by the Florentine Renaissance artist Utili[8].

[7] B.Geiger, *Magnasco*, Bergamo, 1949, Plates 72/b and 87/a; M.Bona Castellotti - E. Camesasca (eds.), *Alessandro Magnasco, 1667-1749*, exhibition catalogue, Milan, 1996, nos. 42-43, pp. 186-187.

[8] P. Schubring, *Cassoni*, Leipzig, 1915, vol. I, p. 244, no. 107; B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance, I: Florentine School*, London, 1963, p. 211; C. Lloyd, *A Catalogue of the earlier Italian Paintings in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 175-178.

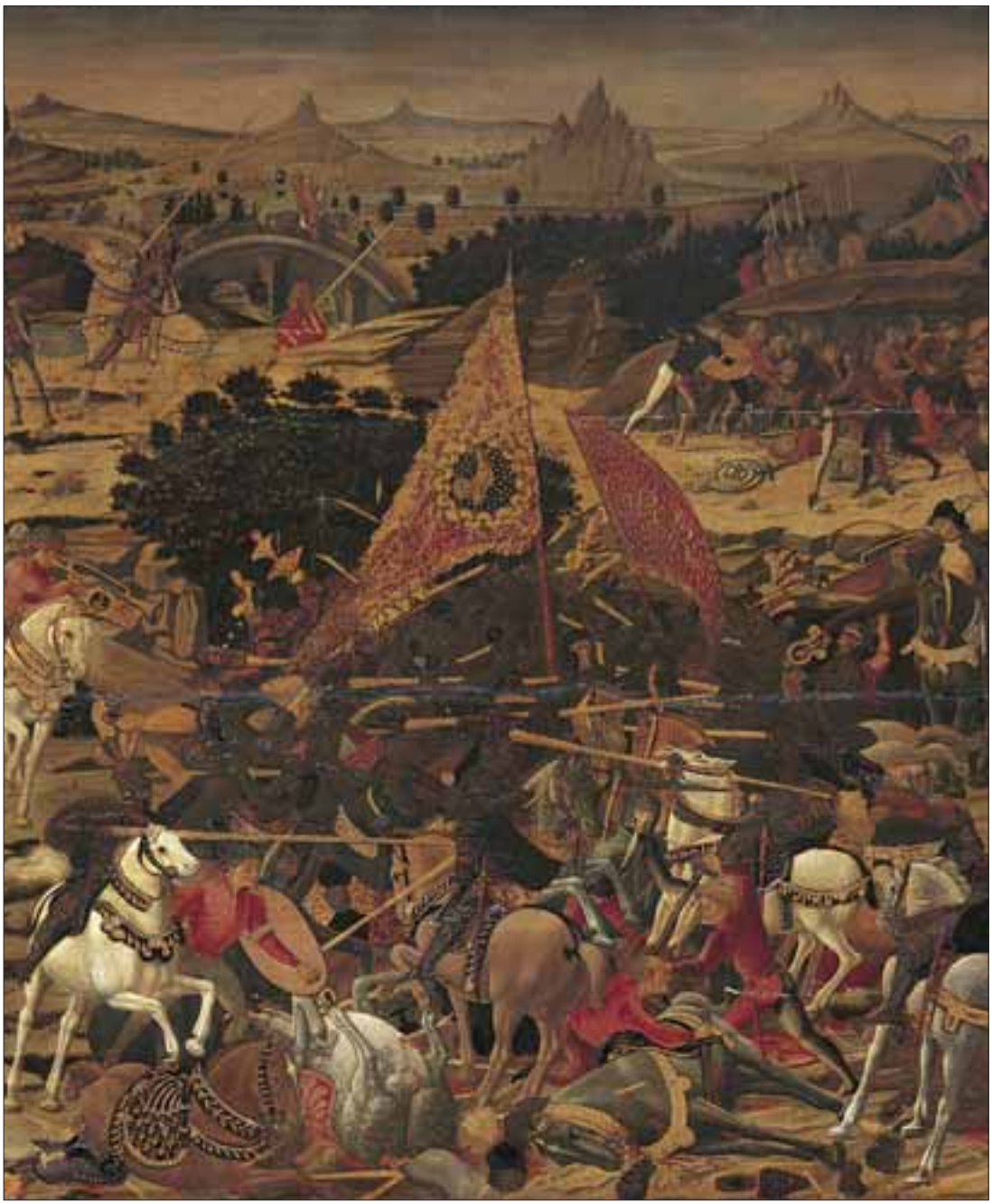
5. Alessandro Magnasco, *Landscape with Women Washing Clothes*, Morning Room.

6. Alessandro Magnasco, *Landscape with Travellers*, Morning Room.

7. Bernardino Luini, *Holy Family*, Morning Room.

10. *The Wild Boar Hunt*, Flemish tapestry in the Morning Room.

8. Biagio d'Antonio, called Utili, *Battle of the River Allia*, Morning Room.



9. Biagio d'Antonio, called Utili, *Battle of the River Allia*, Morning Room, detail.

The scene shows the Gauls led by Brennus to the left, the death of Quintus Fabius in the middle, and the retreat of the Roman army towards a city to the right. A beautiful landscape dense with delicate naturalism creates the background of the fight, and the gilded details of the armours give a precious touch to this beautiful picture.

To the left of the cassone panel is another Flemish tapestry, the *Wild Boar Hunt*, which forms a pair with the *Departure for the Hunt* in the entrance hall. *(fig. 10)*

11. Giovanni Paolo Panini and school, *Roman Capriccio*, Morning Room.

13. Detail of fig. no. 11.

On the wall that divides the Morning Room from the Dining Room, over two late-seventeenth century Italian commodes there is another pair of paintings, two charming *Capricci*, imaginative views of Rome painted by Giovanni Paolo Panini (1696-1765) with the collaboration of one of his pupils. *(figg. 11-13)*

This type of paintings became very fashionable during the 18th Century, particularly among the travellers of the Grand Tour, who were buying them while in Italy and then taking them back to the North. Panini worked mainly in Rome and specialized in views of it, very often creating images with monuments and statues taken from different parts of the Eternal City and put together in a composition. This is the case of both the Embassy's canvases, which come from an English collection. In one of them Panini grouped together the Arch of Janus, the Arch of Titus (with the Dioscuri of Piazza del Quirinale on top),

12. Giovanni Paolo Panini and school, *Roman Capriccio*, Morning Room.

and the Colosseum, in the other the Temple of Antonius and Faustina is the centre of a scene where famous antique statues like the Dying Gaul and the Farnese Hercules appear.

Over one of the commodes there are two drawings in sanguine, one (*St. Mary the Magdalene*) possibly by the 16th century painter Giovanni Agostino da Lodi, or, as an inscription on it says, by Francesco Badile, the other (*St. John the Evangelist*) of a less refined quality and by a different hand, but certainly a Northern Italian work of the early Cinquecento[9]. *(figg. 14-15)*

[9] This drawing too has an insciption: "de m[astro] bernardin dito el boraga".

14. Giovanni Agostino da Lodi (or Francesco Badile?), *St. Mary the Magdalene*, Morning Room.

15 Lombard, 16th century, *St. John the Evangelist*, Morning Room.


de in bernardin detto el boraga

16. The Dining Room.

The Dining Room *(figg. 16, 17)* is one of the most impressive spaces of the Embassy, especially because of the superb tapestries that hang on the walls. These are the celebrated *Spalliere a Grottesche* that were commissioned in 1545 by Grand Duke Cosimo I of Tuscany from his tapestry weavers, Jan Rost [Brussels, 1535 (?)-Florence, 1564] and Niklaus Karcher [Brussels (?), 1498 (?)-Mantua, 1562].

The cartoons for the tapestries were provided by the Florentine painter Francesco Ubertini, called Il Bachiacca (Borgo San Lorenzo, 1494-Florence, 1557) and the *Spalliere* were woven between 1546 and 1553 with threads of wool, silk, gold, and silver. *(figg. 18-26)*

Their original location was the Sala dell'Udienza in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, a room that was normally used as a tribunal, but, occasionally, it seems, staged official banquets given by the Grand Duke. Ten *Spalliere* were made, six are in the Italian Embassy in London, where they arrived in 1934, four are still in Florence, in the Palazzo Pitti[10].

The *Grottesche* became part of Italian ornament towards the end of the fifteenth century. Their name derives from *grotte* (caves) because they were copied mainly from the frescoes of the Domus Aurea in Rome, the lavish villa of Emperor Nero that was half buried and that therefore, with its vaulted ceilings, had the aspect of a series of caves.

These painted decorations were a formidable treasure for Renaissance artists and soon a trip to the grotte of the Domus Aurea became a source of inspiration and a nearly compulsory visit for painters and scholars travelling to Rome. Under the influence of Raphael and of Giovanni da Udine, the taste of the Grottesche broke away from the simple imitation of the antique, and new elements and combinations were introduced.

[10] More detailed information on the Spalliere a grottesche by Il Bachiacca is contained in: M. Tinti, *Francesco Bachiacca e i suoi arazzi*, in Dedalo, 1921, pp. 807 et seqq. ; M. Ferrero Viale, *Arazzi italiani*, Milan, 1962, p. 31, pl. 39; L. Berti (ed.), *Il Museo di Palazzo Davanzati a Firenze*, Florence, 1972, p. 211, cat. no. 183; C. Adelson, *Bachiacca, Salviati, and the decoration of the Sala dell'Udienza in Palazzo Vecchio*, in *Le Arti del Principato Mediceo*, Florence, 1980, pp. 141-200; L. Meoni, *Gli arazzi nei musei fiorentini. La collezione medicea. Catalogo completo. I. La manifattura da Cosimo I a Cosimo III (1545-1621),* Leghorn, 1998, pp. 172-185.

17. Detail of the dining table.

The variety of animals, both real and imaginary, masks, festoons, garlands, architectural elements and astrological allegories that one can see in the *Spalliere a Grottesche* designed by Bachiacca are a beautiful example of this artistic phenomenon.

All tapestries except one are signed with monograms either by Rost or by Karcher and bear another monogram, the Florentine lily with tho F.

The images created by Bachiacca are dense with iconographical riddles and allegories.

The Capricorn was the astrological ascendant of Cosimo I, and the peacock, a bird that relates to Juno, might allude to his wife, Eleonora di Toledo. There are images of Charity and Fortitude, and it seems also that the bubbles blown by one of the putti signify Vanity. Whatever this may be, weawing something nearly invisible, like a bubble, requires an extraordinary ability, yet another sign of the superb quality of these tapestries. The originality and decorative richness of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* and the chromatic effects of the different threads of gold, silver and silk, make of the Dining Room a marvellous interior, a unique place in London.

Two fine Piedmontese gilt and carved wood consoles of the eighteenth century are at the sides of the door leading to the Morning Room. Together with the elegant white marble fireplace, they integrate the furnishing of a room dominated by extremely important and fascinating works of art.

20. Detail of one of the *Spalliere a grottesche* in the dining room.

18. One of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* in the Dining Room.

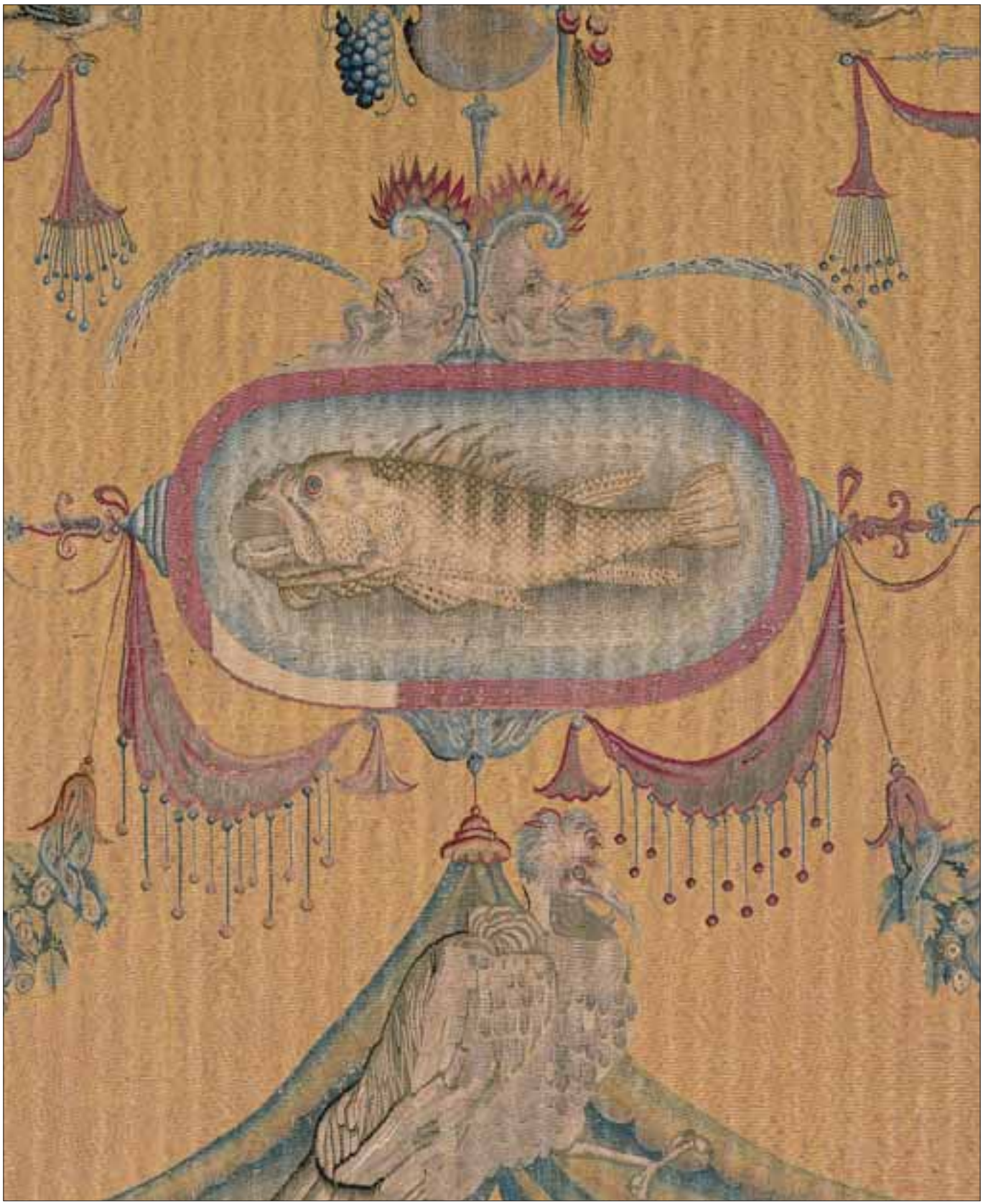
19. One of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* in the Dining Room.

21. Detail of one of the *Spalliere a grottesche* in the dining room.

22. One of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* in the Dining Room.

23. One of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* in the Dining Room.

24. Detail of one of the *Spalliere a Grottesche* in the Dining Room.



25. Detail of one of the *Spalliere a grottesche* in the dining room.

26. Detail of one of the *Spalliere a grottesche* in the dining room.

27 The Study of the Ambassador.

From the Dining Room, one walks through the staircase to the Study of the Ambassador. *(fig. 27)* This is an intimate space, with oak-panneled walls, a place perfectly suited to work. There are a nice Italian bureau plat in Louis XV style, an interesting North Italian late eighteenth century table with square inlaid wood top, and some pictures. A *Madonna and Child* probably by the school of Giampietrino, one of the Lombard followers of Leonardo, hangs over the fireplace *(fig. 28).* On the walls there are also a nice Italian 18th century *Still Life with Flowers and a Vase*, and especially a very attractive Venetian Baroque painting, that could belong to the hand of Sebastiano Mazzoni (Florence, 1611 *circa*-Venice, 1678)[11]. *(fig. 29)*

The subject of this painting is unclear, as indeed the attribution. The names of Francesco Furini and Simone Pignoni, both Florentine, have been suggested as well. A woman with an anchor on her breast, probably an allegory of Temperance, is binding another one, blindfold, her breasts bare, and richly dressed. This may be Prodigality.

[11] G.M. Pilo, *La Pittura del Seicento a Venezia*, catalogue of the exhibition, Venice, 1959, p. 108.

28. School of Giampietrino, *Madonna and Child*, Study of the Ambassador.

29. Sebastiano Mazzoni, *Temperance binding Prodigality*, Study of the Ambassador.