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FAMOUS COLLECTORS

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LUDOVICO STANZANI (1784-1872)

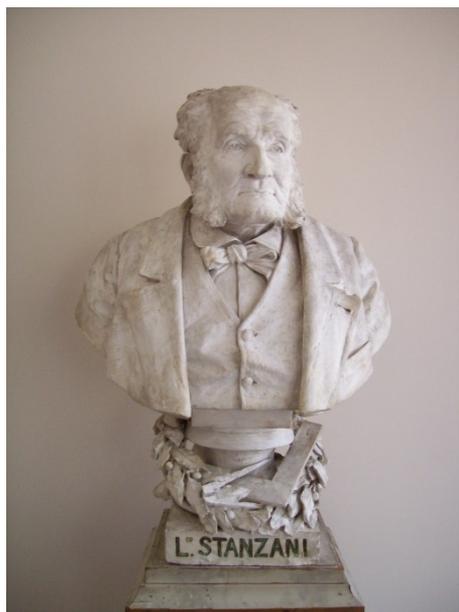


Fig. 1

When Stanzani died in Kiev on 6 August 1872, he was said to be 88 years old, so he was likely born in 1784 (supposedly in Rome) but some Ukrainian sources give the date of his birth as 1793. His will provides the name of his father, Vincenzo.

Ludovico Stanzani, sometimes mistakenly called Luigi (Melbechowska-Luty, 1975), married a Polish countess, Michalina Dziekońska, who was an amateur painter. He was an architect, of unknown education, who was invited to Odessa in 1821 by the French governor, Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langéron. It was probably through him that Stanzani became a freemason, as indicated by the compass and the square on his 1900 bust by Guido Galli. This bust is at the headquarters of the Pontifical Academy of Arts and Belles-Lettres at the Pantheon, Via della Conciliazione 5 (Rome).

In 1832, he became the official architect in the southern Ukrainian region of Kamianets-Podilskyi. He acted as chief architect in Kiev from 1833 to

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1848, designing and building various public and private structures, such as the Catholic church of St. Alexander, a large portion of the area of Lypky, and in 1836 – together with Vincenzo Beretti – the University of Kiev.

After meeting Stanzani and his wife in Saint Petersburg, the regent of the Accademia dei Virtuosi al Pantheon, Giuseppe De Fabris, described him to other Virtuosi as: “*Court Counsellor, Knight member of various scientific institutions, talented person in various domains, a man with plenty of money and benefactor for Russian Catholics*”.

De Fabris proposed to appoint the couple as corresponding-members of the Accademia and they were admitted in December 1857. Less than 20 years later, the very same Academy received Stanzani’s inheritance, including his collection of gems and coins, which, according to the testament dictated in Russian by Stanzani on 19 June 1872, to the clerk of the Kiev military Council, was to be bequeathed to the “*Archaeological Cabinet of Rome*”.

The coins and gems – valued at over 30,000 gold roubles – were packed in a box, and in June 1873 the Consul of the Italian Embassy in Odessa – General Castiglia – sent it to Italy, addressed to the Accademia dei Virtuosi, as the Institution was to be depositary of the collection until the bequest took place. The box arrived on a Lloyd steamer in Brindisi, where it remained almost for a month before anyone claimed it. Nevertheless, institutions, scholars and the local press were interested by the arrival of the collection in Italy, and an archaeology student named Pietro Veri wrote a letter to the gazette *La Libertà*, denouncing that the collection was kept in the regent’s private house. This was taking place shortly after the unification of Italy, and, as Pietro Veri noted, there was a risk, unless the Municipality acted and claimed its rights on the collection, that it could enter instead the Vatican Museum. Such fears, that the Stanzani bequest could be claimed by the Vatican Museums, the Pontifical Academy of Archaeology, or the University of Rome, had been expressed as early as October 1872, in a letter sent by the archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani to the Mayor of Rome. The issue, leading to such complication, was that there was no such “*Archeological Cabinet of Rome*” at that time.

As a reaction to the fear of losing the Stanzani coins, Augusto Castellani made a gift to the Capitoline Museums, enabling the Archaeological Commission hurriedly to create a coin cabinet in October 1873. This did not only enrich the collections of the museums, it also provided the municipality of Rome with a solution to claim Stanzani’s bequest.

Documents, preserved in the archives of the Accademia dei Virtuosi, explain the issues. At the time of Stanzani’s will, there were two coin cabinets in Rome that were open to the public: the Vatican cabinet (which belonged to the Pope), and that of the University of Rome (which was a Royal institution). There would later be one more coin cabinet in Rome,

after the foundation of the Museo Nazionale Romano in 1889, but at the time of Stanzani's bequest there was no cabinet that could claim to belong to the municipality. The cabinet newly created at the Capitoline Museums, instead, could therefore claim to be the only "Archaeological Cabinet of Rome". The Virtuosi Academy entrusted Stanzani's collection to the Capitoline Museums in September 1877, and some of it was placed on display the following year.

It is documented that the box sent in 1873 contained an inventory of the collection, but it has since been lost. Baron Pietro Ercole Visconti initiated a catalogue, but he stopped soon after: as one can read in a report of 1891 by the archaeologist Camillo Serafini: "*the Municipality possesses also the collection of the Stanzani bequest, consisting of 9,251 coins, mostly Oriental and Mediaeval coins. The classification, begun by the Baron Pietro Ercole Visconti, was then interrupted, so the collection lies in disorder and the pieces exhibited in the Coin Cabinet are arranged without any practical or scientific criteria, lacking names and dates that could inform the visitor at least about the series and age they refer to*". However short, this note is more precise than the other forthcoming references to the collection that would appear.

When Rodolfo Lanciani published a testimony of the archaeological activity in Rome and its region (in *The Athenaeum* in 1901), he only mentioned the Stanzani collection. The same year, an article in *The New York Times* was as laconic. Settimo Bocconi, in his *Collezioni Capitoline* of 1930, named Stanzani, together with Augusto Castellani and Ortensio Vitalini, among the generous donors who contributed to forming the Capitoline Coin Cabinet – and the two thousand coins, medieval and modern, notably from Germany, Poland and Russia, which Bocconi noted were certainly Stanzani's. But Bocconi evoked no oriental coins in the cabinet, and the importance in this field of Stanzani's holdings were simply ignored: when questioned in 1970 by the Istituto Italiano di Numismatica, for their survey of Arabic coin collections in Italy, the Capitoline coin cabinet declared to have "some hundreds of coins"(no provenance indicated), when Stanzani had in fact given about 4,500 Oriental coins.

The Capitoline coin cabinet reopened to the public in 2003, and the Stanzani collection was finally rediscovered – much more than a century after his death. At the request of the direction of the Museums, the present author started to classify, catalogue and study the collection, and her publications to-date have provided a new understanding on the collection – its history, its contexts, and its accompanying manuscript notes. Dirhams from Viking Age hoards have been identified, and the catalogue of 150 Golden Horde and Mongol exemplars have already been published.

In addition to almost 700 semi-precious stones, Stanzani had bequeathed 9,251 coins and medals. These were ancient, medieval and modern – Roman, Byzantine, Arabic, Polish, Russian, and German. The Roman and Byzantine coins have been mixed with the other holdings of the museum

and are no longer identifiable. Instead, Stanzani's Arabic coins, already evoked by Tiesenhäusen in 1875, have remained as an easily identifiable group: the Arabic ones – with few in gold – represent nearly half of Stanzani's collection in number, which renders it the second largest private European collection of the time, after that of Frédéric Soret (1795-1865) who owned 5,500 exemplars. The showcases of the new permanent exhibition include some of Stanzani's gems and coins, next to the Castellani gift.

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