A Cinquedea with the arms of Alfonso 1st d'Este, Duke of Ferrara and Lucrezia Borgia

n°115 of the Charles Buttin collection

Charles Buttin (1856–1931), a renowned authority on antique weapons, left a lasting mark not only on the world of arms collecting but also on my own family history. The catalogue of his collection has been my bedside reading ever since my father, Henri—one of his grandsons—began, in the early 1970s, to wander the aisles of flea markets with his sons, searching for the right piece to enrich his own collection. That collection was built upon a core inherited from his father. A worthy heir to Charles, Paul, and Henri, I represent the fourth generation of collectors in this lineage, with a particular fondness for Oriental arms, especially those from the Malay world.

The subject of the present study, however, lies elsewhere. It focuses on one exceptional object from my great-grandfather's collection: a cinquedea bearing the arms of Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, and his wife, Lucrezia Borgia.

A notary in Rumilly, Charles Buttin was the son of a notary himself and the sole heir to several family lineages. He had seven sons after his family, his greatest passion was his arms collection, to which he devoted much of his fortune. Comprising more than a thousand pieces, it formed a remarkable ensemble representative of all periods and regions of the world. A meticulous scholar, Charles Buttin became a leading reference in his field through the publication of numerous studies and through extensive correspondence with museum curators across the globe.

Upon his death, his sons divided the European portion of the collection among themselves. The celebrated cinquedea was considered so valuable that it alone constituted a separate lot in the division. Paul, Charles's fifth son, was particularly attached to this weapon. He had always known it lying on his father's desk and was aware of the considerable scholarly effort Charles had devoted to its study.

At the time of the division, Paul's brother François expressed doubts about the dagger's authenticity. He later wrote: "Paul gave me a wrought-iron pendant lamp as compensation for my share of the cinquedea, which remained in joint ownership. I did not hide from him that the cinquedea was most likely a forgery, while the lamp was a fine piece of wrought iron. He told me that he was convinced of the opposite and that I was making a bad bargain."[1] Paul, who was not motivated by financial considerations and who had complete confidence in his father's expertise, ultimately secured the cinquedea for himself.

After Paul's death, my father Henri's family had Paul's collection appraised by Robert-Jean Charles, a well-known French arms expert of the time. The dagger—once considered priceless—was downgraded to the status of a nineteenth-century forgery. While this verdict was pronounced, the reasons behind it were never clearly articulated, leaving room for doubt. My father believed that Charles Buttin had examined so many cinquedeas in his lifetime and unmasked so many forgeries that his judgment could only have been sound. In his view, jealousy alone could have driven later experts to dismiss the famous dagger of the Duke of Ferrara as a fake.

The controversy surrounding the authenticity of the cinquedea attributed to Lucrezia Borgia's husband shaped my childhood and continues to intrigue me today. The present study revisits Charles Buttin's early twentieth-century notes, re-examined in the light of more recent scholarship on the forgeries that entered many nineteenth-century collections.

[1] Hand written note from François Buttin

Charles Buttin in his office with the cinquedea on his desk
Les Balmes, Rumilly, 1903

CHARLES BUTTIN CRITICAL METHOD IN THE CINQUEDEA STUDIES

In the catalogue[2] of Charles' collection, published by his son François, the weapon, under the number 115, is described as follows:

" ***CINQUEDEA***, *formerly belonging to Alfonso I d'Este, 3rd Duke of Ferrara, husband of Lucrezia Borgia, Ferrara, 1501–1503.*

Large double-edged blade, tapering from hilt to point and reprofiled into a carp-tongue form. It is fluted with three tiers of fullers: four at the base, three at mid-blade, and two toward the point.

The quillons, sloping toward the blade, are entirely chiseled except for their inner faces adjacent to it. Each side is adorned with monstrous animals bearing different heads; their tails extend into scrolling foliage that ornaments the quillons to their extremities. Heraldic escutcheons appear on each side—subjects to be discussed later—while the faces turned toward the grip are decorated with scale motifs.

The grip, covered in boiled leather, is baluster-shaped with a rectangular cross-section, formed of two truncated pyramids joined at their bases. The eight trapezoidal faces thus created are embellished with trophies of arms embossed in the leather, framed by the grip's ridges and by three pairs of encircling bands positioned at the center and at each end.

The pommel takes the form of a disk surmounted by two straps of diminishing thickness: the upper thinner than the lower, and the lower thinner than the disk itself. These straps encircle the disk, the first over three-quarters of its circumference and the second over half; disk and straps are forged in one piece. The central band of the pommel bears, carved at the center of each face, a medallion. Both straps have guilloche patterns; their edges chiseled with scrolling foliage and overlapping scales akin to those on the quillons. The upper surface of the pommel retains the peened tang button.

The frames of the heraldic escutcheons, the circular and partial circular elements of the pommel, and certain lines of the busts within the medallions are accentuated with gold inlaid into the iron.

The dimensions of this weapon are: total length 59.5 cm, blade length 40.5 cm. »

With the same rigor that characterized all of his research, Charles was among the first specialists to undertake a detailed study of cinquedeas. He published two seminal studies:

- *A cinquedea with the arms of Este from the Hal Gate Museum* (1904)
- *The cinquedea from the collection of Mrs. Goldschmidt* (1906)

[2] BUTTIN Charles "Catalogue de la collection d'armes anciennes européennes et orientables", Rumilly, 1933, p 42.

Although the cinquedeas described in these studies were regarded as authentic at the time, Charles adopted a notably cautious stance. Concerning the first piece, he concluded that "*the numerous alterations of which it bears traces impose great reservation*,"[3] while for the second he emphasized "*that the greatest caution must in any case be exercised in the attribution of ancient objects, and that any assertion must always be supported by solid evidence and authentic documents.*" [4] These remarks clearly illustrate the prudence with which this weapons expert approached the study of such princely daggers.

By contrast, one of Charles's contemporaries, Sir Guy Laking, cites the Hal Gate cinquedea in his authoritative survey of European arms and armor[5] without questioning its authenticity, even though he devotes an entire chapter in the final volume of his work to the activities of forgers.

In his work, Charles was led to distinguish between two principal types of cinquedeas. The first he identified as the so-called Venetian cinquedea, "*whose grip is formed of two riveted ivory plates decorated with openwork copper rosettes; whose pommel is replaced by a kind of bronze horseshoe to which the silk is riveted; and whose iron quillons are strongly inclined toward the blade*."

He contrasted this type with the so-called Ferrara model, in which "*the pommel—sometimes of iron inlaid with gold or silver, more often covered with nielloed or embossed silver—almost always bears a portrait medallion on one side and, on the other, either a second medallion or, more frequently, the coat of arms of the person portrayed. The grip, sometimes covered with boiled leather and sometimes faced with plates of silver, lapis lazuli, or tortoiseshell, almost invariably takes the form of a baluster with a quadrangular section, composed of two truncated pyramids joined at their bases. The eight trapezoidal faces of these two elements are generally decorated with trophies of arms, either tooled in leather or rendered in nielloed or embossed silver.*

The quillons, which are always inclined toward the blade, are likewise lavishly ornamented. When made of iron, they are enriched with engraving or chasing and are sometimes entirely gilded; more often, however, they are clad in plates of embossed silver or adorned with filigree scrollwork. The escutcheons of these quillons invariably bear coats of arms, which in some cases are even repeated on the blade itself."

The blade resembles those of other cinquedeas in its overall form, yet it differs fundamentally in the construction of its mount. Rather than being secured within quillons riveted directly to it, as is the case with the ivory-handled cinquedeas, the blade in the earliest daggers of this type is only lightly set into the quillons; in the more recent examples, it lies flush with them, following their contour. The tang is that of a conventional weapon and bears none of the characteristic breadth found in the first type of cinquedea. It passes through the grip and extends to the pommel." [6]

[3] BUTTIN Charles « Une cinquedea aux armes d'Este », Bruxelles, Vromant & Cie, 1904, p 22.
[4] BUTTIN Charles « La cinquedea de la collection de Mme Goldschmidt », Bruxelles, Vromant & Co éditeurs, 1906, p29.
[5] LAKING Sir Guy Francis « A record of European Armour and Arms through seven centuries », Londres, G. Bell & sons, 1920, Vol III, p 80
[6] Ibidem note 3, Brussels, Vromant & Cie, 1904, pp. 6 and 7.

This identification of the distinctive characteristics of the Ferrara cinquedeas, apparently first formulated by Charles Buttin, was subsequently taken up by Dean Bashford in his 1929 study of European weapons.[7]

Charles approached the study of the cinquedea with great caution, fully aware that numerous forgeries had been produced in the nineteenth century. In an unpublished study, at the opening of a chapter entitled "*The Cinquedea of Ferrara*," Charles Buttin observed: "*The attribution of ancient objects to this or that historical figure is one of the most formidable pitfalls of archaeology. Even the most eminent scholars have at times been misled and have committed serious errors; in such matters, it is therefore essential to proceed with the utmost caution*." [8]

THE SANQUIRICO BROTHERS

The romantic movement of the nineteenth century fostered a renewed enthusiasm for the Gothic style, of which Viollet-le-Duc became one of the most ardent champions. Wealthy collectors assembled magnificent holdings of paintings and antique weapons, displaying a pronounced taste for exceptional works from the great periods of the past. A visit to the Wallace Collection in London or the Stibbert Museum in Florence conveys the full extent of this passion, which lay at the origin of a flourishing market that enriched antiquities dealers in London, Paris, and Venice—but also, inevitably, forgers.

In an article devoted to counterfeiting, Edmond Bonnaffé explicitly alludes to the particular attraction exerted by princely Renaissance objects:

" Decidedly, the sixteenth century seems an inexhaustible mine. Are you in search of helmets, shields, swords, breastplates, maces, or war hammers? The moment is opportune: they arrive from Spain, Italy, Sweden—perhaps even from Belleville or Montmartre. All are chased, gilded, embossed, damascened; all are said to have belonged to princes or sovereigns. It is enough to give one pause.

Where do these newly arrived "ancients" come from? Where are their family papers? And if some are indeed of good lineage, can one be certain that parvenus have not slipped into this world of gentlemen? The names of the purchasers are cited; they are reputable, connoisseurs, well aware that in such matters mistrust is the beginning of wisdom. Very well—but alas, is expertise alone still sufficient today?" [9]

Among the great collections of the period, particular attention must be given to that of the Royal Armory of Turin, the origins of which are as follows:

" *In 1833, Charles Albert of Sardinia (Carlo Alberto di Savoia, 1798–1849) resolved to establish a museum devoted to arms and armor in the great Beaumont Gallery of the Palazzo Madama. The collection of the Royal Armory, initially composed of weapons from the arsenals of Turin and Genoa together with pieces from the sovereign's private holdings, was soon augmented by the acquisition, in July 1833, of approximately three hundred objects from the collection of Alessandro Sanquirico (1777–1849), the celebrated decorator of La Scala in Milan.*

[7] BASHFORD Dean, "Catalogue of European Daggers", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1929, pp. 79-82.
[8] BUTTIN Charles, "Les Cinquedeas", unpublished manuscript study
[9] BONNAFFE Edmond, "Sur la contrefaçon", published in "L' ART - Revue hebdomadaire illustrée", A. Ballue Editeur, 1876, Volume II, p28.

Charles Albert entrusted Captain Vittorio Seyssel d'Aix with the task of further enriching the collection. In this capacity, Seyssel d'Aix acquired numerous additional pieces from Parisian antiquities dealers, among them the jeweler Louis Lacroix and the gunsmith Henri Le Page. Notably, he purchased two shields reputed to have been made by Benvenuto Cellini. At the same time, Antoine Vechte (1799–1868), a French goldsmith residing in London, was producing iron shields and dishes that were subsequently acquired by a dealer and sold as works by Benvenuto Cellini." [10]

Alessandro Sanquirico was a versatile and accomplished artist, renowned for revolutionizing opera stage design through his innovative use of perspective. He worked at La Scala in Milan from 1806 to 1832, creating decorations that, while aligned with the neoclassical style of the period, were also adapted to the emerging tastes of Romanticism. His designs left a lasting mark on nineteenth-century opera and continue to inspire contemporary poster art.

Alessandro had a brother, Antonio, an antiquarian in Venice whose shop—pompously named the "Museo Sanquirico"—was a destination for every serious collector. In his Journey to Italy, Théophile Gautier states: "*The two most famous dealers were Antonio Zen, at the Tron Palace in San Stae, and Antonio Sanquirico, the brother of the theatre decorator, who had opened his establishment in the old Scuola di S. Teodoro in the Campo S. Salvatore*".[11] He made a specialty of selling the collections of the great Venetian aristocratic families ruined after the fall of the Republic of Venice under Bonaparte's blows in 1797. Antonio officiated from the late 1820s to the mid-1850s. His museum, considered one of the largest in Europe in the 1840s, was described by Jules Lecomte in 1844 as follows: "*Mr. Sanquirico, brother of the famous painter and decorator of that name, whose reputation is European, has for many years amassed in this vast building various collections of art and antiquities that will be visited with interest*..."[12] Further on, he cites, among other things: "*Armor, mosaics, cameos, chinoiseries... weapons... old and new Murano glassware... Immense Capernaum, which has no equal in Italy*." It is noteworthy that Antonio Sanquirico is credited with reviving the ancient Murano glass industry. He commissioned several master glassmakers to reproduce objects adorned with filigree—pairs of twisted threads—that he himself owned. His efforts were so successful that these creations came to bear his name and are still known today as Zanfirico.

Just as Antonio Sanquirico revitalized Murano glass, he had a similar influence on other works of art. In his manual for collectors and dealers in prints, Francesco Vallardi offered the following advice: "*In the absence of originals, those who desire copies—or even niello plates engraved by the names Pirona, Zanetti, Comanirato—may turn to the antique arms workshop in Venice, operating under the name of the Sanquirico brothers, publishers*".[13]

The Hungarian collector Ferenc Pulszky recounts an anecdote that illustrates the famously unscrupulous methods of the antique dealer Antonio Sanquirico. Pulszky had fallen in love with a magnificent Greek vase from the Grimani collection. After negotiating the price all night, he returned the next day to pay for it—only to feel that the vase in his hands did not evoke the same impression as the one he had admired

[10] Extract from the website of the Armeria Reale di Torino
[11] GAUTIER Théophile, "Voyage en Italie", Eugène Fasquelle éditeur, Paris, 1901
[12] LECOMTE Jules, "L'Italie des gens du monde. VENICE or a literary, artistic, historical, poetic and picturesque glance on the monuments and curiosities of this city", Paris, Hyppolite Souverain, publisher, 1844.
[13] VALLARDI Francesco Santo «Manuale del racoglitore e del negoziante di stampe», Milano, 1843, in 8, p 93

the day before. He informed Sanquirico that he no longer wished to purchase it. Pulszky says: "*Sanquirico, adjusting his spectacles, took the vase in hand, examined it closely, and, with some embarrassment, apologized: it was not the original vase from the previous day, but a recent reproduction. He then opened a cupboard and presented the original, replacing it with his copy*." [14]

Jules Lecomte also mocked Sanquirico by saying: *"Ask the owner of the place for a curl of Attila's hair or a few hairs from Doge Anaphertus' beard..." he has your business in an old wallet; and if you like the portfolio, it turns out that it belonged to the terrible Francis Carrara, lord of Padua*." [15]

Ferenc Pulszky's anecdote illustrates that at the Museo Sanquirico, originals and copies were so closely intertwined that it was often difficult to distinguish the authentic from the imitation.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the production of counterfeit high-period weapons was especially lucrative: demand was strong, and scholarly studies on the subject were virtually nonexistent, making it easy to deceive buyers. Sir Guy Laking describes this activity as a distinct Italian specialty: "*The first Italian forgers devoted their efforts to the production of shields, helmets, armor, and elaborate hilts for swords and rapiers. Among the names of these producers, three families stand out: Diamante of Rome, Gaggini of Milan, and San-Quirine (sic) of Venice*." [16]

Tempera offered to the King of Sardinia, in which A. Sanquirico depicts himself designing his armory.

In Album del re Carlo Alberto, Turin, Reale Library

REASSESSING THE FERRARA CINQUEDEAS

Among the items in the Sanquirico collection whose authenticity has been questioned are two particularly fine cinquedeas, listed under catalogue numbers H6 and H7. Long regarded as genuine, these blades were well known to all connoisseurs of renaissance swords. In his study of Ferrara craftsmanship, Gustave Gruyer references the work of Hercules of Ferrara, known as de Fideli: "*He was not only an exceptional goldsmith; he also engraved swords and scabbards in embossed leather… The famous sword of Cesare Borgia is attributed to him… In the Armeria of Turin, one*

[14] PERRY Marilyn "Antonio Sanquirico, art merchant of Venice", in Larbyrinthos, nos. 1-2, Le Monnier, 1982
[15] Ibid. note 10
[16] LAKING Sir Guy Francis, "A record of European Armour and Arms through seven centuries", London, G. Bell & sons, 1920, Vol V, p 112

may see three short blades with niello bearing the arms of Alfonso I, Duke of Ferrara..."[17]

The dagger, catalogued as H6 and adorned with the arms and portrait of Hercules d'Este, father of Alfonso, formed a cornerstone of Charles Buttin's argument for authenticating this cinquedea. He observed: "*Its pommel is of iron, yet it retains the curved form characteristic of the pommel of Hercules I cinquedea in the Turin museum, and the medallions typical of most arms in this series. The grip, made of boiled leather, consists of two pyramids joined at their bases, displaying trophies—a feature we have identified as distinctive of this family of cinquedeas. Finally, the coat of arms on the escutcheon of the quillons and the mounting of the blade—which, instead of being riveted into the quillons, is only slightly embedded—along with the tang, narrow in contrast to those of Venetian cinquedeas and passing simply through the grip to be secured to the pommel, are all distinctive features that we recognize here*."[18] Charles' comparison with the H6 cinquedea in Turin focused on the handle, the guard, and the blade assembly.

At the time, this cinquedea was regarded as authentic, but it is now considered a nineteenth-century composite. As it is noted in the Armeria Reale 2001 guide book: "*In reality, the entire handle of the cinquedea is a nineteenth-century forgery, attributable to a workshop producing forgeries for the antiquarian Antonio Sanquirico of Venice, brother of the scenographer Alessandro. The blade and its decoration, however, are genuinely from the period*... **"** [19]

Sanquirico has long been known for producing counterfeit cinquedeas. In his study of forgeries, Paul Eudel writes: "*Italy excels in crafting sandedei or cinquedea, those broad daggers that dealers mistakenly call 'ox tongues.' A certain Sanquirico made a name for himself with these sumptuous ceremonial weapons, which were nearly as beautiful—and far less expensive—than those of the Marquis of Mantua (1594), recently acquired by the Louvre for 25,000 or 30,000 francs*."[20]

Charles was aware of Sanquirico's reputation and mentions him in his study of the cinquedea from the Hal Gate: "*San-Quirico—or the forger, whoever he may be, author of cinquedea no. 282 of the Hiltl catalogue—appears to us to be responsible for the numerous alterations observed on the Hal Gate cinquedea"* [21].

However, Charles did not consider all weapons acquired from Sanquirico to be forgeries. In a handwritten note on the back of a photograph of a Ferrara-type cinquedea from the Gotha Museum, he wrote: "*This cinquedea was, according to M. von Ubisch, acquired in 1843 by Duke Ernst I of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha from the antiquarian Sanquirico in Venice. Herr von Ubisch perhaps too hastily concluded that it is false. Sanquirico produced both good and bad pieces, and his forgeries were usually made by copying authentic examples. It is unlikely that in 1843 he would have created the designs of these weapons without having original pieces to copy. The engraving on the blade appears genuine, and the deliberate substitution of the double-headed eagle in the blade's medallion for an earlier engraving suggests, on the*

[17] GRUYER Gustave, "L'art ferrarais à l'époque des Princes d'Este", de, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1897, p 575.
[18] BUTTIN Charles, "Catalogue de la collection d'armes anciennes européennes et orientables", Rumilly, 1933, p 42/43.
[19] VENTUROLI Paolo, "L'Armeria Reale di Torino, Guida brève", 2001
[20] EUDEL Paul, « Trucs et truqueurs : altérations, fraudes et contrefaçons dévoilées », Librairie Molière, Paris, 1908
[21] BUTTIN Charles, "Une cinquedea aux armes d'Este", Brussels, Vromant & Cie, 1904, page 15 note 1

contrary, that the weapon is authentic and only retouched—perhaps to support an attribution to Charles V and thereby increase its value. The motif of the grip, pommel, and quillons, which is consistently found in these arms, was probably copied a few times by Sanquirico".[22]

The question of authenticity for certain renaissance weapons was a topic of correspondence between the prominent collector Georges Pauillhac and Charles Buttin. In a letter dated March 4, 1907, Charles wrote: "*Is the Ferrara-type cinquedea, of which you are sending me a photograph, genuine or false? I know nothing about it and cannot determine this from a photo. All I can say is that it is constructed exactly like the two famous cinquedeas in the Turin Museum, which have been there since the museum's founding in 1830… These Turin daggers have been examined not only by Yriarte*[23] *and Angelucci*[24]*, but by a thousand others and always recognized as authentic. It is true that this proves nothing, but it is nevertheless a beginning of proof. And I am not talking about the number of others of the same type acquired as good by illustrious connoisseurs such as Prince Odescalchi*[25]." [26]

This letter followed an earlier correspondence on October 21, 1906, in which the two collectors discussed a cinquedea discovered by Georges Pauillhac that bore a striking resemblance to Charles' own. The discovery evidently provoked Charles to such an extent that he presented a detailed argument to defend the authenticity of the centerpiece of his collection.

"*Your discovery is extremely interesting, and you would have been mistaken not to share it with me, even if it led you to believe that my dagger is a fake. One always owes the truth to a friend; that is a principle from which I do not deviate. Clearly, the two weapons, though not as identical as you might think, derive from the same model. There are three possible explanations:*

1. *or the weapons are both from the same workshop and are good,*
2. *or, coming from the same workshop, they are both modern,*
3. *or one is authentic and has served as a model for the other, which is said to be false.*

Anything is possible. As for determining today which hypothesis I am attached to, I am not even trying.

If both weapons are genuine, their similarity is self-explanatory; there is no type in which such close resemblance is more common than in cinquedeas. Without wishing to comment on yours, I look forward to the day when we can place them side by side and examine them together. For now, I simply wish to indicate what the maker of mine would have needed to know—during the Romantic period—to execute it as it is. You may draw your own conclusions. This scholar, clearly ahead of his time, would have had to possess such knowledge:

1. *that the cinquedeas, instead of being chiefly made in Verona, as everyone believed at the time according to Meyrick*[27]*, had been chiefly made in Ferrara,*
2. *That in Ferrara there was precisely a goldsmith, Hercules de Fideli, identified around 1890 by Angelucci and Yriarte, who specialized in cinquedeas and*

[22] BUTTIN Charles, Handwritten note archives Charles Buttin
[23] YRIARTE Charles, "Autour des Borgia", Paris, Rothschild, 1891
[24] ANGELUCCI Angelo, "Catalago della Armeria Reale", Torino 1890, H6, p33.
[25] Prince Ladislao ODESCALCHI (1846-1922) built up a fine collection of weapons in Rome.
[26] BUTTIN Charles, letter to Georges Pauillhac, 04/03/1907, Charles Buttin archives
[27] MEYRICK, Sir Samuel Hush Meyrick "Engraved illustrations of ancient Arms and Armour", 1854

was also an exceptionally skilled leather chaser. Consequently, if a forger applied a leather decoration to his daggers—deviating from the familiar ivory grips—he would have had to chisel the leather trophies to conform to what was later recognized in 1890. It is worth noting, in passing, that this style of grained-background chasing bears no relation to that found on your Burgundian arms with a lattice-patterned background.

3. *that at the time when he wanted to place his daggers, around 1500, reigned in Ferrara, Hercules I d'Este, godfather of the future Hercules di Fideli, and whose son, Alfonso I d'Este, was to marry in 1502, Lucrezia Borgia,*
4. *that in 1502, at the time of this marriage, the two most recent medals of the two spouses were precisely those that he took to copy them on the two sides of the pommel, which was discovered and proved by Aloys Heiss in his work: The Medalists of the Renaissance, a work which is not within the reach of all forgers because it costs 1000 francs and which could not be within the reach of the romantic forgers because it was completed in about 1900,*
5. *In particular, the forger would have had to use, for the future Alfonso I d'Este—who was still only heir presumptive—the specific medal he copied, and no other, for it was the only one struck with the effigy of this prince at the time of his marriage. This medal is exceedingly rare—so rare that an incomplete bronze copy sold for 80 francs at the Spitzer sale, and so rare that it was unknown to Litta, the great historiographer of the Este family and the only authority at the time the forgery would have occurred. It has only become known through the more recent studies of Armand and Aloys Heiss,*
6. *that for the escutcheon to be placed on the quillons, he was not to take the arms of the Dukes of Ferrara, but only the eagle d'Este; Alfonso was not yet Duke of Ferrara at that time,*
7. *that, to maintain verisimilitude, the forger would have had to render the coat of arms on the side of Lucretia in the distinctive shape of the Borgia arms, while simultaneously omitting the actual coat of arms—since nearly all Borgia arms had been defaced following the death of Alexander VI—a detail that has only recently been highlighted by specialists,*
8. *That the Este escutcheon should not depict the field using hatching, as this heraldic convention only emerged at the end of the sixteenth century—a mistake that has already led to the identification of numerous forgeries*
9. *Nor should the exergue of the medal have been clumsily copied, as was the case with the cinquedea sold by Bachereau to Prince Odescalchi—probably the work of San-Quirico, whose style is quite different. While a nobleman might indeed own a dagger bearing his portrait alongside that of his wife, it would have been absurd, even around 1500, for his name to be engraved in the exergue surrounding the portrait.*

All of this—the detailed knowledge of medals, heraldic conventions, and decorative motifs—the supposed forger would have had to know, yet no one in his time could have possessed it. On top of that, he would have needed the skill to chisel and inlay iron and to achieve a true likeness in a medallion of chiseled iron. If he truly had such knowledge, he made remarkably poor use of it, for when I purchased this dagger from a second-hand dealer around 1900, it was certainly not from a collection: it was covered in dirt and rust, and the dealer had no idea of its value, selling it to me for a mere pittance. Dealers of such objects typically do not behave this way. Moreover, how can we suppose that a weapon sold around 1830 as being made for the wedding of Lucrezia Borgia could have fallen into such neglect in less than seventy years?

If it were mere chance that brought together, in the hands of a forger—at a time when all forgeries were riddled with archaeological errors—such precise concordance of the elements in his work, then one must admit that chance performs remarkably well.

One more word: in Vienna, you tell me, they quickly recognized the weapon as a fake. I expressed my opinion of the official experts in the case of the Goldschmidt cinquedea. If a piece deviates from the ordinary type, it is invariably exposed. This is straightforward and entirely safe, whereas declaring a forged document to be genuine is both dangerous and profoundly compromising.

Ascamio (sic) San-Quirico, I repeat, belonged to a completely different type. The type of the Goldschmidt cinquedea, the great Bachereau cinquedea, and the Hal Gate cinquedea with the arms d'Este—all of these are of one style. They have nothing in common with your weapon or mine.

I am not claiming, however, that either is genuine—or even that one of them is. I simply lay out the facts; you may draw your own conclusions." [28]

Three months later, Charles received photographs of Georges Pauillhac's cinquedea and admitted he was troubled. After explaining why the weapon did not appear authentic, he elaborated on his unease: "*Obviously, the two weapons were inspired by each other, but I am not as concerned about mine as I am about yours. I must admit, however, that there is an extraordinary problem here, particularly since the carvings on your quillons closely resemble those of the cinquedeas by San-Quirico and those in the collections of Turin, Prince Odescalchi, Aster, and others, whereas the chiseling on mine derives from a different and entirely exceptional order of design.*

Note, however, in addition to what I have already said about my dagger, that the prominent flaws present on yours are entirely absent from mine. It would be extraordinary if a forger had managed to reproduce one side perfectly while introducing errors on the other. Only the grip remains unchanged—but where did it come from? Once a model exists, molding is always possible, even in leather."[29]

These correspondences with his friend Georges Pauillhac show that Charles was well acquainted with Sanquirico's style. Yet, despite certain similarities, he consistently maintained that his own cinquedea was genuine. His argument rested on a historical analysis: a forger could not have had access to sufficient information to depict accurately the portraits of Alfonso d'Este, Lucrezia Borgia, and Este heraldry without introducing anachronisms.

However, the validity of this argument can be questioned, since the portraits are from known medals. Alfonso's portrait is copied from a medal by Niccolò Fiorentino dated 1492, nine years before his marriage to Lucrezia, when he was only sixteen. The portrait of Lucrezia, by contrast, is a reproduction of a medal attributed to Filippino Lippi from 1502—after the marriage, which took place at the end of December 1501. Interestingly, this same portrait of Lucrezia also appears on another 1502 medal commemorating the union, paired with a profile of Alfonso wearing a hat and brocaded garment. Should not the goldsmith, who reproduced Lucrezia's 1502 portrait, also have reproduced Alfonso's 1502 portrait, rather than the earlier 1492 version?

[28] Letter from Charles Buttin to Georges Pauillhac, 21/10/1906, Charles Buttin archives
[29] Letter from Charles Buttin to Georges Pauillhac, 18/01/1907, Charles Buttin archives

Medallion of the cinquedea representing Lucrezia Borgia

Medal attributed to Fillipino Lippi, 1502
Schifanoia Palace, Ferrara

Medal in honor of the marriage of Lucrezia and Alphonsus, 1502
Schifanoia Palace, Ferrara

Medallion of the cinquedea representing Alfonso d'Este

Medal attributed to Niccolo Fiorentino, 1492
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Medal in honor of the marriage of Lucrezia and Alphonsus, 1502
Schifanoia Palace, Ferrara

SCHEDELMANN, BLAIR AND THE REASSESSMENT OF THE FERRARA CINQUEDEAS

In 1965, Hans Schedelmann, a Swiss expert, published an article on counterfeit weapons. He observed that many cinquedeas entering collections during the nineteenth century shared the common characteristic of having been produced by the same hand. These works are of such high quality that they can deceive even the most discerning experts. According to Schedelmann: "*The main errors, beyond stylistic shortcomings, arise from the overabundance of gold, silver, niello, and other materials, as well as from excessive ornamentation and indications of the weapon's supposed owner (portraits, initials, heraldry…). The master who created these pieces drew upon emperors, kings, and dukes from different eras to mislead his clients, thereby enhancing both the perceived value and the historical significance of these objects*."[30]

He cites the following cinquedeas :

1. Armeria Reale, Turin, H6
2. Armeria Reale, Turin, H7
3. Prince Charles of Prussia Collection, n°282
4. Prince Charles of Prussia Collection, n°281
5. Hermitage Leningrad,
6. Dreger Collection, Berlin, n°36
7. Rothschild Collection, a set including accessories for plaster handles and scabbards.

[30] SCHEDELMANN Hans, "Der Waffensammler, Gefälsche Prunkwaffen", , Waffen und Kostümkunde, vol VII, Munich-Berlin, 1965, p 124-127

8. Former Colloredo Collection, Prague
9. Odescalchi Collection, Rome, n°376

Hans Schedelmann further observes that the forger produced objects whose supposed owners spanned an excessively long chronological period, without any corresponding evolution in style and without regard for the historical phases during which cinquedeas were actually worn.

In a footnote, he adds: "*Buttin notes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in Venice, the antiquarian San Quirico copied the style of Hercules de' Fideli to the point of error. Nevertheless, in his catalogue, under numbers 115/116, he includes forgeries of this manufacture and explicitly describes them as period works. It seems likely that this antiquarian and the Milanese painter Sanquirico were one and the same person."*[31]

Schedelmann also cites in his article casts of cinquedea handles from the Rothschild collection, decorated with trophies and fitted with pommels bearing medallion portraits. These pommels are exact replicas of those found on the Bachereau cinquedeas, Prince Charles of Prussia's no. 282, and the example in the Gotha Museum, thereby demonstrating that all these pieces derived from the same mold—or at least from the same workshop.

These weapons, which entered major collections in the early twentieth century—such as those of Prince Charles of Prussia, Prince Odescalchi, Prince Colloredo, Lord Carmichael, or Tsar Alexander II at Tsarskoe Selo—share the common feature of having been acquired during the nineteenth century.

The case of the cinquedea in the Hermitage Museum is particularly instructive. According to Schedelmann, the forger drew inspiration from the decoration of a partisan illustrated in 1830 in Skelton's catalogue of the Meyrick collection—an object now preserved in the Wallace Collection under inventory number A 1009. This example demonstrates that nineteenth-century forgers could be exceptionally well informed and made deliberate use of published scholarly sources when devising their creations.

The following year, Claude Blair published a study of the scabbard of Cesare Borgia's sword, in which he challenged the foundations upon which Yriarte had based his identification of the goldsmith Hercules de' Fideli. According to Blair, the Turin cinquedea no. 6 belongs to "*a well-known group of forgeries, probably produced in Milan in the 1830s*." [32] It should be noted that two figures named Hercules are involved in these attributions. One is said to have produced the scabbard of Cesare Borgia's sword, as well as those preserved in the Musée de l'Armée in Paris and the Hermitage Museum; the other is credited with the engraving of the blades themselves[33]. There is, moreover, nothing to confirm that these two figures were in fact the same person.

While Schedelmann and Blair regarded all Ferrara-type cinquedeas as forgeries—including no. 6 in the Armeria Reale of Turin—the museum's specialists maintain that

[31] Ibid., free translation of note 1, p 132
[32] BAIR Claude, "Cesare Borgia's sword-scabbard", Victoria & Albert Museum Bulletin, Oct 1966, Vol II, n°4, p 134
[33] On its website, the Armeria Reale associates the decoration of the blade of the cinquedea n°6 with the style of Ercole de'Roberti (c1451-1496) also known as Hercules of Ferrara, who was painter to the Este court in Ferrara from 1486. L'Armeria adds that the engravings of the dagger have similarities with the work of the engraver named "the master of 1515" who, according to Bair, could be the author of the decorations of the cinquedeas blades.

the blade itself is authentic, attributing only the mounting to the nineteenth century. It appears, therefore, that many cinquedeas of this type were reassembled using genuine period blades.

This interpretation is corroborated by Charles Buttin in his study of the Goldschmidt cinquedea: “Several weapons of this type, produced at a later date, were mounted by adapting a faced handle in place of the original handle with ivory plates riveted onto the wide tang. One may cite in particular cinquedea no. CP 8199 in the Berlin Museum, to which the same observations apply, since the traces of the original quillons and the rivet holes are perfectly visible at the heel of the blade".[34] Sir Laking presents these composite assemblies as a Sanquirico specialty: "*San-Quirine (sic) became famous for his ingenious combinations, for his skill in adapting a genuine blade to a false handle—or vice versa—and for his talent in redecorating an ordinary old weapon, or even in creating an entirely new piece*".[35]

The studies by Schedelmann and Blair appear to have had limited impact, as evidenced by a 1980 article in La Gazette des Armes on “*A Cinquedea with the Arms of Borso d’Este*” in a Swiss collection.[36] The author adopts the classification proposed by Buttin and Bashford, linking this cinquedea to the Ferrara group. The weapon, in poor condition and missing its grip, exhibits many similarities—particularly in the shape of the pommel and quillons—with the Buttin collection piece. It could be the cinquedea mentioned by Pauillhac in his correspondence with Charles Buttin.

BOSSON Clément, "Une cinquedea aux armes de Borso d’Este dans une collection suisse"
Gazette des Armes n°88, December 1980

[34] BUTTIN Charles, "La Cinquedea de la collection de Mme. Goldschmidt", Brussels, Vromant & Cie, 1906, p 13
[35] LAKING Sir Guy Francis, "A record of European Armour and Arms through seven centuries", London, G. Bell & sons, 1920, Vol III, p 66
[36] BOSSON Clément, "Une cinquedea aux armes de Borso d'Este dans une collection suisse", Gazette des Armes n°88, December 1980

However, the attribution of the weapon to Borso d'Este (1413–1471), based on a medallion copied from an Antonio Marescotti medal, would place it among the earliest cinquedeas—produced some thirty years before that of Alfonso I. Given that the hilts and quillons of the two daggers appear to originate from the same workshop, such a chronological gap raises serious questions about their authenticity.

A CONTEMPORARY EVALUATION OF THE BUTTIN CINQUEDEA

During a visit on 6 September 2000 to the home of Charles Buttin, namesake grandson of the great collector, José A. Godoy, curator of the Arms and Armour Department at the Geneva Museums of Art and History, examined cinquedea no. 115 from the Buttin collection. According to Godoy, the quality of the damascening is too coarse when compared to that of authentic cinquedeas: the gold fillets lack fineness and precision, and defects and gaps are visible in several areas. This assessment is further illustrated by a comparison with the damascening on the hilts of Cesare Borgia's sword (Caetani collection, Rome), which shows meticulous and precise workmanship, whereas the pommel of the Buttin cinquedea appears irregular and uneven.

Sword of Caesar Borgia
Casa Caetani, Rome

Medallion of the Duke d'Este
Cinquedea Charles Buttin

José A. Godoy also noted a detail concerning the escutcheon: on one side, it aligns perfectly with the central edge of the blade, while on the opposite side it is off-center. This misalignment is striking, considering the skill and precision of the engravers who typically executed Ferrara-type cinquedeas. Once again, the damascening, particularly around the Este coat of arms on the escutcheon, appears approximate and uneven.

Based on these observations, the Swiss expert concluded that the weapon is a forgery.

ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY

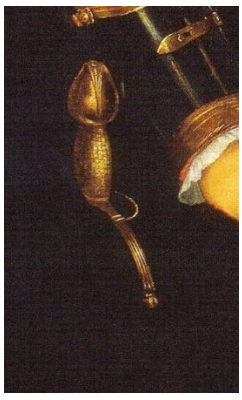
The study of portraits of Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, is particularly revealing. As a man of war, he is often depicted carrying his sword, his right hand resting on a cannon, evoking the decisive role of artillery in his campaigns on the side of the French, particularly at the Battle of Ravenna in 1512. Of the six portraits examined, three are based on a composition by Titian in which he carries a sword with a hilt. Two others are of greater relevance here, as they depict the duke holding a sword with curved

quillons similar to those of a cinquedea. However, the pommel of this sword is not cylindrical, the grip is made of metal, and the quillon terminals are domed—features that preclude any direct identification with the cinquedea in the Buttin collection. It is likely that this weapon belonged to the same type as Cesare Borgia's sword, with proportions adapted to Alfonso I's imposing stature.

If, as Charles Buttin suggests, Alfonso I had the Borgia coat of arms removed from the cinquedea to appease Pope Julius II, it would indicate that this weapon was particularly dear to him. Nonetheless, no portrait has been found that depicts the duke with this specific dagger.

Battista Dossi
Alfonso I at the Battle of Polosella in 1509
Galleria Estense, Modena, ca 1530

Anonymous portrait
Palazzina Marfisa, Ferrara



The removal of the Borgia coat of arms is one of the key arguments Charles Buttin used to support the authenticity of his weapon. In this context, he again cites Yriarte: "*The reaction that followed the death of Alexander VI would inevitably have led to the destruction of monuments representing the Borgias: they would have been suppressed, mutilated, removed, or otherwise distorted."* [37] This detail is perplexing

[37] YRIARTE Charles, "Autour des Borgia", Paris, Rothschild, p 7

and remains unexplained. If the cinquedea is indeed a forgery, the craftsman responsible would have to have been an extraordinary connoisseur of Italian Renaissance history—capable of deceiving one of the foremost experts on weapons of the early twentieth century

A SWORD OFFERED BY ALEXANDER VI

This study would not be complete without considering the line of inquiry pursued by my father. According to his research, on Sunday, 6 February 1502, during the solemn Mass celebrated in the Duomo of Ferrara, a papal chamberlain presented Duke Alfonso with a hat and a sword that the pope had blessed on Christmas Day 1501.[38]

Henri poses the question: "*Could the cinquedea in the Charles Buttin collection be the very sword presented by the Pope to Alfonso I d'Este? Was it not only natural that he should receive a sword of the same type as the still-famous one of Cesare Borgia—justifying a princely style—yet, as the marriage had been arranged and celebrated in such a short time, a sword whose blade could not have been engraved*? [39] He found no answer to this question, as his search for a contemporary inventory or a painting depicting the ceremony proved unsuccessful.

The presentation of a blessed sword by the pope during the Christmas holidays is a tradition dating back to Pope Paul I (757–767), according to Eugène Müntz, and it became an annual custom during the reign of Urban V (1365). This ceremony was later accompanied by the presentation of a ducal hat, a practice that continued until 1825, when the Duke of Angoulême received the honor.

In his study of swords of honor, Müntz describes them as "*works of art in the fullest sense of the term: chasing, damascening, enameling, executed with meticulous finish and elegance; scrolls of exquisite taste alternated with subtle allegories or inscriptions in beautiful Ciceronian Latin. Above all, one must note the originality of their form and ornamentation: these weapons were intended to be held with both hands, the point raised in the air*." [40] We have to conclude that the weapon in question cannot be a cinquedea, since such swords were designed to be held with both hands. Moreover, the haste surrounding the marriage of Alfonso I and Lucrezia cannot account for the rapid production of the weapon. Indeed, as an annual custom, these swords were commissioned well in advance and executed with the utmost care and craftsmanship.

[38] GREGOROVIUS Ferdinand, "Lucrezia Borgia", Stuggart, 1874, p 259
[39] Letter from Henri Buttin to Mario Scalini, expert in Renaissance arts, September 29, 1999
[40] MÜNTZ Eugène "Les épées d'honneur distribuées par les papes", in "La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne", Paris, Tome IX, Janvier-Juin 1901, p 251

According to Müntz's work, the goldsmith attached to the Vatican, Angelino di Domenico de Sutri, is the author of the swords of honor given by the pope "*in 1493, 1494, 1497, 1498, 1501... In 1501, Lucrezia Borgia's new husband, Alfonso d'Este, received the sword (Burchard, t.III, p79). The goldsmith Angelino, for his part, received 249 ducats, 30 bolognes for the supply of the sword, the belt and the beret*". [41]

Sword of honor of Vladislaus II Jagiellonian of Hungary in 1509, made by Angelino di Domenico
Budapest, Museo Nazionale Ungherese, Armeria, Inv.n. 55.3235

Müntz also mentions that a sword of honor was bestowed upon Cesare Borgia. This weapon, however, must not be confused with the famous sword traditionally attributed to Cesare Borgia and preserved in the Caetani collection. The latter, by its form, decoration, and iconography, corresponds to a very different category of arms and cannot be identified with the ceremonial swords of honor distributed annually by the papacy.

Moreover, if the weapon had been made before the papal blessing of Christmas 1501, how could the goldsmith have copied the portrait of Lucretia engraved by Filippino Lippi in 1502 in commemoration of the wedding?[42]

CONCLUSION

We will probably never know with certainty the author of this cinquedea, nor will it be possible to reach a definitive verdict on its authenticity. Nevertheless, the strong stylistic and technical affinities it shares with other arms attributed to the workshops associated with Antonio Sanquirico argue convincingly in favor of such an origin.

One distinctive feature of the Buttin cinquedea must, however, be emphasized: its grip, measuring 11 cm, is approximately 2 cm longer than that of the other so-called "Ferrara" cinquedeas. This atypical dimension makes it more suitable for a man's hand and could suggest that the weapon was conceived for actual handling rather than for purely ornamental display.

This peculiarity opens the way to a hypothesis that has so far remained unexplored. The cinquedea may have been conceived and commissioned by Alessandro Sanquirico himself. In addition to his renown as a scenographer, Sanquirico was also an accomplished costume designer: from 1818 onward, he was actively involved in the creation of stage costumes for La Scala, alongside his innovations in perspective, special effects, and festival decorations.[43]

[41] MÜNTZ Eugène, "Les Arts à la cour des papes, Innocent VIII, Alexandre VI, Pie III", Ernest Leroux Editeur, 1898, p 233 and 239
[42] GREGOROVIUS Ferdinand, "Lucrezia Borgia", Stuggart, 1874, p 360
[43] VIALE FERRERO Mercedes & FRANCHI Francesca "Costumes designs by Alessandro Sanquirico and others for ballets performed at the Teatro Alla Scala, Milan 1820-24", Edinburgh University Press, 1984

One may therefore ask whether Charles Buttin's cinquedea could be connected to the success of Victor Hugo's *Lucrèce Borgia* (1833), a subject taken up shortly thereafter by Felice Romani in the libretto for Donizetti's opera *Lucrezia Borgia*. The opera premiered on 26 December 1834 at La Scala, with stage sets designed by Alessandro Sanquirico. Could the cinquedea have been conceived as a costume weapon for this production—designed by Alessandro and manufactured in the Venetian workshops of his brother Antonio?

Such a hypothesis would help explain both the object's functional grip and the exceptional care taken in its historical detailing. Yet it also raises a paradox: why would this particular piece display such erudition and precision when many other weapons emerging from the same milieu are marred by glaring anachronisms?

Even if the balance of historiographical evidence tends toward a nineteenth-century fabrication, the object resists a simple binary classification. Caught between scholarly reconstruction, theatrical creation, and antiquarian deception, the Buttin cinquedea ultimately forces us to reconsider the very meaning of authenticity. Is it an authentic Renaissance weapon—or an authentic testimony to the nineteenth century's fascination with the Renaissance?

Cinquedea Emilia
Circa 1500-1510
Milan PP2369

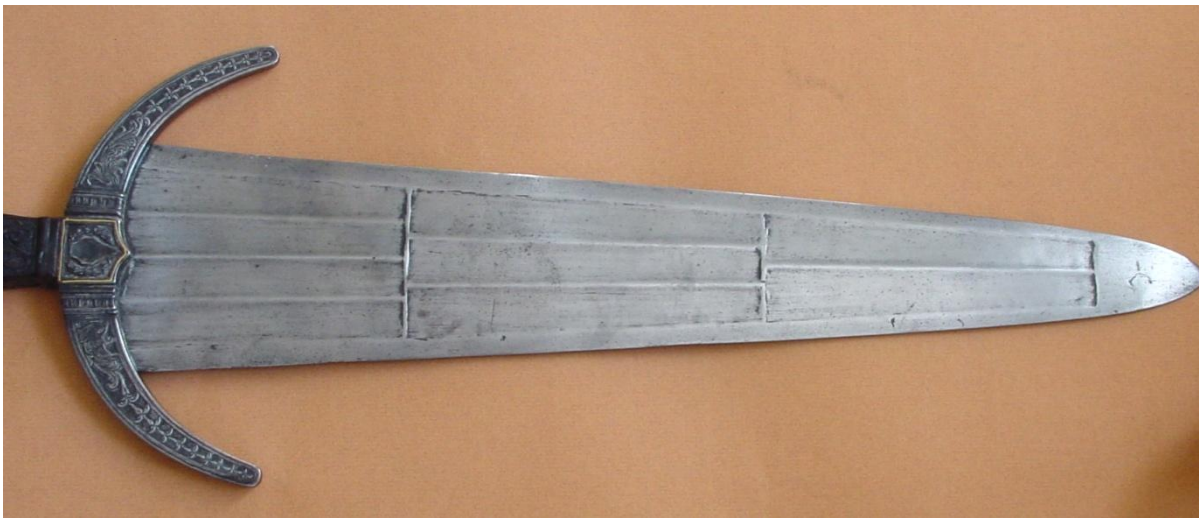
Cinquedea Emilia
Circa 1490-1500
Paris, MA J 774

Caesar Borgia Sword
Circa 1498-1499
Casa Caetani, Rome

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Angelucci Angelo "Catalago della Armeria Reale", Torino 1890
- BAIR Claude, "Cesare Borgia's sword-shabbard", Victoria & Albert Museum Bulletin, Oct 1966, Vol II, n°4
- BASHFORD Dean, "Catalogue of European Daggers," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1929
- BEMIS Elizabeth, "The sword of César Borgia: a redating with an examination of his personal iconography", University of Florida, 2007
- BONNAFFE Edmond, "Sur la contrefaçon", published in "L' ART - Revue hebdomadaire illustrée", A. Ballue Editeur, 1876
- BOSSON Clément, "Une cinquedea aux armes de Borso d'Este dans une collection suisse", Gazette des Armes n°88, December 1980
- BUTTIN Charles "Catalogue de la collection d'armes anciennes européennes et orientables", Rumilly, 1933
- BUTTIN Charles « Une cinquedea aux armes d'Este », Bruxelles, Vromant & Cie, 1904
- BUTTIN Charles "La cinquedea de la collection de Mme Goldschmidt", Brussels, Vromant & Co éditeurs, 1906
- EPIFANI Mario, "Un teatro d'armi : la collezione di Allesandro Sanquirico nell'Armeria Reale", catalogue of the exhibition "Nuova luce sull'Armeria Reale di Torino. La collezione Sanquirico", L'artistica Editrice, November 2015
- EUDEL Paul, « Trucs et truqueurs : altérations, fraudes et contrefaçons dévoilées », Librairie Molière, Paris, 1908
- GAUTIER Théophile, "Voyage en Italie", Eugène Fasquelle éditeur, Paris, 1901
- GREGOROVIUS Ferdinand, "Lucrezia Borgia", Stuggart, 1874
- GRUYER Gustave, "L'art ferrarais à l'époque des Princes d'Este", de, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1897
- LAKING Sir Guy Francis "A record of European Armour and Arms through seven centuries", London, G. Bell & sons, 1920
- LECOMTE Jules, "L'Italie des gens du monde. VENICE or a literary, artistic, historical, poetic and picturesque glance on the monuments and curiosities of this city", Paris, Hyppolite Souverain, publisher, 1844
- MEYRICK, Sir Samuel Hush Meyrick "Engraved illustrations of ancient Arms and Armour", 1854
- MÜNTZ Eugène "Les épées d'honneur distribuées par les papes", in "La Revue de l'art ancien et moderne", Paris, Tome IX, January-June 1901
- PERRY Marilyn "Antonio Sanquirico, art merchant of Venice", in Larbyrinthos, nos. 1-2, Le Monnier, 1982
- SCHEDELMANN Hans, "Der Waffensammler, Gefälsche Prunkwaffen", , Waffen und Kostümkunde, vol VII, Munich-Berlin, 1965
- SHEREN Paul, "Sanquirico, Alessandro", in Stanley Sadie, (Ed.), The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, Vol. Four. London: Macmillan Publishers, Inc., 1998
- VALLARDI Francesco Santo «Manuale del racoglitore e del negoziante di stampe», Milano, 1843
- VIALE FERRERO Mercedes & FRANCHI Francesca "Costumes designs by Alessandro Sanquirico and others for ballets performed at the Teatro Alla Scala, Milan 1820-24", Edinburgh University Press, 1984
- VENTUROLI Paolo, "L'Armeria Reale di Torino, Guida brève", 2001
- YRIARTE Charles, "Autour des Borgia", Paris, Rothschild, 1891

Cinquedea n°115 from the Charles Buttin collection



Cinquedea Ferrare type

Turin # 6

Turin #2

Sotheby's, lot 97, 15/12/2004

Lord Carmichael

Prince Odescalchi (Palazzo Venezia)

Palazzo Venezia

Musée de Gotha

Collection Carl Van Preussen #282
Musée de Berlin

Prince Colloredo