Public access description
Micromosaics developed into a popular Roman souvenir in the 19th century. The works shown here are among the most ambitious works ever created in this technique which uses minuscule glass pieces just as a painter uses brush-strokes.

Cavaliere Michelangelo Barberi (1787-1867) trained as a painter and mosaicist. He nonetheless postulated that technical perfection was not an aim in itself, but rather a 'service to Rome' and Italy. The ancient art form mosaic, its revival and further evolution were part of a revolutionary message: at a time when Italians were fighting for political union, Barberi's monumental tables brought together iconic views showcasing the shared cultural identity of Italy and its ancient roots.

The two Sicilies consisted of the southern Italian kingdom around Naples and the island of Sicily. The six Sicilian and Neapolitan landscapes and their lush vegetation shown on the table top are labelled in the border. Ruled by the Bourbons from 1731, the two states were officially united in 1816. The table was commissioned by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I (reigned 1825-55), and shows the profile of his daughter Olga in the centre.

Sir Arthur Gilbert and his wife Rosalinde formed one of the world's great decorative art collections, including silver, mosaics, enamelled portrait miniatures and gold boxes. Arthur Gilbert donated his extraordinary collection to Britain in 1996.

Descriptive line
Circular table with Flora of the Two Sicilies, Michelangelo Barberi, Rome, ca. 1850.

Physical description
Circular micromosaic tabletop featuring views of six landscapes in Southern Italy framed by foliage. A mosaic ribbon border is inlaid in mosaic with names of the sites in capital letters. In the centre of the tabletop on a sky-blue ground is a profile of the Grand Duchess Olga (daughter of Tsar Nicholas I). The chased gilt-bronze base consists of a four-sided pyramidal pedestal supported by four lion's paw feet below lion masks, all on an incurved four-sided plinth.

Dimensions
Diameter: 104 cm, Height: 79.4 cm

Museum number
LOAN: GILBERT.190:1, 2-2008

Object history note
Provenance: Tsar Nicholas I. Sale, Sotheby Parke-Bernet, Monaco, lot 639, 06/06/1981.

Historical significance: Nicholas I visited Italy in 1845 and the table known as 'The beautiful sky of Italy' made by Michelangelo Barberi and shown at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London recorded the Italian cities which the Tsar visited (see LOAN:Gilbert.894-2008).

Historical context note
The table was commissioned by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I (reigned 1825-55) and shows the profile of his second daughter Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna (1822-1892, later Queen Olga of Württemberg) in the centre.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O157775/the-flora-of-two-sicilies-table-barberi-michelangelo/