

SECRET ROME



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

CONTENT

Centre North

HENDRIK CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN MUSEUM	14
PERIOD ELEVATOR ON THE PINCIO	16
THE PINCIO WATER CLOCK	17
THE BUST OF FATHER SECCHI	18
GALILEO'S COLUMN	20
THE ASTROLOGICAL CEILING OF THE PRIVATE STUDY OF FERDINANDO I DE' MEDICI	22
THE BAS-RELIEF DEPICTING THE JUDGEMENT OF PÂRIS	26
THE ROMAN CISTERN AT VILLA MEDICI	28
THE CANNON BALL OF VIALE DELLA TRINITÀ DEI MONTI FOUNTAIN	30
THE ANAMORPHIC FRESCOES OF TRINITÀ DEI MONTI CONVENT	32
TRINITÀ DEI MONTI CONVENT SUNDIAL	34
VILLA MARAINI	36
THE BREASTS OF BERNINI'S 'CHARITY' AND 'TRUTH'	38
THE FACADE OF PALAZZO ZUCCARI	40
THE MARBLE FLOOD GAUGE OF PORTO DI RIPETTA	42
THE COLUMNS OF RIPETTA	44
BLESSING OF THE THROATS	46
POUSSIN'S TOMB	48
MIRACULOUS WATERS OF THE MADONNA DEL POZZO	49
MASS IN ARAMAIC AT SANTA MARIA CHURCH IN CAMPO MARZIO	52

Centre West

PRIVATE TOUR OF PALAZZO SACCHETTI	56
THE 'SOFAS' ON VIA GIULIA	58
CRIMINOLOGY MUSEUM	60
GONFALONE ORATORY	62
THE COVER OF THE 'TERRINA' FOUNTAIN	64
MONUMENTAL HALL OF THE VALLICELLIANA LIBRARY	66
THE SECRET ROOMS OF SAINT PHILIP NERI	68
THE MOTORISED RUBENS	72
PICENI HOSPICE	74
PALAZZO SCAPUCCI	75
TOMB OF SAINT ANICETUS	76
TOUR OF THE ANGELICA LIBRARY	78
PRIVATE TOUR OF PALAZZO PATRIZI	80
THE MARBLE FACE OF PIAZZA NAVONA	82

PALAZZO PAMPHILJ	84
THE PRIVATE CHAPEL OF PALAZZO MASSIMO ALLE COLONNE	86
THE MARBLE MASK OF PIAZZA POLLAROLA	88
THE SAW OF THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA IN MONSERRATO	
DEGLI SPAGNOLI	90
CAPELLA SPADA	92
HYPOGEUM CEMETERY OF SANTA MARIA DELL'ORAZIONE	
E MORTE CHURCH	94
ESOTERIC SYMBOLS AT PALAZZO FALCONIERI	96
THE OPTICAL ILLUSION OF THE FOUNTAIN IN THE PIAZZA CAPODIFERRO	102
THE 'NOBLE FLOOR' OF PALAZZO SPADA	104
THE MONTE DI PIETÀ CHAPEL	106
BEEES AT THE CASA GRANDE	108
THE ABANDONED INFANTS BAS-RELIEF	109

Centre South

PRINCESS ISABELLE'S APARTMENT	112
CARDINAL BESSARION'S CHAPEL	114
HIDDEN MESSAGE OF THE HOLY APOSTLES	116
SANCTUARY OF OUR LADY OF THE SMALL ARCH	118
CRYPT OF THE PAPAL ENTRAILS	120
THE WINDOW SILLS OF THE PALAZZO DI MONTECITORIO	122
THE STAG OF SANT'EUSTACHIO CHURCH	124
ROSE PETALS AT THE PANTHEON	126
PLAQUE CONDEMNING THE 'VILE TAVERNS AND THEIR LOATHSOME UGLINESS'	127
SCAR ON A MARBLE COLUMN	128
ACCADEMIA D'ARMI MUSUMECI GRECO	130
THE ROOMS OF SAINT ALOYSIUS DE GONZAGA	132
THE MONUMENTAL HALL OF COLLEGIO ROMANO	134
MUSEO ATHANASIUS KIRCHER	136
CASANATENSE LIBRARY	138
THE HIDDEN SYMBOLISM OF BERNINI'S ELEPHANT-OBELISK	140
FLOOD PLAQUES AT THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA SOPRA MINERVA	144
HIDDEN SYMBOLISM OF THE TOMB OF ANDREA BREGNO	146
BERARDI'S WATER CLOCK	148
THE HOLY FACE OF JESUS AT SANTO STEFANO DEL CACCO	150

CONTENT

THE MARBLE FOOT	152
THE CAT OF PALAZZO GRAZIOLI	154
THE COTTAGE OF AN ELDERLY WIDOW	156
THE BOARDED-UP WINDOW AT PALAZZO MATTEI	158
THE <i>PIANO NOBILE</i> OF PALAZZO MATTEI DI GIOVE	160
INSTITUTE OF THE ITALIAN ENCYCLOPAEDIA	162
OUTLINE OF THE FORMER GHETTO FOUNTAIN	164
INSCRIPTION AT PALAZZO MANILI	166
PALAZZO COSTAGUTI'S WALLED-UP ENTRANCE	168
MARBLE SLAB STIPULATING THE SIZE OF FISH	169
MONASTERO DI SANTA FRANCESCA ROMANA DI TOR DE' SPECCHI	170
CAGES OF THE WOLF AND THE EAGLE	172
HOLE IN THE FACADE OF SANTA MARIA IN ARACOELI	174

The Vatican and surrounding area

THE POPE'S RAILWAY	180
THE VEIL OF VERONICA AT SAINT PETER'S	182
SYMBOLS OF THE MOTHERHOOD	188
THE 33RD TOOTH OF JESUS IN THE <i>PIETÀ</i>	190
SYMBOLISM OF THE FONTANELLA DELLE TRE TIARE	192
THE WHITE MARBLE DISCS OF ST. PETER'S SQUARE	194
THE PLAQUE DESIGNATING THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE OBELISK ON ST. PETER'S SQUARE	195
SAINT PETER'S MERIDIAN	196
NERONE'S HEART OF STONE	198
PASSETTO ARCHES	200
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE	202
MONUMENTAL COMPLEX OF SANTO SPIRITO IN SASSIA	204
THE ITALIAN CLOCK OF THE PALAZZO DEL COMMENDATORE	206
THE FOUNDLINGS' WHEEL	208
MUSEUM OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY	210
PALAZZETTO BIANCO	212
THE OPTICAL ILLUSION OF VIA PICCOLOMINI	213

Gianicolo

SAN PIETRO IN MONTORIO'S CANNON BALL	216
AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME	218

THE FACADE OF 'MICHELANGELO'S HOUSE'	220
HERMETIC FRESCOES OF VILLA FARNESINA	222
THE FACE AT VILLA FARNESINA	226
THE GRAFFITI OF CHARLES V'S SOLDIERS	228
THE GRAFFITI OF JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID	230

Trastevere

THE MECHANISM OF THE RELIQUARY OF SAINT FRANCIS' CELL	234
THE CLOISTERS OF THE NUOVO REGINA MARGHERITA HOSPITAL	236
ANATOMY THEATRE OF SAN GALLICANO HOSPITAL	238
THE CLOISTER OF SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA DEI GENOVESI	240
THE CHURCH BELL OF SAN BENEDETTO IN PISCINULA	242
THE FORGOTTEN MOSAICS OF SANTA MARIA IN TRASTEVERE CHURCH	243
THE OLD PHARMACY OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA	244

Aventino – Testaccio

THE FIGURES MISSING FROM THE ARCH OF THE MONEYCHANGERS	248
THE HOLES IN THE ARCH OF THE MONEYCHANGERS	249
TRACES OF JUDAISM IN THE ROSETO COMUNALE	250
THE ORANGE TREE OF SANTA SABINA CLOISTER	252
THE DEVIL'S STONE	254
THE HIDING PLACE OF SAINT ALEXIUS	256
GARDENS OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA PRIORY	258
THE ORDER OF MALTA'S KEYHOLE	259
ISTITUTO NAZIONALE DI STUDI ROMANI	264
PARK OF THE MUSEO FERROVIARIO DI PORTA SAN PAOLO	266
THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY	268

Latran – Colosseum – Forum – Celio

<i>TITULUS EQUITII</i> BELOW THE BASILICA OF SAN MARTINO AI MONTI	272
THE MARKS OF SAINT PETER'S KNEES	274
THE HAND ON VIA DEI CERCHI	276
THE MITHRAIC SANCTUARY OF CIRCO MASSIMO	278
THE TABLE OF SANTA BARBARA ORATORY	284

CONTENT

THE GRAFFITI IN SANT'ANDREA AL CELIO	286
X-RATED FRESCOS IN ST STEPHEN'S	288
GAME IN THE CLOISTER OF SANTI QUATTRO CORONATI BASILICA	290
VERBAL ABUSE IN BASILICA SAN CLEMENTE	292
THE URN OF CLEMENT XII	296
THE TRIPLE ENCLOSURES OF SAN GIOVANNI IN LATERANO CLOISTER	298
PRIVATE VISIT TO THE SANCTA SANCTORUM	300
THE RELIC OF CHRIST'S FORESKIN	302
THE INRI INSCRIPTION AT SANTA CROCE IN GERUSALEMME	304
MUSEO STORICO DEI GRANATIERI DI SARDEGNA	306
THE BAKER'S TOMB	308
HYPOGEUM OF THE AURELII	310
THE DUST OF THE PILLAR OF SANTA BIBIANA	313

Quirinale – Termini – Monti – Esquilino

DIVINE WISDOM FRESCO	316
THE STATUE OF STANISLAS KOSTKA	318
CASINO DELL'AURORA	320
MUSEO DI PATOLOGIA DEL LIBRO	322
ANACHRONISTIC CHARACTERS IN THE SANTA PUDENZIANA MOSAIC	324
THE BUST OF NEGRITA	326
THE SQUARE HALO OF SANTA PRASSEDE BASILICA	328
MARQUIS PALOMBARA'S PORTA ALCHEMICA	330
BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS AT SANT'EUSEBIO	334
FISH FARM NEAR STAZIONE TERMINI	336
THE SUNDIAL OF SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI CHURCH	338
THE BOREAL MERIDIAN OF SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI CHURCH	344

Outside the Centre – North

VILLA MADAMA	348
IPOGEO DI VIA LIVENZA	350
THE CANNON BALL IN THE AURELIAN WALL	352
GUIDO RENI'S PAINTING OF SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL	353

A VISIT TO VILLA ALBANI	354
BARBER'S SYMBOLS AT PORTA PIA	356
MUSSOLINI'S BUNKERS AT VILLA TORLONIA	358
MUSEO DI STORIA DELLA MEDICINA	360
THE PAINTING L'ITALIA TRA LE ARTI E LE SCIENZE	362
SOURCE OF THE ACQUA SACRA	364
THE DEVIL'S THRONE	366
BUNKER AT VILLA ADA SAVOIA	368

Outise the Centre – South

ALFONSO TOZZI'S COLLECTION	372
PASOLINI'S TABLE AT THE AL BIONDO TEVERE RESTAURANT	374
FRESCO AT VILLA OSIO	376
THE THREE COLUMBARIA OF VIGNA CODINI AND THE TOMB OF POMONIUS HYLAS	378
MUSEO DELLA MEMORIA GIOCOSA	380
THE POPE'S TRAIN AT THE CENTRALE MONTEMARTINI MUSEUM	382
GEODETIC BASELINE ON THE APPIAN WAY	384
MUSEUM OF PERIOD COACHES	386
MAUSOLEO DI MONTE DEL GRANO	387
THE LEGENDARY FOOTPRINTS OF JESUS	388
MUSEO DELLE AUTO DELLA POLIZIA DI STATO	390
JEWISH CATACOMBS OF VIGNA RANDANINI	392
ALPHABETICAL INDEX	394

VILLA MARAINI

12

A superb panoramic view from an artificial hill

48 Via Ludovisi

Guided tours: every Monday at 3pm and 4pm (in English and Italian), on request only, by writing to: visite@istitutovizzero.it

Metro A Barberini

Bus: 61, 63, 80, 83, 116



In the heart of the Ludovisi district, close to Via Veneto, Villa Maraini offers one of the most spectacular views over the city: from the tower of the villa is a 360° panoramic viewpoint that is only 3 metres lower than the belvedere on the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica.

This luxurious and eclectic building combining Renaissance and Baroque influences was built between 1903 and 1905 by Emilio Maraini, a successful captain of industry born in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1853.

He began to produce sugar from beets that he had grown in the countryside around Rieti and in a few years became the 'sugar king'.

He then obtained Italian citizenship and even became a member of parliament, which is why he moved to Rome. A short distance from the church of Trinità dei Monti he bought some land where tonnes of stone, gravel and rubble had been piled up, partly for the construction of Via Ludovisi. Rather than just dispose of the rubbish, Maraini had the idea of building his house on top of this artificial hill.

The majestic three-storey villa, set in lush gardens, was designed by his architect brother Otto, who was also involved with the construction of the Excelsior Hotel on Via Veneto.

Inside, stucco, columns, frescoes, tapestries and marble figures grace the rooms, among which is the unmissable grand ballroom overlooking a loggia open to the garden. The monumental staircase with its three landings, flanked by two columns and graced with an incredible marble parapet, leading from the ground floor to the first floor, is very impressive.

The villa's decorations are the originals, embellished with copies of antique sculptures.

The owner's widow, Countess Carolina Maraini-Sommaruga, donated the villa to the Swiss Confederation in 1947. Since 1949, it has been home to the Swiss Institute, whose mission is to promote scientific and artistic exchanges between Switzerland and Italy.



THE FACADE OF PALAZZO ZUCCARI

14

Monsters on the facade

Via Gregoriana
Metro A - Spagna



© Valerio Ceva Grimaldi

Palazzo Zuccari occupies an area comprising the last part of Via Sistina and that of Via Gregoriana, and its facade is probably the most curious and unusual in the city. The cornices of the main door and of the windows are all formed by gaping monsters' mouths.

Federico Zuccari, the famous Baroque artist, bought the land in 1590, struck by its wonderful location, and he built the house and the studio for himself and his children, drawing inspiration for the palace's facade from the 'monstrous' style of the famous monsters of Bomarzo, close to Viterbo. This architectural whimsy was both criticised and admired, but in any case soon became the ideal house for artists in the area. Through the Accademia di San Luca, Zuccari left the dwelling to foreign artists, but his wishes were not respected and when the artist died, the building was passed on to another owner.

The Queen of Poland lived there from 1702 and for decades the house was the centre of high society in the city. After several changes of ownership, Zuccari's wish finally came true and the building became an inn for foreign artists. Winckelmann and Reynolds stayed there, David and Nazareni painted famous works there, and it appears in *Il Piacere* (The Child of Pleasure) by Gabriele D'Annunzio. In 1900 Henrietta Hertz, the last owner, left her collection of paintings to the Italian state and the palazzo and its library to Germany, allowing for the creation of the famous Biblioteca Hertziana (Hertzian Library), specialised in art history and still open today to scholars with special letters of recommendation.

The building, which is closed to the public for restoration, is full of important works, such as the frescoes of Giulio Romano.

In the basement the ruins of the villa of Lucullo, from the end of the Roman Republic, were found.



GONFALONE ORATORY

④

A little-known marvel

32/A Via del Gonfalone

06 6875952 – 06 68805637 – 06 9066572

Open during concerts or on request

Bus 23, 116, 116T, 271, 280, 870



This small marvel of the 16th century, hidden at the end of one of the many intersections of Via Giulia, once belonged to the important Archconfraternity of the Gonfalone. The oratory, which was restored between 1998 and 2002, remains almost unknown even though it is used today as a concert hall. It is, however, an extraordinary example of Roman Mannerism.

Although the building's small facade, by Domenico Castelli, is not particularly impressive, the interior is superb; with its walls completely covered with an extraordinary cycle of frescoes featuring the Passion of Christ in twelve parts. They were painted in 1573 by Federico Zuccari, Livio Agresti, Cesare Nebbia, Bertoja, Raffaellino Da Reggio and Marco Pino. Wooden choir benches encircle the room. Also note the ceiling of carved and gilded wood, the work of Ambrogio Bonazzini dating from 1568.



Gonfalone means 'standard' or 'banner' and refers to the fact that, in the 14th century, Archconfraternity members used to raise the standard of the pope (who resided in Avignon at the time), as a sign of support for his sovereignty over Rome. The confraternity, whose members wore a white habit and blue hood, was also known for the organisation of processions and other religious ceremonies. Their representations of Christ's Passion were so realistic that the popes had to put a stop to them in order to prevent crowd violence towards the Jews. The Archconfraternity of the Gonfalone was dissolved at the end of the 19th century and the oratory fell into disuse, ending up in such a dilapidated state that it was used by refuse collectors as a storage area until a musician discovered this treasure and decided to use it as a concert hall.

BERARDI'S WATER CLOCK

①9

A rare and curious mechanism

Palazzo Berardi
62 Via del Gesù

Stop in front of the open gate of Palazzo Berardi, in La Pigna district, to see a superb and theatrical water clock (hydrochronometer) in the courtyard.



It was installed in 1870 by the Dominican scholar Giovan Battista Embriaco, head of the nearby Minerva convent. The clock was not his first attempt, as he had already successfully presented two prototypes at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867.

This curious mechanism, which is still in working order, sits at the centre of a shell surrounded by four caryatids supporting two marble busts. The whole structure acts as a fountain and water feature.

There is another water clock on the Pincio (see page 17).



SAINT PETER'S MERIDIAN

8

A forgotten giant sundial

Piazza San Pietro



Since 1817, the famous obelisk of Saint Peter's Square – a red granite monolith over 25 metres high, or 40 metres if you count the base and the cross – is one of the world's largest gnomons marking a meridian (see the Place de la Concorde meridian in *Secret Paris*, in this series of guides).

On the paving stones of the square is a strip of granite that forms a straight line linking a point to the right of the base of the obelisk to another point beyond the Maderno fountain.

At each end of this strip, two marble discs indicate the points where, at midday, the shadow of the cross is projected during the summer solstice (in the sign of Cancer) and the winter solstice (in the sign of Capricorn). Five more discs mark the passage of the sun through the other signs of the zodiac, arranged in pairs: Leo-Gemini, Virgo-Taurus, Libra-Aries, Scorpio-Pisces and Sagittarius-Aquarius.

The obelisk was probably erected at Heliopolis during the 12th dynasty (20th-18th centuries BCE). Caligula had it brought to Rome in 37 CE to set off his private circus, on the Vatican hill, before it was taken over by Nero.

Several popes have attempted to embellish or otherwise make their mark on the obelisk. Sixtus V, for example, decided to add four lions to the base as a reference to the coat of arms of his family, the Peretti, and he donated the bronze ball that surmounts the obelisk, claimed to contain the ashes of Caesar, to the municipality of Rome. Alexander VII crowned it with the Chigi symbols of mountains and stars, and Innocent XIII added the bronze eagles and the heraldic emblems of the Conti family.



THE HAND ON VIA DEI CERCHI

③

The hand of Cicero

87 Via dei Cerchi
Metro B – Circo Massimo



Along Via dei Cerchi, a narrow street that winds between the Circus Maximus and the Palatine Hill, stands a building whose architecture is strikingly original: above the cornice, which features 18 large oculi, a strange hand crowns the construction.

This hand is a plaster copy – on a smaller scale – of a Roman marble original that was found in the area and originally featured on the facade of the little church of the Madonna dei Cerchi, also known as Santa Maria de Manu, built in the 13th century and demolished in 1939. The thumb and forefinger of the hand point towards the sky. In ancient Rome, from the days of the Republic, this gesture had a precise meaning: it was how military commanders and emperors demanded silence before the *adlocutio*, a speech to rouse the troops before battle.

Popular tradition refers to this sculpture as the ‘hand of Cicero’, although there is no reason to associate it with the famous Roman orator.

Inside the building, the windows are surrounded with decorative motifs, notably the fleur-de-lys, heraldic symbol of the Farnese family. The site is in fact at the foot of the Orti Farnesiani (Farnese gardens), which Cardinal Alessandro Farnese ordered to be planted from 1520. In this northern section of the Palatine Hill, the first private botanical gardens in Europe were created; they were inherited by the Bourbons of Naples and subsequently sold to Napoleon III, before the Italian government acquired them after unification in 1870.

The building must originally have been one of the farmhouses on the extensive Farnese estate, but it was embellished with this complex facade during renovations at the end of the 17th century. It is now part of the properties of the Olivetan Benedictine monks, who own the basilica of Sant’Anastasia, whose apse lies behind this building.

At the time of Sixtus V (1585-1590), the common people believed that the hand indicated the price of wine: 1 sou per fojetta (half a litre).

Why is there a tower within the Circus Maximus?

The medieval Torre della Moletta (Tower of the Little Mill) was part of a fortified complex that belonged to the Frangipane family, a powerful Roman clan. It is so called because of a nearby water mill, powered by the Aqua Mariana channel that flowed right through the centre of the circus.

CASINO DELL'AURORA

③

See the dawn once a month

Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi

43 Via XXIV Maggio

06 83467000

First day of the month, 10am–12pm and 3pm–5pm

Admission free

Specialised foreign language guides available on request



In the grounds of the extraordinary Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, the Casino dell'Aurora (Dawn Pavilion) is open to the public free of charge on the first day of every month. The palace, built in 1610 over the ruins of the Baths of Constantine, was the former home of the powerful Cardinal Mazarin (Giulio Mazzarino). The *casino* (pavilion), designed at the same time as the hanging garden and the semicircular fountain on the opposite side, was built by the Flemish cabinet-maker Giovanni Vasanzio (the Italian name of Jan Van Santen), who became the assistant of the celebrated architect Flaminio Ponzio upon arriving in Rome. The building's two levels are only visible on the outside from Via XXIV Maggio, because on the other side, which faces the garden, the lower level is buried due to the difference in height between street and garden. The building, which on both levels consists of a central hall flanked by two smaller rooms, has the typical 'C' form of hunting lodges and suburban villas built from the end of the 15th century, and the garden side corresponds to the second floor of the building reserved for banquets and formal ceremonies. On the ceiling of the central hall is the fresco masterpiece that gives the pavilion its name: *Aurora* by Guido Reni, painted 1613-1614, and one of the most copied works in the history of art over the past four centuries. The central hall is filled with 17th-century marble busts of Roman emperors and famous Greek statues, such as *Artemis the Huntress* and the *Rospigliosi Athena*.

Private visit: the side rooms of Casino dell'Aurora

By booking (Madame Capaccioli at 06 83467000), not only can you visit the pavilion in peace but also gain access to two side rooms that are closed during the monthly public tours.

The ceilings are frescoed with Giovanni Baglione's *Renaldo and Armida* and Passignano's *Battle of Armida*. There are also two paintings by Guido Reni, *Christ Crucified* and *Andromeda Freed by Perseus*, as well as *The Death of Julian the Apostate* and *The Conversion of Saul* by Luca Giordano.

Pavilion of the Muses

Exceptionally it may also be possible to visit the Pavilion of the Muses, which forms part of the same palace complex. Some very fine frescoes can be seen there by Orazio Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi. Reservation again through Madame Capaccioli at 06 83467000.

THE BUST OF NEGRITA ⑥

The remarkable story of the first ambassador from Africa to Europe who died in Rome in the arms of Pope Paolo V Borghese in 1604

Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore
 basilicasantamariamaggiore.va

Admission free

Metro A: Vittorio Emanuele or Termini stops; Metro A/B: Termini

In the first chapel on the right in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, a striking black marble bust adorns a Baroque monument. This work, crafted by sculptors Stefano Maderno and Francesco Caporale, is believed to enshrine the remains of Nsaku Ne Vunda (1575–1608), a young ambassador from the Kingdom of Kongo. Baptised and consecrated as a priest with the name António Emmanuele, he was nicknamed ‘Negrita’ by Europeans due to his dark skin.



The bust stands as a testament to the first formal diplomatic contact between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe in the modern era. Nsaku Ne Vunda was a relative of King Álvaro II (1578–1614), ruler of a vast Central African empire encompassing present-day Angola, Gabon, and numerous vassal states. An educated man fluent in Latin, Ne Vunda was sent in 1604, at the age of 29, on a mission to Rome. The goal was to establish direct diplomatic relations with the Holy See, assert Kongo's autonomy from Portuguese influence in ecclesiastical and political affairs, and denounce the slave trade imposed by colonial powers.

Ne Vunda's journey was plagued by obstacles and delays orchestrated by Portugal to thwart his mission. He departed from Mbanza Kongo (modern-day Angola) in 1604 aboard a slave ship bound for Brazil, accompanied by court nobles and family members. Enduring mistreatment on the voyage, he also faced storms and attacks by Dutch pirates before finally arriving on the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, King Philip III (1578–1621) detained him, further delaying the mission's success. Despite these challenges, Ne Vunda reached Rome on 2 January 1608, gravely ill and with only four companions left.

Pope Paul V Borghese (1552–1621) warmly received him in the Vatican, providing medical care. Tragically, Ne Vunda succumbed to illness just days later, on 6 January 1608, the Feast of the Epiphany. It is said that he died in the Pope's arms. Moved by the young ambassador's story, the Pope ordered a grand funeral procession from the Vatican to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where solemn rites were held. He also commissioned the black marble bust, modelled on Ne Vunda's death mask, to preserve his memory.

Ne Vunda's story left a profound impression on Roman society. He was later depicted posthumously, alongside other ambassadors of the era, in the *Salone dei Corazzieri* at the Quirinal Palace. A more intimate portrayal appears in an inaccessible fresco by Giovanni Battista Ricci (1610) in the Pauline Chapel of the Vatican. Pope Paul V Borghese also minted a commemorative medal in his honour.

A VISIT TO VILLA ALBANI

5

An (almost) inaccessible treasure

92 Via Salaria

fondazionetorlonia.org/visiting

Most Romans believe that the fabulous Villa Albani is closed to the public, but in fact it can be visited by appointment.



This villa is one of Rome's largest and most important late Baroque buildings. Designed as a suburban residence for pleasure and leisure, it was filled with works of art and held festivals and concerts, all within a large park extending over 10 hectares – from Via Salaria to Viale Regina Margherita, the third-largest green space in the city. It also has a splendid Italian garden dotted with fountains.

The villa was built over a period of twenty years from 1747, under the direction of architect Carlo Marchionni, and was designed as the residence of Cardinal Alessandro Albani, nephew of Pope Clement XI. It was then inherited by the Castelbarco and Chigi families before being bought in 1866 by Prince Alessandro Torlonia, banker and art lover, who had carried out excavations at Villa Massenzio and Villa Quintili.

The main building consists of a ground floor flanked by two wings with arcades and a piano nobile (first-floor salon). Part of the Museo Torlonia (Torlonia Museum), the largest private collection of ancient sculptures – statues, bas-reliefs, sarcophagi and busts – is housed here. The villa also has a large art gallery, which has been inaccessible to the public for centuries but houses works by Perugino, Guercino, Van Dyck, Tintoretto, Giulio Romano and many other painters. There are also precious Etruscan frescoes from the François Tomb at Vulci. Inside is the wonderful Parnassus salon, with its ceiling fresco by the neoclassical painter Anton Raphael Mengs. In an adjoining room the famous relief depicting Antinoüs, originally from Hadrian's Villa, stands in the hearth.

In one of these rooms, on the afternoon of 20 September 1870, a few hours after the nearby Porta Pia had been breached, leading to the fall of Rome, the Papal States signed the surrender of the city. The villa effectively became the headquarters of the Italian army. At the opposite end of the garden is a belvedere known as the 'Caffehaus'. There are other minor buildings in the park, including a small temple that served as an aviary and fake ruins built with authentic archaeological fragments.

For years there has been talk of the villa (which still belongs to the Torlonia family) being expropriated so that it can be enjoyed by the people of Rome, but this does not seem likely to happen any time soon.



THE DEVIL'S THRONE

11

The Devil's wiles on the doorstep of the papacy

Piazza Elio Callistio

Metro B1: Libia

Railway station: Roma Nomentana

Popular tradition has long associated the ruins at Piazza Elio Callistio with the Devil.

At first glance, the remains of this structure resemble the shape of a throne. Legend has it that Satan himself, upon arriving in the Eternal



City, sat on it impetuously and this caused the repeated collapses of the brick structure. Since then, on moonlit nights, rumours persist that the Evil One reclines on this seat, gleefully observing feasts and rituals held in his honour, promising his devotees the gifts of prophecy or healing from all ailments.

As early as the Middle Ages, the 'throne' was believed to possess miraculous properties. Many would scrape powder from its walls to use in the preparation of magical potions, or more simply, carve their desires into the bricks.

Another legend tells of an alchemist named Leonhard Thurneisser zum Thurn, who allegedly inscribed the word *KABALA* across six bricks scattered among the ruins. It is said that anyone able to locate each of the six letters and reconstruct the word in full could strike the wall three times with a clenched fist and recite the incantation: 'I want my story to change!' (Although, whether this change would be for better or worse remains unknown).

According to a 19th-century tale, a shepherd named Giovanni ventured near the Devil's throne in search of a lost sheep and inexplicably acquired remarkable medicinal knowledge. He began successfully treating the sick – naturally, for a fee.

Word of the miraculous brick dust spread swiftly throughout Rome and its surroundings, but in the end, Giovanni the healer was forced to flee the city to avoid serious accusations of witchcraft.

From Piazza della Sedia del Diavolo to Piazza Elio Callistio

In a corner of Piazza Elio Callistio, the two different names the site has held are still visible side by side.

In the 1950s, local residents petitioned for a formal name change, and in 1958, Rome City Council officially approved the change.

The current name reflects the belief that the ruins were, in fact, a second-century brick funerary shrine attributed to Aelius Callistion, a freedman of Emperor Hadrian.





SECRET ROME

Visit palaces closed to the public, admire exceptional works of art away from the tourist circuit, listen to a concert in a magnificent hidden oratory, have your dog or car blessed, puzzle over a rare catoptric meridian or a wonderful anamorphic fresco, discover the remarkable motorised Rubens, enter into the secrets of the Vatican, say a prayer before an image of the Holy Face of Jesus like that deposited on the moon in 1968, organise a dinner for two in a private palace, protect your throat from the rigours of winter ...

Far from the crowds and the usual clichés, Rome is still a reserve of well-concealed treasures only revealed to those who know how to wander off the beaten track, whether residents or visitors.

An indispensable guide for those who thought they knew Rome well, or who would like to discover the hidden face of the city.

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING
400 PAGES

£15.99 – US\$21.95 – €19.95

info@jonglezpublishing.com
www.jonglezpublishing.com

ISBN: 978-2-36195-848-0



9 782361 958480