

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

ROME

THE SECRET ATLAS



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05.

The French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici
Viale della Trinità dei Monti, 1
Metro A – Spagna; Bus 119 – Trinità dei Monti

THE ROMAN CISTERN AT VILLA MEDICI

A little-known witness to Rome’s water supply

Visible only during temporary exhibitions at the villa or upon request, an ancient Roman cistern, hidden from street view, lies beneath the Villa Medici. This immense reservoir, with a capacity of 1,300 cubic metres (now empty), is an extraordinary testament to the Pincian Hill’s long-standing strategic role in supplying water to Rome. As the site of one of the first major water-capture systems, the Pincian Hill became a crossroads for several ancient aqueducts, including the Aqua Virgo, which continues to deliver water to central Rome via a 19-kilometre-long tunnel. Benefiting from easy access to water thanks to these aqueducts, the hill became, from the 1st century BCE, an ideal location for large patrician villas adorned with gardens and fountains. In 536 CE, during Emperor Justinian’s campaign to reclaim Italy from the Ostrogoths, General Belisarius entered Rome and established his camp in the former palace of Emperor Honorius, the remains of which still lie buried beneath the Villa Medici. It was probably

during this period that the Roman cistern was constructed, its vaulted roof supported by two massive pillars. Although access to water became more challenging following the fall of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance marked a revival of ornamental gardens on the hill. In 1564, the land was purchased from the Crescenzi family and redeveloped by Cardinal Giovanni Ricci of Montepulciano, who commissioned the construction of what would become the Villa Medici. Appointed superintendent of waters, the cardinal also restored the Aqua Virgo aqueduct. Surrounding himself with the finest engineers of the era, he tasked Camillo Agrippa with devising a system to supply fountains located tens of metres above ground, defying gravity, water was forced upwards using a pump powered by the motion of a water wheel. After acquiring the villa in 1576, Ferdinand de’ Medici, the future Grand Duke of Tuscany, continued his predecessor’s transformations, enhancing the gardens with additional fountains.



© Assaf Shoshan

09.

Palazzo Zuccari
Via Gregoriana
Metro A – Spagna

THE FAÇADE OF PALAZZO ZUCCARI

Monsters on the façade

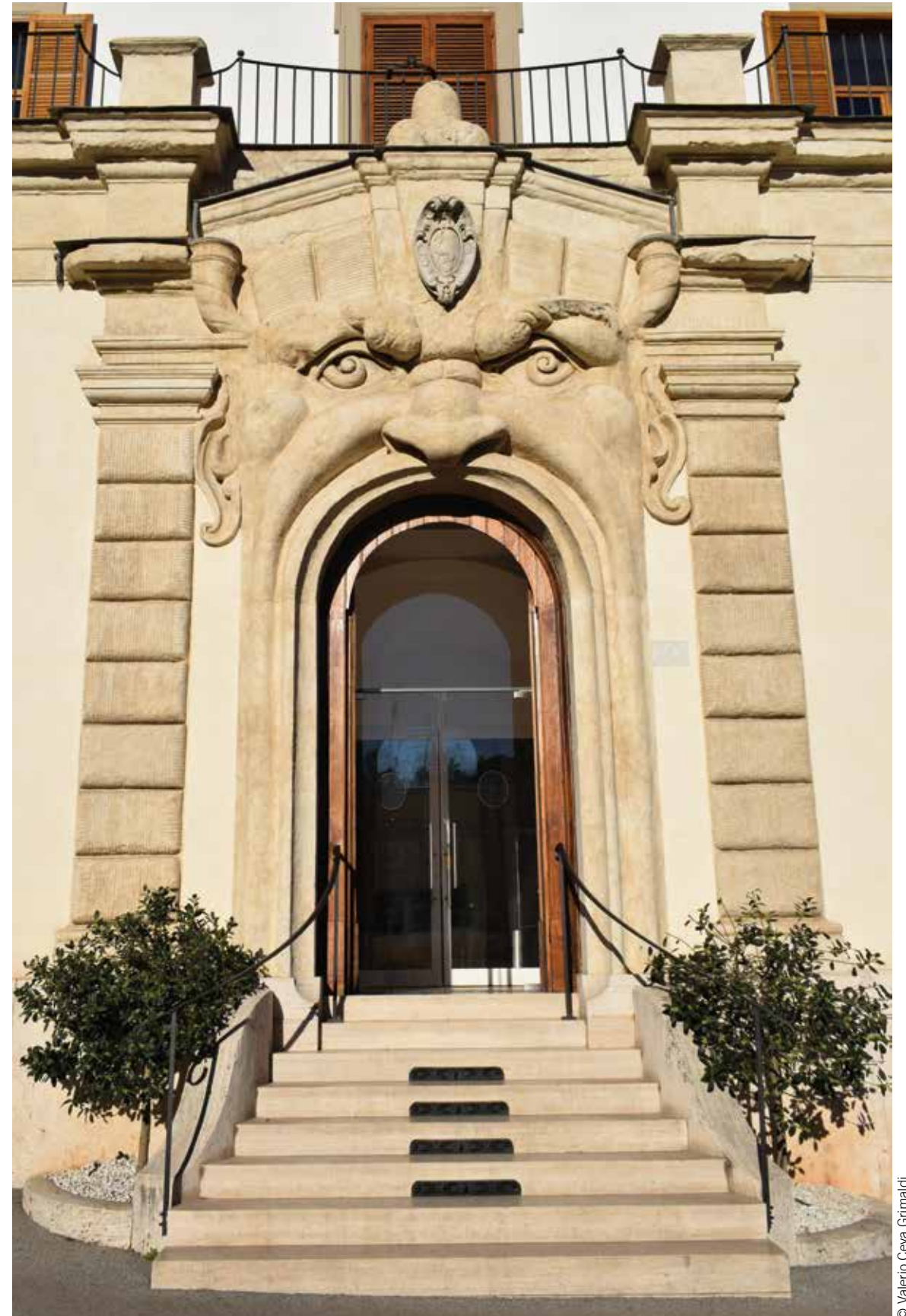
Palazzo Zuccari occupies an area comprising the last part of Via Sistina and that of Via Gregoriana, and its façade is probably the most curious and unusual in the city. The cornices of the main door and of the windows are all formed by gaping monsters' mouths.

Federico Zuccari, the famous Baroque artist, bought the land in 1590, struck by its wonderful location, and he built the house and studio for himself and his children, drawing inspiration for the palace's façade 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 Hert-

ziana (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 Lucullus, from the end of the Roman Republic, were found.



© Valerio Ceva Grimaldi

03.

Gonfalone oratory
Via del Gonfalone, 32/A
Bus 23 or 280 – Lungotevere Tebaldi/Perosi

GONFALONE ORATORY

A little-known marvel

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 façade, 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.

Le 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.



08.

Brazilian Embassy
Piazza Navona, 14
Bus 30, 70, 81, 87 – Rinascimento

PALAZZO PAMPHILJ

The main gallery of the Brazilian Embassy

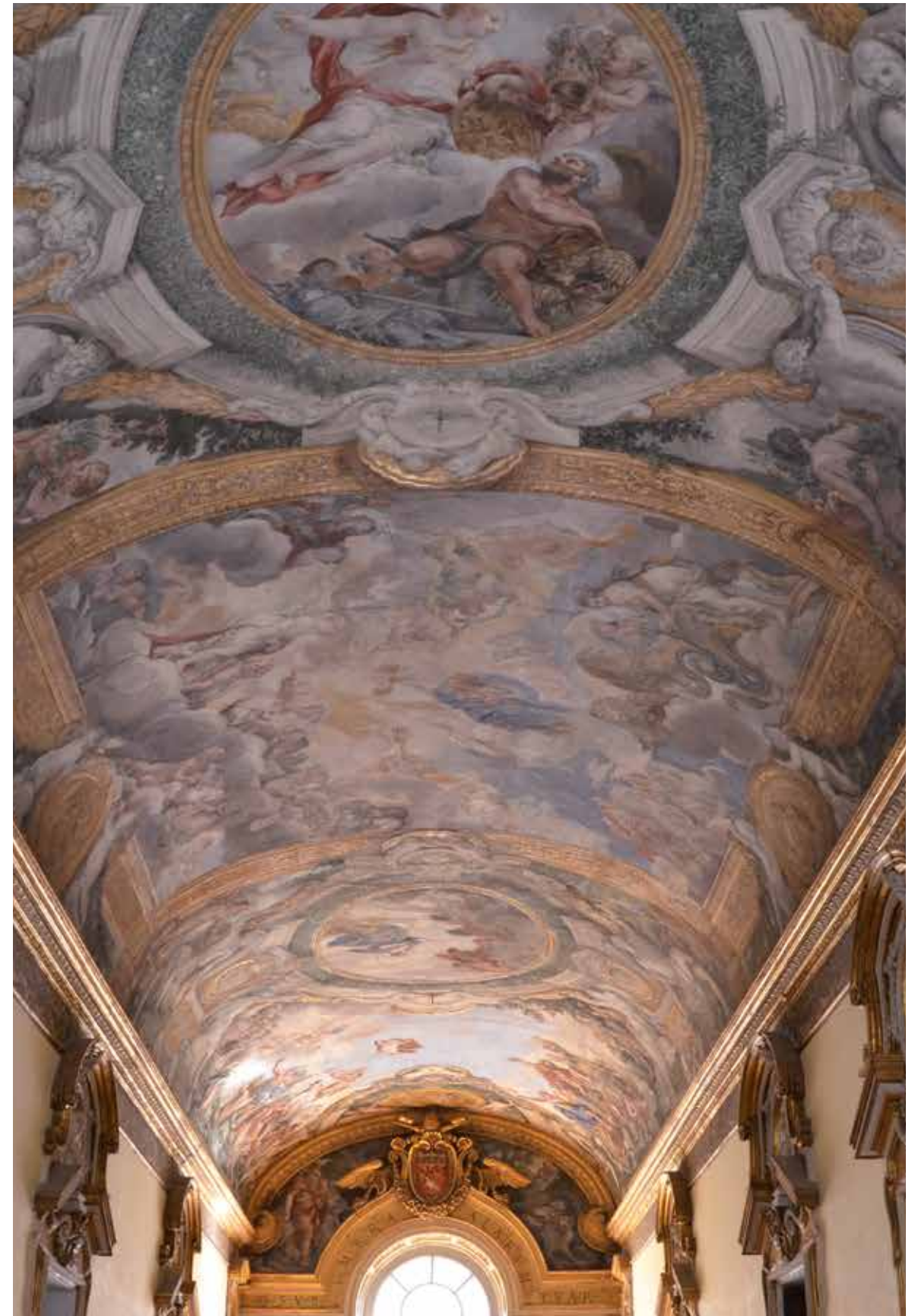
Palazzo Pamphilj, built in the 17th century, has accommodated the Brazilian Embassy since 1920. Twice a month, visitors who have booked ahead are shown round the seven magnificent chambers on the first floor (piano nobile), where biblical and mythological subjects alternate in the work of the most famous artists of the time: Giacinto Gimignani, Agostino Tassi (who went down in history as the rapist of Artemisia Gentileschi), Andrea Camassei, Gaspard Dughet and Giacinto Brandi.

The highlight of the visit is the main gallery, which is over 30 m wide and overlooks Piazza Navona. Designed by Francesco Borromini and decorated (1651–1654) by Pietro da Cortona, whose fresco cycle depicts scenes from the life of Aeneas, this privileged environment was designed to welcome and impress even the most distinguished guests of the Pamphilj family. Although the Pamphilj had owned houses on this side of Piazza Navona since the 15th century, it was not until two centuries later that the family had its moment of glory, when Cardinal Giovanni Battista was elected to the pontifical throne as Innocent X in 1644. This taciturn and wary pope was little loved by the public on

whom he imposed heavy taxes to satisfy his architectural ambitions. As soon as he became pontiff, he commissioned Girolamo Rainaldi to build this magnificent palace as well as the church of Sant'Agnese in Agone (the family's private chapel), two projects on which Borromini subsequently worked.

The palazzo is also linked to Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, the pope's sister-in-law and one of the most influential women of her time.

An authoritarian and hated figure, all kinds of sordid acts were attributed to her (it was said that she ran Rome's brothels); her ghost is still believed to haunt Piazza Navona. This powerful woman, nicknamed 'Pimpaccia' (a pejorative diminutive of Olimpia) as well as 'she-pope', was probably no worse than her male contemporaries but she was never forgiven for her influence over Innocent X (she was reputed to be his mistress). She was also renowned for her greed – it is said that on the pope's death she stole two chests filled with gold meant for his funeral expenses. In the end, Innocent X was buried without pomp and ceremony in the crypt of Saint Agnes, the place he had built by starving the people.



09.

Via del Collegio Romano, 27
 Bus 51, 62, 63, 83, 85, 119, 160 – Corso/Minghetti

THE MONUMENTAL HALL OF COLLEGIO ROMANO

An exceptional, little-known library

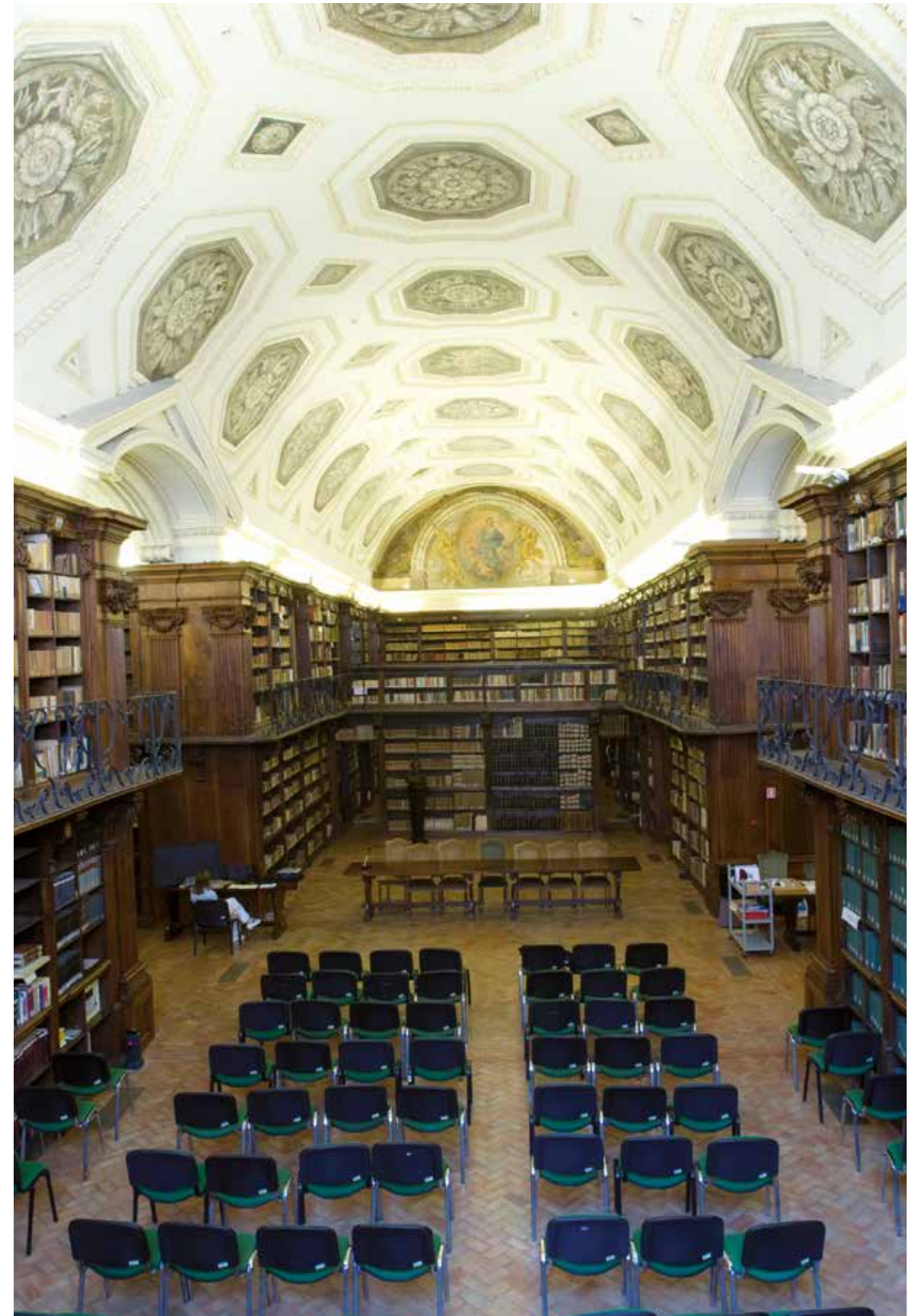
Lovers of art or archaeology, ancient books and great Baroque library enthusiasts will take great pleasure in exploring the spectacular Sala Crociera (cruciform hall) of Collegio Romano, or even studying in the sumptuous reading room attached to it.

The immense hall in the form of a cross, as its name indicates, is disconcertingly beautiful. The walls that form the arms of the cross are entirely covered in books, most of them ancient and rare. The superb shelving where they are stacked was built especially for the library in the 17th century, at the time when the hall was the main library of the college founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola and modelled on the University of Paris.

More recently, this hall and the adjoining reading room were part of the National Library of Rome, until the latter moved into its present site at Castro Pretorio.

Since 1989, these halls have been occupied by the Library of Archaeology and History of Art, and the collection includes a vast number of volumes donated by archaeologists, art and architecture historians, as well as a collection of art gallery catalogues, with sections devoted to theatre, music, heraldry and Oriental art, besides an

exceptional collection of catalogues from the principal salerooms dating from the 19th century onwards.



01.

Via della Stazione Vaticana
Bus 34, 36 – Aurelia/Bonifacio VIII

THE POPE’S RAILWAY

The shortest international railway in the world

1270 metres – this is the total length of the Vatican railway built (following the Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929) to link the Holy See with the Italian rail network via a junction with the nearby station of Roma San Pietro.

Construction work was finished in 1932. It involved erecting the 143-metre-long Gelsomino (‘Jasmine’) viaduct, built of masonry faced with travertine and brick. The track passes under a wide arch surmounted by the coat of arms of Pope Pius XI and goes through the Leonine Wall to enter the State of the Vatican City.

A majestic sliding double gate – weighing over 35 tonnes – closes this passage, which is only open on rare occasions to allow a freight convoy through.

A short distance beyond the gate is Vatican City station, opened in 1933 and now a shopping centre.

The track continues for another hundred metres or so to end in a cul-de-sac: an 80-metre-long tunnel, with two parallel sidings used for shunting.

During the preparations for Jubilee 2000 at Roma San Pietro station, one of two tracks along the viaduct was

taken up, to be replaced by a pleasant walkway with a fine view of the gate and an unusual perspective on *Er Cuppolone*, the immense dome of Saint Peter’s.



07.

Villa Farnesina
Via della Lungara, 230
Bus 280 – Lungotevere Farnesina/Trilussa

THE GRAFFITI OF JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

Even famous painters left graffiti

Within the Villa Farnesina, a surprising piece of graffiti is hidden in the fresco by Sodoma (1477–1549) depicting *The Marriage of Alexander and Roxana*. The Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) discreetly signed his name in the folds of a servant's drapery.

A leading figure of Neoclassicism, David broke away from the playful and indulgent style of Rococo to, in his own words, 'regenerate the arts by creating a form of painting the Greek and Roman classics would unhesitatingly claim as their own'. During his time at the French Academy in Rome from 1775 to 1780, he studied ancient works with dedication. He returned to Rome in 1784, the same year he painted *The Oath of the Horatii* that would make him famous. It was during this second visit that he added his signature to Sodoma's fresco: 'louis David 1784'. The broad strokes of the 'd' are characteristic of the painter's signature.

This act, of course, compromises the integrity of the fresco. Could it be considered vandalism? Art historian Charlotte Guichard, in her work *Graffiti. Inscrivere son nom à Rome. XVI-XIX^e siècle* (2014), cautions against such a reductive interpretation. She argues that a painter's act

of inscribing their name on another's work is not mere defacement but carries deeper meaning. David's gesture pays homage to Sodoma's majestic style, itself drawing inspiration from antiquity. By writing his name into the fabric of the fresco, David positions himself within a lineage of artists, and claims a shared connection with Renaissance painters who revitalised the classical past. The act signifies both admiration for the original work and an assertion of mastery over its legacy.

David may have felt justified in his subtle signature, considering that the Villa had already been marked by graffiti since the Sack of Rome in 1527 (see previous double page). Furthermore, he placed his name just beneath that of Carlo Maratta (1625–1713), who signed 'Carlo Maratti' in the style of the registers of the Accademia di San Luca, of which he was a director. It was Maratta who restored the Farnesina frescoes in 1693, and then Raphael's Rooms and Lodges in the Vatican, which had been badly damaged during the Sack of Rome. By signing the fresco, David positions himself not merely as a visitor but as a Neoclassical restorer of painting, asserting his role in the continuation of its tradition.



04.

Piazza della Bocca della Verità, 16
Metro B – Circo Massimo; Bus 51, 81, 85, 87 – Cerchi/Bocca della Verità

THE MITHRAIC SANCTUARY
OF CIRCO MASSIMO

One of the largest Mithraic sanctuaries in Rome

In the early 1930s, during restoration work on the building facing the north-west of the Circo Massimo (Circus Maximus), at a depth of 14 metres below the present road level, the remains of a vast brick building from the 2nd century CE were discovered.

Its location suggested a public building related to the neighbouring circus. This hypothesis is confirmed by the presence of a majestic flight of steps, a later addition leading to an upper storey.

In the 3rd century CE, certain ground-floor rooms were converted to house one of the largest Mithraic sanctuaries known in Rome. Access is by a secondary entrance and a passage to the right, from which opens a service chamber.

A wide brick archway separates this chamber from the sanctuary proper, the sides of which are fitted with raised stone benches for use by worshippers. On the rear wall, a semi-circular niche probably held a statue of the god.

The floor is paved with blocks of salvaged marble while in the centre of the sanctuary stands a circular alabaster stone remarkable for its size.

The scene is completed by an incredible white marble relief showing Mithras in the act of slaying a bull, surrounded by his two torch-bearers (*dadofori*) Cautes and Cautopates, the Sun, the Moon, a raven, a scorpion, a dog and a serpent.

WHY IS THERE A TOWER WITHIN THE CIRCO 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.



07.

Santa Prassede Basilica
Via di Santa Prassede, 9
Metro A – Vittorio Emanuele; Metro B – Cavour

THE SQUARE HALO OF SANTA PRASSEDE BASILICA

Square halos were for subjects alive at the time a mosaic was created

Santa Prassede Basilica, famous for its mosaic cycles made by Byzantine artists in the 9th century, was erected by command of Pope Paschal I (817–824) in honour of Saint Praxedes, the sister of Saint Pudentiana and daughter of Saint Pudens, with whom Saint Peter is said to have stayed. She is also mentioned in the Epistles of St Paul.

The celebrated mosaic in the apse depicts Saints Praxedes and Pudentiana ascending to heaven. To the right of Jesus, Praxedes stands between Saint Zeno and Pope Paschal I, who is presenting Christ with a model of the church he had had built. You will notice that his head is encircled by a very unusual halo: square and blue, instead of the traditional round golden halo (see opposite). Similarly, Paschal's mother Theodora, who is buried in the Saint Zeno chapel, is shown above the door on the left, inside the chapel, also wearing a square blue halo. This type of halo can also be seen in the mosaics of the church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, again surrounding the head of Paschal I, who was the force behind the rebuilding of this church too.

Outside the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, the apse mosaic of the remains of Leo III's papal dining hall (*Triclinium Leoninum*) also depicts the pope (795–816) with a square halo.

WHY SQUARE HALOS?

Until the 4th century, only Christ wore a halo, the symbol of those who lived as saints and who had been admitted to heaven. From the 9th century, the halo would nevertheless be accepted for all the saints. These were plain round haloes, the circle being a symbol of perfection and eternity, and golden in colour, symbol of divine light. Haloes are often interpreted as representations of the heavenly space (the aura, in more modern terms) that surrounds the saints. It is focused on the head, supposed to be the noblest part of the human body, the seat of the soul.

The square halo that surrounds certain figures in mosaics signifies that the person was alive at the time the mosaic was made. It represents the earth and the four points of the compass. Blue, the colour of the sky, is the most spiritual, the purest and closest to the divine. It symbolises self-detachment and the flight of the soul towards God and thus indicates an intermediate stage on the path to God and the colour gold.



ROME

THE SECRET ATLAS

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

Admire exceptional works of art away from the tourist circuit, puzzle over a rare catoptric meridian, 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, protect your throat from the rigours of winter, spot the insults immortalised on the fresco of a basilica ...



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