

ANTIQUÉ PAINTINGS

Under the Popes, every state room of the Quirinale Palace was decorated with paintings, almost all of which predictably depicted a sacred subject.

The presence of religious paintings in the Quirinale Palace was so widespread that it was often out of sync with the nature of the places: for example, in 1843 Pompeo Batoni's 1779 extremely pious [Madonna with Child and Saints Catherine, Jerome and Lucia](#) was hanging in the billiard room.

Of particular importance, in terms of the relevance and the dimension of the paintings, was the collection from St. Peter's Basilica displayed in the Palace's halls which included the cartoons for the decorations of the Basilica's chapels and several colossal altarpieces that, in the Basilica, had been progressively replaced by mosaic copies.

The pontifical art collection in the Quirinale Palace was the first to be impoverished by Napoleonic requisitions and was ultimately reduced to only a few pieces after the Popes were forced out of the Palace in September 1870.

Perhaps in a show of respect for the Quirinale Palace's consecrated places and their decorations, the only paintings that are left hanging are the ones decorating the altars of the Palace's chapels, including Guido Reni's 1610 Annunciation in the Chapel of the Annunciation.

The paintings belonging to the Holy See left in the Quirinale Palace include the Table of the Infant St. John the Baptist that was purchased by Clement XII as a work by Raphael, subsequently long believed to be by Giulio Romano and now thought to be by an anonymous Roman painter of the 16th Century, two extraordinary portraits of saints by French painter Simon Vouet (1590–1649), the spectacular [Martyrdom of Forty Jesuit Priests](#) by Jacques Courtois (1621–1676), which currently hangs in the stately office of the President of the Republic, and two altarpieces by Giovanni Lanfranco and Carlo Maratta.

In the early years of the Kingdom of Italy, the court of the House of Savoy realized that they needed to fill many empty spaces on the walls and to counterbalance the religious iconography of the Popes' paintings with paintings portraying historical or dynastic themes that would necessarily be profane.

Thus the Quirinale Palace was filled with solemn portraits, often of poor quality, of members of the House of Savoy, or paintings dedicated to historical events that gave lustre to the family. Among these were four portraits that Charles Albert King of Piedmont–Sardinia commissioned to Massimo d'Azeglio in 1838 for the Royal Palace of Turin, or casual paintings featuring scenes from everyday life, still lifes, flowers and animals.

The quality of the paintings that the Savoy dynasty brought to Rome from their residences in Piedmont is upgraded by a pair of paintings by Sebastiano Ricci ([Esther before Ahasuerus](#) and *Belshazzar's Feast*, of 1733), and the six [Stories of Aeneas](#) (circa 1735) by Corrado Giaquinto. They were brought to the Quirinale Palace to decorate a ceiling in the Royal Family's relentless intent to transform the austere 17th Century palace into a refined late 18th Century royal residence.

The Quirinale Palace of the Republican period, and more generally of the present-day, has relaxed its pursuit of "ideological" subjects in antique paintings, seeking instead to display the most significant pieces of the collection in the Palace's state rooms.