

# The Collections

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## **The clocks of the Quirinale Palace**

Just as a large part of the furnishings present in the Quirinale Palace, also the collection of clocks mostly comes from Italy's pre-Unification royal palaces. In the aftermath of the taking of Rome, the administration of the House of Savoy started decorating the halls and royal state rooms with a large number of pendulum clocks, mainly French, spanning a timeline from the end of the 17th Century to the last decade of the 19th Century. Thus, the collection has a unitary and coherent cultural identity embracing the styles of the early Louis XIV, the Second Empire and the Third Republic.

The French origin of the pieces crafted after pendulums were introduced in clocks (1657) frees the collection of the sombre and moralistic elements of the late Mannerism, thus presenting refined, elegant and lavish objects celebrating the levity and "lightness" of the time instead of the unavoidable passing of the hours towards decline and death.

## **The Louis XIV Style**

The collection of the Quirinale Palace includes the pendulum clock by Nicholas Hanet, which dates back to the last decade of the 17th Century and was brought from the Ducal Palace of Parma, and is the highly valuable emblem of this moment of stylistic transformation. Instead, the pendulum clock by Gilles Martinot, the clockmaker of Louis XIV, dates back to the last decade of the 17th Century and can be more directly referred to the preceding style as it presents features closer to the pendule religieuse, even if the gilt-bronze and tortoiseshell marquetry denote the inception of a new intellectual climate.

## **The Long-Case Clocks**

The two long-case clocks with English-made mechanisms express a different cultural environment. The first is by John Ebsworth while the case was certainly made before 1692 for a member of the family of Cosimo III de' Medici by the Grand Ducal workshops in Florence. The case and contours of the other long-case clock by Robert Higgs are in burr walnut veneer and the clock was produced in London between 1714 and 1731. This magnificent pendulum clock was the only one already present in the Palace at the time of the popes; in the Inventory of 1732 it was placed in the Quirinale's Hall of the Ladies while in the following Inventory of 1771, it was located in what is currently the Hall of Lille Tapestries.

## **The Régence Style**

Significant and fascinating samples of the French Régence in the Quirinale's collection of clocks can be found in the magnificent pendulum clock with a mechanism signed '*Jacques Panier à Paris*' and in the one by clockmaker Thurel featuring a gilt-bronze *applique* with a crane and a female figure holding a book with the inscription «VIDES PRESENTEM FUTURAM COGITA». The clocks' cases are progressively curved and decorated with an increasingly rich repertory of appliques featuring figures and animals, often fantastic, and exotic or bizarre plant decorations.

## **The Louis XV Style**

Progressively leaving behind the classical foundations and the rectilinear and balanced compositions that was initiated with the Régence Style, the so-called Louis XV Style further developed asymmetric and picturesque forms and whimsically curved lines started to characterise the decorative arts. The use of naturalistic and fantastic elements, combined with oriental decorative patterns, ushered in the final transition of clocks from having parallelepiped-shaped cases to rounded curvilinear ones.

An emblematic example of the grandiose Louis XV Style is the pendulum by Denis Masson which, through the allegorical figure of the putto setting fire to weapons, very probably celebrates the pursuit of peace during the Seven Years' War. Made around 1750 by the great French *maître*, it was purchased for the Ducal Palace of Parma in 1759 and was brought to the Quirinale Palace in 1888. The splendid pendulum made by Pierre Latz and Jean Biesta between 1752 and 1753 represents one of the loftiest and most significant examples of the *rocaille* decoration of the mid-1700s and was brought from the Ducal Palace of Colorno.

## **The Empire Style**

The taste for neo-classical design introduced new forms in the shape of urns, temples, lyres and compositions with allegorical and mythological subjects. This trend was greatly developed under the Empire Style also through a renewed interest for the Greco-Roman culture and for that of ancient Egypt. The iconography on clocks was enriched with references to mythology, history and tragedy or with the images of temples, arches of triumph, symbols of war and Roman weapons. The Quirinale's clock collection contains several examples of this decorative style: two pendulum clocks, made by Charles-Guillaume Manière fils and Berton between the last decade of the 18th Century and the first of the 19th Century, recapture the theme *L'Emploie du Temps* elaborated by Laurent Guiard for Madame Geoffrin already in 1754. The figurative and allegorical range of subjects of the "theme pendulum clocks" broadened during the Restoration, producing a repetition of the repertory of iconographies that saturated the clock market in the years that followed the Congress of Vienna: an example of this is the magnificent pendulum, attributed to Claude Galle, portraying the "dialogue" between Hippolytus and Theseus drawn from the Greek tragedy *Phaedra*.

## **The Second Empire Style**

The period of the Second Empire witnessed a progressive contamination of forms and was marked by the reappraisal of the Louis XV Style. An example of this is the large pendulum clock by the Frères Lerolle, which can be dated at around the 1850s–60s, in which the monumentality, complexity and overabundance of decorative elements coexist thanks to the refined craftsmanship of the details that reveal a great artistic skill. Also the piece by Ferdinand Barbadienne, which dates back to the middle of the 19th Century, draws from Louis XV designs, with a *cartouche*-shaped dial highlighting the archaic nature of its decorative pattern.