

Brief Guide to the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini Palace and Garden



Aerial photography of Rospigliosi Palace -1950

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NOTE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE MONTECAVALLO SECRET GARDEN

The vast area in which the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini Palace is situated was the property of Cardinal Scipione Borghese Caffarelli from 1610 to 1616. He was the nephew of Pope Paolo V Borghese (1605-1622).

The cardinal was renowned for his never-ending activity of gathering of art works and patrimonies for his family. He was also passionate for construction and built the “Montecavallo Garden” near the magnificent Pontifical Palace of the Quirinale, for which his uncle Paolo V had dedicated numerous efforts.

Such a passion was brief and costly for Scipione Borghese who sold the garden and various buildings nearby after only seven years to Giovanni Angelo Altemps. It wasn't yet the magnificent palace we see today which consists of numerous buildings united, some from an earlier period, others commissioned by cardinal Borghese and others by the later owners, which were Altemps, Bentivoglio, Lante, Mazzarino and Pallavicini-Rospigliosi.

Scipione Borghese soon abandoned his secret garden in favor of the Ripetta Palace (the “Clavicembalo”, the harpsichord) and the Pincio

vineyard where today stands the Borghese Museum. He devoted numerous efforts to these places, as a true art lover would. All together, the Ripetta Palace, the Borghese Villa (which includes the Borghese Gallery) and all the constructions in the vineyard, make it one of the most interesting monumental patrimonies of the world.

In the few years in which he owned the garden of Montecavallo, Scipione Borghese commissioned two among the most significant artworks by Guido Reni, renowned artist from Bologna. These were the Aurora (dawn) with Apollo's carriage (painted upside down so that it can mirror in the floor and allow the vision of the Aurora the right way around, for the delight of the noble guests) and the Pergolato (grapevine) made together with the Flemish artist Paolo Brill.

The Pallavicini Aurora, a glorification of Scipione Borghese himself as a triumphant Apollo, is considered a sort of emblem of this historical moment. The Pergolato, rich in animals, plants, flowers and angels was the heart of the secret garden. It also glorifies Scipione according to renaissance symbolism through flowers and plants and the tension eros-antieros expressed in the sails and the combat of the angels who find sublimation in the peace under the two heraldic Borghese symbols which are the "tagete" flower and the eagle. Guido Reni himself drew the angels on the sails, each one painted in one day without preparatory sketches because the artist was in a hurry to go back to other jobs he had in Bologna. Paul Brill and his collaborators realized the Pergolato with its intricate vines and exotic animals, many of which were still a novelty for the times in which they were painted (the turkey and the Amazonian rooster from the Americas). Again, the position of each animal reflects the concept of contraposition between good and evil as the positive animals are drawn inside the lodge and the negative ones in the outside.

Prior to the buying the area, it was occupied by remains of the Classical Era relative to Constantine's thermal baths. However, Cardinal Scipione had them destroyed in favor of his "hortus conclusus." This area was of much interest to the cultural minds of the time. One shouldn't have a hard time imagining Michelangelo Buonarroti walking with Vittoria Colonna d'Avalos in the area near the Dominican convent of San Silvestro al Quirinale and not far from Palazzo Colonna.

Nowadays, many of the buildings of the time are missing such as a Greek gymnasium and the homes of Platina and Pomponio Leto. On the remains of the Constantine thermal baths was the Church of San Salvatore,

which hosted the Heremites of San Girolamo, which was soon demolished in favor of the garden. There were also numerous villas of the Roman aristocracy, which were also torn down.

Paolo V, during his Pontificate, gave a new asset to the entire Quirinale hill, starting from the Palace that Gregorio XIII had wanted as Pontifical summer site. He re-qualified it so that it became a second Vatican in terms of solemnity and splendor. In this operation we also see the intervention of Scipione Borghese.

On one side the official Pontifical palace of power, and on the other the garden, place of profane rather than sacred pleasures, but also location for some official occasions such as the visit of the first ambassador from the Far East, of which we see a testimony in a portrait at Palazzo Barberini.

Scipione buys, piece by piece, starting in 1610, the area of the baths of Constantine. He had asked for permission to bring to it water from the Sisto V aqueduct from Santa Susanna square. The first move was the garden and the Casino Biondo, bought from Fabio Biondo Patriarca di Gerusalemme, who was the Pope's butler and prefect of the apostolical palaces. The "Casino Biondo" which, in the palace, is the one where we see the beautiful Pergolato by Reni, is the oldest area of the building and probably the most beautiful. One must not fail to notice the stars of the Aldobrandini family in the antique columns in the external part of the lodge, which suggest that this building was probably part of the family Villa.

After this acquisition, Scipione received as a gift from his uncle the Pope, a part of the Ferrero palace situated in the area between today's Constitutional Court and vicolo del Mazzarino. In 1611, other small properties such as a small tower (torrione), some small houses and, for 11 thousand scudi (currency of the time) paid by the Camera Apostolica, the house of the Zitelle del Rifugio, nuns who were moved to via della Dataria. The church of San Gerolamo was demolished with the excuse of expanding the road towards the apostolical palace. The Eremitani who ran the church were given in concession the church of the saints Vincent and Anastasio a Trevi.

Another area acquired was that of the property of Tranquillo Ceci, close to Vicolo del Mazzarino. Subsequently, the Piccolomini and the Colonna towers were bought. In 1612, the acquisition of the area is

complete and the demolition begins so that the new buildings adjacent to the casino of the Aurora can be built.

Although not all of the acquisitions were finalized, Scipione Borghese initiated the main pictorial artworks, starting with the works of Guido Reni and Paolo Brill in the pergolato (originally composed of five arches, then changed to three), which constituted the passageway between the secret garden and the main palace.

There are few remains of the trees that once stood there. Also, there were another four small pavilions in which new constructions were realized such as the Casino Psiche with scenes from the Metamorphosis of Apuleio (destroyed after 1870 to build Via Nazionale).

In 1611 the lodge of the Muses and the water theater with the statues of the Po and the Tiber were built. Also, works began on the part of the garden towards piazza del Montecavallo with the Casino dell'Aurora finished at the end of 1612. Guido Reni was able to finish his painting only in 1614 when the nuns went away and the San Gerolamo church was demolished.

In the meanwhile, Scipione developed an interest for the constructions in the Pincio vineyard and the Ripetta area rather than those of the Quirinale. Once the garden and the loggia were completed there was only one palace missing for which artworks were commissioned to Vasanzio and maybe also to Maderno. This palace was constructed with less attention and dedication compared to the others.

On May 8, 1616, Scipione sold the property to duke Giovanni Angelo Altemps for 115 thousand scudi. According to the breakdown of valuations: 200 scudi for Reni's Aurora, 520 for the paintings of Tassi and Gentileschi, 247 for those of Tempesta and 300 those of Cigoli in the casino of the Muses; the incredible sum of 700 scudi for the Pergolato. The description of the secret garden: the palace of retirement (Casino Biondo), the dining lodge (casino Psiche), the Aurora lodge with two rooms for banquets and a fishing area for the boats, the fountain with the water theater and the lodge of the Muses. Little is said on the palace because as when it was just finished, no refinements were made such as the symbols of the Borghese family.

One of the reasons that the garden had to be dismantled was without a doubt, the costly maintenance. Altemps himself kept it for merely three years and resold it in 1619 for 55 thousand scudi to Enzo

Bentivoglio, who gave it to cardinal Guido, apostolical nuncio in France at the court of Louis XIII.

To this period we can attribute the works of Giovanni Mannozi da San Giovanni: the three abductions of Europe, Anfitrite and Persephone as well as the friezes with landscapes by Filippo D'Angelo and Pietro Paolo Bonzi found in the ground floor of Palazzo Rospigliosi as well as other works by Giovanni Mannozi in the Pallavicini part: a fire in Troy, the Death of Cleopatra and the Night Allegory.

Around 1633, the Bentivoglio family sold the property to the Lante family who then sold it in 1641, to cardinal Giulio Mazzarino. In 1704 Filippo Mancini duke of Nevers and Mazzarino's nephew, sells to the Pallavicini Rospigliosi family. Maria Mancini, Filippo's sister, was supposed to have lived close by, and is remembered as one of the long lost lovers of Louis XIV, forced by her uncle Mazzarino to marry Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna at 15 years of age. The secret garden must have seen innumerable walks of Maria and Filippo. It was destroyed with the absurd realization of Via Nazionale.

The Pallavicini family still own the second floor of the palace, the Casino dell'Aurora and the remains of the secret garden. The Rospigliosi part, on the other hand, is today the site of the Coldiretti organization.

THE FAMILY, THE PALACE AND THE PALLAVICINI-ROSPIGLIOSI COLLECTION

The Pallavicini family was one of the first in Genoa and was part of the Golden Book of Ligurian nobility since the 1400s. One of its members, Nicolo', among his 22 sons, had three who initiated the Roman branch of the family in the 1600s: Lazzaro, Stefano and Carlo.

Lazzaro (1602-1680) gained the highest degrees of the ecclesiastical career and was elected cardinal from Pope Clemente IX Rospigliosi, from Pistoia. He is very devoted to his family and has his niece Maria Camilla, only heir of his brother Stefano, marry Giovan Battista Rospigliosi, Clemente IX's nephew.

In this way began the history of a great family with Ligurian and Tuscan origins which, in the two branches Pallavicini and Rospigliosi,

became entirely Roman, and is strictly related to the history of the Montecavallo Palace.

Cardinal Lazzaro Pallavicini was truly devoted to elevating as much as possible the Roman branch of the family. The Rospigliosi from Pistoia had themselves a desire to grow in prestige so the two families went along very well, even in the desire to keep alive the Pallavicini name. For this matter, they establish, for the present and for the future, that if the Rospigliosi family have only one male child, he should have also the last name Pallavicini (a double surname), with its nobility title and the belongings of the family until a second male son was born to commence the new branch of Roman Pallavicini. In the case the Rospigliosi family had only one daughter heir she must bind the surname and the belongings of the Pallavicini to the future husband and descendants.

At the same time, Lazzaro is keen in expanding his artwork patrimony and buying a respectable residence for his heirs. In 1674, before buying the palace on the Quirinale, he buys a palace of the Barberini family in the area of Monti di Pietà', near Campo de' Fiori. However, this palace will be given back to the Barberini family from Nicolo', second son of Maria Camilla Pallavicini and Giovan Battista Rospigliosi, who in 1694, following the rule, had taken on the last name Pallavicini.

In 1704, the Rospigliosi Pallavicini bought the Palace on the Quirinale, arranging the artworks as we can see them today. It was definitely a palace that stood up to the prestige of the growing family with a huge garden, which extended itself in three levels towards Via dei Serpenti and the Church of Sant'Agata dei Goti, towards the current day Bank of Italy.

After the brief but intense period in which Scipione Borghese Caffarelli had enriched the different area of the lodges of the Aurora, of the Muses and of the Psiche, the water Theatre and the Casino Biondo with the artworks of Reni, Brill and the others, Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio added further art acquisitions as already mentioned (by Giovanni Manno, Gobbo dei Carracci and Filippo D'Angelo). After the sale to the Lante family, Cardinal Mazzarino and his heirs extended the palace towards south the west including the loggia of the pergolato of the palace.

In 1704 the Pallavicini bought the palace from the Mancini, heirs of Mazzarino and extended it towards south, building the stables and the palazzo dei famigli in the main garden. At the time there is the family division of palace parts that exists today. To the Pallavicini go the noble

floor, the casino of the Aurora and of the Muses. To the Rospigliosi, the ground floor with the Casino Biondo, the second floor (not built at the time) and the casino of the famigli.

The art collection follow the destiny of the two family branches. At that point begins an art history of great importance with a very relevant patrimony, which remained almost intact within the families. It was enriched by the benevolence of figures such as: San Carlo Borromeo who gave great gifts to his niece Giustina, wife of Camillo Rospigliosi, son of Maria Camilla; the Colonna family at the beginning of the 1800s, whose heir Margherita Gioemi Colonna married Giulio Cesare Rospigliosi Pallavicini and bringing one third of the family belongings with her. Later, another third will be recuoped by Giulio Cesare to reunite it with the belongings of his wife Margherita and to divide it equally between Pallavicini and Rospigliosi.

Throughout the entire 1700s and part of the 1800s the galleries were enriched even more and along with this grew the problem of inheritance. Giulio Cesare Rospigliosi-Pallavicini and Margherita Colonna were those who really made an effort to divide equally the parts between the families as was a desire of the cardinal Lazzaro Pallavicini. The first son Clemente Rospigliosi and the second Francesco Pallavicini united the names and the properties as of today.

THE ROSPIGLIOSI “QUADRERIA”

The artistic collections go through the same procedure of division between families and physical location as of today.

The Rospigliosi Collection, enriched for almost two centuries together with the Pallavicini collection, is, without a doubt, one of the most important although less visible Roman art collections both for art historians who have seldom had the chance to study and appreciate it and for the public who hasn't had the chance to see it.

The collection was born in the years 1630-43 by wish of Guido Rospigliosi, close friend of the Barberini cardinals, nephews of Urbano VIII. A friend of the de' Medici family and authentic art lover, he was engaged in various theatre productions which represented the most mundane and diplomatic happenings of the 1600s. He took under his

protection such artists as Poussin and Claude Lorrain, Giacinto and Ludovico Gimignani and Mattia Preti. Also as a state figure, he was Cardinal Secretary of State, delegate in Spain and Pope for two years until 1669.

The collection is made of 123 paintings and ten sculptures (in the 1700s, with the Pallavicini family, it included about 700 artworks which went lost). Only 21 paintings, the “crème de la crème” of the collection, were exhibited in the year 2000. The 123 works (87 attributed paintings; 36 anonymous: ten sculptures; two bas-reliefs; seven busts; one angel on a dolphin) are extremely interesting and have survived the two sales in 1931-32 made to fill the economic gaps of the family economy.

Among the major artists of the collection we find: Luca Giordano, Van Dyck and Guercino. The work of Luca Giordano is an unseen painting 200x255 cm named “La fuga di Elena” (Helen’s escape), an early production of mid 1600s. The autographed Van Dyck (an original, not a copy) is a “Santa Rosalia” (Saint Rosalia) 160x170cm. The Guercino (the total number of Guercino paintings of the Rospigliosi collection between original’s copies and imitations is eight) is “San Francesco in Preghiera” (the praying Saint Francis). The other important and beautiful Guercino is the “Flora” with an unveiled breast, a magnificent autograph of 1642, quintessential to the collection. It is quite a big painting (203x234cm) and surely one of the most beautiful by artist di Cento (his brother Paolo Antonio is responsible for the flowers and the wreath). The restoration in 1997 freed the passageway on the left, the light touch on the tree and the sky exuding lights, mellow colors and warm clouds.

From Guercino’s workshop also came the painting “Fruttivendola con Bambino” (fruit seller and child), of great interest as a multi authored work. We also find an unusually cut “Cristo e Pilato” (Christ and Pontius Pilate) by Mattia Preti with dimensions 131x295cm, from the blue silverish tones enlightened by points of brightness on the faces and the group around the Christ.

The restoration also saved “L’ebbrezza di Noe” (Noah’s drunkenness), a work by Andrea Sacchi (215x286cm) which had endured several modifications.

Among the paintings with a religious subject, those selected were “Fuga dall’Egitto” by Giuseppe Chiari (with bright colors and the scene of Saint Giuseppe who pushes a donkey who doesn’t want to move);

the “Sacra Famiglia” (Sacred Family), and a small oil on copper by Sebastiano Conca.

Among those with a historical subject we find “Ester who faints in front of Assuero” the most beautiful of Ludovico Gimignani’s works (in the latest restoration, a young court boy was unveiled under the king’s mantle although Gimignani erased it almost completely). One cannot fail to notice how the artist was inspired by Paolo Veronese who painted the same exact subject in a work found at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The scenery and the luxurious environment are interesting as they really mark Venetian paintings of the 1600-1700s.

Among the mythological subjects we find another painting, unknown until recently. It is “Cefalo e Procri”, probably by the Florentine artist Simone Pignoni.

There are three portraits. One of Cardinal Fabroni by Benedetto Luti; one called “Ragazzo con levriero”(boy with greyhound), in which the protagonist is the stunning dog, made by four artists, Ludovico Gimignani, David de Coninck (Flemish); one of Vincenzo Rospigliosi by Ferdinand Voet, characterized by a wig resembling whipped cream, subtle veins of color and an ironic yet direct regard in the subject’s eyes.

Among the other paintings stand out the Flemish artists’ landscapes: the Aventine Hill, the Colosseum of Johann van Bloemen called l’Orizzonte (horizon); the coast landscape with mild clouds and lights by Paolo Brill.

Also important are the still lives: two by Abraham Brueghel III, but most importantly the “Still life with apples, pomegranate, grapes and a man.” The author should be the Maestro of the Metropolitan: its colors of a certain density of consistence bulge out and are both free and mild, reminding of the Impressionists. It is probably one of the most beautiful paintings of the collection. As a closing note, the two battle scenes by Jacques Courtois are much appreciated in the 1600s.

