

- Chigi Palace -



English Version

Traduzione di Giovanna Gallo



Ancient palace of the Sixteenth century located in the heart of Rome, it was conceived by Pietro Aldobrandini, Pope Clement VII's brother and an important representative of the Roman aristocracy.

The idea of the original plan, entrusted to the Umbrian architect Bartolini from Città di Castello, was to enlarge a pre-existent block of buildings, to incorporate some more houses and to construct a single building made of three floors with the main entrance on Via del Corso.

The ownership of the palace was rather unstable because it was handed several times to other Families, such as the Detis, for almost a whole century, until 1659 when it was purchased by the Chigi family, among whose members there were also some cardinals and one Pope, Alexander VII. The Chigis were rich bankers with Sienese origins and backers of the Vatican and they changed the frame of the building, that was thus named after them.

At least for two centuries the palace has been the residence of some aristocratic families and, later on, it became the seat at first of the Spanish Embassy (around the second half of the XVIIIth century), then of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, being sold at last by the Chigis themselves to the Kingdom of Italy (Regno d'Italia) in 1916, when it was assigned to become the seat of the Ministero delle Colonie (Ministry of Colonial Affairs).

In 1922 Benito Mussolini, both as Italian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, ordered to transfer there the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This arrangement lasted until 1961 when this Ministry was moved to the new seat of the Farnesina Palace, while the ancient palace was used as official residence of the Italian Government.

The building was readapted several times – the main entrance on Piazza Colonna, right in front of Marco Aurelio's column, was built in the XVIIIth century - and recently, in 1999, it has been restored with a massive project of cleaning and structural recovery, that has brought back to light the original colours both of the façade and of the interiors.

The entrance of Palazzo Chigi has a courtyard with arcades in Doric style and a big fountain made of travertine with storage capacity decorated with a mask, and a closed gallery that enriches the architecture of the building.

On the inside a magnificent great staircase of the XVIth century, adorned with coats of arms, Greek statues and Roman sarcophagi, leads to the ancient and richly adorned rooms on the first floor.

Among the most beautiful rooms there are: Sala dei Mappamondi (Hall of globes), the anteroom of the Salone del Consiglio (Hall of Counsel) that is named after the two globes of the XVIIth century representing the celestial and the terrestrial spheres; Sala del Consiglio dei Ministri (Hall of Counsel of Ministers), decorated with frescoes illustrating mythological scenes and tapestries from Ruben's school of the second half of 1600); Studio del Presidente del Consiglio (Prime Minister's office), preceded by an anteroom adorned with small paintings portraying Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini's life. The Prime Minister's

office, during the recent restoration, has seen re-emerging frescoes illustrating biblical events that well combine with the other sacred scenes that enrich the environment.

The most interesting part of the building is the Detis' Gallery: its historical value and its rich decorations with stuccos, gildings and paintings, illustrating scenes from the Bible, make it unique.

This wing, formerly dwelled by Cardinal Deti, was later on used as Benito Mussolini's office during the Fascist Regime: in those rooms, the Italian dictator succeeded in escaping an attempt on his life in 1925 and from its balcony he used to stand and deliver his speeches to the crowd.

Today it is used as reception room on special occasions such as the visits of important guests.

Another place that deserves to be noticed is Sala delle Repubbliche Marinare (Maritime Republics Hall) adorned with the coat of arms of the four Maritime Republics in the period when the Palace was the seat of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs; it is nowadays the Deputy Minister's office anteroom.

Next to this hall there are the two Saloni degli Arazzi (Halls of Tapestries), an important evidence of the ancient textile art of the Flemish tapestries of the XVIth century. The first hall is adorned with scenes from the Bible whereas in the second, assigned to the General Secretary as his parlour and anteroom, it is possible to admire Alexander the Great's ventures.

The Prime Minister's apartment consists of some richly adorned halls, with *trompe l'oeil* beams ceilings and with XVIIth century paintings portraying mythological scenes (Sala d'Oro - Golden Hall) and seascapes (Sala delle Marine – Hall of Marines) .

The Palace is also well-known for the so-called Biblioteca Chigiana (Chigis' Library) built by the architect Contini on behalf of prince Agostino Chigi between the end of 1600 and the beginning of 1700, in order to preserve the important book legacy inherited by Pope Alexander VII, made of several thousands volumes besides ancient manuscripts and incunabula.

In 1923 Mussolini gave the whole collection to the Vatican. Today the prestigious ebony shelves contain recent publications concerning judicial and legislative matters.