

## - Vidoni Palace -



English Version

Traduzione di Giovanna Gallo



*Palazzo Vidoni* was built in the XVIth century on behalf of Bernardino Caffarelli, a Roman nobleman, on Lorenzo Lotti's design. Many scholars, being Lotti Raffaello Sanzio's pupil, ascribe the project of this palace right to the great artist, even without having any definite evidence. There is actually a plaque in the inner courtyard that state the paternity of the work to him.

The palace stands nearby the famous Piazza Navona: its oldest part is on Via del Sudario and the most recent façade, which includes the main entrance, erected at the end of the XIXth century by architect Settimj, is on overlooks Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

As well as many other mansions built in the centre of Rome, *Palazzo Vidoni* followed the ups and downs of the families that owned it within the course of four centuries.

The estate belonged at first to the Coltrolini family, then to the Stoppanis, to be hold later on by the Vidonis (who gave, together with the Caffarellis, the name to the building), and then, at the beginning of the XXth century, by the Bandinis and the Vitalis.

Finally, this important mansion was handed down to the Guglielmi family who sold it to Italy in 1924: Italy, on its turn, gave it to Germany that used it as its embassy.

Along the years, almost each noble proprietor left his mark on both the decoration and the structure of the building: there are, in fact, a lot of coats of arms and plaques as a memorial of the important people who lived there.

During the Italian Fascism the palace became the administrative seat of the Party, that is why it was called *Palazzo del Littorio*: it was there that Benito Mussolini, in October 1925, drew up an agreement between the Italian Manufacturers' Association and the Fascist unions, which acknowledged them as the only representatives of the Italian workers to *Cgil* disadvantage. ( *Cgil* is the acronym for Italian General Confederation of Labour, which is a national [trade union](#) ). This situation required the institution of a job authority who had to deal with the problems related to the collective labour agreements and who denied the right to strike.

After the Second World War *Palazzo Vidoni* became the headquarters of the French army.

When it came back in possession of Italy, it was assigned to the Ministry of Education and later on, in 1953, it became the seat of the Premiership of the Italian government.

Since 1979 it is the seat of the Ministry for the Civil Service (Dipartimento della funzione pubblica).

Many important people lived in the palace along the centuries, among them there were emperors (Charles V), kings (the Queen of Spain Christina of Bourbon) and popes (Leo XIII and Pius X), as the papal insignia placed in the courtyard show.

The frame of the building was renovated and enlarged several times; the last work, at the beginning of 1900, included the addition of a balcony on the main door.

The two *vestiboli* (vestibules) on the inside of the building, are noteworthy as they are adorned with an arcade built on three sides. Passing through them it is possible to enter the courtyard, enriched by three statues, two of them representing two ancient Romans, the other one is related to the figure of the emperor Lucius Aurelius Verus. Another

remarkable element is the fountain upon which there is a bas-relief portraying the winged lion of Venice.

On the ground floor there are the halls dedicated to the two architects, Lotti and Settini, who erected the palace and the hall named after Raffaello, with its ceiling made of gilded wood.

Going up the marble great staircase, it is possible to reach the most important rooms of the building, such as the ancient *Sala da pranzo* (Dining room), with its ceilings adorned with pictures in oils, ascribable to the eighteenth-century painter Tommaso Maria Conca and portraying the arts of Painting, Architecture and Sculpture: this room is nowadays the office of the principal private secretary (*Capo di Gabinetto*) of the Minister of Civil Service. Further on, the *Sala Stoppani*, adorned with paintings depicting Greek and Roman gods, is generally used for meetings and conventions. One of its two marble doors leads to the *Sala Pompeiana*, with its ceiling embellished by a painting portraying an allegorical woman figure, whereas the contiguous *Cappella* (Chapel) is adorned with paintings representing the theological Virtues, Prophets and Sibyls. These two halls are also named *Sale dei Fasti Prenesti*, after the ancient Roman tables of the calendar of *Praeneste Fasti*, that were kept there by Cardinal Stoppani for a certain period of time before being moved to the '*Museo Nazionale Romano*' (National Museum of Rome) in the monumental area of the Baths of Diocletian.

Among the most important halls there is Charles V's one – the Minister's present room – named after the emperor of the Roman Holy Empire, following up his magnificently celebrated visit in 1536. Its paintings, made on Raffaello's style, portray faces of Roman and German emperors and scenes of Charles V's life; on the ceiling shows up the famous initials S.P.Q.R.

Adjoining this room, there is the *Gabinetto della Signora* (Lady's private room), duchess Giustiniani Bandini's apartment, who wanted it to be richly adorned, during the XVIIIth century, with seagreen stuccoes and mirrors on the walls, whereas on the ceiling there is a painting of Cupid with his bow and arrows who plays with two doves.

The last hall, *Sala del Bigliardo*, has lacunar ceilings made of carved wood with a fine gold cornice and it is adorned with frescoes describing biblical scenes from Tobia's book.