

Ugo Colombo Sacco di Albiano

# WHERE DIPLOMACY MEETS ART





AGLI ITALIANI CHE DRODANO  
LA PATRIA NEL MONDO

# FOREWORD



It gives me great pleasure to present this important work by Ugo Colombo Sacco di Albiano which takes a look at the history of the buildings that have housed Italian diplomacy in almost a century and a half of activity. In so doing, it also looks at the stages in the evolution of our profession.

This original and valuable research, reconstructing the events intimately linked to the buildings in which the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has carried out its work, travels along those same dual paths that traditionally characterise the approach of Italian diplomacy: to conserve the memory and rich legacy of an assuredly glorious past as an ideal ‘launching pad’ for projecting itself towards new challenges and the increasingly complex missions of the present and future.

It would also appear that the route along which this book has travelled towards its publication – and especially its passionate promotion effected by Gaetano Cortese – corroborates another ‘typical’ aspect of the diplomatic system: the particular relationships that are created among its members. In fact, our Representations abroad bear a certain resemblance to ships, in that the common destiny of the crew, surrounded by the high seas, inevitably depends in the main on the united aims and commitment of all those aboard. This leads to the form-

ing of both professional and personal bonds – sometimes so strong as to be almost familial – between the head of a Mission and his collaborators. Often, these bonds resist the changing fortunes arising from the requirements of duty that may beset individual life paths and careers.

I therefore firmly believe that these pages, through their descriptions of art treasures and historical events, will help the reader discover the spirit that has always animated the men and women of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Ambassador  
*Paolo Pucci di Benisichi*  
Secretary-General of Foreign Affairs

TAKEN FROM THE

# PREFACE



I have often asked myself, even before acting some years ago as Italian Ambassador to the King of the Belgians, why, given its history and traditions, there was no publication about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no book that illustrated its origins and subsequent life in the successive capital cities of Italy: Turin, Florence and Rome.

All the more so, in a period in which the Ministry is experiencing a significant relaunching of its functions, do I believe it important that all Italians (and not only), both young and old, should know the history and traditions that underlie the fundamental worth of our diplomacy.

During the late 1990s, when I first acted as an Ambassador, I attempted to produce a less vast editorial project, though it answered the same call: making known the historic State residence of the successive heads of the Italian diplomatic Mission in Belgium, accompanied by fitting illustrations.

I quickly understood, however, that not only was a specific preparation required, but also great passion and a considerable spirit of sacrifice. I found these qualities in my Councillor for Economic Affairs, Ugo Colombo Sacco di Albiano, who successfully coordinated the much desired publication, on his own initiative involving

scholars of various disciplines as well as working on the final editing and revision.

For this reason, when, in 2001, Colombo Sacco confidentially disclosed to me that he had been spending his weekends and holidays writing a book entitled *Dove la Diplomazia incontra l'Arte: le sedi storiche del Ministero degli Esteri* [Where Diplomacy Meets Art: The Historic Buildings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], I energetically encouraged him to proceed with his far-ranging and ambitious project.

I am quite certain that I interpret the wishes of many in wanting to thank the author, Ugo Colombo Sacco di Albiano, as well as all the people and institutions that, from the beginning, have enthusiastically believed in his project and supported it.



*Gaetano Cortese*



*Squarcio*, bronze by Aldo Calò, main atrium, property of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



*Room of the Mosaics*. In the foreground: *Sculpture - Intervention*, by Mauro Staccioli, 1976, concrete and iron, Milan, collection of the artist. In the background: *Grande Ghibellina 2*, by Giò Pomodoro. The *white sculpted wooden ceiling* by Amerigo Tot can also be admired in this image. Photo by Alessandro Tartaglia.

# PRESENTATION



This book is not intended for those who hurry on their travels through times past (otherwise known as “birds of passage” by Lord Byron).

Its ideal readers are lovers of calm and restorative journeys towards the historical roots of our country, in a search for aesthetic emotions, human warmth and that little bit extra of History to hand down to children and grandchildren.

For the first time, this book presents to the eyes of the general public the interiors of the state receptions rooms in the successive historical buildings of the *mother house* of Italian diplomacy:

- Palazzo delle Segreterie di Stato in Turin;
- Palazzo Vecchio in Florence;
- Palazzo della Consulta, Palazzo Chigi, the Farnesina, and Villa Madama in Rome.



It is a succession of privileged opportunities for the creative spirit of great artists, including (at the Farnesina) contemporary artists. In addition, some of the most sophisticated results in the legacy of skills and values preserved and transmitted by the minor arts can also be admired, in the thousand forms into which they have been shaped by the effort, love and sense of beauty of past generations.

Together with the splendid images, readers can also find – between the lines – recollections of the development of that *new world* that gradually paved the way for the consolidation of the State of Italy, helping to give shape and substance to the current project of Europe.

Indeed, the author has not limited his description of the historic seats of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs merely to their essence as testimonies, though valuable, of the past, but has grasped their significance as an investigative instrument for assessing what remains or has been transformed by changes in the economy, society, customs and lifestyles.

Bearing in mind that 2011 marks the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, this new way of rereading Italian diplomacy is also a means for re-evoking one of the most vital roots of this historic event.

*Ugo Colombo Sacco di Albiano*

**Turin, where it all began.** The *Palazzo delle Segreterie di Stato* was perhaps the first European example of a building conceived specifically (it was 1717) to house the ‘command centres’ of a State, including the offices for Foreign Affairs, with the aim of creating a simple, rapid and efficient instrument for drawing up and carrying out the sovereign’s orders. The affairs, in the era of the *Ancien Régime*, of a minuscule (but not for this less respected at a European level) Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the process of being formed are remembered with verve. The key moments of the meeting between the forefathers of Italian diplomacy (Ormea, Ossorio, Solaro, Gorzegno) and great artists of the period are brought to life. In this period the British Minister for Foreign Affairs, Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth lord of Chesterfield, urged his son to visit Turin in order to glean from the King of Sardinia’s diplomats the secrets of their exemplary skills, courtesy and mental openness. Travelling a variegated historical-artistic path, the mid-nineteenth-century Risorgimento phase is reached. This polyphonic tale unfolds in luminous images of sumptuous reception rooms (including those patronised by Cavour and his predecessors), great diplomatic court balls, and the most exclusive club in Turin (the *Società del Whist-Accademia Filarmonica*, where all the accredited diplomats in the city waged war to the sound of slams and influential political refugees from many nations found a warm welcome). All this alongside the intellectual life of the cafés, which united champions of the old and new diplomacy, politics, the army, the heights of elegance and culture.

## THE PALAZZO DELLE SEGRETERIE PIAZZA CASTELLO TURIN 1861–1865



Above: the *Palazzo delle Segreterie di Stato* (on the right) with the piano nobile decked out for the anniversary celebrations of the Statute, tempera by Carlo Bossoli, Turin, 1853, reproduced by kind concession of the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento of Turin. Below: *The facade on Piazza Castello*, architectural rendering of the elevation by Marco Fortunato and Michele Scuruchi.

**Florence, the blossoming of a new cosmopolitan era in the country.** The meeting between diplomacy and its new *mother house* is narrated alongside the transformation of the city into a showcase of the recently unified Italian State. The reader's eyes are dazzled by the magnificent reception rooms of Palazzo Vecchio in which national diplomacy was conducted. They were lavishly conceived by Cosimo I Medici, in the seventeenth century, as the quintessence of everything that Mannerist taste was capable of, as well as the means for symbolically transforming his ducal residence into a magniloquent affirmation of new international prestige.

The state apartments and their furnishings are shown in seductively colourful images that introduce a cohort of internationally renowned artists and architects. For the first time, thanks to Cosimo I and to his revolutionary Accademia del Disegno, artists were freed from a traditionally subordinate condition to transmit knowledge and the cultural dignity of art in new terms. Extremely moving moments in the cultural and social life of diplomats during the five years when Florence was the capital complete the multicoloured overall picture. This does not neglect to show the warm welcome proffered by the Jockey Club of Florence to the members of the diplomatic corps, including the Chinese Legation.

PALAZZO VECCHIO  
PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA  
FLORENCE 1865–1871



*View of Palazzo Vecchio (on the left), the Loggia and the square with celebrations for the feast day of St John the Baptist, patron saint of the city, Giuseppe Zocchi (Fiesole 1716/7–Florence 1767), plate XXIII, Florence 1754, image reproduced by kind concession of the Museum 'Firenze com'era'.*



**Rome: act one, the development and consolidation of the “politica della Consulta”** or statecraft of the Consulta offices. In little more than fifty years this expression would become the symbol of a measured, discreet and responsible diplomatic approach. After recalling to mind the brusque break, for much of Rome’s population, caused by the events of 1870, the new quality of life in the Eternal City, to which the diplomats of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a significant contribution, is illustrated. The origins and events of the Consulta palace on the hill of the Quirinale are recounted, reviving the atmosphere of the diplomats’ meeting with the spaces skilfully conceived by the architect Ferdinando Fuga to welcome a vortex of cardinal purple, clinking armour, crackling parchment and neighing horses. These rooms also recall the significant rearrangements needed to provide the sparkling hospitality given, from 1871 to 1874, to the hereditary princes Umberto and Margherita of Savoy. After visiting the individual state rooms, the brilliance of some of the most prestigious names in Italian diplomacy of the period is recalled, highlighting the fruitful interweaving of their lives with two of the most influential clubs in the capital: the *Circolo della Caccia* (the Hunt) and the *Nuovo Circolo degli Scacchi* (new Chess Club).

PALAZZO DELLA CONSULTA  
PIAZZA DEL QUIRINALE  
ROME, 1871–1922



*View of Piazza del Quirinale with Palazzo della Consulta in the background, Giovanni Paolo Pannini, by kind concession of the Coffee House of the Quirinale, Rome.*

**Rome: act two, the diplomacy of Palazzo Chigi** and the long human adventure that traversed the Fascist regime, its fall, the Kingdom of the South, and the return of the Foreign Affairs Ministry to Rome leading to the birth of the Italian Republic and to its first contribution to the international community as a result of the Second World War. Through illustrating the architectural and artistic saga of Palazzo Chigi (more than three centuries of constant adjustments and redesigning), the reader is led towards the fascinating rise of a centuries-old branch of a great princely house of papal origins, universally acknowledged as one of the most all-embracing expressions of patronage. Time is also spent on recalling the elegant gala receptions held in the exceptional surroundings of some of the great Salons, the setting for future Italian diplomacy. In this way, the slim elegant figures, often of painterly proportions, of the damsels of the highest-ranking Roman families emerge from the mists of time. They enhance the social whirl within the rooms of the palace with their graceful manners, lively intelligence and the beauty of their sumptuous clothes. Several of the great heads of the Chigi family are remembered for the enormous contribution they made to the blossoming of some of the happiest moments in Rome's international culture. And a unique witness recounts the everyday life of diplomats in service at Palazzo Chigi: one of the last illustrious survivors of the "Regia Carriera", who, in 1940, began his highly esteemed career here. The furnishings of Palazzo Chigi and the individual rooms are thus, for the first time, described through a reconstruction of their diplomatic purposes.

PALAZZO CHIGI  
PIAZZA COLONNA  
ROME, 1922–1959



*Palazzo Chigi, view of the wing on Piazza Colonna. Photo by Alessandro Tartaglia.*

**Rome: intermezzo, Villa Madama, the melting pot where diplomacy meets the art of state banqueting.** Firstly, the unique and unrepeatable fruit of the genius of Raphael and his circle is described. Following a coherent vision, the building united the entire slope of Monte Mario, from the peak to the river. Then the reader is led through the individual rooms currently destined for top level inter-governmental diplomatic meetings, held here since 1937 and more frequently after 1941, when the Villa became the property of the Italian State. The narrative then pauses on the ancient roots of the gastronomic tradition of the *Masters of the Kitchen* who were responsible for creating the official international banquets given in the Villa by Prime Ministers and Foreign Office Ministers. The reader thus becomes familiar with the names and the creative contributions of the greatest interpreters of the art of state banqueting, through an overview that runs from the fifteenth century up to the present. Enriched with little-known anecdotes and the publication of some of the more elaborate menus for the most important banquets (in honour of Emperors, Czars, Kings, great statesmen), the text concludes with considerations about the most recent strategic alliances between diplomacy and the creative revival of the promotion and preservation of Italy's gastronomic and oenological traditions.

## VILLA MADAMA

JUNE 1941



*View of Villa Madama from the fishpond, etching by Percier and Fontaine, early nineteenth century. Library image.*

**Rome: act three, the Farnesina as the seat of a new and exhilarating experience:** the inclusion of works marking the greatness of Italian modern and contemporary art in the diplomatic reception rooms. The complex architectural adventure of the building acts as a prologue to the tale: conceived in 1933 as the new headquarters of the National Fascist Party, it ended in the late 1950s by housing the present Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In an area characterised, still in 1942, by marshes and cane thickets where “one used to go in boots or sometimes by boat to shoot snipe”, the Farnesina now stands. Covering 720,000 square metres, it shares the record in Italy for size with the Royal Palace of Caserta. In the moving and sometimes politely ironic words of direct reports, such as those of Ambassadors Pansa Cedronio and Sergio Romano, the narrative evokes the diplomats’ move from the majestic architectural casket of Palazzo Chigi to the new Ministry, where an office on the first floor “is so huge an architect could divide it horizontally to make two floors and thus an apartment of four or five rooms”. A visit to the reception rooms, offered to the general public for the first time by this book, is also used as a singular occasion for highlighting features and points of excellence (reproduced in splendid colour photographs) in the collection of contemporary Italian art housed in the building. For the breadth and originality of its conception this is perhaps a unique experience in the world. In conclusion, picturesque accents enliven the tale of the ways in which the now inseparable relationship between the Farnesina and the Roman district of Ponte Milvio has developed, privileged witness to important moments (evoked once again with little-known images) in the life of the film industry, sport and the arts.

PALAZZO DELLA FARNESINA  
PIAZZALE DELLA FARNESINA  
ROME AFTER 1959



*Palazzo della Farnesina, main facade. Photo by Alessandro Tartaglia.*



CENTRO STUDI PIEMONTESE  
*CA DÈ STUDI PIEMONTÈIS*