



Brussels manufacture (?), *Last Supper* (copy after Leonardo da Vinci), 1516-1533. Tapestry in silk and silver and gold metallic yarn. Vatican City, Vatican Museums  
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# In *Leonardo's* shadow Tapestries and ceremonies at the papal court

Exhibition set up with  
 the outstanding collaboration  
 of the Vatican Museums



MUSEI VATICANI

**Reggia di Venaria**

21 March — 18 June  
 2023



**RESIDENZE  
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 SABAUDE**



Reggia di Venaria,  
 part of the Residences  
 of the Royal House of Savoy,  
 World Heritage since 1997





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REGGIA DI VENARIA

# ***ALL'OMBRA DI LEONARDO (IN LEONARDO'S SHADOW).***

## ***TAPESTRIES AND CEREMONIES AT THE PAPAL COURT***

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*Curated by Alessandra Rodolfo and Andrea Merlotti*

*Reggia di Venaria, Rooms of the Arts*

*21 March – 18 June 2023*

**Reggia di Venaria**, the historical site on the outskirts of Turin that has been awarded the status of World Heritage Site along with Piedmont's other Royal Residences of the House of Savoy, opens the new season with a **precious, powerfully evocative exhibition: *All' ombra di Leonardo (In Leonardo's shadow). Tapestries and ceremonies at the papal court*, open to the public from 21 March to 18 June 2023 in the Rooms of the Arts.**

The exhibition is organised by the **Consorzio delle Residenze Reali Sabaude (Consortium of the Royal Residences of the House of Savoy)** with the outstanding participation of the **Vatican Museums** and brings together works that are not only from the Vatican Museums themselves, but also from the Quirinale Palace, the *Museo di Roma* (Museum of Rome), the *Musei Reali di Torino* (Royal Museums of Turin), the *Museo Diocesano Tridentino* (Tridentine Diocesan Museum), the *Civica Raccolta delle Stampe A. Bertarelli*, Milan (Civic Print Collection “Achille Bertarelli”, Milan), and from a number of private collections.

It is an **unmissable occasion** for joining an **insider journey among some of the most important papal ceremonies: Foot washing and *Coena Domini***, which once took place on Holy Thursday in the heart of the Vatican Palace, in solemn settings enriched by extraordinary works of art, linked to names such as Leonardo and Raphael. The sense of the ancient ceremonies, rich in symbols and significance, is conveyed by **tapestries, painting, engravings and objects, which tell a story deeply rooted in the past**, immersing visitors into a world made of traditions and ancient rites. Not just superficial acts, but important expressions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The story the exhibition tells began in 1533 when Francis I King of France, on the occasion of the wedding of Catherine de'Medici, the niece of Pope Clement VII, and his second-born Henry of Valois, presented the pontiff with a **precious tapestry depicting Leonardo's Last Supper**. An outstanding

wedding and gift that sealed the alliance between France and the Papacy against Emperor Charles V (accountable for the Sack of Rome, which had occurred just six years earlier, in 1527).



BRUSSELS MANUFACTURE (?), Last Supper (copy after Leonardo da Vinci) 1516-1533.

Tapestry in silk and silver and gold metallic yarn. Vatican City, Vatican Museums

Photo: © Governatorato dello Stato della Città del Vaticano - Direzione dei Musei Vaticani (Governorate of the Vatican City State - Directorate of the Vatican Museums), all rights reserved.

**The work, created after 1516, was commissioned by Francis I in person and his mother Luisa of Savoy.** This explains the **Savoy emblems running along the tapestry border**. Milan's Last Supper was faithfully transposed onto the precious cloth, fully woven with gold and silk, except than for one important variation. The background –which in the original is almost an abstraction – here takes on the shape of a Renaissance building: as if the Last Supper had happened at the French court. Francis I was a great admirer of Leonardo, to such an extent to want him at his court at the Castle of Amboise (in the Loire Valley) where the artist lived from 1516 to 1519, and **nowadays it is a widespread opinion that the cartoon of the tapestry, after which the latter was then woven, was created in France under Leonardo's personal supervision.**

Once it became part of their own collections, **the pontiffs decided to use the tapestry for some of the most important and evocative religious ceremonies held at the papal court.** In



**particular for Foot Washing**, which took place in the Ducal Hall of the Vatican Palace, when the pontiff, likewise Christ, washed the feet of thirteen poor priests (twelve representing the apostles, one maybe Christ himself) sitting on a stage below the Leonardesque tapestry. The pontiff in person then, assisted by his retinue, served the dinner (*Coena Domini*) to the thirteen men: a clear reference to the Last Supper.

Here the story of the Leonardesque cloth interweaves with that of **another tapestry of great relevance and beauty: the dossal of the papal baldachin, one more work created for Clement VII**, a passionate collector of textile items. **It was designed by Raphael's disciples**, the same that had worked with the Master in the celebrated Raphael's Rooms and in the Loggias of the palace.



PIETER VAN AELST MANUFACTURE (1450 ca. - 1532/1533), Brussels, after a cartoon by Raffaello Sanzio's workshop, Dossier of the Baldachin of Clement VII Medici 1525-1530. Tapestry; warp in wool; weft in wool, silk and gold-coated silver, 465 × 535 cm. Vatican City, Vatican Museums © Governatorato dello Stato della Città del Vaticano - Direzione dei Musei Vaticani (Governorate of the Vatican City State - Directorate of the Vatican Museums), all rights reserved.



**Forty years since it was last displayed, the imposing baldachin, made at the same Brussels manufacture where Raphael's famous Sistine Chapel tapestries were woven, will be reassembled and exhibited, including its covering enriched by strikingly beautiful hanging panels.**

Once the Foot Washing ceremony started, the pontiff would rise from his throne, under the Raphaelesque baldachin, and move below the Leonardesque tapestry, in the shadow of which he would wash the feet of the poor people.



PRASLON CHROMOLITH (V. MARCHI INV.), *Lavement des pieds des apôtres* in H. FISQUET, *Histoire liturgique et descriptive des Chapelles Papales tenues pendant l'année dans le diverses églises de Rome*, Paris, Abel Pilon, 1871, lithography, tab. III. Milan, Castello Sforzesco (Sforzesco Castle) - Civica Raccolta delle Stampe "Achille Bertarelli", © Comune di Milano (Municipality of Milan), all rights reserved.

Even though the solem Foot Washing rite generally took place in the Vatican Palace, and later in St. Peter's Basilica, at least once (in 1831) it was also performed in the Quirinale, formerly a Papal Palace. A story indirectly commemorated by the **great tapestry depicting Jesus washing the Apostles' feet**. Donated by Napoleon to Pope Pious VII, the fine cloth, woven in Paris at the celebrated Gobelins Manufactory, is still now displayed in the *Sale del Carracci* (Carracci Rooms) in the Italian presidential palace.



GOBELINS MANUFACTORY, *atelier* run by F. Cozette, after a cartoon by J. Restout (1692–1768) and P.-J. Perrot, *Foot Washing*. Tapestry part of the «New Testament» series, Paris 1755–64; weft: wool and silk, cm 422 x 699.

Rome, Quirinale Palace © Segretariato Generale della Presidenza della Repubblica (General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic) – Photo Giuseppe Schiavinotto, Rome.

Nonetheless, the Foot Washing rite was not a papal prerogative. All Catholic sovereigns - and until the late 1600s also England's Protestant king, likewise the papal court - performed it for several centuries, in some cases up to less than a hundred years ago. A story whose memory lives on in the exhibition also thanks to a **splendid ewer (aiguïere)** used by Charles Felix and Charles Albert of Savoy, now in the deposits of Turin's *Musei Reali* (Royal Museums). It is **associated to other two similar items, from the Papal Sacristy, probably used for the same purpose**.





INNOCENTE GAYA  
(1761-1838), attr.,  
*Aiguière* with basin  
(1827-28). Gilded  
silver, embossed,  
chiselled and  
engraved; molten  
silver decorations  
Turin, Musei Reali  
(Royal Museums) -  
Royal Palace.  
© MiBACT, Musei  
Reali (Royal  
Museums). Photo  
Paolo Robino.



PIERRE-MARIE BOSSAN  
(1814-1888), THOMAS-  
JOSEPH ARMAND CALLIAT  
(1822-1901),  
*Ewer with basin*, 1867,  
gilded silver and  
polychrome enamels.  
Vatican City, Papal  
Sacristy.  
©Ufficio celebrazioni  
liturgiche del Sommo  
Pontefice (Office for the  
Liturgical Celebrations of  
the Supreme Pontiff).

*Exhibition curated by:*

### Alessandra Rodolfo

Art historian, has collaborated with several universities, with the *Servizio per la Conservazione del Patrimonio Artistico del Segretariato Generale della Presidenza della Repubblica Italiana* (Service for the Conservation of Artistic Heritage of the Presidency of the Italian Republic), with the *Soprintendenza di Roma* (Superintendency of Rome) and with *Regione Lazio* (Lazio Regional Authority). She has worked at the Vatican Museums since 2004, where she is now the curator of the Department of XVII and XVIII Art, and of the Department of Tapestries and Textiles. Her curriculum includes the curatorship of a number of exhibitions, conference speeches, the management of several restoration interventions and numerous scientific publications focusing on the Vatican collections.

### Andrea Merlotti

Historian, has worked at Venaria since 2001, and since 2008 has been the head of the *Centro studi del Consorzio delle Residenze Reali Sabaude* (Study and Research Centre of the Consortium of the Royal Residences of the House of Savoy). Curator of a number of exhibitions and author of several books and researches on the history of the House of Savoy and of the Italian courts, PhD in Social History in Europe and member of the Scientific Committee of the *Centre de recherche du Château de Versailles*. He regularly writes for *Il Sole 24 Ore* newspaper, has a column in *Giornale dell'arte* magazine and has collaborated to numerous programmes by *Rai Storia*, the public Italian history channel.

*Set-up by:*

**Lorenzo Greppi**

Mainly active in the field of multimedia set-up design for museums and exhibitions, Lorenzo Greppi, architect, has pursued an absolutely original career path over time. Among his works, the *Museo di storia naturale* (Natural History Museum) in Venice, the *Museo della battaglia di Vittorio Veneto* (Museum of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto), the *Musée de la Résistance nationale* in Paris, the *Museo di Palazzo Davanzati* (Palazzo Davanzati Museum) in Florence, the exhibitions “*Il Nilo a Pompei*” (The Nile in Pompei) at the *Museo Egizio* (Egyptian Museum) in Turin, “*Courir après le Temps*” at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, “*Il genoma umano*” (The human genome) at Muse in Trento, etc. He is currently working on the new set-up of the *Museo La Specola* (La Specola Museum) in Florence, of the *Museo del Trecento* (The Fourteenth Century Museum) in Rimini, of the *Museo archeologico di Stabiae* (Stabiae Archaeological Museum), of the *Museo della Letteratura* (Museum of Literature) in Trieste, of the *Musée Suisse du Jeu* at La Tour-de-Peilz, plus others. He is one of the founders of the “*MuseiEmotivi*” project, created in 2015 in collaboration with *Unifi*, committed to the promotion of interdisciplinary research activities for a new concept of museum.

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## STATEMENTS

**Michele Briamonte** and **Guido Curto**, President and Director of the *Consorzio delle Residenze Reali Sabaude* (Consortium of the Royal Residences of the House of Savoy) have stated: «*All'ombra di Leonardo* (In Leonardo's shadow) is a prestigious exhibition, not only because of the valuable collaboration with the Vatican Museums which made it possible, but also and especially as it is an unmissable occasion for actually seeing unique masterpieces able to introduce you to rituals and ceremonies filled with ancient significance. The importance of the loans we have brought together makes us particularly satisfied of opening the new season with this exhibition, and by truly acknowledging the Vatican Museums, which, given their international prestige, make the ideal partner for the Reggia».

**Barbara Jatta**, Director of the Vatican Museums, has defined the initiative as «an important collaboration between the two institutions during Lent focusing on two works that are substantial in the history of the papal collections, and which have contributed to the evangelization process over the centuries».

## INFORMATION AND TICKETS:

***IN LEONARDO'S SHADOW. Tapestries and ceremonies at the papal court***  
curated by Alessandra Rodolfo and Andrea Merlotti

- ♦ **WHERE:** Reggia di Venaria, Rooms of the Arts - 2nd floor
- ♦ **WHEN:** From Tuesday 21 March to Sunday 18 June 2023
- ♦ **HOW:** Full exhibition ticket 10 €; discounted 8 €; youths discounted 6 €; schools discounted 3 €.

All tickets dedicated to the exhibition include admission to the Gardens.

*Tutto in una Reggia* (All in a Palace) ticket: full 20 €; discounted 16 €; youths discounted 10 €; schools discounted 6 €.

The ticket *Tutto in una Reggia* includes admission to the Reggia, the Gardens, and to ongoing exhibitions.

Free admission for children under 6.

For further information, free admission, discounts and ticket purchase: [lavenaria.it](http://lavenaria.it)

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