

The Alvarez de Castro / From 1902

Ghosts in Rome © RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA

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At the end of the 1800s, the parties hosted by the Corsetti family to find suitors for their two beautiful daughters, Olga and Maria, became legendary. In the oral history of the family, it's said that after every party, their mother, **Adele Polverosi-Corsetti**, would express her stern disappointment over the disappearance of the girls' photos from silver frames, particularly those of Maria, who was stunning, just like her mother. The target of Adele's frustration was always the same: a group of bold young men, all from the elite circles of Rome at the time. With the empty frames in hand, barely suppressing a hint of jealousy, Donna Adele would confront her daughters, accusing them of failing to stop the audacity of those daring young men who would steal the pictures to daydream over. Olga and Maria probably enjoyed these 'thefts' a great deal. Among the photo thieves was certainly the handsome noble guard **Emilio Alvarez de Castro**, who was madly in love with Maria and, as much as the times and strict morals allowed, was greatly reciprocated.

After yet another photo theft, Emilio Alvarez de Castro felt compelled to take action. Emilio was undeniably a handsome man, coming from an old Portuguese noble family, cultured, with a love for both the fine arts and beautiful women. Additionally, among the group of 'scoundrels' targeted by Donna Adele, he was certainly the most distinguished. A noble guard in the service of His Holiness, Emilio was the son of a good family—his brothers, **Filippo** and **Giovanni**, were diplomats, and his father, **Carlo**, held the rank of colonel in the Noble Guard. Emilio had all the credentials to be a serious contender for the hand of the beautiful Maria. Though not wealthy, the Corsetti family valued nobility far more than gold coins. For them, wealth was not an issue, and certainly not for Maria, who was hopelessly in love with him.

The ancient history of the Alvarez de Castro family compensated for their temporary financial difficulties. The first Alvarez de Castro arrived in Rome in 1696 and quickly earned a reputation for their outstanding qualities. According to Portuguese customs, the

first two family members bore their grandmother's surname, **Lopes Rosa**, who had married **João Alvares de Castro**. They were **Duarte** and **Miguel Lopes Rosa**.

Duarte was a famous court physician, whom **King Pedro II** of Portugal had sent to the bedside of his friend **Pope Innocent XII**, to cure him of the violent fevers that papal physician **Giovanni Maria Lancisi** had compared to those suffered by the King of Portugal, whom Duarte had restored to full health. The Portuguese doctor also cured the pope's fevers and was subsequently invited to stay in Rome, along with his nephew Miguel, a banker. The cured pope, along with his successors, appointed Miguel as the manager of the **Duchy of Castro**, later the custodian of the **Luoghi di Monte** banknotes, and finally, the sole director of the **Pontifical Mint** for a decade.

Despite some less-than-stellar final outcomes (the family's banking firm collapsed due to a significant financial crash), the Alvarez de Castro family remained in Rome and retained a good reputation. That was enough for **Gustavo Corsetti** to marry off his beautiful daughter Maria, who, as per custom, received **Palazzo Podocataro** as part of her dowry. Emilio repaid the Corsetti family's trust, proving himself to be a good father and diligently working to improve his own financial situation.

In support of Emilio, an incident from those days must have played in his favor, one that stirred the social life of the Roman nobility and even made it into the diary of Count Ignazio della Porta Rodiani Carrara. The count recounts the event: "... the ambassador had invited the entire delegation of the embassy to dinner, including Filippo Alvarez de Castro, who was the chancellor, and his brother, a gentleman. Martens told the ambassador that he could not have his wife seated at the table with those two gentlemen, to which the ambassador replied: "The Alvarizes are far more noble by family than either of us; if the Portuguese ambassadress makes no objections, it is absurd for you to do so." In reality, Filippo Alvarez de Castro was the Consul of Portugal in Rome, and his brother Giovanni was the head of the Chancellery of the same embassy. The clash between the ambassador and the former ambassador Martens spread quickly through the salons of Roman nobility and had a disruptive effect on the ousted ambassador, who from that day forward was cleverly avoided by everyone. Meanwhile, the noble lineage of the Alvarez de Castro family, dating back to the year 1000, was revived. Their ancestors included notable figures such as four queens, including the famous Ines de Castro and João de Castro, the Viceroy of India. These illustrious names were music to the ears of the Corsetti family,

who were constantly seeking to assert themselves in the face of the Roman “black” nobility, which had snubbed them and their wealth—just as they had (the Corsetti consoled themselves) with Prince Torlonia, the wealthy landowner and recent drainer of Lake Fucino.

Emilio, after settling into his new residence at Palazzo Podocataro on Via di Monserrato, could not tolerate the idea of the family’s vast fortune being squandered by previous generations, and he sought to redeem what he felt was an old debt. The proximity of his wealthy father-in-law, Gustavo, embarrassed him. He wanted to prove to his beloved Maria, but more importantly to her father, what he was truly made of.

Having entered the Noble Guard at the age of 20, and in the current climate of economic revival in the city, while maintaining his loyalty to the Holy Father, Emilio began looking for ways to wisely invest his hard-earned savings. He found the solution in Umbria, where, using his own funds and securing a bank loan, he purchased the flourishing estate of Castelluccio, near Gualdo di Narni. This significant property included several farmhouses as well as a dilapidated fortified rustic building with a medieval tower that gave the estate its name.

Unlike his father, Emilio had a strong artistic sense, combined with skilled craftsmanship and a decent talent for drawing, which allowed him to oversee the restoration of the small village without altering its original structure. With the help of a foreman and four skilled masons, he personally directed the work. In a short time, the medieval ruin was transformed into a splendid walled village, just as it would have appeared in its original state.

The estate had productive vineyards, which Emilio improved through new grafts, raising their quality and yields to impressive levels. In just a few years, thanks to the wine production, he was able to pay off the bank loan and fully enjoy the benefits of his investment.

When World War I broke out, the two branches of the Alvarez de Castro family were unaffected, purely due to age. Emilio and his brother Giuseppe, aged 53 and 47 respectively, were too old for military service, while their sons—Giovanni (10 years old), Carlo (8), Filippo (9), Mario (7), and Giorgio (2)—were far too young to offer their blood in service to the country.

Despite this, Emilio, the noble guard, became involved in the war effort in his own way. He was highly regarded both in Rome and in Gualdo di Narni, where he managed the Castelluccio estate. During the Caporetto retreat, the leading figures of Gualdo approached him, entrusting him with the community’s valuables in case the Austro-

Hungarian armies overran the region. Emilio took possession of the treasure and hid it in a cave adjacent to the estate's cellars. After the war was won, he returned it to the community.

In Palazzo Podocataro on Via di Monserrato, Emilio led a comfortable life befitting his noble status. In addition to managing the Castelluccio estate and fulfilling his duties as a Noble Guard in service to Pius X (Giuseppe Sarto), he found time to play the viola d'amore in his uncle Filippo's chamber orchestra, design furniture to be crafted by trusted carpenters on Via dei Cappellari, and—at an amateur level—he painted reasonably well. He left behind numerous oil paintings, some interesting tapestries, and many pieces of furniture still preserved by his descendants.

In one of the guest rooms at Palazzo Podocataro, at the foot of the bed, there was a travel trunk lined in leather and reinforced with brass studs, which his grandfather Michele had used on his trip to Portugal. Even today, his grandson Marco keeps it in the same room where his grandfather Emilio had placed it.

Given Emilio's strong inclination for art and beauty in general, it is surprising that he didn't intervene to stop the ruinous addition to the loggia. The most plausible reason might be that, having just arrived, he did not want to contradict the misguided decisions of his father-in-law, who, surely with the best of intentions, wanted to make the palace more 'modern' than it actually was. A questionable concept that led to a new layer of wallpaper being applied over the previously applied layers, without even suspecting what might lie beneath all those layers of paper.

The beautiful Maria gave Emilio four children: Maria Adelaide, Beatrice, Giovanni, and Carlo. The other branch of the family, the one from Via della Scrofa represented by Giuseppe, Emilio's brother, was no less productive. Giuseppe and Savina Gaudenzi in Alvarez de Castro had five children: Filippo, Mario, the twins Ines and Mercedes, and finally Giorgio. While Mussolini was busy changing the face of Rome, the young Alvarez de Castro clan indulged in the high life. Filippo was not the only ladies' man in the family. In the Palazzo Podocataro branch, the restless eldest son Giovanni and his more composed brother Carlo shared the same role as their cousin Filippo from Via della Scrofa. Giovanni, to start, refused to join the Noble Guard. "That pot on my head," he said to his father Emilio, in full uniform, pointing to the helmet he was wearing, "I'll never put that on." And the 'pot' was passed by right to the younger brother Carlo.

Giovanni was known to be hot-tempered. Family stories whispered that one day he challenged a dangerous opponent to a duel with sabers over an unspecified insult. His mother, Maria Corsetti, fearing the worst, secretly from her husband, intervened by giving

the challenged man such a generous sum of money that he chose the less honorable option of fleeing.

Having escaped the duel, Giovanni, a motorsports enthusiast, participated in several editions of the famous Mille Miglia race, suffering a serious accident. The same fate, in another edition of the same race, befell his cousin Filippo, who, racing with his friend Umberto Dalla Vecchia in a red Alfa Romeo 1750 Spider, crashed into a wall on a blind curve at the entrance of a small village in Romagna.

Giovanni, a cavalry officer, and Filippo, an air force pilot, shared some war time in North Africa, albeit in different branches of the military. However, on September 8, they found themselves on opposite sides: Giovanni joined the Republic of Salò, while Filippo, almost by chance, sided with the Roman partisans. In the 1960s, after liquidating his mother Maria's inheritance in favor of his siblings, Giovanni sought his fortune in the construction business, often proclaiming, "A count without a county or a palace is a count who is worth ... nothing." Not exactly a motto to inscribe on the family crest, but it conveyed Giovanni's blunt perspective on the matter.

On December 28, 1931, Maria Adelaide, the beautiful eldest daughter of Emilio Alvarez de Castro and Maria Corsetti, married Baron Giovanni di Giura, a young diplomat, refined Latin scholar, and author of numerous books (who was awarded, among many other honors, the Collar of the Supreme Order of the Most Holy Annunciation). Giovanni would go on to serve as plenipotentiary minister in Lithuania and Venezuela and later held the presidency of the prestigious Dante Alighieri cultural association, a role he would keep for the rest of his life. In the 1990s, the Municipality of Chiaromonte (in Potenza) commemorated his memory by naming the street where the town hall stands after him.

From the marriage of Maria Adelaide Alvarez de Castro and Giovanni di Giura, four children were born: Gerardo, Fabrizio, Livia, and Flaminia di Giura. Fabrizio di Giura, (a law graduate, Marquis of Battifarano, Knight of Honor and Devotion of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, and Knight of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus) acquired the honorary role of 'dean' as he has always worked to keep the Di Giura and Alvarez de Castro families united, organizing receptions and frequent gatherings.

Carlo, who became a Noble Guard after his elder brother's refusal, remained a bachelor for many years, marked by countless love affairs until he lost his heart to the young Monica Slaghek Heukensfeldt Fabbri, a beautiful noblewoman descended from an ancient Dutch family and from the Robilant branch. The marriage, celebrated with great pomp in 1956 in the presence of the Noble Guard Corps, was possible only after a papal dispensation, as Monica was a minor (at that time, the legal age was 21).

Carlo's wealthy and favored aunt, Olga Corsetti, was strongly opposed to his marriage to Monica due to their significant age difference. She disinherited her favorite nephew and never spoke to him again. Monica, on several occasions, tried to reconcile her husband with his aunt, but Olga stubbornly maintained her stance for the rest of her life. Carlo often recounted this story, and after listing the many properties his aunt owned (including the vast building adjacent to Palazzo Podocataro, which overlooks Piazza Ricci), he would declare firmly that he had never regretted his choice. Most of these properties were eventually squandered by Olga Corsetti's heirs. Paolo Emilio and Marco were born from Carlo's marriage to Monica.

The marriage to the beautiful Monica rekindled Carlo's interest in his surroundings. His young wife's energy was contagious, and new concepts began to take root in the aging noble guard, Carlo Alvarez de Castro—ideas he had never explored before, mostly due to laziness. For instance, despite being born in the palace and living there all his life, Carlo had never been curious enough to learn more about it. He knew the palace had once belonged to the famous Cardinal Ludovico Podocataro, but its history seemed distant and never worthy of his special attention. Monica, on the other hand, with the curiosity typical of young women, kept asking questions. When she didn't receive satisfactory answers, she turned to her mother-in-law, who, also unaware of the ancient residence's history, passed the questions on to her sister, Olga.

Despite the rift caused by Carlo's marriage, Olga and Monica maintained a good relationship—perhaps not strong enough to forgive Carlo's "affront," but enough to discuss the Corsetti family and their many inherited properties, including Palazzo Podocataro. However, even Olga couldn't satisfy Monica's growing curiosity.

One day, while discussing with Carlo the need to refresh some apartments for rent, Monica wondered why their 16th-century palace looked so different from the neighboring Palazzo Ricci, which was from the same period. The latter was rich with friezes and frescoes, while theirs was bare and completely lacking character. Monica's undeniable logic gnawed at Carlo's mind. The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that his wife was right. After all, he had always heard about a passage in Vasari's *Lives*, where the famous painter mentioned Palazzo Podocataro and stated that none other than Perin del Vaga had worked there. Yet, there was no trace of that work visible on any of the walls in the ancestral palace.

At that time, the film "Fantasmi a Roma" was a big hit in Roman cinemas, directed by Antonio Pietrangeli and featuring a stellar cast: Edoardo De Filippo, Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman, Tino Buazzelli, Belinda Lee, Sandra Milo, and Lilla Brignone. That brilliant Italian comedy could easily have been set in the dilapidated Palazzo Podocataro. The plot revolves around the last days of Prince Annibale di

Roviano, who, living in perfect solitude, would regularly converse with the ghosts of his ancestors who still resided in the crumbling palace. One day, while trying to fix a gas boiler on his own, the old prince blows himself up, and at last, sees the ghosts with whom he had been conversing while alive. These ghosts all had something in common: they had all died violent deaths. The prince's nephew, returning from Paris to Rome for his uncle's funeral, takes possession of the palace, completely unaware of its history, and decides to sell it for a pittance. When the ghosts learn that the palace is to be demolished to make way for a modern supermarket, they band together to save it by turning it into an architectural landmark. To do so, they enlist the help of another ghost, a 17th-century painter known for his greed, called "Il Caparra" (The Down Payment). Promised a spot in the family to live with the house's other ghosts, the painter, in one night, frescoes the ceiling of the grand bedroom with a stunning Caravaggesque painting, hidden beneath a false ceiling. Needless to say, when the sale contract is about to be signed, the ceiling—torn apart by the ghosts—collapses, revealing the grand "Caravaggio" underneath. A prominent art critic, upon seeing the fresco, blocks the sale and saves the palace, where the ghosts can continue to roam forever.

If Carlo and Monica, both avid cinema-goers, had seen the movie (which is quite likely), it would have broken the last barrier separating Monica's logical thinking from Carlo's indifference. In reality—far less cinematic but still full of surprises—Carlo and Monica, needing to carry out renovations on a couple of apartments, began to explore a salon in the opposite wing of the palace, where they didn't usually live. Carlo noticed a strip of peeling wallpaper near the ceiling. Climbing a ladder, he tore off the first four layers and, realizing that the remaining six layers came off just as easily, he stripped them all away in one sweeping motion, revealing the first part of a cycle of frescoes depicting the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. That single gesture marked the rebirth of Palazzo Podocataro.

The success of this discovery energized Carlo and his vivacious young wife. In the following days, they uncovered another cycle of frescoes—four large allegorical paintings with themes ranging from the sacred to the profane, depicting virtues and mythology. The discovery of these four frescoes in what was once the kitchen made them realize the urgency of involving an expert. Carlo enlisted Professor Tarcisio Spini, who worked with Cesare Brandi's team, specializing in the delicate process of detaching frescoes. Spini agreed to take on the complex task and oversaw the careful restoration of the cycle dedicated to Saint Ignatius. It was a costly and intricate project, but Carlo was convinced it was money well spent, bringing the palace back to the glory of Livio Podocataro—friend of Perin del Vaga—and the noble Orfini family from Foligno, who had left their own significant artistic mark on the palace. Though Spini refrained from definitive attributions, he confirmed that the Loyola frescoes were by a talented painter from the late 16th century, likely during the peak period of Tommaso Laureti, known as Tommaso Siculo, a favorite artist of Monsignor Giustiniano Orfini. The four earlier frescoes, from

the early 16th century, hinted at the style of Raphael, perhaps from a promising pupil of Perin del Vaga himself.

To commemorate this remarkable restoration, Tarcisio Spini added, in a perfectly styled section between two deteriorated panels, the Alvarez de Castro family crest and an oval plaque with the inscription: “Carlo and Monica Alvarez de Castro, with their sons Paolo Emilio and Marco, had this restored MIMLXIV (1964).” It was a small yet significant reminder for future generations, urging them to maintain the palace’s dignity and respect the artworks fate had entrusted to them. The overall cost of the restoration equaled that of a luxury apartment, but the palace was finally restored to its 16th-century splendor. For Carlo, this was not just a hope—it was a legacy for his children and the future generations of the Alvarez de Castro family, reminding them to follow his example and honor the words of Vasari, referring to Perin del Vaga’s paintings: “This work has been esteemed and will always be considered by artists as something very praiseworthy.”

Following their parents’ passing, Paolo Emilio and Marco Alvarez de Castro took up the challenging legacy, continuing the work their parents had begun. Their first major project, ironically, started in the courtyard leading to the secret garden, always the heart of the palace. Upon opening a forgotten cellar, they found a mountain of ancient cobblestones no one remembered existed. It only took a glance for Marco and Paolo Emilio to realize where they had come from: the palace’s entrance corridor, which had been paved like a provincial road. Their grandfather Gustavo Corsetti, driven by a desire to modernize the palace, had replaced the “uncomfortable” cobblestones with a modern layer of futuristic asphalt.

The two brothers decided otherwise, restoring the entrance and the first courtyard to their original form with the classic Roman paving, which extends from the street into the palace. With the remaining sampietrini, which probably once paved the now-vanished cloister, Paolo Emilio and Marco planned to arrange them around the fountains in the secret garden, giving a more orderly appearance to an area that time threatened to turn into an overgrown thicket. Unfortunately, on November 7, 2012, Paolo Emilio passed away at the age of only 56, leaving his brother with the responsibility of continuing the restoration work on the palace started by their parents. Now alone, the last son of Carlo and Monica had to make the best of the situation. The projects planned with his brother slowed down but were not abandoned.

Just as his father Carlo had experienced, Marco made a discovery almost by accident—some fragments of Perin del Vaga’s paintings. One day, while overseeing a worker tasked with clearing out a room that had once been part of the ancient portico from the Podocataro era, the laborer pointed out that the vaulted ceiling was bulging and the

plaster was at risk of falling. To avoid any potential accidents, Marco climbed the ladder and lightly pressed on the swollen section of the ceiling. The heavy layer of plaster fell to the floor, revealing the face of a satyr, part of the famous frescoes described by Vasari: “...he called Perino, his great friend; and together they decided that he should paint many scenes on the walls of that garden, including Bacchantes, satyrs, fauns, and wild things.”

The ongoing work to restore the garden should ideally conclude with the recovery of what remains of Perin del Vaga’s frescoes, thus completing the effort to return Palazzo Podocataro to its former glory. One of the most significant interventions by the current owners includes the conservation restoration of the Roman column in the first inner courtyard and the statue atop it. This is the path taken—and still to be followed—in the successful restoration of Palazzo Podocataro-Alvarez de Castro.

The Podocataro Collection

The collection of antiquities housed within Palazzo Podocataro, now Alvarez de Castro, located at Via Monserrato 20 in Rome, is a fascinating assemblage of various types of artifacts. It consists primarily of architectural decorations, fragments of Roman sarcophagi, and inscriptions—mostly funerary—written in both Latin and Greek.

To better understand the Podocataro Collection, we must first briefly touch upon the culture of collecting and the collectors in Rome between 1400 and 1750. Unlike the grand collections that adorn many aristocratic Roman palaces, the Podocataro Collection is not dominated by statues but by stone fragments, funerary inscriptions, and architectural decorations. Another distinguishing feature of this modest collection is its setting—Palazzo Podocataro—which Cardinal Ludovico Podocataro virtually had built to house his beloved collection. This aspect alone sets it apart from the vast collections of prominent Roman families like the Farnese, Aldobrandini, Albani, Borghese, Barberini, and Pamphili, who filled their palaces with magnificent statues, rich galleries of paintings, and, of course, ancient archaeological relics. These were all-encompassing collections that differed in strategy and material content from the more “specialized” collection of Cardinal Ludovico Podocataro.

The collections of many noble families often began as displays of wealth, power, and superiority over others. But slowly, many of these families developed a genuine love for art. It is thanks to them that many splendid works of art have been preserved from destruction. Of course, among such noble intentions were less honorable actions, such as when many statues and marble stones from Ostia Antica were turned into lime to build the very palaces that would later house some of these collections.

Focusing the time frame from the 1400s—when Palazzo Podocataro was built (1499)—to the first half of the 1700s, marked by the founding of the Capitoline Museums, the world’s first public museum (1734), this part will focus more on the notable figures of this period than on their vast collections. These are deserving of more detailed attention. The aim here is to provide brief insights into the world of collecting from the 1400s to 1734, the year Pope Clement XII (Lorenzo Corsini) officially established the Capitoline Museums as a public museum, although its role as an art repository had long been present in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Piazza del Campidoglio.

In the second half of the 1400s, we find a collection of antiquities stored in the Palazzo dei Conservatori by Pope Sixtus IV. One of the earliest transfers to the museum involved the large sepulchral inscriptions of Agrippina the Elder and her son Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, which had already been brought to Piazza del Campidoglio in the 1300s to serve as standard measures for the market that was then held there (CIL, VI 886, 887). The Agrippina inscription in the Palazzo dei Conservatori formed part of the first core of what would eventually become the Capitoline Museums’ epigraphic collection.

Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, a great patron of the arts, gifted the Roman people with the fragments of the *Fasti Consulares*, which had been discovered by chance in the Roman Forum. As noted by Giulio Molisani in his book *La collezione epigrafica dei Musei Capitolini*, “Two years later, on June 13, 1548, a decree was issued, still preserved in the Capitoline Historical Archive (*Decreti di Consigli, Magistrati, Cittadini Romani, Cred. I, t. XVIII, pp.68 s.*), concerning the arrangement of the fragments, which by then had increased, thanks also to the research carried out by the Lateran Canon Gentile Delfino and his collaborator Tommaso Cavalieri.”

Among the numerous donations and relocations, there is one decided by Pope Gregory XIII, who had the famous bronze tablet known as the “*Lex de imperio Vespasiani*” (CIL, VI 930) moved from the Lateran to the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill. This was the same tablet that Cola di Rienzo had dramatically presented to the people in 1347, claiming it as ancient proof that imperial dignity originated from the will of the people, rather than being imposed through dynastic right by the emperors, who were considered the guardians of the Holy Roman Empire and its people, including the Romans themselves.

Another significant figure, Cardinal Alessandro Albani, the nephew of Pope Clement XI, was forced by financial ruin to sell the remaining 424 sculptures from the Albani Collection to Pope Corsini for a relatively modest sum: 66,000 gold scudi. These sculptures would form the foundation of the future Capitoline Museums. The low selling

price was likely part of a deal between the cardinal and the reigning pope, who was well aware that Albani had violated laws enacted by his uncle, Pope Clement XI, prohibiting the export of artworks. Albani had secretly sold 32 sculptures to Augustus the Strong, the Prince Elector of Saxony, for the substantial sum of 20,000 scudi. To further ingratiate himself with the future Polish king, he also included two marble lion statues from Carrara in the shipment. On that occasion, blatantly disregarding his uncle's edict, Cardinal Albani facilitated (likely for a fee) the export of the entire Verospi-Vitelleschi Collection and part of the Giustiniani Collection to Dresden. The cardinal's "forgiveness" for these serious transgressions came in the form of selling the 424 sculptures to the pope at a bargain price. If priced according to the Saxony sale (32 sculptures for 20,000 scudi = 625 scudi per piece), the 424 statues for the future Capitoline Museums should have cost Pope Corsini 265,000 scudi—199,000 scudi more than the actual selling price.

Another less reputable figure, Francesco de' Ficoroni, an art critic and antiquarian, sold 500 ancient inscriptions to the Capitoline Museums—which had been established only six years earlier—in 1740. These inscriptions still represent an important part of the museum's epigraphic heritage. Unlike Albani, Ficoroni had no misdeeds to be forgiven for, so it is assumed he was paid well for his collection. Among the pieces sold by Ficoroni was the famous bronze tablet issued in 260 AD to Cretius Fuscus by the guild of craftsmen from Sentinum (CIL, XI 5748), as well as, according to Molisani, "... the graceful funerary altar of P. Albius Memor and the urn of D. Lucilius Felix (CIL, VI 11346 and 21577), and the three rostrate altars dedicated to Neptune, the Winds, and the Calm Seas, found at the port of Anzio (CIL, X 6642-44)."

Amidst this rich landscape of private collections, donations, acquisitions, and sales, the Podocataro Collection stood out for its integrity, remaining intact and private until the last of the Podocataro family, Pietro, who owned Palazzo Ludovico Podocataro. A commission of guarantors, including Marchese Incoronati, Bishop Luigi Ardinghelli, and Cardinal Gianfrancesco Gambara, was appointed to ensure the collection's preservation as per the wishes of the Podocataro family. However, despite their oversight, the most prized piece, the celebrated bas-relief of the Three Graces, had already been removed from the collection by the last of the Podocataro family for private use, and its whereabouts remain unknown to this day. © RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA