

Orfini, not Orsini. It's time to correct a historical inaccuracy that has persisted since the 1500s. Contrary to what is written in all existing paper and online sources, Palazzo Podocataro was sold in 1575 by the brothers Costanzo, Ardicino, and Francesco della Porta not to the Orsini family, who dominated the Arenula Region, but to the Orfini family—spelled with an “F” like Foligno. Monsignor Giustiniano Orfini, secret chamberlain to Pope Pius V (Antonio Ghisleri) and a distinguished tenant of the della Porta brothers, came from Foligno and was in line for a cardinal's hat that, unfortunately for him, never materialized. The initial error was likely the result of a scribe mistakenly writing Orsini instead of Orfini during the second transfer of ownership of Palazzo Podocataro-della Porta. This mistake was then perpetuated, as subsequent writers, unwilling to double-check the deed and other existing documents where “Orphinus” and “fulginatensis” (from Foligno) are clearly written in Latin, erroneously attributed ownership of the palace from 1575 onward to the noble, though blameless, Orsini family, who did indeed wield power in the Arenula region.

The discovery of this glaring mistake is credited to Alberto Laudi, a renowned researcher of Roman family history and art history, and a relative of the Alvarez de Castro family, the current owners of Palazzo Podocataro. Laudi, having lived until recently in the family's palace on Via Sant'Aurea, just fifty meters from Palazzo Podocataro, extensively studied the history of the ancient families of the Arenula Region and their ancestral palaces, such as the Pericoli, Incoronati, Sterbini, Aste, and, of course, the Podocataro and Corsetti families.

According to Foligno historian Monsignor Michele Faloci Pulignani, the first Orfini family members to achieve nobility were Salvoro, son of Emiliano; Pier Matteo di Salvoro; and Emiliano di Pier Matteo, all artists active in Foligno between 1420 and 1465. They were responsible for introducing printing to the city of San Feliciano, setting up a

modern printing press (the sixth in Italy, chronologically) and hiring a team of German printers led by Johannes Numeister from Mainz. This team printed works in the following order: *De Bello Italico Adversus Gothos* by Leonardo Bruni from Arezzo, *Epistulae Familiares* by Cicero, and as the crowning achievement, on April 11, 1472, they published the first printed edition of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Notably, this was the first work in the Italian language to be printed in Italy—a significant achievement that reflects well on the cultured Orfini family.

These illustrious accomplishments alone were a sure guarantee for the future of the Podocataro collection and the palace itself. The surviving guarantors (or their heirs), appointed through the wills of Ludovico Podocataro and reaffirmed by Livio and Cesare, reluctantly accepted by the della Porta family, could rest easy. The Orfini family should receive unconditional gratitude from the future owners of the palace, from the Corsetti to the Alvarez de Castro, for the valuable improvements they made to the palace: the creation of one of the two fresco cycles, the one dedicated to the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The other cycle, consisting of four large allegories, predates the Orfini family.

The noble Orfini family, who resided in the palace from 1575 until June 12, 1824, can claim two indisputable merits but also suffered the price of a slow decline in interest during the 19th century. The first merit was preserving the Podocataro collection, which they acquired along with the palace, in its entirety. The second was commissioning a notable artist to create one of the aforementioned fresco cycles, though the attribution remains uncertain. For the Orfini cycle on Loyola, it is quietly suggested that Tommaso Laureti, known as Tommaso Siculo, may have been the artist. The other four allegories, possibly commissioned by Livio Podocataro, deserve further study.

### **The Act of Disaffection Toward the Palace**

The disaffection toward the palace, likely developed in the second half of the 18th century, is evidenced by a series of radical renovations aimed at increasing the revenue

from the property. From the records in the well-preserved *Fondo Orfini* in the Foligno branch of the *Archivio di Stato di Perugia*, we can see that between 1750 and 1776, there was a significant redistribution of spaces, with the addition of partition walls, mezzanines, division of apartments, and the opening of new windows. (One of these, unfortunately, led to the destruction of the tenth panel of the fresco cycle depicting the life of Ignatius of Loyola). These changes significantly altered the configuration of the palace. During the same period, the arches of the portico frescoed by Perin del Vaga were likely bricked up. Four windows were opened on the *piano nobile* (noble floor)—two overlooking Via di Monserrato and two facing the interior of the first courtyard. One of these resulted in the demolition of the tenth panel of the Loyola cycle, and the mutilated remains of the cartouche can still be seen on the back wall today.

Returning to the origins of the purchase of Palazzo Podocataro by the Orfini family, we find the della Porta brothers increasingly dissatisfied with the revenue generated by the palace and more determined to sell it. Meanwhile, Monsignor Giustiniano Orfini, the secret chamberlain of Pope Pius V, was joined by his uncle Tommaso, an esteemed theologian and expert on the rules established by the Council of Trent. For this reason, after assigning Carlo Borromeo to oversee the clergy and faithful of Milan to ensure they adhered to the Council's decrees, Pope Pius V turned his attention to Tommaso Orfini, the strict Prior of Foligno, and summoned him to Rome in the spring of 1566. Tommaso was added to the commission of visitors led by Cardinal Savelli, tasked with supervising the conduct of the Roman clergy and people, similar to what Borromeo was successfully doing in Milan.

The role of secret chamberlain to Pius V, held by Giustiniano Orfini, must have been significant—he may have been the one to inform his uncle of the news, and he certainly hosted Tommaso when he arrived in Rome. Without waiting for the commission to convene, Tommaso, at the suggestion of the pope, began his pastoral visits. The commission, led by Cardinal Savelli, began its work in mid-June, and by the end of the summer, Tommaso had already visited 39 churches and completed the corresponding

reports. In recognition of his diligence, on August 14, the pope elevated him to the rank of Bishop of Strongoli, a small and poor town in Calabria. However, considering the work he was doing with the commission, his departure was delayed, and Tommaso continued to live at Palazzo Podocataro until October 24, when he left for Calabria with the task of visiting the churches of the major towns he encountered along his journey.

In that year, 1566, marking the tenth anniversary of the death of Ignatius of Loyola, whom both Giustiniano and his uncle ardently supported, the two likely discussed at length how to honor the memory of the founder of the Society of Jesus. They began to entertain the idea of commissioning a fresco cycle for the chapel of Palazzo Podocataro, depicting the life of Ignatius, who was not yet beatified, let alone canonized. But for them, this mattered little. With the historical frescoes that adorned their palaces in Foligno in mind, they pursued this project.

Giustiniano took the lead, having already commissioned Tommaso Laureti to paint a splendid portrait of Pope Sixtus V, which adorned the *salone d'onore* of Palazzo Podocataro. (Alongside this painting was a white and red marble bust of Pope Pius V, currently in Palazzo Orfini in Foligno, which Dr. Sabina Maniello, a specialist in 16th-century sculpture, discovered to be the work of the sculptor Leonardo Sormani). In his will, dated April 18, 1597, Giustiniano bequeathed the important painting “to the Most Illustrious and Reverend Don Alexandro Peritto, Deacon of St. Lawrence in Damaso, Cardinal Montalto, and Vice Chancellor of the Holy Roman Church: *Quadrum sancta memoria Sixti Papa Quinti impressa manu insigni Artificis Thoma Siculi.*” A large altarpiece depicting Saint Thomas “*painted by the distinguished hand of a master*” was bequeathed to the family chapel dedicated to Saint Thomas in the Foligno Cathedral, dedicated to Saint Feliciano. This work may also have been by Laureti. Another small painting depicting an *Annunciation* “*...imagine Beatae Virginis Annunciatae*” with two small children kneeling before the Virgin was left to “Michele Bonelli, known as Cardinal Alessandrino.”

To his nephews Muzio and Giovanni Battista, Giustiniano left his property in the Arenula Region: "...*cum Cortili, Viridario, Funticulo, Puteo, appartamenti superioribus et inferioribus et alis pertinentis cum stabulo e conspectu Domus et cum alia Domo ibidem contigua*" (with courtyards, gardens, fountains, wells, upper and lower apartments, stables, and with a neighboring house). In essence, he describes the palace, which he later refers to as the "Domus magna" (Great House), and the adjacent house, referred to as the "Domus parva" (Small House), the latter occupied by the family of his secretary Lorenzo Pellegrino. He required the brothers to maintain all members of the Pellegrino family living in the house as tenants at a symbolic price, as of the date of the deed. Any future additions to the family, however, would lose this right.

Disregarding the brief interlude of ownership by the *della Porta* brothers, the Orfini family restored the deep love for art that Livio Podocataro had infused into the palace, notably through the significant intervention of Perin del Vaga, and Giustiniano Orfini's commissioning of the fresco cycle depicting the life of Ignatius of Loyola. With the Orfini family, the palace experienced a new golden age that lasted for more than a century and a half. Successive Orfini family members, such as Monsignor Giustiniano, his nephews Muzio and Giovanni Battista, and the great-nephew Ottaviano (an apostolic protonotary), all infused the palace with the same elegance that the family had bestowed on their palaces in Foligno for centuries.

The nine panels adorning what used to be the chapel of the palace depict key episodes from the life of Saint Ignatius. Both the unknown artist and the commissioner decided on the themes of these panels together, and most notably, they also agreed on the characters to be portrayed, some of whom had already been depicted in famous works by Raphael, Titian, and others.

The anonymous artist, relying on accounts of Ignatius of Loyola's life, surrounded the future saint with realistic portraits of famous figures from his time. Naturally, Queen Germana de Foix, often painted by other artists, and Pope Paul III, famously depicted by

Titian, are included. In the panel showing Ignatius presenting the rules of the Society of Jesus to the pontiff, the background figures are also depicted with a likeness to the original frescoes in Palazzo Podocataro.

One particularly interesting panel illustrates Ignatius and his nine fellow founders of the Society of Jesus working with street children in a challenging Rome. The accompanying text refers to “ten pious men,” alluding to the first ten Jesuit fathers: Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Peter Faber, Laínez, Salmerón, Jay, Rodríguez, Bobadilla, Giovanni Polanco, and Giovanni de Mendoza. In his autobiography, Ignatius writes that while waiting to depart for Jerusalem, he decided to teach street children Christian doctrine, focusing his efforts in the Arenula Region and its surroundings. He assigned Xavier and Faber to San Lorenzo in Damaso, Laínez to San Salvatore in Lauro, Salmerón to Santa Lucia, Jay to San Luigi dei Francesi, Rodríguez to San Michele in Pescheria, and Bobadilla to San Celso ai Banchi, while he himself took responsibility for Nostra Signora di Monserrato.

In this panel, the artist depicts Ignatius working with the street children of Monserrato, with architectural landmarks in the background. On the left, the Corte Savella and nearby patrician houses are visible, while on the right, a highly stylized church may represent either Nostra Signora di Monserrato or San Giovanni in Ayno, located opposite Palazzo Podocataro, which had become the chosen parish of the Orfini family.

Another intriguing panel shows Ignatius as a page in the licentious court of Queen Germana de Foix, widow of Ferdinand II of Aragon. In the scene, Ignatius is depicted handing a book to the queen. The damaged text on the panel still contains references to Germana de Foix, describing her as a concubine and repudiated.

In yet another panel, the artist opts for a more realistic portrayal of Ignatius’ injury during the siege of Pamplona, instead of the traditional depiction of his conversion. On May 20, 1521, a French cannonball fractured Ignatius’ left foot and shin. Field surgeons saved his life, but he was left with a limp. Unwilling to accept the deformity, Ignatius

requested that doctors at the Loyola family castle break his leg again to set it correctly. The procedure was more complicated than expected, and Ignatius nearly died. According to hagiography, he asked for religious comfort and prayed to Saint Peter, who granted him grace. However, with one leg shorter than the other, Ignatius had to abandon his military career. It was during this period of suffering that he found his calling.

The vocation panel, rich with allegories, reflects the visions Ignatius had after his conversion. Fasting and engaging in night prayers, he punished his body to the point that his confessor threatened to deny him communion unless he ate and slept at least once a week to stave off suicidal thoughts. According to his biography, “Dominic of Guzman and Francis of Assisi appeared to him as heroic champions whose courageous deeds he compared with his own, to see if he, too, could achieve such feats. Christ appeared to him as a captain, a king, serving whom seemed the noblest of enterprises. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared as the only lady worthy of his love. On one occasion, the Madonna appeared to him holding the child, infusing peace into his soul and extinguishing all sexual desire. God favored him with visions and revelations as a reward for the seven hours he spent kneeling in prayer each day. At night, he was visited by supplicant God, the apostle Thomas, the young Simon, but also demons and flagellants.”

The most important panel in the cycle shows Pope Paul III, to whom Ignatius, supported by his nine companions, presents the document containing the guidelines of the Society of Jesus. The significance the painter attributed to this scene is evidenced by the fact that the accompanying text, unlike the others, is left blank. The description is instead written below the coat of arms of the Alvarez de Castro family: *“Ignatius Loiola Cantaber, decem sibi sociis adiunct societatem Iesu fundavit eius instituto a Paulo Tertio Pot. Max confirmato A MDXL”* (Ignatius of Loyola, Cantabrian, with ten companions, founded the Society of Jesus, and its statutes were confirmed by Pope Paul III in 1540). For this scene, the artist drew inspiration from a painting by Titian depicting the historic presentation of the Society of Jesus to Paul III. The posture of Paul III, the presence of his cardinal nephew, and the striking resemblance of one of the background figures all point to Titian’s influence.

The sixth panel recounts the story of Francis Xavier, who, as a form of penance, traveled from Paris to Venice wearing a double cilice (hairshirt) on his arms and legs to punish what he saw as his youthful vanity. *“As penance,”* writes Polanco in the hagiography, *“with certain small cords tied tightly in knots, he bound his arms and legs at the knee, and with this torment, feeling the pain anew with each step, he traveled with his companions to Italy.”* However, during the journey, Xavier fell ill and confessed to his companions the penance he had imposed on himself. *“His flesh,”* Polanco continues, *“was not only chafed all around, but had swollen so much that the cords were buried and embedded in his flesh, invisible to the eye.”* Carried to a surgeon, the latter refused to operate, saying it was impossible to cut the cords without also cutting the limbs. *“Only God,”* the surgeon said, *“could save your companion,”* and left. The companions laid Xavier down and prayed to the Lord. The hagiography concludes: *“After resting through the night, Xavier awoke with the cords broken into pieces, his flesh healed, and not a sign of a wound or scar to be found—practically a miracle.”* It was the twenty-ninth miracle in his life.

The panel dedicated to the miracle of the resurrected child in 1611 in Manresa, a small town in Catalonia where Ignatius is highly venerated, is particularly noteworthy. Summoned to assist a woman in labor, Ignatius arrived after the child had already been born and declared dead. The hagiography describes the miracle as follows: *“A far greater grace was granted to another child, to whom, in the same moment, both temporal and eternal life were restored. The child had been born dead and was set aside without care, while attention was given to the mother, who was near death. After the mother had been stabilized, the midwife turned her attention to the dead and discolored child. Out of compassion, she knelt and prayed to Saint Ignatius, asking that, for the love he bore for the land of Manresa, where God had granted him so many graces, he restore the child’s life—if only long enough to receive baptism. As she said this, the child moved, opened its eyes, and, to the cries of the midwife and those present, the miracle was proclaimed, and the child was restored to its mother alive and healthy.”*

The penultimate panel refers to the episode in which God appeared to Ignatius while he was absorbed in prayer in a small church in La Storta, on his way to Rome to present the

rules of the Society of Jesus to the pope. God the Father appeared to him and placed him and his companions under the protection of His “divine son,” who, bearing the cross, said to Ignatius: *“I will be favorable to you.”*

The penultimate panel depicts one of Ignatius of Loyola’s first interventions in Italy, in Venice, where in 1537 he welcomed Francis Xavier and the other eight companions. Like Ignatius, they were not yet ordained as priests but were already devoted to helping souls and, with great courage, caring for the incurable patients at two Venetian hospitals: the Hospital of the Incurables and the Hospital of San Giovanni e Paolo, where Ignatius had already been working for some time before his companions joined him.

The final panel of the cycle at Palazzo Podocataro relates to an episode that took place at the Hospital of the Incurables, where Ignatius and Francis Xavier, while caring for a dying man with ulcers, miraculously restored him to health. They removed and sucked out the infected, worm-ridden sores of the man without becoming infected themselves, despite the revolting nature of the task.

The selfless work of the ten Jesuits attracted important political figures and noblewomen of Venice, who were moved by their dedication. In the now heavily damaged painting illustrating the event at the Hospital of the Incurables, the artist prominently features, on the right, a Venetian nobleman with a red hat—possibly the Doge—being addressed by one of the Venetian noblewomen. Nearby, a Jesuit brother, likely Polanco, is seen with his hands outstretched toward the patient. In the lower right corner, a fragment of the painting shows the left foot and the hem of Ignatius’ robe as he kneels beside the patient, tending to his purulent sores.

At the Hospital of San Giovanni in Venice, where no beds were available, Ignatius shared his humble bedding with a plague-stricken man. By morning, the man had disappeared, but Ignatius’ body was covered in plague buboes. According to his hagiography, Ignatius thanked the Lord for testing him so harshly, and by the evening, the buboes had

disappeared from his body. The tenth panel, which was destroyed to make room for a window, likely depicted the death of Ignatius of Loyola, following the narrative of the other panels in the series.

This cycle of frescoes dedicated to Loyola exemplifies the artistic legacy of the Orfini family in Rome, which lasted until the second half of the 18th century. During this period, a shift from patronage to neglect began, leading to the deterioration of the palace.

Fortunately, the lapidary collection—by its very nature—fared better against neglect, weather, and the ignorance of the tenants during the final period of Orfini ownership in Rome. However, the frescoes and coffered ceilings were hidden under layers of wallpaper and cane-reed panels, which were installed to lower the ceiling height in line with a more utilitarian approach to space redistribution.

By the time Alessandro Orfini, son of the late Giuseppe and nephew and heir of Cardinal Viviano, sold Palazzo Podocataro on June 12, 1824, with a deed drawn up by notary Apolloni, “successor to notary Pellegrini,” the palace was treated as if it were merely a farm. It was sold with everything included (“cancelli chiusi”) to the banker Giovanni Corsetti for 4,200 scudi. © *RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA*