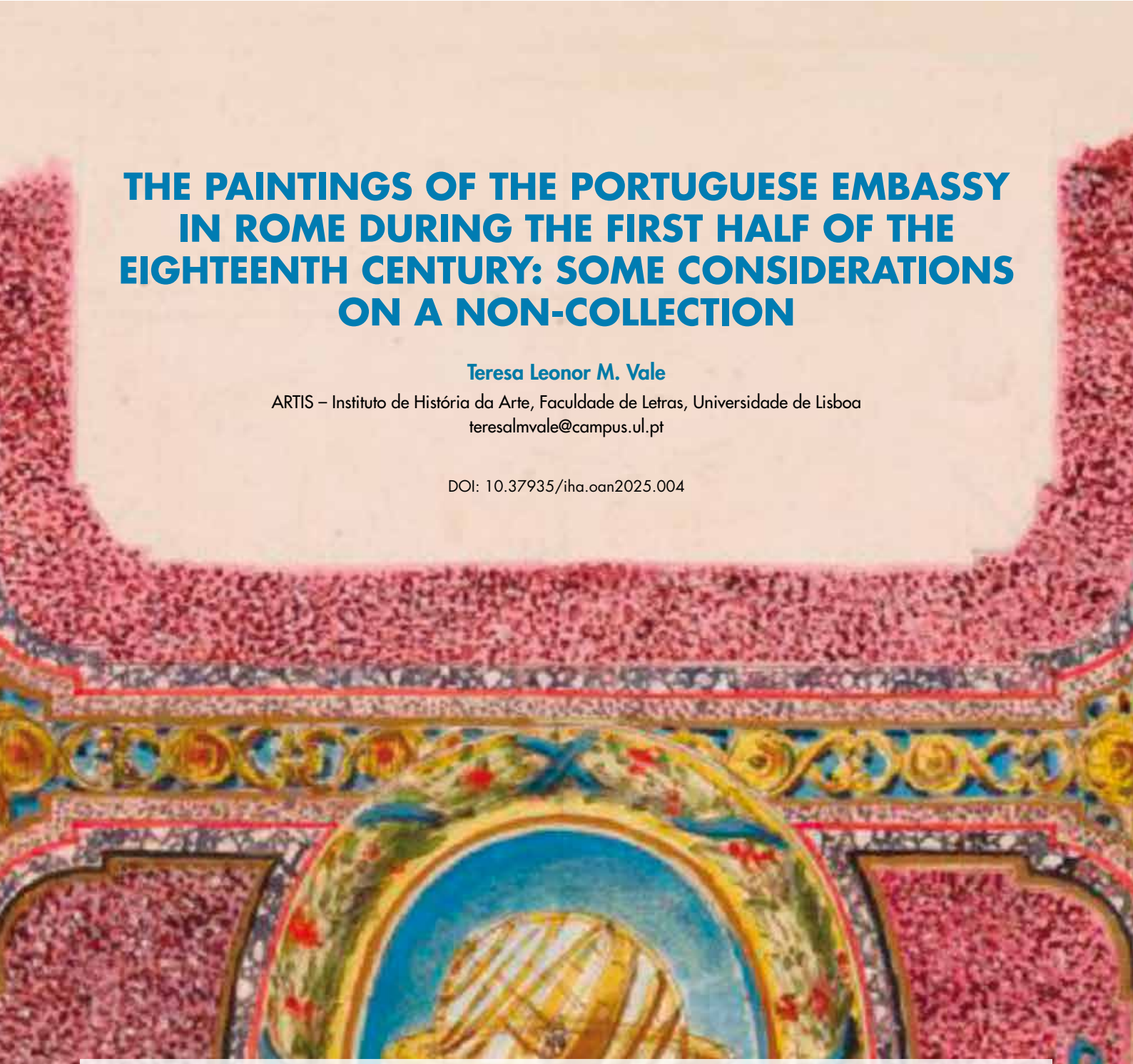
THE PAINTINGS OF THE PORTUGUESE EMBASSY IN ROME DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON A NON-COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

This contribution aims to offer a preliminary reflection on the paintings identifiable within the spaces successively occupied by the Portuguese embassy in Rome during the first half of the eighteenth century, corresponding to the reign of King João V (1706–1750). Indeed, associated with the palace occupied by the Marquis of Fontes, those inhabited by the Count of Galveias, the residence of José Maria da Fonseca Évora in the convent of Aracoeli, and the Palazzo dell'Olmo, where Manuel Pereira de Sampaio resided, a significant number of paintings can be identified. The objective of this text is to undertake, based on the analysis of primary sources, a study of these works, addressing their themes, technical characteristics, and attributions, while also reflecting on the extent to which they constitute a collection or a non-collection – that is, a mere assemblage of pictorial compositions intended to animate the walls of the various palaces mentioned.

KEYWORDS

Painting | **Embassy** | **Rome** | **João V**

THE SPACES OF PAINTING

The four ambassadors who represented the Crown in the papal city during the reign of King João V resided in markedly different dwellings. D. Rodrigo Anes de Sá Almeida e Meneses, Marquis of Fontes (1676-1733), extraordinary ambassador between 1712 and 1718, settled in a still obscure palace located near the Piazza Colonna. Indeed, the designation of the building, as it appears in contemporary or near-contemporary sources, hinders its precise identification and, consequently, any spatial or other characterization (Vale, 2015a: 121–122).

In the case of André de Melo e Castro, Count of Galveias (1668-1753), who first served as envoy (1708-1718) and, following the Marquis of Fontes's departure from Rome, assumed the role of ambassador, three residences are known: the first, the Palazzo Buratti "*apresso l'Angelo Custode*" (Valesio, 1978: 930); the second, from 1709 onwards, the Palazzo Cavallerini, on Via dei Barbieri, near the Piazza Argentina; and the third, from 1724 onwards, the Palazzo Sforza Cesarini (Diez del Corral, 2023).

Far more original was the residence of the third ambassador of the Joanine period, Friar José Maria da Fonseca Évora (1690-1752), who, being a Franciscan at the convent of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, established his dwelling there, adapting a set of quarters deemed suitable to accommodate the diplomatic representation of the Portuguese Crown (Vale, 2015a: 128–136).

Finally, the last ambassador of the Magnanimous King in Rome, Manuel Pereira de Sampaio (1691-1750), occupied the most sumptuous residence of all the four diplomats: the Palazzo dell'Olmo, a now-vanished building that once formed part of the vast architectural complex of the palace of the powerful Colonna family (Vale, 2025: 187–199).

At the current state of research, no documentary evidence is available regarding the furnishings of the Marquis of Fontes's palace, but the same cannot be said of the other diplomatic residences. The interruption of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See in 1728 (Vale, 2022: 43–49) prompted the departure from Rome of the ambassador — at the time André de Melo e Castro — as well as of all Portuguese subjects who were not permanent residents, and also necessitated the drafting of a report detailing all that he left behind in the city. This report was drawn up by Miguel Lopes Rosa, an agent in the service of Portugal who was permitted to remain in the Urbe due to his status as a permanent resident. This document constitutes the first manuscript that will serve as a source for our inquiry.

Subsequently, in 1740, at the conclusion of the diplomatic mission of Fonseca Évora, and again in 1750, upon the death of ambassador Manuel Pereira de Sampaio, two further inventories of the furnishings of the Portuguese embassy were produced. These, likewise, will be consulted in the present analysis.

THE SOURCES

This contribution is grounded in the analysis of primary sources, which we have previously published in another context and with different objectives, and from which a specific approach will now be developed, directed exclusively towards their contents concerning works of painting.

Accordingly, four manuscripts form the basis of our study, all of them preserved in the collection of the Biblioteca da Ajuda:

1. **An inventory of paintings that were held at the Portuguese embassy in Rome until 1728**, when, as a result of the interruption of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Holy See, the ambassador, Count of Galveias, abandoned the papal city. The inventory was compiled between 1735 and 1736 and delivered by Miguel Lopes Rosa, an agent in the service of the Crown, to Friar José Maria da Fonseca Évora (1690-1752), who had assumed — first informally and later formally — the functions of Portugal's representative in the papal city [fig.01].

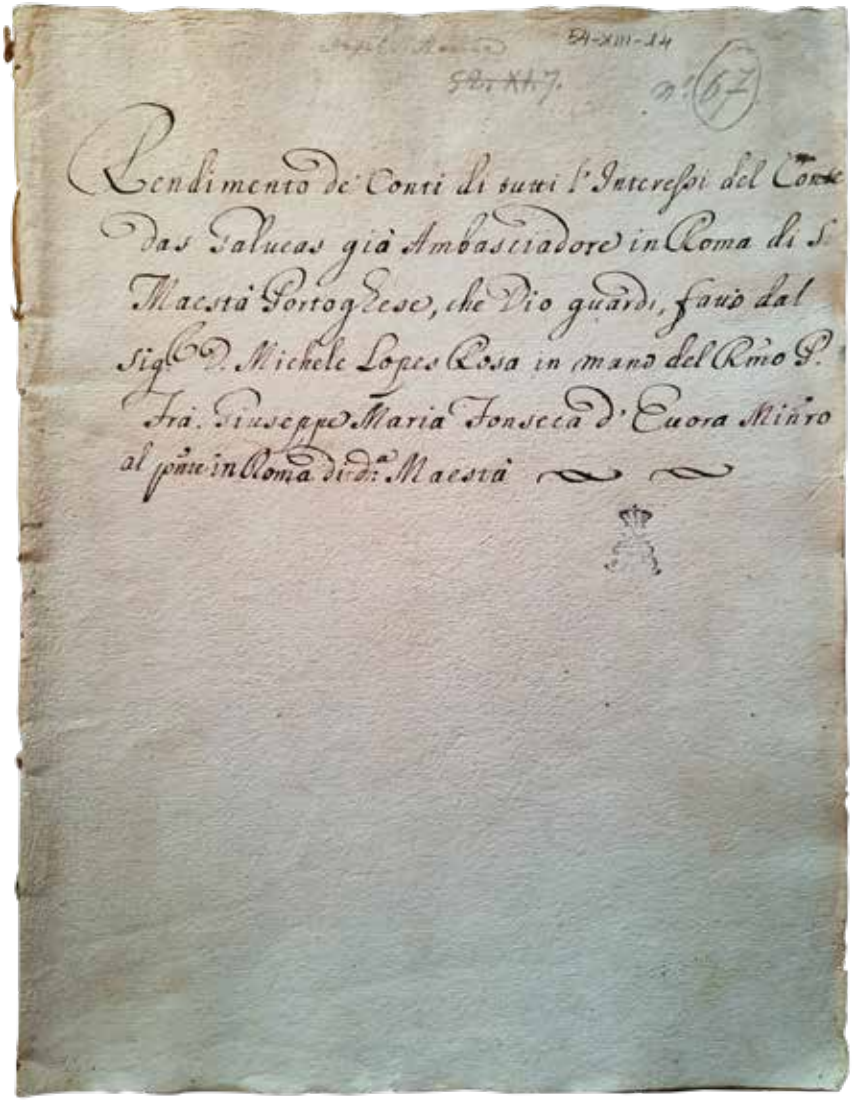


Fig. 01· First page of the manuscript *Rendimento de' conti di tutti l'Interessi del Conte das Galueas già Ambasciatore in Roma di S. Maestà Portoghese, che Dio guardi, fatto dal Signore Miguel Lopes Rosa in mano del Reuerendissimo Frà Giuseppe Maria Fonseca d'Euora Ministro al presente in Roma di detta Maestà*. Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, Ms. 54-XIII-14, Doc. 67 [N° 413]. © Museus e Monumentos de Portugal / Biblioteca da Ajuda.

2. **An inventory of all the objects which, in 1740, were located in the quarters of the Franciscan ambassador at the convent of Santa Maria in Aracoeli**, but which belonged to the Portuguese Crown, drawn up at the conclusion of the diplomatic mission of Friar José Maria da Fonseca Évora[1] [fig.02].

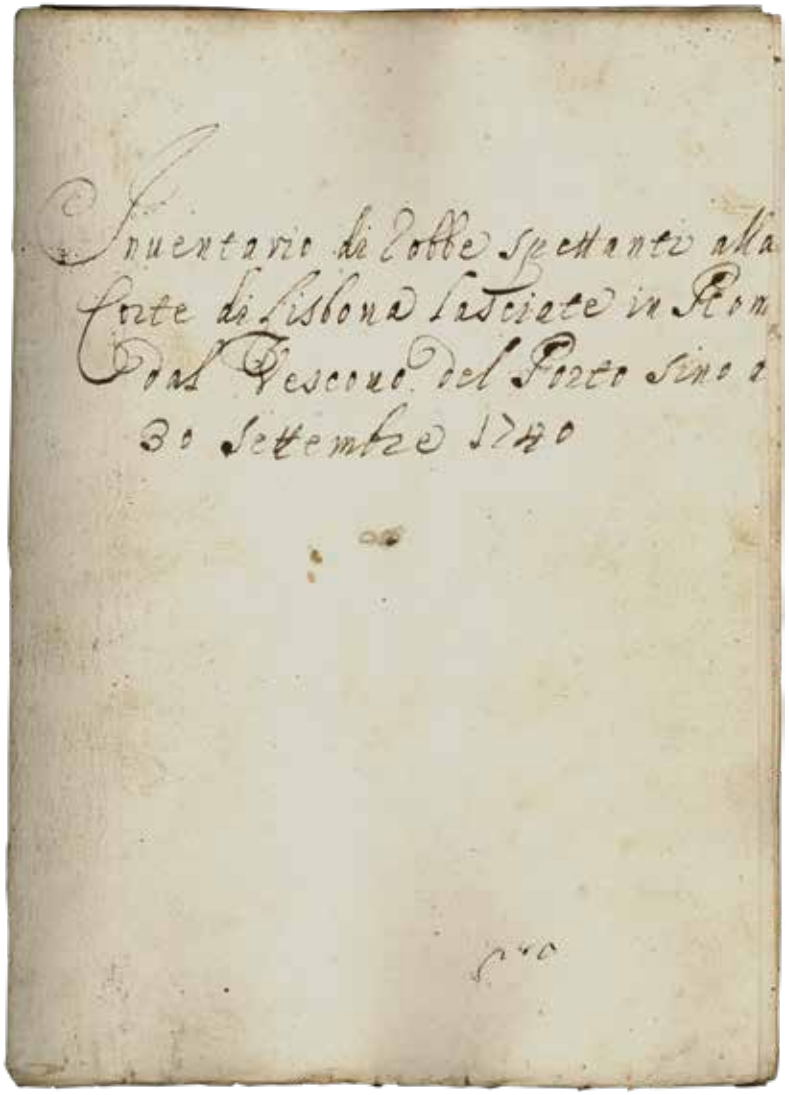


Fig. 02· Cover of the manuscript *Inuentari di Mobili, Carrozze et altro Spetanti alla Corte di Lisbona con lo sfogo de Medesimi Ritrouato a 1° Giugno 1749*. Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, Ms. 49-IX-35. © Museus e Monumentos de Portugal / Biblioteca da Ajuda.

3. **An inventory of all the items present at the embassy in 1749**, which may be regarded as a kind of status report[2], motivated by the ambassador's general concern to render an account—with transparency and precision—of everything that belonged to the Crown and of what was his personal property[3] [fig.03].

1. Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon (hereafter BA), Inventario di Robbe spettanti alla Corte di Lisbona lasciate in Roma dal Vescovo di Porto sino a 30 Settembre 1740, Ms. 49-VIII-21, Doc. 189, published by Vale, 2015a: 160-192.
2. BA, Inuentari di Mobili, Carrozze et altro Spetanti alla Corte di Lisbona con lo sfogo de Medesimi Ritrouato a 1° Giugno 1749, Ms. 49-IX-35, published by Vale, 2025: 201-238.
3. Another document discloses the possessions belonging to Manuel Pereira de Sampaio: Archivio Capitolino, Roma, Notai, Inventarium bonorum (...) ill.mo Comm.re Di. Emmanuely Pereira Sampajo (...) Febrry 1750, Ms. C.C., Sez. 8, Vol. 70 – mentioned by Borghini, 1995: 254-261.

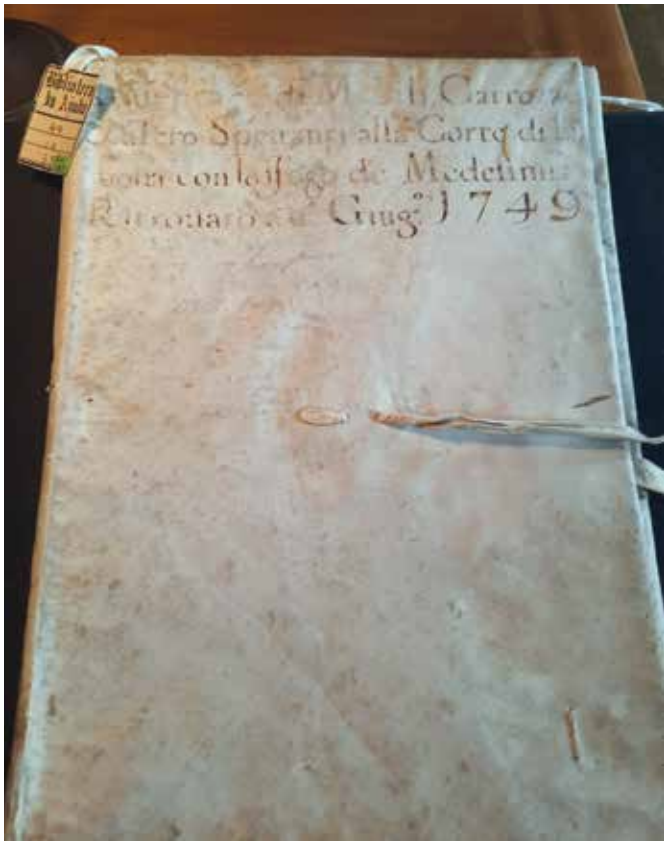


Fig. 03· Cover of the manuscript *Inventario di robbe spettanti alla Corte di Lisbona lasciate in Roma dal Vescovo del Porto sino al 30 settembre 1740*, Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, Ms. 49-VIII-21, N° 189. © Museus e Monumentos de Portugal / Biblioteca da Ajuda.



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4. **An inventory dated 1750, recording all the possessions — once again belonging to the Portuguese Crown — that remained from the embassy of Manuel Pereira de Sampaio in his residence at the Palazzo dell'Olmo**, following his death in February of that year. These objects had meanwhile been transferred to a small *palazzo* located in the Piazza Margana [fig.04][4],which was intended to accommodate Sampaio's successor as ambassador, António Freire de Andrade Encerrabodes (1699–1783).

These four manuscripts provide a guiding thread with regard to the pictorial collection associated with the national diplomatic representation in the *Urbe*, spanning from the embassy of the Count of Galveias, which began in 1718 (although André de Melo e Castro had already been residing in Rome since 1708, as noted), to the conclusion of that of Manuel Pereira de Sampaio in 1750, thus covering a time span of more than a quarter of a century.

4. BA, Inventario di ciò che spetta alla Real Corte di Lisbona, e che si ritrova in Roma nel Palazzetto à Piazza Margana (…), Ms. 49-VIII-21, Doc. 189a, published by Vale, 2015a: 194-240.

THE WORKS

The first point that deserves emphasis concerns the ownership of the paintings: all items recorded in the aforementioned inventories were the property of the Portuguese State. Although any of these four men may have personally owned paintings (as well as other works of art) acquired either through direct commission or simple purchase, those mentioned in these texts belonged to the Crown.

For example, it is known that André de Melo e Castro brought several paintings with him to Lisbon, which we may reasonably presume were his personal property rather than items held in his capacity as a Crown diplomat. Indeed, in his will, dated 1753, it is recorded on folio 159: "Deyxo ao Conde das Galveias meo sobrinho (…) **todas as pinturas que trouxe de Roma** em paineis"[5] (our emphasis). Accordingly, the paintings referenced in the *Inventario, e consegna de Quadri…*, under analysis here, belonged to the embassy and, therefore, to the Crown. The same applies to Pereira de Sampaio, whose will identifies several bequests of works of art, specifically paintings, that he personally owned (Vale, 2015a: 72–75; Vale, 2025: 196–197).

Of the four manuscripts, and with regard to the study of paintings belonging to the Portuguese embassy in Rome, the chronologically earliest — corresponding to the items remaining from the diplomatic mission of the Count of Galveias at the time of its interruption in 1728 — is the most extensive and detailed. Accordingly, it should be regarded as the starting point for the analysis to be undertaken.

It should be noted, before any further consideration, that the paintings listed in Miguel Lopes Rosa's report of 1735-1736 had been placed, at the initiative of João Ribeiro de Miranda, the *Maggiordomo* of Ambassador André de Melo e Castro, with a *regatiere*. In eighteenth-century Rome, a *regatiere* was an appraiser of goods who also acted as an intermediary between owners (interested in disposing of such goods) and the *Monte di Pietà*, the official pawnbroker of the city, in credit operations relating to pledged property (Travaglini, 1992: 415–448). It was therefore to a *regatiere* named Tittarella that Ribeiro de Miranda turned to place a set of paintings from the ambassador's palace in the *Monte di Pietà*. The motivations for this action need not be discussed here, as they have already been addressed elsewhere (Vale, 2025: 144–145); what is important to note is that Friar José Maria da Fonseca Évora considered it relevant to recover them, which was done, and the paintings returned to the national embassy.

This group comprised more than eighteen dozen paintings, all framed (with varying characteristics), a fact which, if it does not confirm, at least indicates that they were likely displayed in the various rooms of the palace rather than kept in storage.

From the standpoint of subject matter, and adopting a very broad approach, the collection included pastoral landscapes, both animated and unanimated, animals in landscapes and hunting scenes, still lifes, ancient architecture/ruins, seascapes, battle scenes, putti (with fruit and a laurel crown), *bambocciate*[6], religious themes, and classical history/mythology.

5. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Registo Geral de Testamentos, Livro 254, ff. 157-163v (28 January 1753). I am indebted to Carlota Cortesão for providing the shelfmark of this document, which she identified during the course of her research for her doctoral thesis in Art History at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon.
6. Pictorial compositions executed primarily by Flemish and Dutch painters active in Rome, followers of Pieter van Laer (1599-1642), known as "il Bamboccio" and consequently referred to as "i bamboccianti", depicting scenes of everyday life among the lower social strata and even marginalized elements of the papal city's society (thieves, gamblers, prostitutes, tavern-goers, and beggars) set against the ruins of ancient monuments—although dated, this work remains the seminal reference on the subject: Briganti, 1983.

Regarding the later inventories, the first noteworthy observation concerns the substantial reduction in the number of works. The inventories of 1740, 1749, and 1750 reveal a decrease of approximately two-thirds of the paintings identifiable within the interiors that hosted the national diplomatic representation in the papal city. Where, then, did these paintings go? Did Fonseca Évora bring some of them with her when she returned to the kingdom in 1740 as Bishop of Porto? Did some remain in the Biblioteca Eborense, which the Franciscan established at Santa Maria in Aracoeli? The fact is that all three subsequent inventories record a very similar number of paintings, slightly more than sixty.

Among the works whose traces have been lost are, in terms of subject matter, numerous landscapes (particularly abundant in the 1735-1736 report), representations of architecture, battle scenes, the so-called *bambocciate*, and others. Attributions are likewise "lost," meaning that authorial information is practically absent from documents subsequent to Miguel Lopes Rosa's report, a point that will be addressed in what follows.

In the inventories of 1740, 1749, and 1750, pictorial compositions on canvas clearly predominate, though works on wood and copper are also recorded. Regarding subject matter, religious compositions are dominant, but those devoted to pagan themes (historical and mythological), portraits, and several depictions of flowers and fruit are also abundant.

Having already undertaken a similar exercise between the two inventories of 1740 and 1750 — thereby identifying several instances of paintings that were transferred from Ambassador Fonseca Évora's residence to that of Ambassador Pereira de Sampaio (Vale, 2015a: 274–279) — we also attempted a closer comparison in the present case. However, this was hindered by the aforementioned scarcity of detail in the identification of pictorial compositions, which characterizes all the manuscripts. Thus, some of the paintings described as "*campagne*" or "*campagne con figure*", mentioned, for instance, on p. 19 of the 1740 inventory[7], may correspond — and very likely do correspond — to some of those listed under the same thematic category in Miguel Lopes Rosa's *Rendimento de'conti…*, but no further significant conclusions could be drawn from the comparison.

With regard to authorship, explicit mentions are generally scarce. In the first manuscript, only seven painters are identified within a corpus of more than one hundred and eighty paintings. Among these are works associated with the Neapolitan Alessio De Marchis (1684-1752) (Chiarini, 1990), whose execution appears to have been carried out in partnership with a certain Leandro, responsible for painting the figures that animated his landscapes. This reflects a collaborative practice not uncommon at the time; one may recall, among others, the successful partnership of Alessandro Magnasco (1667-1749) and Antonio Francesco Peruzzini (1643/44-1724).

Paintings are also attributed to a painter referred to as Monsù Rosa, who may correspond either to Francesco Rosa (1638-1687) (Nicolaci, 2017), to Salvatore Rosa (1615-1673) (Montanari, 2017), or even to the German artist active in Rome from 1677, Pieter Philip Roos, known as Rosa of Tivoli (1655/57-1706), whose workshop may have trained Alessio De Marchis, as mentioned above.

In the field of attributions, one painting is associated with Sebastiano Conca (1680-1764) (Scavizzi, 1982): "Vn quadro di tela di mezza testa cornice gialla a due ordini d'Intaglio dorati per trauerso rappresenta un Putto con corona di lauro in testa, et in mano, **si crede di Conca**" (p. 6, emphasis added), a painter who, as is well known, worked for the Crown and was connected to the Portuguese Academy in Rome (Vale, 2021: 68).

Two further paintings are attributed to Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691-1765): "Due quadri per alto misura 3. e 2. cornice dorata rappresentano Prospettiue **dicesi del Pannini**" (p. 11, emphasis added).

7. BA, Inventario di Robbe Spettati alla corte di Lisbona Lasciate in Roma dal Vescovo del porto sino al 30 Settembre 1740, Ms. 49-VIII-21, Doc. 189, p. 19, published by Vale, 2015a: 176.

Additionally, two paintings are attributed to the Flemish painter and engraver Jan Frans van Bloemen / Blommen / Bloms (1662-1749) (Busiri Vici, 1968). The difficulties in the spelling and pronunciation of his name likely explain why he became known in the Roman milieu simply as *L'Orizzonte* (p. 6).

Finally, the Roman painter Andrea Lucatelli (1695-1741) (Leone, 2006) is associated with several copies: six *bambocciate* (pp. 6 and 11) and two paintings depicting "*Figure, et Animali*" (p. 9). It may be presumed that the great admiration at the time for this Roman landscape painter determined the abundance of copies of his works, notably present in the prestigious collection of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (1667-1740) (Leone, 2002), a central figure in the cultural panorama of Rome during the first half of the eighteenth century.

In summary, it remains relevant to note that the fact that the paintings are generally referenced in pairs, or in groups of four or six, indicates their primarily decorative function, serving to fill and embellish the interiors of the ambassador's palace. From our perspective, this is further underscored by the scarcity of indications of authorship, and even when such information is provided — apart from a few exceptions — it does not concern highly prestigious painters.

If the first manuscript is not particularly generous in mentioning the authors of the listed works, the subsequent inventories are even less so. In the 1740 inventory, only one canvas has its author explicitly recorded (p. 17): a "Padre Eterno col Mondo in mano del Guercino", that is, by Gian Francesco Barbieri (1591-1666) (Miller, 1964; Vodret and Gozzi, 2011). The same work appears in the 1749 inventory (p. 26), then located in the so-called Chinese Room ("Stanza alla Cinese"), and in the 1750 inventory, placed in the room where His Excellence sleeps ("dove dorme Sua Eccellenza", p. 15), but by that point without an indication of authorship.

As for other possibilities, one may only hypothesize that a painting depicting fruit[8] could correspond to one of two compositions on this theme delivered in 1713 by the painter Michelangelo Corbi, who received several payments during the mission of the Count of Galveias (Vale, 2015a: 38–39). A more certain attribution to Corbi would be a depiction of *The Bath of Diana*, which appears in the inventories of 1740 (p. 20), 1749 (p. 30), and 1750 (p. 7), since he had received payment for a composition on this theme (together with a representation of Noah's Ark) in 1710 (Vale, 2015a: 39).

In the 1750 manuscript, one of the rare explicit mentions of authorship can be found among the depictions of flowers and fruit. Indeed, three paintings — two representing flowers and garlands and another depicting unidentified figures — are explicitly attributed to Ignazio Sterna[9]. This refers to the Bavarian painter active in the papal city, Ignaz Stern (1679-1748)[10], whose name is occasionally Italianized as Ignazio Stella. These paintings were very likely those for which payments were recorded in 1745 and which served as models for the execution of mosaics for the floor of the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in the Church of San Roque [fig.05].

On 17 July 1745, Ignaz Stern signed a receipt for 45 Roman scudi: "cioè scudi uenti cinque monetta a conto del mio Lauoro, e scudi uenti in Azurro seruito per li festoni dè fiori da me fatti per farsi in Mosaico per seruizio della Maestà del Rè del Portogallo", and a few days later, on 29 July, he issued another receipt (for 20 scudi): "a conto de Quadri di fiori fatti e da farsi per mettersi a Mosaico per seruizio della Maestà del Rè di Portogallo". Four further payments followed, with all accounts settled by 29 July 1746[11].

8. BA, Inventario di Robbe Spettati alla corte di Lisbona Lasciate in Roma dal Vescovo del porto sino al 30 Settembre 1740, Ms. 49-VIII-21, Doc. 189, p. 19, published by Vale, 2015a: 176.
9. BA, Inventario di ciò che spetta alla Real Corte di Lisbona, e che si ritrova in Roma nel Palazzetto à Piazza Margana (…), Ms. 49-VIII-21, Doc. 189a, p. 7 published by Vale, 2015a: 200-201.
10. No comprehensive monograph has yet been dedicated to Ignazio Stern; greater scholarly attention has been directed to his son Ludovico, so that only partial studies may be taken into account: Horak, 2017.
11. BA, Ms. 49-VIII-14, Nº 309 (17 July 1745, 45 scudi romani), Nº 370 (29 July 1745, 20 scudi), Nº 515 (18 October 1745, 30 scudi), Nº 533 (15 December 1745, 20 scudi), B.A., Ms. 49-VIII-15, f. 11 (18 February 1746, 30 scudi) and f. 85 (29 June 1746, 30 scudi).



Fig. 05· Mosaic floor of the chapel of St. John the Baptist in the church of S. Roque in Lisbon, executed by the mosaicist Enrico Enuò and collaborators, from the Fabbrica di S. Pietro, according to paintings by Ignaz Stern (1679-1748). © Museu de São Roque, SCML.

Building on Stern's proposal, a team of mosaicists from the *Fabbrica di S. Pietro* — including Guglielmo Paleat, Nicola Onofri, and Giuseppe Ottaviani — under the coordination of Enrico Enuò, executed the floor of the aforementioned chapel (Salerno, 2017: 104–108). A drawing of the entire pavement is preserved in the *Libro degli Abozzi de Disegni delle Commissioni che si fanno in Roma per Ordine della Corte*[12] [fig.06], an illustrated compilation of information concerning art commissions then underway in Rome, produced at the initiative of Ambassador Manuel Pereira de Sampaio in the mid-1740s.

Stern's paintings, depicting flowers and garlands, invite further reflection. Indeed, these works were not regarded at the time as independent works of art, created through a commission intended to produce floral-themed paintings by the artist Ignaz Stern. Rather, the Bavarian painter's compositions functioned as a stage in a process aimed at the creation of another work of art — in this case, the mosaic floor of the royal chapel in the Jesuit church of Lisbon. Stern's paintings, presumably because they pleased Ambassador Pereira de Sampaio, were framed and integrated into the interiors of the diplomat's residence.

This consideration allows us to entertain the possibility that the same could have occurred with other paintings, notably the work attributed to Sebastiano Conca in Miguel Lopes Rosa's report. This artist, who was the resident painter of the influential Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, also worked for Portugal during the reign of King João V and, as the documents indicate, was in some way connected to the Portuguese Academy in Rome, which remained active until 1728 (Vale, 2021: 68). Could the "Putto con corona di lauro in testa, et in mano", associated with Conca and mentioned above, have been a study for a subsequent work by the painter? At present, we do not have an answer to this question.

12. Bibliothèque de l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris, Ms. 497, published by Vale, 2015b.



Fig. 06· Drawing, from the Libro degli Abbozzi..., for the mosaic floor of the chapel of St. John the Baptist in the church of S. Roque in Lisbon, to be executed by the mosaicist Enrico Enuò and collaborators, from the Fabbrica di S. Pietro, based on paintings by Ignaz Stern (1679-1748). Bibliothèque de l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris, Ms. 497. © Museu de São Roque, SCML.

Finally, one last aspect deserves mention in approaching these paintings, belonging to the diplomatic mission in Rome during the reign of King João V, through the analysis of the four manuscripts: their location. With the exception of the first document, which consists of a list of works delivered to a *regatiere*, all the others specify the spaces in which the paintings were situated. From this perspective, the 1749 inventory is particularly interesting, as its author, using the 1740 inventory as a reference point, demonstrates a concern with identifying the compartments in which the works were located. It thus shows where the paintings were in Ambassador Fonseca Évora's quarters at Santa Maria in Aracoeli and where they were subsequently distributed among the rooms of the so-called Palazzo dell'Olmo, inhabited by Manuel Pereira de Sampaio.

It should be noted that a few paintings — either because they did not please the ambassador or due to a less satisfactory state of preservation — had been transferred to the guardarobba, a storage space in which everything not required for immediate use or display was kept, for various reasons, including the seasonal rhythm of household use. For example, among the "Tre quadri in tela da testa per alto Cornice dorate Liscie rappresentando una Pellegrina e due ritratti di Uomini Antichi" listed in the 1740 inventory, the two portraits of "Ancient Men" were located in the quarters of Abbot Lara (a cleric serving in the ambassador's household), whereas the "*Pellegrina*" had been relegated precisely to the *guardarobba*[13].

In any case, the issue that warrants reflection is how this group of paintings should be understood, initially comprising a considerable number of works and subsequently reduced to approximately one-third.

13. BA, Inuentari di Mobili, Carrozze et altro Spetanti alla Corte di Lisbona con lo sfogo de Medesimi Ritrouato a 1° Giugno 1749, Ms. 49-IX-35, p. 25, published by Vale, 2025: 212.

Considering that an art collection — because it is such collections that concern us here — consists of a set of works whose assembly reflects the interests and taste of its collector(s), with criteria defined and strategies established for its formation (Debenedetti, 1993; Cappelletti, 2003; Gozzano, 2004; Montagu, 2008; Parrilla and Borchia, 2019), the paintings under consideration can scarcely be understood as a collection in this sense. Indeed, both the initial version, comprising over 180 paintings, and the subsequent grouping identifiable from the 1740 inventory, reduced by two-thirds, correspond to an aggregation of works resulting from the interests and actions of multiple agents, who, as has already been noted, were highly diverse. Thus, this is not a collection formed through the action of multiple individuals connected by family ties, which might themselves provide a unifying thread for the collection, despite the potentially differing interests of successive family members responsible for its assembly.

These four men are linked solely by the exercise of diplomatic functions at the highest level. All of them served as ambassadors of the Portuguese Crown to the Holy See. However, none of these men, even if one were to attribute to them the role of collector (which would not be appropriate), owned the paintings under consideration here. The paintings that populated and animated the spaces which, during the first half of the eighteenth century, successively housed the national diplomatic representation in Rome, were the property of the State, and it was on behalf of that State that they were commissioned or, more simply, acquired.

Regarding the latter point, we believe we are dealing with an assembly of works acquired within the context of the Roman art market, which from the second half of the seventeenth century had become increasingly diverse and significant (Lorizzo, 2003: 159–174; Coen, 2018; Pampalone, 2023; Vale, 2014: 38–53). Two aspects support this view: on the one hand, the absence of prominent names in terms of authorship, given that the most prestigious artists were still primarily engaged in commissioned work; and on the other, the difficulty in detecting a preference for a particular subject matter or pictorial type. Indeed, already in the first document — the 1735-1736 listing in Miguel Lopes Rosa's report — the largest number of works consists of landscapes or representations of flowers (and fruit), typologies which, with due exceptions, constituted a common resource at the time for enlivening wall surfaces in palatial and/or bourgeois interiors. The remaining subjects are roughly balanced between religious themes and those that, for convenience, we may generically term pagan, depicting figures or episodes from classical history and mythology.

It should also be noted that this group of paintings, whose presence in the State's possession resulted from the actions of various agents, precludes the identification of a collector figure and, consequently, makes it impossible to recognize any underlying interests or tastes in their assembly, as well as to discern potential strategies aimed at the acquisition of the works.

On the other hand, such circumstances also preclude an understanding of the *space and display* binomial, that is, the relationship of the works to the space for which they were originally intended (Waddy, 2014: 31–40), making it impossible to discern how they were arranged or positioned within those spaces. This aspect is fundamental for appreciating potential luminous or chromatic effects achieved through particular placements or exhibition choices for a given work or group of works, in pursuit of the *meraviglia* so prized in the Baroque (Magnani, 2013; Feigenbaum and Freddolini, 2014). Various strategies could be employed for this purpose; one, most recognizable in larger spaces such as galleries, consisted in the *parare co'i quadri*, that is, covering the walls with the paintings themselves (Magnani, 2013: 15–17). Although a textile component might exist on the wall surface, the paintings were applied according to multiple criteria: subject, authorship, morphology, or chromatic harmony. Works could also be arranged to create a dialogue, producing an effect analogous to literary *paragone*.

In practice, what the sources allow us to know about the presence of these paintings in various spaces is limited to their location. Indeed, we are only informed of the compartment in which they were situated at a given moment. The nature of the documents does not provide information regarding their relationship to furniture, textile components, or architecture (such as windows or doors as sources of light), thereby precluding any further understanding of the pictorial ensemble and its possible readings.

Taking into consideration what has just been presented regarding the corpus of paintings that, during the first half of the eighteenth century, belonged to the Portuguese embassy in Rome, we may affirm that we are dealing with a *non-collection*. Rather, it consists of an assemblage of works brought together over a relatively extended period of time, shaped by diverse — and at times even adverse — circumstances (notably the interruption of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Papal States). This assemblage resulted from the intervention of different agents, namely the successive ambassadors, whose actions were guided by distinct motivations and conditioned by multiple conjunctures.

Since it is not possible to identify one or more collectors, nor to discern specific criteria or deliberate strategies aimed at the acquisition of the works, this grouping of paintings, as revealed by the documents, cannot, in our view, be regarded as a collection.

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