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Collecting Orthodoxy in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Rome: From the Collection of Agostino Mariotti (1724–1806) to the Vatican Museums (1820–Present)

Abstract

During the 18th century, the abbot and lawyer Agostino Mariotti (1724-1806) formed an extensive art collection in Rome. Of the 198 paintings that made up the Mariotti collection, 35 were works of what was then understood as the Byzantine style. Mariotti, an important scholar of ancient Greek, collected these panels with a dual purpose: as testimonies of rites of the Orthodox Church in juxtaposition to those of the Western Church, and as reflecting the influence that the school of “Greek” art exerted on Latin schools throughout the Middle Ages. After the death of Mariotti (1806), many of these objects, including Byzantine icons, were purchased in 1820 by the Vatican Museums, where they are still preserved today.

Keywords: Agostino Mariotti, Vatican Museums, Greek Icons, Ecclesiastical History.

Introduction

Objects from the Byzantine or Greek Eastern territories have long been present in Roman collections. However, until at least the seventeenth century, very few objects of this type are mentioned in private inventories. It is only starting in the eighteenth century that we find more objects and more frequent mentions of Eastern art in the collections of important churchmen or scholars; often the works are designated in

the inventories as “Greek” or “Greek-Russian.” This change in taste is echoed in the writings of scholars and art lovers who began to look at the history of painting with a focus on early painting and medieval art with a renewed interest. After recounting the Roman situation in the seventeenth century, this paper will investigate the presence of Byzantine art in Rome between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and explore the reasons why it was collected. I will focus in particular on the collection of Agostino Mariotti (1724–1806), who was a lawyer of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, an antiquarian, and a Greek scholar well known in eighteenth-century Rome.¹ By studying his motivations for amassing his rich collection and tracing its placement in the nineteenth century, we can better understand the growing interest in Byzantine art during this period.²

Roman Collections in the Seventeenth Century

In the seventeenth century, there were already objects recognized as “Greek” or “Byzantine” in some Roman collections, although these were rare exceptions, and their identifications were sometimes false, indicating style rather than origin. These works interested collectors mainly because they were considered tangible connections to the first centuries of Christianity and appealed to scholars who appreciated this era.

An example of such interest is the circle around Cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597–1679), nephew of Pope Urban VIII Barberini, which included his librarian, the scholar Leo Allatius (ca. 1586–1669), the collector Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), and the artist Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588–1657). Allatius, born in Chio, Greece, was a member of an Eastern Orthodox church in communion with the papacy, that is, a Greco-Catholic Church; and he also was an ardent student of the history of the Church and its rites.³ He used images and artistic demonstrations to compare the rites of the Eastern Church to those of the Western Church,⁴ and he authored a book about Byzantine architecture titled *De templis graecorum* (On Greek Temples), published in 1645, which focused on the church of Saint Athanasius in Rome.⁵ His interests certainly influenced Barberini’s taste for artwork that originated in the East.

In fact, Barberini’s collection included two famous Byzantine ivories, both published several times over the centuries. The first is the so-called Barberini ivory, a gift from Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc to the cardinal, today on display at the Musée du Louvre in Paris.⁶ The second is the triptych now in the Palazzo Venezia Museum in Rome.⁷ In the eighteenth century, an engraving of the Barberini ivory was published in the second volume of the book *Thesaurus veterum diptychorum* (Treasury of Ancient Diptychs) by Antonio Francesco Gori (1691–1757), issued posthumously by his friend Giovanni Battista Passeri (1694–1780) in 1759.⁸ The French scholar Jean-Baptiste-Louis-Georges Seroux d’Agincourt (1730–1814) also commissioned an engraving of this

ivory, which was published posthumously in 1823 in his famous six-volume *Histoire de l'art par les monumens*. (History of Art through Monuments).⁹

The second ivory is an equally famous masterpiece that was reproduced by Cassiano dal Pozzo in a drawing included in his *Museo cartaceo* (Paper Museum), which consists of different albums of drawings and watercolors of artworks, now in the Royal Library in Windsor.¹⁰ Dal Pozzo was also the cupbearer of Francesco Barberini, a role that allowed him privileged access to the Barberini collection.

Another important Roman family of the time, the Giustiniani, also collected Byzantine works of art. The family had come into possession of frescoes and mosaics from the portico of the Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. These comprised two fragments depicting Saints Peter and Paul and three mosaics of different ages and styles: a *Saint Joseph* (705–7 CE), a *Deesis* from the façade (1227–41) and a *Christ Child* (1294–1303). The fragments were probably collected to preserve “a small relic of various parts of the ancient basilica.”¹¹ In their inventories, the family recorded these frescoes and mosaics as being of Byzantine origin, aligning their family lineage with the Byzantine emperor Justinian the Great (482–565 CE), to whom the family name also nods. In reality, these fragments all belonged to the Roman artistic sphere, with the exception of the *Saint Joseph*, the only work that has a true Eastern origin.¹²

These collections were part a strand of renewed interest in the Christian Middle Ages, inaugurated primarily by Ludovico Antonio Muratori's (1665–1736) *Antiquitates italicæ medii ævi* (Italian Antiquities of the Middle Ages), published between 1738 and 1743.¹³ This book's six volumes present artwork as historical evidence for the first centuries of Christendom. Previous books by Antonio Bosio (1575–1629),¹⁴ Marcantonio Boldetti (1663–1749),¹⁵ Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (1689–1775),¹⁶ Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729), and Giuseppe Bianchini (1704–1764) had dealt with Christian history and consequently touched on medieval works of art. Francesco Bianchini, in particular, advocated for a museum entirely devoted to early Christian works within the papal collections: the Ecclesiastical Museum intended for Pope Clement XI Albani (r. 1700–1721).¹⁷ This project never materialized, but it soon became very famous, especially in Rome, thanks to the publication of the four volumes of the *Demonstratio historiae ecclesiasticæ quadripartitæ* (A Demonstration of Ecclesiastical History in Four Parts), conceived by Francesco Bianchini and published by his nephew Giuseppe between 1752 and 1754. The goal of the Bianchinis was to compare “Christian” art and that of ancient Rome by using art as testimony to the growing greatness of the Church.¹⁸

The Collection of Agostino Mariotti

In addition to these collections, there were others in Rome, assembled with the intent

of documenting the past of the Roman Church. This interest grew during the eighteenth century, when private collections possessing many Byzantine—or purportedly Eastern—objects begin to appear. Worth mentioning are those of the cardinals Francesco Saverio de Zelada (1717–1801)¹⁹ and Stefano Borgia (1731–1804),²⁰ and those of Giuseppe Simone Assemani (1687–1768)²¹ and Francesco Vettori (1692–1770),²² respectively custodian of the Vatican Library and *primo custode* of the Museo Sacro in the Vatican.

Among these prominent collectors, we also find the intriguing figure of the lawyer Agostino Mariotti. He was the owner of a collection created over a span of more than fifty years and consisting of different categories of objects, including numerous Byzantine icons. To understand what drove Mariotti's interest in the Orthodox world, it is necessary to briefly introduce Mariotti and explain his connection with Greek culture.

Born in a modest family, Mariotti became an abbot and a well-known lawyer in Rome. Like most of the ecclesiastics of his time, he was first and foremost a scholar, specifically a bibliophile, numismatist, member of the Italian literary Academy of Arcadia, expert in antiquities, and collector. He was also known in Rome for his deep knowledge of ancient philology and especially Classical Greek. He studied languages from the age of fourteen with Raffaele Vernazza (d. 1780), an expert of Greek at the Vatican Library, teacher at the Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, and great connoisseur of the Greek scholar and theologian Leo Allatius, mentioned above. Mariotti became so close with his teacher that Vernazza designated him as his heir, and a pair of portraits of Vernazza and Allatius were displayed in Mariotti's residence as a reminder of his respect and admiration. The two paintings were donated by the lawyer in 1803 to the Vallicelliana Library, together with all the manuscripts of Allatius and Vernazza that Mariotti held in his personal library.²³ In addition, I discovered an autograph letter in the archives of the Vatican Library in which Agostino wrote to Seroux d'Agincourt to explain the Greek inscriptions on a "bassissimo tempo" (very ancient) painting representing a Madonna and Child of the Greek school in the collection of the French nobleman.²⁴

The Roman lawyer's passion for the Greek language also translated into a genuine interest in "Greek" and, more generally, Byzantine works. The Mariotti collection was divided into three broad sections: the Sacred Museum, the Profane Museum, and the *Naturalia*. The objects of Byzantine origin, due to their intrinsic religious connotation, were entirely included in the Sacred Museum. These works were collected for various reasons, including the need to cover all the centuries of Christian history, which was one of Mariotti's primary aims. He explained the reason for this vast chronological period:

Because of the natural inclination for the fine arts that I had since early adolescence, I was able to gather a series of paintings, in which some

of them, dated from the coming of the Lord up to Michelangelo, proved the truth of Religion and Ecclesiastical History, while the others, from Michelangelo up to nowadays, testified to the perfection of the drawing.²⁵

In this explanation, Mariotti focused on the paintings, but the same approach can be easily extended to all the objects that made up his collection. As with medieval works, those referred to as “Greek” also fall into the typology of objects that bear witness to the Christian Church. Mariotti’s holdings include paintings, ivory diptychs, wooden objects, and even an ancient manuscript.

Let us start with the paintings. Mariotti’s museum contained 198 paintings of which 35 were Greek, testifying to his avid interest for this kind of art. In Mariotti’s inventories, the icons were accompanied by the qualifying word and phrases: “greco” (Greek), “greco-mosco” (Greco-Muscovite), or “opera latina, Scolari dei Greci” (Latin work, [made by] pupils of the Greeks).²⁶

The motivation for Mariotti’s interest was twofold: on the one hand, he wanted to investigate, like many other scholars, the influence of the Greek school on the Latins throughout the Middle Ages; on the other hand, he wanted to study Greek images as testimonies of the Orthodox rites.²⁷ An example of one of his objects that served these purposes is the *Dormition of the Virgin* (*Dormitio Virginis*) painted by Ioannis Moskos (1635/44–1721).²⁸ Archival documents indicate that this icon depicts the *Dormitio Virginis* alongside the scene of the Holy Belt. The Holy Belt (*Sacra Cintola*), regarded as the most significant relic of the city of Prato (Italy), is traditionally believed to be the belt of the Virgin Mary, which she is said to have given to the Apostle Thomas as tangible proof of her Assumption into Heaven. The iconography of this specific icon includes two principal scenes: the Assumption of the Virgin, in which she hands the belt to Saint Thomas, and the *Dormitio Virginis*, depicting the apostles gathered around the Virgin’s lifeless body. This very rare image was analyzed in the book *Specimen ecclesiae Ruthenicæ* (A Model of the Ruthenian Church) by Ignatium Kulczynski (1694–1747).²⁹ Mariotti likely prized this icon due to its inclusion of this specific iconographic detail, which provided evidence of the Orthodox rites. His knowledge of and passion for the Greek language and culture surely contributed as well to his preference for this type of painting, as testified by his translation and analysis of the inscriptions present on the icons that Mariotti reproduced in his manuscripts.

However, even if the interest in the rites of the Orthodox Church drove Mariotti’s collection of Greek icons and paintings, he was also increasingly drawn to the aesthetics of Eastern art. During the eighteenth century, in Italy as well as in other countries, there was a growing fascination with the works of the Middle Ages, including those of the Greek style. This revaluation was also motivated by authors such as Luigi Lanzi (1732–

1810) and Guglielmo Della Valle (1746–1805). They were both interested in Byzantine art because they wanted to reconstruct the genesis of Italy's pictorial history, starting from the influences of the Greek school and demonstrating how Italian art evolved to achieve different pictorial results. It is no coincidence that these authors both knew Mariotti's collection, as they visited his apartment for study on different occasions. Indeed, in 1792, in his *Lettere Senesi sopra le belle arti* (Sanesi Letters on the Fine Arts) (fig. 1), Della Valle said of Mariotti's collection, "Greek paintings differ from Latin ones not only for the different Greek or Latin letters affixed to them, but also for the totally different way [of being painted]."³⁰ Lanzi, in his *Taccuini* (Notebooks) of 1794, focused on Christian objects, and specifically on the icons in Mariotti's collection. He described a triptych representing the Baptism of Christ, the Crucifixion, and the Saints John the Baptist, Mark, and Nicholas as

very beautiful with preserved folds [of the drapery], very reasonable faces and nudes, but with ugly hands and too thin feet. In the Baptism of Our Lord represented as in certain mosaics and bas-reliefs, the water is represented by parallel lines, one above the other, Saint John with camel clothes, the angel who holds the garments. . . . They are believed to be works of Italians, disciples of the Greeks.³¹



Fig. 1 Guglielmo della Valle, *Lettere Senesi sopra le Belle Arti*, Volume 1 (Venice, 1782).

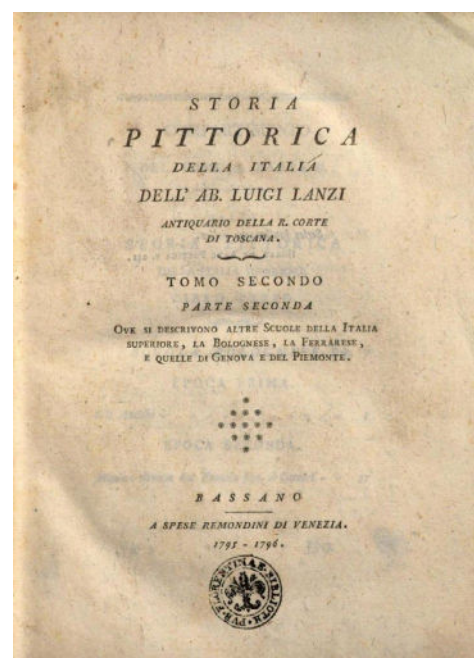


Fig. 2 Luigi Lanzi, *Storia pittorica d'Italia*, 2 volumes (Bassano, 1795-1796).

These considerations were also publicized in his best-known text, *Storia pittorica d'Italia* (The Pictorial History of Italy), published between 1795 and 1796 (fig. 2).³²

Nevertheless, Lanzi seems to not have accepted the eleventh or twelfth century date put forward by Mariotti for this triptych because, as we can read in *Storia pittorica d'Italia*, "among the paintings defined as Greco-Muscovite, some are of good quality, [there is] beautiful architecture, they all have a good balance of colors, the feet are well placed . . . I think they are however more recent."³³ Today, the triptych is identified as belonging to the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Overall, Mariotti's proposed dates for his objects were often inaccurate and generally too early, reflecting the Western assumption that the "Greek" style remained static over time. This notion also attracted the attention of Seroux d'Agincourt, who devoted part of his *Histoire de l'art* to the evolution of the styles of the Greek and Latin schools, emphasizing the influence of the former on the latter, and often assuming that Greek art always came first. As evidence for this theory, the French historian studied several works, including the aforementioned *Dormitio Virginis* by Ioannis Moskos.³⁴ The interest in Byzantine art reflects an eagerness for knowledge and connoisseurship of Eastern styles among 18th-century scholars—albeit their conclusions were shaped by their limitations.

A list of the thirty-five icons in the Mariotti collection reveals his fascination with various image types, as well as his largely incorrect dating:

1. Ioannis Moskos, *Dormitio Virginis*, Mariotti dated to eighteenth century, now dated seventeenth or eighteenth century;

2–4. Panels from a triptych, Mariotti dated eleventh to twelfth century, now dated sixteenth or seventeenth century:

- *The Baptism of Jesus Christ, by the Latin pupils of the Greeks;*
- *The Crucifixion with Madonna and Saint John the Evangelist;*
- *Saint John the Baptist with Saints Mark and Nicholas;*

5. *The Five Doctors of the Eastern Church (Saints Anastasius, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Cyril)*, Mariotti dated to eight century (fig. 3);³⁵

6. *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskeva, Helen, and Photini*, Mariotti dated between the tenth and eleventh century, now dated to the sixteenth century (fig. 4);

7. *The Deesis*, Mariotti dated between the tenth and eleventh century, now dated to the seventeenth century (fig. 5);

8–9. *Moses and Melchizedek*, Mariotti dated to twelfth century, now dated between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries;

10. *The Annunciation and Selected Saints*, inscribed with the date 1551;

11. Giovanni Panalopolo, *Jesus Christ, the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist*, inscribed with the date 1743;

12–17. Six icons of the *Virgin and Child*, without further details;

18–20. Three icons of the *Virgin Mary*, without further details;

21. *Dormitio Virginis*;

22. A triptych in a silver riza with only the heads of the Virgin, Child, and various saints visible;

23. *The Adoration of the Magi*;

24. *Christ Child Holding the World in His Hand*;

25. A triptych with Christ, the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist in the center, and Saints Nicholas of Bari and Maximus on the sides;

26. *Christ the Savior Holding the Gospels*;

27. *Christ the High Priest*;

28. *Christ and the Adulteress*;

29. *The Ascension of the Lord with the Virgin and Apostles*;

30. A triptych with Saint John the Baptist in the center;

31. An icon of Saints John the Baptist, Anthony, George, and Catherine;

32. *The Angels Burying Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai*;

33. An icon of Saint Catherine, the Virgin, and an unidentified martyr;

34. *Saint George on Horseback*;

35. A small icon with Greek bishops.



Fig. 3 Cretan school, *Five Doctors of the Eastern Church*, 17th century, Vatican Museums, inv. 40089.



Fig. 4 Cretan school, *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskevi, Helen and Photini*, 16th century, Vatican Museums, inv. 40074.



Fig. 5 Russian school, *Deesis*, 17th century, Vatican Museums, inv. 40050.

Besides these icons, Mariotti also owned other works of Greek art, among them eighteen wooden objects. The vast majority were small items, including diptychs, triptychs and crosses that depicted stories from the life of Christ or the apostles.³⁶ This group included four crosses, two ovals, and a *busso traforato* (perforated boxwood), all from the monasteries on Mount Athos.³⁷ A boxwood heart “ben lavorato, ed intagliato finissimo” (well worked and very finely carved), was decorated on one side with the image of the Virgin and on the other with a saint.³⁸ Another crucifix was considered a “latina” (Latin) work, but it was so beautiful that “it does not have to envy the other [works] described above from Greece”.³⁹ It is also important to mention one diptych that was described in the third volume of the history of Benevento written by Cardinal Stefano Borgia,

who commissioned an engraving of it by Pietro Leone Bombelli (1737–1809). Mariotti’s collection was mentioned in connection with this piece: “a fine example of a wooden Greek diptych that the lawyer and scholar Agostino Mariotti owns in Rome along with various other sacred antiquities.”⁴⁰ In this text, the cardinal uses Bombelli’s engraving as a parallel to explain the iconography of the birth of Jesus depicted on the door of the cathedral of Benevento.

An overview of Greek objects from Mariotti’s collection should also mention the book *Fragmentum troparii graeci*, a copy of a Byzantine troparion, or short hymn, which was yet another testimony of the Orthodox rites for its collector.⁴¹

From A Roman Palace to the Vatican Museums

Thanks to documents found in the Vatican archives, we can reconstruct the events surrounding the dispersal of the collection when Mariotti passed away in 1806. All the objects passed by inheritance to Mariotti’s sister, Apollonia (dates unknown), and to his brother-in-law, Donato Luparelli (d. 1818). A few months after Donato’s death, Apollonia decided to sell her brother’s whole collection and started negotiations with the Vatican, which immediately showed a pronounced interest in some of the objects. The first document that mentions the sale, dated February 12, 1819, was drafted by Abbot Giuseppe Lelli (d. 1821) and Filippo Aurelio Visconti (1854–1831), the emissaries of Pope Pius VII Chiaramonti (r. 1800–1823).⁴² Lelli had known Mariotti directly because

the lawyer had estimated some valuable objects from Lelli's own collection.⁴³ Visconti had succeeded his father, Giovanni Battista (1722–1784), as director of the Pio-Clementino Museum and was therefore very familiar with the pope's collections.⁴⁴ The list they compiled of works they wished to purchase includes 419 objects accompanied by brief descriptions, as well as their estimations (see table below). From this list, we can see how the pope's art experts favored Christian coins, medals, and series of lead seals, a category that made up more than half of the objects they wished to purchase, constituting 242 pieces (57.8 percent of the listed items). The second most represented category is icons and paintings, numbering 99 objects, or 23.6 percent of the total.

These data help us understand the interests of the papal collections. The focus on the series of lead seals, for example, can be explained by the rarity of having complete series with all the pieces extant. In addition, some seals were considered rare or extremely rare. As for the other coins and medals, they likely helped complete series already present in the papal collection. The interest in Mariotti's paintings, however, was more linked to the history of the collections of the Vatican Museums. The Treaty of Tolentino of 1797 and the period of the Roman Republic (1798–99) had resulted in the dispersal of the pope's collections and the loss of many masterpieces. Napoleon's military campaigns in Italy led to the occupation of the Papal States, and under the Treaty of Tolentino, the pope was forced to cede territory, pay heavy reparations, and surrender many valuable artworks, which were transported to France.⁴⁵ After the fall of Napoleon (1769–1821), some confiscated pieces returned to Rome, and the pope continued to expand his collections with new acquisitions. The section of his museum dedicated to "primitive" artists (namely artists who were active in the century and a half between Giotto and Raphael) was still very limited, although this type of work was already present in many private Italian and European collections and enjoyed a growing popularity. The Pacca Edict,⁴⁶ published in April 1820, highlights this change of taste and reveals that the categories neglected previously by the pontifical authorities were now officially recognized as worthy of being safeguarded, including all the works that "can illustrate the decadence, the resurrection, and the history of the arts"—meaning that premodern art was now considered important.⁴⁷ For this reason, from 1819 to 1820, the pope decided to purchase the icons and works of "primitive" artists of the Mariotti collection with the aim of decorating the rooms of the Vatican library. The pope was also interested in his frescoes, engraved stones, and miscellaneous objects and acquired a total of seventy-eight pieces.

A breakdown of Lelli and Visconti's list for papal acquisitions allows us to draw four main conclusions:

1. Icons made up a large number of the paintings from the Lelli-Visconti list, comprising twenty-nine items out of a total of ninety-nine (29.3 percent);

2. Paintings dated to the fourteenth (nineteen works), fifteenth (seventeen works), and sixteenth centuries (eleven works), numbering forty-seven in sum, constituted almost half of the entries (47.5 percent);

3. A sizeable part of the budget allocated to painting acquisition was spent on the icons (448.50 *scudi romani* [40.9 percent]), followed by early Renaissance paintings from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (respectively, 307 *scudi romani* [28 percent] and 117 *scudi romani* [10.7 percent]).

4. The average price paid for an icon was 15.47 *scudi romani*, second only to that paid for a painting from the fourteenth century (16.16 *scudi romani*).

Most of the twenty-nine icons purchased from the Mariotti collection were small in size, but the most expensive was the large altar triptych with the *Annunciation and Selected Saints* of 1551, valued at 80 *scudi romani*, followed by the *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskevi, Helen, and Photini*, estimated at 40 *scudi romani*. Four other icons were each estimated at 30 *scudi romani*, such as the *Dormition* by Ioannis Moskos, the *Five Doctors of the Eastern Church*, the panel with *Moses*, and an icon of the *Virgin Mary*. The pope's collection already boasted a respectable number of icons thanks to the donation of Francesco Vettori before 1757, and the additions from Mariotti's collection were intended to help fill in the last chronological and iconographic gaps.

While the archival sources enable a general reconstruction of the collecting preferences of the pope's emissaries, there is only sufficient information in a few cases to reconstruct the history of individual icons. Regrettably, it is impossible to trace the current location of the entirety of these twenty-nine icons; however, the location of the triptych with the *Baptism of Jesus Christ, the Crucifixion, and Saints John the Baptist, Mark, and Nicholas*, the *Five Doctors of the Eastern Church*, the *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskevi, Helen, and Photini*, and the pair of panels representing *Moses and Melchizedek* is known.⁴⁸

The paintings and the icons purchased from Mariotti's collection joined the rooms of the Christian Museum when they entered the papal collection. However, they would not remain there very long, as over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Vatican Museums underwent many changes, with much rearrangement of the galleries and relocation of the objects. Why they were displayed in these rooms rather than in the museum's picture halls, which would have been the most obvious choice, is something of a mystery. At the time, the works of "primitive" artists and icons were regarded primarily as testimonies of the medieval Christian past, whereas the picture gallery showcased the most important modern works in the Vatican Museums, such as

paintings by Raphael (1483–1520) and Caravaggio (1571–1610).⁴⁹

An important change took place with the 1837 inauguration of the room of paintings of the Middle Ages, commissioned by Pope Gregory XVI Cappellari (r. 1831–46). On this occasion, some of Mariotti's paintings were moved from the Christian Museum to that new location, which is currently known as the Sala degli Indirizzi (Addresses Room).⁵⁰ The objects here were displayed in twenty cabinets made by Raffaele Stern (1774–1820) in 1820.⁵¹ This arrangement was much appreciated by the pope's contemporaries, including Antonio Nibby (1792–1839) who, in 1838, celebrated the new opening in his guide to Rome:

Returning to the hall of ancient paintings, embellished on the high walls with frescoes by Professor Filippo Cavaliere Agricola, you can see around the cabinets rich in American wood, equipped with crystals, made with beautiful architecture and decorated with gilding. Within them are, jealously guarded, many rare paintings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most of them on panel and all with sacred subjects. These very valuable paintings, excluding a few, come from Mariotti's museum, and Pope Gregory XVI had them cleaned and decorated with rich frames and here placed and arranged them in a beautiful order.⁵²

Thus, thirty years after his death, Mariotti's collection continued to interest scholars and art lovers. The investment of the Vatican in Byzantine, or "Greco-Russian," art prompted Monsignor Gabriele Laureani (1788–1849), *primo custode* of the Vatican Library, to assemble in the Sacred Museum "a precious collection of the most ancient images of the Christian rite."⁵³ The upheavals and changes in the museum's internal structuring in 1854, due to Giuseppe Marchi (1795–1860) and his pupil Giovanni Battista De Rossi (1822–1894), were also recalled by the text of Canon Xavier Barbier de Montault (1830–1901), published in 1867 and devoted to the artworks in the various rooms of the Vatican Museums.⁵⁴ According to this guide, immediately after the library, the visitor entered the room of the Museo Sacro, whose objects were divided into three major periods and displayed in six cases and eighteen cabinets. Here viewers encountered "first of all, the Latin art of the catacombs or of the first centuries; [then] the art of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and modern times; and finally Byzantine art, which, having a distinct character, was not to be confused with the art of the West."⁵⁵ These latter works were divided according to the material from which they were produced: "We have different categories for goldsmithing, silverware, bronze, enameling, ivory, ceramic, glyptic, numismatic, painting, etc."⁵⁶

The arrangement of the showcases and cupboards still forms a geometric partition today, with the cabinets (three per side) separating the eighteen cupboards (nine per

side) in groups of three. The Byzantine section continues to present some works that belonged to Mariotti. We find the icons of the *Five Doctors of the Eastern Church*, the *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskevi, Helen, and Photini*, and the two Greek paintings of *Moses* and *Melchizedek*. At the start of the twentieth century, further changes disrupted the pope's museums, starting with the Pinacoteca during the pontificate of Pius X Sarto (r. 1903–14). In 1909, he decided to add paintings from the Middle Ages to the picture gallery and to move all of the collections to the ground floor of the Apostolic Palace, into the seven large rooms of the Belvedere corridor, the so-called Bramante Gallery. However, because of the direct sunlight on the works, this arrangement was not retained for long.

The paintings found their current place in the building constructed in 1930–31 by Luca Beltrami (1854–1933), the architect of Pope Pius XI Ratti (r. 1922–39). This new space, opened in 1932, consists of two floors: the lower one houses the conservation and restoration laboratories, the photography cabinet, the depository, and the administration offices. Upstairs is the gallery, following the same ground plan. The new rooms of the Pinacoteca still preserve the layout of 1932, but a chronological arrangement is now privileged over an organization by schools. In addition to these works, this new arrangement was accompanied by the first-ever exhibition to the public of a large number of paintings that were hitherto inaccessible, namely: a set of Byzantine and Russian icons; other paintings from “primitive” artists; panels from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries; as well as a number of works previously displayed in the pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. This display brought on view artworks that had previously been in the pope's private apartments, the offices of the papal administration, or stored in the depository. The change made it possible to appreciate a large selection of the works preserved in the Vatican and several paintings from the Mariotti collection, which are still exhibited alongside other pieces of the papal collections.

Among the pieces of Mariotti's collection, we know the current location of six of them. In Room XVIII: Fifteenth to Nineteenth Century (Icon Room), are the *Five Doctors of the Eastern Church* (display case 7/c, inv. no. 40089), the *Virgin and Child with Saints Anne, Paraskevi, Helen, and Photini* (display case 7/b, inv. no. 40074), and the *Deesis* (display case 2/a, inv. no. 40050). In the papal private administration rooms or reserves are the triptych with the *Baptism of Jesus Christ, the Crucifixion and Saints John the Baptist, Mark, and Nicholas* (inv. nos. 40034–36), the *Moses* (inv. no. 40892), and the *Melchizedek* (inv. no. 40893).

Conclusions

This study of the Mariotti collection provides insight to the Roman collections of Eastern

art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mariotti's great interest in icons was due to his passion for the Greek language and culture. His training and his acclaim as a Hellenist inspired him to collect this class of objects, then still rare in such large numbers in private collections. Marriotti appreciated both the icons' visual style and their value in documenting Greek devotional practice, hence his attention their inscriptions and iconography. The pope's acquisition of Mariotti's rich collection and its current display in the Vatican Museums indicates the lasting importance of this complex and multifaceted man, who is today almost completely forgotten.

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Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

1 S. Moretti, *Roma bizantina: Opere d'arte dall'impero di Costantinopoli nelle collezioni romane* (Rome: Campisano, 2014). On Mariotti, see G. Previtali, *La fortuna dei primitivi: Da Vasari ai neoclassici* (Torino: Einaudi, [1964]1989), 227nn1–4, 230; F. Todini, "Agostino Mariotti: Un collezionista nella Roma settecentesca," *Antologia di Belle Arti Roma* 13–14 (1980): 27–37; A. Tartuferi and G. Tormen, eds., *La fortuna dei primitivi Tesori d'arte dalle collezioni italiane fra Sette e Ottocento*, exh. cat. (Florence: Giunti, 2014), 35–145; G. Odone, "L'avocat Agostino Mariotti (1724–1806) et son musée, "une des curiosités de Rome" (PhD diss., Université de Lorraine; Università degli studi La Sapienza (Rome), 2020).

2 On the emergence of Byzantine Studies, inclusive of art history, in the sixteenth to eighteenth century, see Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff, eds, *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2021).

3 C. A. Frazee, "Leon Allatios, a Greek Scholar of the Seventeenth Century," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 1 (1985): 64–72; Thomas Cerbu, "Leone Allacci (1587–1669): The Fortunes of an Early Byzantinist," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1986); Karen Hartnup, *"On the Beliefs of the Greeks": Leo Allatios and Popular Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

4 S. Moretti, "Le miniature medievali nel Seicento e nel Settecento fra erudizione, filologia e storia dell'arte," *Rivista di Storia della miniatura* 12 (2008): 147n48.

5 L. Allatius, *De templis graecorum recentioribus* (Rome: Apud Jodocum Kalcovium et socios, 1645). See also Ingo Herklotz, *Apes urbanae: Eruditi, mecenati e artisti nella Roma del Seicento* (Città di Castello, Italy: LuoghInteriori, 2017), 199–211; and, more recently, Camilla S. Fiore, "Il caso di Sant'Atanasio dei Greci a Roma tra universalismo riformato e liturgia greca," in "Constructing Nationhood in Early Modern Rome," eds. Susanne Kubersky-Piredda and Tobias Daniels, special issue of the online journal RIHA.

6 Musée du Louvre, inv. no. OA 9063. A. Héron de Villefosse, "L'ivoire de Peiresc," *Mémoires de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France* 75 (1915–18): 267–95; J. Durand, *Byzance: L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), 63–65; A. Cutler, "Barberiniana: Notes on the Making, Content, and Provenance of Louvre OA. 9063," in *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef Engemann, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* S18 (1993): 329–39; M. Cristini, "Eburnei nuntii: I dittici consolari e la diplomazia imperiale del VI secolo," *Historia*:

Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 68 (2019): 489–520. During the eighteenth century, the ivory was sold together with other objects from the Barberini collection and eventually arrived at the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

7 Mauro della Valle, *Costantinopoli e il suo impero. Arte, architettura, urbanistica nel millennio bizantino* (Milan: Jaca, 2007); G. Pittiglio in I. A. Eliades, ed., *Cipro e l'Italia al tempo di Bisanzio: L'icona grande di San Nicola tis Stegis del XIII secolo restaurata a Roma*, exh. cat. (Rome: Museo Bizantino e Galleria d'Arte, Fondazione Arcivescovo Macario III, Nicosia, 2009), 227–30; S. Moretti, "Viaggio di un trittico eburneo da Costantinopoli a Roma: Note in margine al 'Corpus degli oggetti bizantini in Italia,'" in *La sapienza bizantina: Un secolo di ricerche sulla civiltà di Bisanzio all'Università di Roma* (Rome: Campisano Editore, 2012), 225–44.

8 A. F. Gori and G. B. Passeri, *Thesaurus veterum Diptychorum consularium et ecclesiasticorum* (Florence: Typographia Caietani Albizzini, 1759), ii, table 50.

9 J-B-L-G. Seroux d'Agincourt, *Histoire de l'art par les monuments: Depuis sa décadence au IV siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVI* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1823), 4: table 3.

10 Inv. no. 9178; Moretti, *Roma bizantina*, fig. 26.

11 "una piccola reliquia di varie parti dell'antica basilica." S. Danesi Squarzina, *Caravaggio e i Giustiniani* (Milan: Electa, 2001), 21. See also Moretti, *Roma bizantina*, 74n252.

12 Moretti, *Roma bizantina*, 76nn263–64.

13 L. A. Muratori, *Antiquitates italicae medii aevi*, 6 vols. (Mediolani: ex Typographia Societatis Palatinae in Regia Curia, 1738–43).

14 A. Bosio, *Roma sotterranea opera postuma di Antonio Bosio romano* (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1632). For an in-depth study of the relationship between Bosio and collectors of Christian antiquities, see C. Cecalupo, *Antonio Bosio e i primi collezionisti di antichità cristiane*, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2020).

15 M. Boldetti, *Osservazioni sopra i cimiteri de' santi martiri ed antichi cristiani di Roma* (Rome: Giovanni Maria Salvioni, 1720).

16 G. G. Bottari, *Sculture e pitture sagre estratte dai cimiteri di Roma pubblicate già dagli autori della Roma sotterranea ed ora nuouamente date in luce*, 3 vols. (Rome:

Nella Stamperia Vaticana presso Giovanni Maria Salvioni, 1737–54).

17 B. Sölch, *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die Anfänge öffentlicher Museen in Rom* (Monaco: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007); P. Liverani, "Il 'Museo Ecclesiastico' e dintorni," in *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, ed. Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 207–34.

18 For a study of collections of medieval objects in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rome, see G. Odone, "Passato/Passati: Medioevo ecclesiastico e classicismo artistico a confronto nel Settecento romano," in *L'invenzione del passato nel Settecento*, ed. M. Formica, A. M. Rao, and S. Tatti, (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2022), 103–14.

19 A. de Angelis, "La collezione di primitivi del cardinale Francesco Saverio de Zelada (1717–1801)," *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* 77 (2002): 41–53.

20 On the Borgia collection, see *Le quattro voci del mondo: Arte, culture e saperi nella collezione di Stefano Borgia 1731–1804*, acts of the colloquium, Velletri, Palazzo Comunale, 13–14 May 2000, Electa; *La collezione Borgia: Curiosità e tesori da ogni parte del mondo*, ed. Anna Germano and Marco Nocca, exh. cat. (Naples: Electa, 2001), especially Marco Nocca's article, "Bell'ornamento per la Patria, e un bel decoro per la casa': Stefano Borgia e la sua collezione," pp. 37–53.

21 A librarian and scholar born in Lebanon, Giuseppe Simonio Assemani contributed to the spread of Eastern studies in Italy in the eighteenth century thanks to his writings and collection of Eastern and Greek manuscripts. On the importance of the Maronite College in Rome, see Pierre Raphaël, *Le rôle du Collège maronite romain dans l'orientalisme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Beirut: Université Saint-Joseph, 1950), 123–36.

22 Francesco Vettori possessed several icons in his collection: <https://catalogo.museivaticani.va/index.php/MultiSearch/Index?search=Francesco+Vettori>.

23 Biblioteca Vallicelliana di Roma (BVR), MS Allacci 172, fol. 62.

24 The letter is entirely preserved in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. lat. 9189, fols. 79r–81r.

25 "Anche per natural propensione avuta perfin dalla prima adolescenza alle belle arti, emmi riuscito fare una serie di Pitture, in cui le une dalla venuta del Signore insino a Michelangelo provarono la verità della Religione, e della Storia Ecclesiastica, e le altre da Michelangelo a noi la perfezione del disegno." BAV, Vat. lat. 9187, fol. 108r.

26 Moretti, *Roma bizantina*, 92–95.

- 27 Simona Moretti, *La miniatura medievale nel Seicento e nel Settecento: Fra erudizione, filologia e storia dell'arte*, Storia della miniatura 12 (Florence: Centro Di, 2008), 137–48, esp. 147nn48–49.
- 28 Manolis Chatzidakis and Evgenia Drakopoulou, *Hellēnes zōgraphoi meta tēn halōsē* (1450-1830), 2 vols. (Athens: Kentro Neoellēnikōn Ereunōn, 1987-2010), 2:203–5.
- 29 I. Kulczynski, *Specimen ecclesiae Ruthenicæ, ab origine susceptæ fidei ad nostra usquē tempora in suis captibus seu primatibus Russiæ cum S. Sede apostolica romana* (Paris, 1733).
- 30 “Si distinguono dalle latine le pitture greche non solamente per le diverse lettere o greche o latine appostevi, ma ancora per la maniera totalmente diversa [di essere dipinte].” G. Della Valle, *Lettere Sanesi di un socio dell'Accademia di Fossano sopra le belle arti* (Venice: Presso G. Pasquali, 1782), 1:218.
- 31 “bello molto con pieghe mantenute, volti e nudo assai ragionevoli, ma di brutte mani e piedi troppo esili, in uno il Battesimo di Nostro Signore rappresentato come in certi mosaici e bassorilievi, e l’acqua è rappresentata per via di linee parallele, una sopra l’altra, vedi Giovanni con pelle, l’angelo che tiene le vesti. In altro San Giovanni Battista, in altro la Crocefissione BEATA CRUSIFIXIO [sic] con simil carattere gli altri. Credonsi lavori di Italiani scolari de’ Greci.” Luigi Lanzi, *Taccuini*, 1794, in Biblioteca degli Uffizi (BGU), MS 36,10, fol. 41r.
- 32 “fra le pitture iscritte grecomosche, alcune sono di buon disegno, bell’architetture, di tutte bell’equilibrio di colori, piedi ben collocati . . . le credo però più recenti.” BGU, MS 36,10, fol. 41v.
- 33 BGU, MS 36,10, fol. 41v.
- 34 Seroux d’Agincourt, *Histoire de l’art*, 2:100; n.(a). BAV, Vat. lat. 9189, fol. 46r.
- 35 Mariotti claims to have bought the icon, whose Greek origin is posited by the words “EX BIZANTIO” on the back of the panel, directly from the heirs of the Roman art dealer called “Spagna.” BAV, Vat. lat. 9189, fol. 73v; Antonio Muñoz, *I quadri bizantini della Pinacoteca Vaticana provenienti dalla Biblioteca Vaticana* (Rome: Danesi, 1929), 9, pl. III.2.
- 36 BAV, Arch. bibl. 67, fol. 246v n28; fol. 248v n. 58; fols 252r–v n. 123–32; fol. 261v n. 241, 243; fols. 268r–69r nn. 372, 380–86, 396–99; BAV, Vat. lat. 9189, fol. 15r, 37v, 39r, 40v, 47r, 90v, 101r, 133r, 160r.

37 BAV, Arch. bibl. 67, fol. 268v n. 380–82; fol. 269r n. 396–99; BAV, Vat. lat. 9189, fol. 15r, 37v.

38 BAV, Arch. bibl. 67, fol. 268v n. 386.

39 “non invidia le altre [opere] descritte della Grecia.” BAV, Arch. bibl. 67, fol. 298v n. 385.

40 “bell’esempio in un dittico greco in legno, che con varie altre sacre antichità possiede in Roma l’erudito Avvocato Agostino Mariotti.” Stefano Borgia, *Memorie storiche della pontificia città di Benevento dal secolo VIII al secolo XVIII divise in tre parti raccolte* (Rome: Salomoni, 1769), 3:pl. XLI.

41 We have no information on this book, other than the title. BAV, Arch. bibl. MS 67, fol. 79v n. 20.

42 “Indicazione delle Antichità Sacre della chiara memoria dell’Avvocato Agostino Mariotti, ora della Sig:ra Apollonia Mariotti, vedova Luparelli.” BAV, Arch. bibl. MS 69, fol. 3 r–11r.

43 See S. Moretti, “Sulle tracce di Bizanzio: Due (anzi tre) codici miniati dispersi e ritrovati,” *Rivista di storia della miniatura* 20 (2016): 66nn25–28.

44 On Filippo Aurelio Visconti, see *L’elogio di Filippo Aurelio visconti socio ordinario vice-segretario ed archivista dell’Accademia letto dal socio ordinario Cav. Luigi Cardinali nell’Adunanza tenuta nel di’ 30 aprile 1835*, Atti dell’Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Dissertazioni 6 (Nella Stamperia della R. C. A., 1835), 413–59; D. Gallo, “I Visconti al servizio di papi, della Repubblica e di Napoleone,” *Roma moderna e contemporanea* (January–April 1994): 77–90, at 82n14; Françoise Hamon and Charles MacCallum, ed., *Louis Visconti, 1791–1853*, exh. cat. (Paris: Délégation à l’action artistique de la Ville de Paris, 1991), 48–59, at 51–52.

45 On the relationship between “Repubblica Romana” and the arts, see P. P. Racioppi, “La Repubblica romana e le Belle Arti (1798–99): Dispersione e conservazione del patrimonio artistico,” *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 9, nos. 1–3 (2001): 193–215.

46 *Editto dell’eminentissimo, e reverendissimo Signor Cardinal Pacca Camerlengo di S. Chiesa sopra le Antichità, e gli Scavi* (Rome: Vincenzo Poggiolini Stampatore, 1820). The document was transcribed in Valter Curzi, *Bene culturale e pubblica utilità: Politiche di tutela a Roma tra Ancien Régime e Restaurazione* (Argelato, Italy: Minerva, 2004), 178–86.

47 “possono illustrare il decadimento, il risorgimento, e la Storia delle Arti.” Curzi, *Bene culturale*, no. 20. On the safeguarding works of art in the time of Pius VII and around the Pacca Edict, see Valter Curzi, “Nuova coscienza e uso politico del patrimonio artistico negli anni del pontificato di Pio VII Chiaramonti,” in *L’arte contesa nell’età di Napoleone, Pio VII e Canova*, ed. Roberto Balzani, exh. cat. (Milan: Silvana, 2009), 28–32.

48 Maria Bianco Fiorin, *Icone della Pinacoteca Vaticana* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 15, 28, 31, 34 e 42.

49 In 1820, the collection of the Picture Gallery was formed by the paintings “i più classici ad olio, che in tavola o in tela fecero i più rinomati pittori delle Scuole Italiane” (“the most classic in oil, as well as on board or canvas made by the most renowned painters of the Italian Schools”), and it was housed in the rooms of the Borgia apartment. The list of paintings exhibited at the time, including very few works by “primitive” artists, can be found in Giuseppe Antonio Guattani, *I più celebri quadri delle diverse scuole italiane riuniti nell’appartamento Borgia del Vaticano disegnati ed incisi da Giuseppe Craffonara* (Rome: nella Stamperia de Romanis, 1820).

50 In 1818, during the time of Pope Pius VII, the room was used to temporarily conserve the library of Cardinal De Zelada. Its current name derives from the fact that until Pius XI (r. 1922–39), it housed the homage messages addressed to popes Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) and Pius X (r. 1903–14). Today, this room is part of the Christian Museum and holds a collection of enamel, ivory, and metals objects.

51 Unfortunately, there is no catalogue explaining each showcase. It was only many years later, with the work of Xavier Barbier de Montault in 1867, that we could trace the arrangement of all the works in the twenty cabinets of the room. The Vatican archives hold a manuscript from 1880, written by Carlo Descemet, that contains the list of paintings kept in the twenty cases, but it does not provide any additional information beyond Xavier Barbier de Montault, *La bibliothèque vaticane et ses annexes: Le musée Chrétien, la salle des tableaux du Moyen-Âge, les chambres Borgia, etc.* (Rome: Librairie de Joseph Spithoever, 1867). See also C. Descemet, *Pitture medievali e cristiane custodite nella XX vetrina della Vaticana. Inventario descrittivo compilato dal comm. C. D.* (Rome, 1880).

52 “Tornando poscia nella sala delle pitture antiche, abbellita sull’alto delle pareti con affreschi del professor Filippo cavaliere Agricola, si veggono attorno negli armadii ricchissimi di legno americano, muniti di cristalli, fatti con bella architettura e ornati di dorature. Entro di essi custodisconsi gelosamente molti rari dipinti del secolo XIII, e XIV, la maggior parte in tavola e tutti di sacro argomento. Queste pregevolissime pitture,

poche escluse, provengono dal museo Mariotti ed il regnante Gregorio XVI fattele ripulire ed ornare con ricche cornici qui le ha collocate e disposte con bell'ordine." Antonio Nibby, *Roma nell'anno MDCCCXXXVIII: Parte seconda moderna* (Rome: Tipografia Belle Arti, 1841), 245.

53 "una preziosa raccolta delle più antiche immagini del culto Cristiano." Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai giorni nostri*, XXXII (Venice: Emiliana, 1845), 49:270.

54 Barbier de Montault, *Bibliothèque vaticane et ses annexes*.

55 "tout d'abord l'art latin des catacombes ou des premiers siècles; l'art du Moyen-Âge, de la Renaissance et des temps modernes; enfin l'art byzantin, qui, ayant un cachet à part, devait ne pas être confondu avec l'art de l'Occident." Barbier de Montault, *Bibliothèque vaticane et ses annexes*, 42.

56 "Nous avons des catégories différentes pour l'orfèvrerie, l'argenterie, la bronzerie, l'émaillerie, l'ivoirerie, la céramique, la glyptique, la numismatique, la peinture, etc." Barbier de Montault, *Bibliothèque vaticane et ses annexes*, 42.