

Large Left Panel

«Come Sole frà le Stelle». Christina, queen of Sweden in the documents of Archivio di Stato di Roma

Christina, queen of Sweden was a leading figure in the extraordinary era of Baroque Rome. The documents on display here allow us to retrace her life in the city.

After abdicating the throne in 1654, she converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism. She arrived in the capital in December 1655, at the end of a long journey across Europe.

Rome was the heart of Catholic Christianity, but it was also the symbol of classical antiquity. This idea had helped shape queen's appreciation for beauty. Naturally curious and eager to learn, and a friend to philosophers and writers, even before coming to Italy Christina had already called "Minerva of the North."

Following her triumphant arrival in the Eternal City, she became convinced that Rome was the best place to fulfill the spiritual and intellectual goals she had always cared about. As a result, once her travels in Northern Europe came to an end, she settled permanently in Rome. She dedicated more and more energies and resources to collecting art and supporting the arts, while continuing her studies in philosophy, science, and alchemy.

Christina never stopped feeling like a queen and always kept her own court. Educated and multilingual, she gathered a lively intellectual circle around her at the Palazzo Riario residence. She built connections with key figures of the cultural *milieu* of her time, eventually becoming a cultural reference point for the city both during her life and after her death.

Right Panel

Essential timeline

18 December 1626 – Christina was born in Stockholm, at the Tre Kronor Castle.

16 November 1632 – Gustav II Adolf, Christina's father, died at the Battle of Lützen during the Thirty Years' War.

15 March 1633 – Christina ascended the throne at six years old. The government was entrusted to a regency council headed by Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna.

20 October 1650 – Christina's solemn coronation took place in the Stockholm Cathedral.

6 June 1654 – Official abdication ceremony in favor of her cousin, Charles Gustav, who was crowned Charles X on the same day.

7 June 1654 – Departure from Uppsala Castle. A few days later, Christina left Sweden to begin her journey across Europe.

7 April 1655 – Cardinal Fabio Chigi (1599–1667) was elected pope under the name Alexander VII.

3 November 1655 – Public conversion to the Catholic faith at the Hofkirche in Innsbruck, following her private abjuration of the Lutheran faith in Brussels.

23 December 1655 – Christina's solemn ride through the Porta del Popolo to make her official entry into the city of Rome.

1656 – A plague epidemic broke out in Rome, leading to Christina's temporary move to Paris. She returns to Rome in 1658 and settles in Palazzo Mazzarino.

1660–1662 – Death of Charles X. Christina left Rome once again to travel to Sweden, and from there to Hamburg, where she stayed for a full year.

1663 – Move to Palazzo Riario (later Corsini), on Via della Lungara in Trastevere.

1666–1668 – Second journey to Sweden and Northern European states. After her failed candidacy for the elective throne of Poland, in November 1668 she returned to Rome, where she would stay until her death.

20 June 1667 – Election of Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi (1600–1669) as Pope, taking the name Clement IX.

29 April 1670 – Election of Cardinal Emilio Bonaventura Altieri (1590–1676) as Pope, taking the name Clement X.

1670 – Construction of the Tordinona Theatre.

11 November 1674 – First session of the Royal Academy of queen Christina of Sweden at Palazzo Riario.

1675 – Jubilee for the Holy Year of 1675.

21 September 1676 – Election of Cardinal Benedetto Erba Odescalchi (1611–1689) as Pope, taking the name Innocent XI.

19 April 1689 – Death of Christina at Palazzo Riario, at the age of 62.

Display Case 1 on the left, entering the Alessandrina

(exterior exhibition panel)

Rome, the landing place of a golden exile

Pope Alexander VII, born Fabio Chigi, wanted Christina's conversion to Catholicism and her arrival in Rome to be celebrated as a true triumph for the Catholic Church and a public display of its power. Therefore, her entry was carefully planned, following the tradition of grand Baroque ceremonies.

Christina officially entered the city on 23 December 1655, through Porta del Popolo. The gate was richly decorated for the occasion by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who had carved near the top the inscription "For a happy and auspicious entry in the year of our Lord 1655".

The entire city became a stage for the solemn celebration: streets and palaces were decorated and illuminated, and crowds of people came out to warmly welcome the queen.

After the lavish festivities, Christina returned to the Vatican, where she was temporarily housed in the Gregorian Tower, and from there, on 26 December, she moved to Palazzo Farnese as a guest of the Duke of Parma, Ranuccio II.

Display Case 2 on the left, entering the Alessandrina

(exterior exhibition panel)

Christina's life in Rome, social relationship

Archival documents reveal the profile of a woman who played a prominent role in the cultural and social life of the capital. She was also a discerning patron of the arts, consistently supporting poets, musicians, artists, and scientists.

At her residence in Palazzo Riario, located in the Trastevere district just a short distance from the Tiber, Christina experienced a period of remarkable cultural vitality. From 1674 onward, the palace hosted the learned conferences of the Royal Academy, as well as parties, concerts, and theatrical performances.

Her charisma and exceptional social standing enabled her to cultivate an extensive network of relationships that extended well beyond the ecclesiastical sphere to include nobles, diplomats, scholars, and artists. Among her most significant friendships was

the one with Cardinal Decio Azzolino, whom she met in 1655 and who would become a constant presence throughout her life.

Display Case 3 on the left, entering the Alessandrina

(exterior exhibition panel)

The life of Christina in Rome, between religious devotion and culture

Acts of devotion, pious works, and participation in religious confraternity were essential parts of Christina's stay in Rome.

She lived through the Jubilee of 1675 with great intensity, visiting religious congregations, taking part in processions, and attending events alongside Pope Clement X, born Emilio Bonaventura Altieri.

In 17th-century Rome, the faith of a converted queen was not a private matter, but had an impact in the public sphere. After initial enthusiasm, also due to her intolerance of rules, the queen's relationships with the popes who succeeded to the papal throne were complex and multifaceted.

Display Case 4 on the left, entering the Alessandrina

(indoor exhibition panel)

The death of a queen

On 19 April 1689, at the age of sixty-two, Christina died at Palazzo Riario, where she had moved in 1663. She had named Cardinal Azzolino as her universal heir and the 'reigning pope' as her executor. Although among her last wishes she had expressed the desire to wear only a white robe and to be buried without any 'funeral cortege and any other similar vanity', Pope Innocent XI (born Benedetto Odescalchi) decided that the funeral service should have the solemnity and splendor due to a reigning sovereign.

The funeral was held in the Chiesa Nuova, with the facade draped in mourning and 'above the main door, a coat of arms of Her Majesty of extraordinary size. The church was entirely decorated in black, divided between the white of the walls and the black of the fabrics, interspersed with strips of silver and gold cloth. (...) Beneath the vault hung a very large royal crown with four cascades of black cloth' (ASR, *Cartari Febei*, ms. 99). Once the funeral rites were over, she was buried in St. Peter's Basilica, an

honor previously granted only to Matilda of Canossa (1046–1115) and Charlotte of Cyprus (1444–1487).

Display Case 5 on the left, moving clockwise, entering the Alessandrina

(indoor exhibition panel)

The roman music scene in the 17th century

In the 17th century, Rome represented one of the main European centers of musical culture. This culture developed within ecclesiastical institutions, religious congregations, cardinal courts, and aristocratic palaces, encouraging the circulation of both sacred and profane genres.

The spirit of the Counter-Reformation also influenced Roman opera. The melodramas performed in Rome in the early decades of the 17th century dealt with sacred themes, the exaltation of virtues, and the victory over sin, or subjects inspired by mythology or ancient history using refined allegories. However, the set designs in the "Roman school" gradually became more sumptuous, with atmospheres closer to those of the profane cantata. Alongside melodrama, the oratorio developed, dealing with sacred and edifying topics.

At the same time, instrumental music was gaining increasing importance in Italy. Through the work of composers such as Stradella, Scarlatti, Corelli, and Vivaldi, it would eventually contribute to the development and consolidation of the concerto and the sonata, forms that became firmly established by the mid-18th century.

Display Casa 6, moving clockwise, entering the Alessandrina

(exterior exhibition panel)

Teatro Tordinona

In the 17th century, Rome became a place for experimenting with Baroque entertainment. Different genres spread, and above all, opera stood out—a fusion of music and singing, complete with grandiose stage sets and theatrical machinery often designed by great artists like Pietro da Cortona or Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The patronage of the major patrician families and the papal court was crucial.

Theatres were generally located within the palaces of noble families, where musical performances and theatrical plays were regularly staged. Similar entertainments were also held at the residence of queen Christina of Sweden. An exception was the Teatro Tordinona, which became the first public theatre for musical performances in modern Rome. It was established at the queen's request through her secretary, Giacomo d'Alibert, who obtained a building to be converted into a theatre.

Designed by the architect Carlo Fontana, the theatre was built in 1670. It was located on the street that shared its name, along the riverbank, and could be reached both from the river and from the mainland.

Display Case 7 on the left, moving clockwise, heading toward the exit from the Alessandrina on the loggia

(exterior exhibition panel)

Collecting

On her journey to Rome, Christina brought part of her art collections from Sweden. Educated to appreciate beauty from a very young age, she was a tiredless collector.

The first core of her collection came from the war loot gathered first by her father, Gustavus Adolphus, and later by her cousin Charles, during the "Sack of Prague" in 1648, the final act of the Thirty Years' War. This event caused the loss of Prague's "cabinet of curiosities".

In Rome, Christina acquired many precious objects from the ancient world (including gems, medals, and statuary pieces) and the modern world (including paintings, tapestries, and sculptures), turning part of her residence at Palazzo Riario into a precious gallery. Her collections also grew thanks to Giovanni Pietro Bellori, who served as the queen's art antiquarian and librarian.

Display Case 8, last one, on the left, moving clockwise, heading toward the exit from the Alessandrina on the loggia

(exterior exhibition panel)

Books

A versatile scholar and bibliophile, from a young age Christina collected rare manuscripts and books from all over Europe.

Part of her precious collection came from the Prague library, which was looted by Swedish soldiers during the sack of 1648.

The queen brought her library with her on her journey from Sweden to Rome, although her books arrived in the city after the queen did. They were cataloged by Lucas Holstenius, a former librarian of the Vatican Library. Later, Giovanni Pietro Bellori became the queen's librarian. The library, kept at Palazzo Riario, was a meeting place and research center for scholars and academics.

After the death of the queen and Decio Azzolino, which happened in a short span of time, all of Christina's belongings, including her valuable books, were sold or dispersed.

The library was purchased by Pope Alexander VIII, born Pietro Vito Ottoboni (1610-1691). The manuscript codices became the Reginense Collection of the Vatican Library.

“Octagon” Display Case (indoor exhibition panel)

Christina at Sapienza

On 14 January 1656, Christina visited Sapienza. At the time, the architectural complex was not yet complete: the interior of the church of Sant'Ivo was still undecorated, while the attic above the long sides of the courtyard and the Alessandrina Library itself had yet to be completed. The library was finally finished in 1665.

The queen's reception had been carefully planned in accordance with strict ceremonial rules. She was invited to attend several classes at the *Studium* and was presented with a gift of books: 53 volumes written by university professors. Cartari, who had played a central role in organizing the visit in his capacity as dean of the College of Consistorial Advocates, together with members Pier Francesco de' Rossi and Carlo Emanuele Vizzani, accompanied the queen through the university's rooms and spaces.

Cartari himself records that “the sound of trumpets was not approved, nor the scattering of flowers, nor even any [...] decoration that is not customary in Universities.” Instead, it was decided to give her "well-bound" books, which were offered to the queen after being bound at Sapienza's expense (ASR, *Cartari Febei*, ms. 77).