



# VILLA LANTE

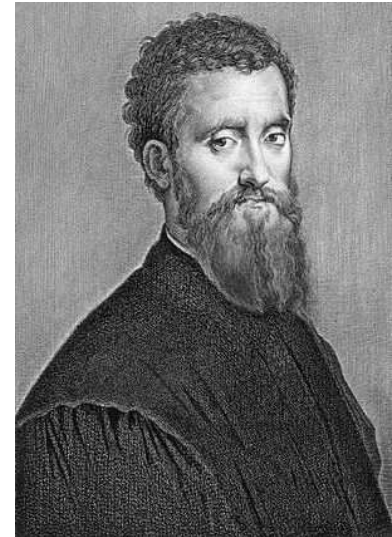
The fascinating history of the Roman seat of the Society of the Sacred Heart

# INTRODUCTION

The events relating to the group of buildings, currently called “Villa Lante”, located in Rome and owned by the Italian Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart, are closely related to those of “Villa Lante al Gianicolo”, a work of Giulio Romano, the most talented Raffaello’s apprentice.

The research carried out has made it possible to establish that the initial nucleus of the Villa Lante was originally part of the suburban villa that Baldassarre Turini, patron of Tuscan origin, owned around the middle of the 16th century on the heights of the *Gianicolo*, and at the time extended, with its territory, as far as *Via della Lungara*. In addition to the so-called “cottage of delights”, designed by Giulio Romano between 1518 and 1539, the perimeter of the villa also included other buildings: support and service structures for the main building, warehouses, shelters for animals and tools used in the care of the gardens and vegetable gardens, houses for the maintenance workers of the complex, and, most probably, a small chapel.

When Turini died in 1551, the entire property was sold by the heirs to the Lante family and later belonged to this noble family of merchants of Sienese origin until 1817. In that year a portion of the estate - the “cottage of delights” and a vineyard - was bought by the Borghese family who, however, in 1837, after only thirty years, preferred to sell it back to the French Barat family.



Giulio Romano, self portrait

# INTRODUCTION

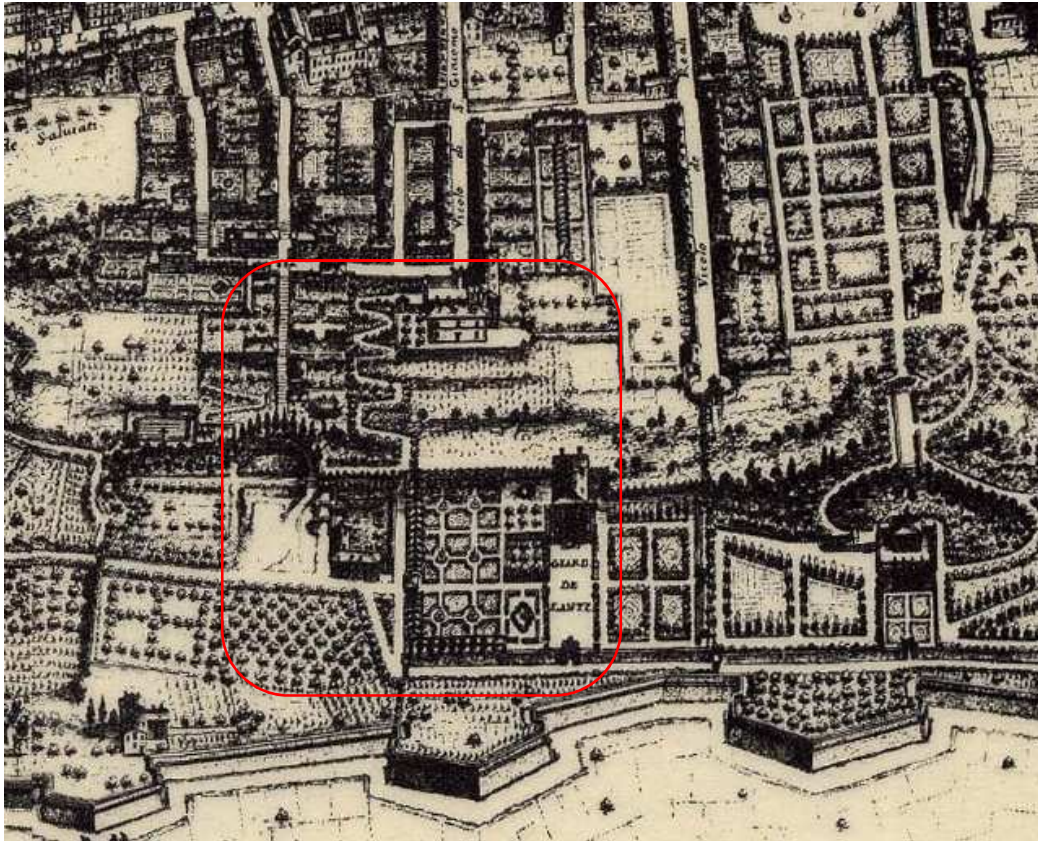
The entire suburban villa was, from that moment on, transformed into the Roman seat of the religious congregation of the “Society of the Sacred Heart”, founded a few years earlier in France by Maddalena Sofia Barat. Since then, the presence of the “Monastery of the Sacred Heart” on the slopes of the *Gianicolo* hill is also testified by most of the plants in Rome dating back to the first half of the 19th century and up to the present day: in particular, in correspondence with the building complex near *Via di San Francesco di Sales*, the words *Dame del Sacro Cuore* (former name of the Congregation) appear almost always.

In spite of the close link between the Monastery of the Sacred Heart and the “Villa Lante al Gianicolo”, the events relating to the latter have been taken into consideration exclusively in support of the study of the former, with reference to the well-known and extensive bibliography available on the subject.

Finally, precisely because of the close link between the two bodies and given the problematic nature of the events relating to the Monastery, it was considered appropriate to base the historical relationship on the original archival material, found mainly in the following archives and libraries in Rome: Capitoline Historical Archive, State Archive, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican Secret Archive, Vicariate Archive, Archive of the IX Department of the Municipality of Rome.



# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE



Giovanni Battista Falda, Plan of Rome, 1676

In some drawings of the seventeenth century - a map preserved in the Vatican Library and the contemporary plan of *Giambattista Falda* - Villa Lante, developed on an area with a very articulated orographic layout, appears extensive, with gardens and orchards surrounding the buildings, from the top of the *Gianicolo* to *Via di San Francesco di Sales*.

As is evident from these ancient documents, the territory of the suburban villa is made up of two sectors identified by two different locations and connected by a long avenue that climbs up the slope of the hill with a sinuous course: the highest area, on the *Gianicolo*, where Giulio Romano's "cottage of delights" emerges and the area below the hill, adjacent to *Via di San Francesco di Sales*, where a large building adjacent to the entrance to the villa on the urban side stands out.

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

Even in the plan of Rome of Nolli, relative to the year 1748, the complex of "Villa Lante" still appears to be characterized by the two buildings that emerge at two different heights, the one at the top of the *Gianicolo* hill and the other close to the urban fabric of the *Trastevere* district. The plan also shows the avenue that joins the two different levels to testify the unity of the agglomeration around the first half of the 18th century.



G.B. Nolli, New plan of Rome, 1748

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

The building near *Via di San Francesco di Sales*, most likely coinciding with the "*altera domu*" mentioned in the deed of sale between the Turini and the Lante family, appears, in the drawings, to consist of two edifices, one of which is set back and developed parallel to the boundary wall of the complex along *Via di San Francesco di Sales*, the other roughly perpendicular to it.

This is probably the body indicated as "*Palazzo Lante alla Longara*" in the contract of sale of part of the villa "for the price of 24,000 *scudi* of Roman currency", stipulated between the Lante and Borghese families on 7 April 1817.

As far as the portion of the estate that was sold - the "cottage of delights" and a vineyard - is concerned, the document, together with its size and value, also describes the boundaries:

"to the east with the property of the fathers of *Sant'Onofrio* and *Palazzo Lante alla Longara*, to the north with the road that goes to the cemetery of *Santo Spirito*, to the west with the road outside *Porta S. Pancrazio* that surrounds the walls and to the south with *Villa Corsini* with buildings of houses, dining room, fountain, avenues, statues (...)"

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

The *Palazzo Lante alla Longara* was later sold to the Duke of Altemps. It is likely in this building, rebuilt on its own grounds and, later, visibly remodeled, restructured and enlarged, that it was partly housed from the first half of the 19th century, as will be seen later, the “Monastery of Villa Lante”, when the family of the founder of the Congregation of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Sister Maddalena Sofia Barat, bought, in 1837, the entire property that once belonged to the Lante della Rovere family.

NUMERO della Mappa	DESCRIZIONE	NATURA	SINT. COGNOME, E GESTORE	SUPERFICIE
Paragrafo	di Frazz.	di Frazz. e Terraz.	di Proprietario	Tarab. Cote.
1238	Via di S. Maria 18	Casa	B. C. Corsini	16
1239	Via di S. Maria 19	Giardino		
1240	Via di S. Maria 20	Casa	idem	8
1241	Via di S. Maria 21	idem	idem	2
1242	Via di S. Maria 22	idem	idem	8
1243	Via di S. Maria 23	Casa	D. Altemps	16
1244	Via di S. Maria 24	idem	idem	1
1245	Via di S. Maria 25	idem	idem	8
1246	Via di S. Maria 26	idem	idem	1
1247	Via di S. Maria 27	idem	idem	8
1248	Via di S. Maria 28	idem	idem	2
1249	Via di S. Maria 29	idem	idem	3

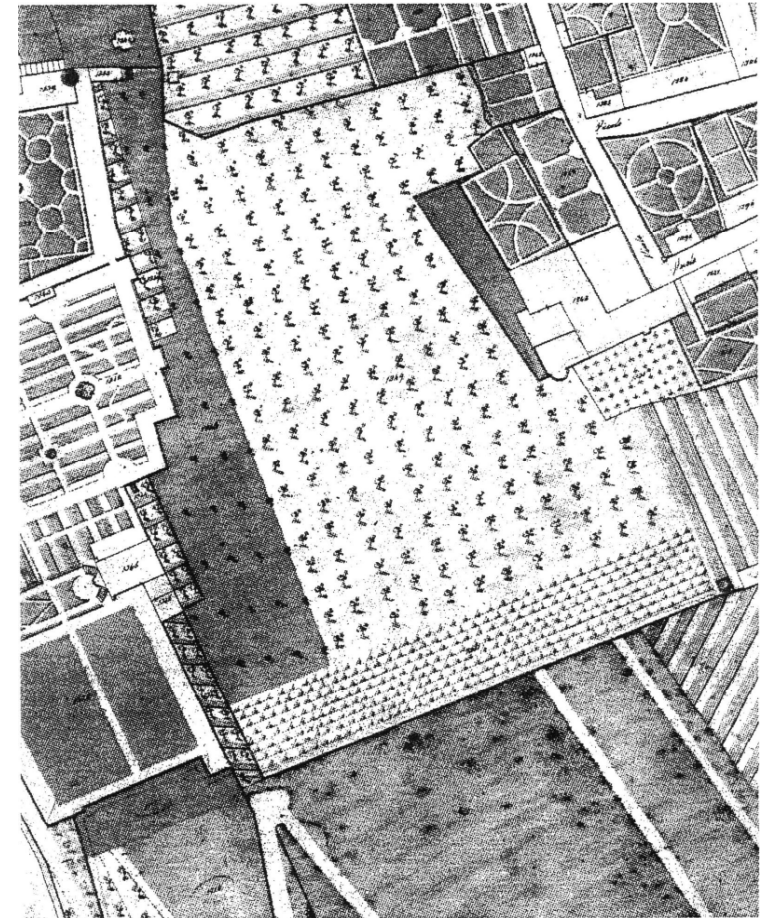
Original “brogliardo” (cadastral registry) of 1819. At number 1243, you can see the owner of the *Palazzo Lante alla Longara*: the Duke of Altemps



# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

In the map of the Urban Cadastre of 1819, two years after the Lante-Borghese sale, the former Lante della Rovere property appears divided into two distinct areas separated by a boundary wall; in this drawing the avenue connecting the upper sector, on the Gianicolo, and the lower sector, adjacent to Via di San Francesco di Sales, has disappeared.

Even the "*brogliardo*" (ancient cadastral registry) relating to the cadastral map, showing the numbers of the parcel and the names of its owners, confirms the separation of the two areas: the "cottage of delights", in *Via del Cemeterio* at number 3, identified by the map number 1345, with the gardens adjacent to it, belongs to Camillo Borghese; the building in the part below the height of the *Gianicolo*, in the cadastral sheet with a Z-shaped plan, located at no. 18, Via di San Francesco di Sales, identified by map number 1243, on four floors and with two gardens attached, is, according to the *brogliardo*, owned by the Duke of Altemps.



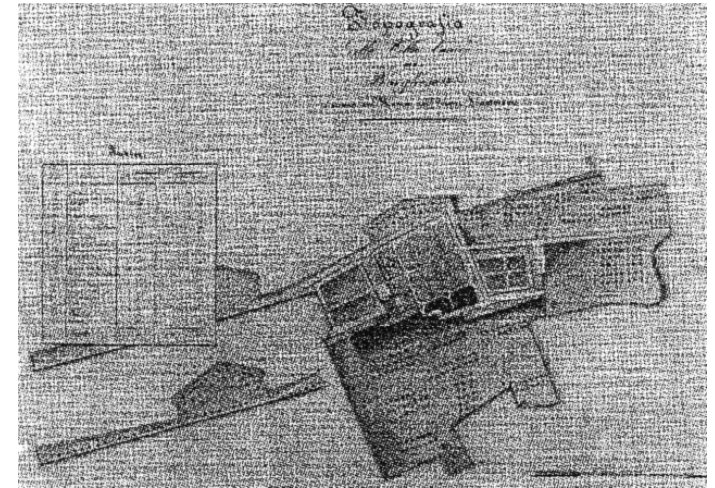
Cadastral map of "Rione XIII Trastevere", sheet 11, 1819  
On the right you can see the *Palazzo Lante alla Longara*; on the left the 'cottage of delights', on the *Gianicolo* Hill.

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

The "Topography of the Villa Lante now Borghese in Rome in the Rione Trastevere" of 1817-37, preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives, also bears witness to this situation: the Borghese property does not, in fact, include the buildings and areas belonging to them, located near Via di San Francesco di Sales.

In May 1837, however, the entire territory that in previous centuries had been part of the Villa Lante, once again reconstituted, was sold, as already mentioned, to the Society of the Sacred Heart, as is also testified by a letter written by Canina, architect of the Borghese family, and dated May, 12th 1837:

"In this year, or rather in these last days, this cottage with the adjoining villa was sold by the Most Excellent Prince Borghese to the Nuns of the Sacred Heart, who wanted to establish a small conservatory of educators there. The paintings, however, in order not to conform to their institutions, were kept by the Most Excellent Prince Borghese, and these, in order not to see them erased or covered with white paint, will be removed from the walls and transported to the Borghese Palace. The Pope, in spite of the opposition of the chamberlain, allowed their removal so as not to see them deteriorate".



Topography of the Villa Lante now Borghese, 1817-37

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

In the beginning, the Society of the Sacred Heart had arranged the novitiate for the young girls sent to the monastic in the “cottage of delights”. Giulio Romano's building was heavily tampered with during this period until the nuns, in 1842, rented it to a painter, Antoine Favard, who enlarged it to build an 'atelier'. Subsequently, in 1888, they rented it to the German archaeologist Wolfgang Helbig, who finally bought the property in 1909.



At the time of the sale between the Borghese and the Barat families, the park of the villa must still have had a very suggestive aspect, as we learn from the Diary of the Villa Lante Institute in May 1837: "The beautiful estate surrounding the house was one of the most pleasant and delightful to see: shady avenues, fountains rich in water and a great copy of citrus fruits and grasses, helped to make it one of the most beautiful stays in Rome".

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

A few years later the nuns had the building near Via di San Francesco di Sales, the *Palazzo Lante alla Longara*, renovated and they moved the novitiate there.

At present the building is composed of two arms, one of which has five floors and the other, developed in front of the main entrance of the Institute, along Via di San Francesco di Sales, of four. Inside some rooms of the building, on the ground floor, first floor and basement level, have vaulted roofs.



The garden front of the five-storey wing currently appears to be without plaster; a peculiarity that made it possible to identify, in part, the materials used for the entire building: solid bricks, with which the stringcourses and the flat bands at the windows were also made; stucco for the sober frames of the openings. In addition, this façade is characterized by two semi-cylindrical turrets, both in bricks with tuff recesses and with roofing, in which there are single lancet windows with stucco frames.

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE



Rome Master Plan, 1883

The perimeter of the suburban villa underwent more than one change over the centuries. In the mid-seventeenth century, during the pontificate of Pope Urbano VIII, due to the construction of the defensive walls for the city - an operation by which the *Gianicolo* was also incorporated within the properly urban area of Rome - the size of the area in front of the building of Giulio Romano, in the part towards the hill, was reduced.

Later, at the end of the 19th century, with the arrangement of the gardens and avenues along the so-called "Promenade of the Gianicolo" provided for in the 1883 Master Plan, the land of the 'parterre' that preceded the "cottage of delights" was further reduced and the access to the villa was reduced to where it still stands today. In 1884 it was precisely the "Monastery of Villa Lante" that was involved in the practice of expropriation of part of its territory 'because of public utility' for the construction of the *Gianicolo* promenade; the operations, as attested by a file kept in the *Archivio Storico Capitolino*, ended in 1910.

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

The expertise on which the expropriation practice is based is an interesting testimony to the situation of the villa around the end of the 19th century. The document, drawn up by the engineers Luigi Amadei, Giulio Buglielli and Pio Piacentini, opens with the "Description of the property formerly Villa Lante" in which it is stated that:

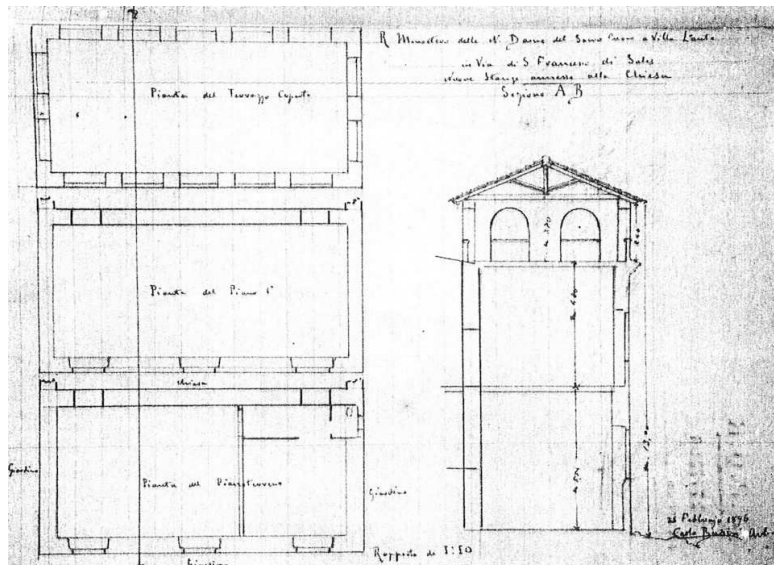
"the former Villa Lante is located in Rome on the right bank of the Tiber in the Gianicolo hill plateau and extends in the eastern slope between the former Villa Corsini and the Oak of the *Tasso* (famous tree under which it is said that the poet Torquato Tasso wrote, in the second part of the 16th century, his epic poem "Jerusalem Delivered". The tree still exists). This villa, it is said, was created at the beginning of the sixteenth century, later passed from the Lante to the Borghese to the Barat and now owned by the heir of the latter, namely Sr. Sofia Maria Rosa Dussaussoy. Now disappeared its ancient lustre that for many years has been lost due to the abandonment in which it was left.

This villa has two different locations, one of which is above the highest and flattest part of the Gianicolo hill; the other extends on the eastern side of the hill itself. The surface of the entire property has the figure of an irregular quadrilateral whose major sides are: the one to the east closed by a hedge and the Monastery of the Society of the Sacred Heart near the Lungara. The one to the west is formed by the ramparts and the interposed curtains, at the foot of which runs along the ring road of Rome. The smaller sides are: the one at *tramontana* ("tramontana" is a cold wind coming from north, formerly used also to indicate the cardinal point) surrounded by walls and hedges and bordered by the buildings of Napoleons and the Asylum. The one at *Mezzodi* (noon, anciently used to indicate south, Ed.) borders on Villa Corsini, now largely owned by the Municipality of Rome. Two driveway entrances give access to this villa, one of which is at the Monastery of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the other in the *pomerio* ("pomerio" is the a belt of sacred terrain close to the walls of the city. According to a tradition dating back to the ancient Romans and even before by the Etruscans, neither living nor farming was allowed in that area) near Porta San Pancrazio.

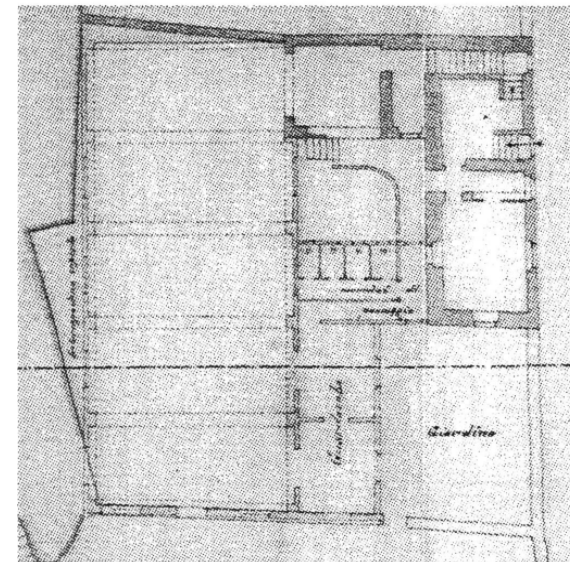
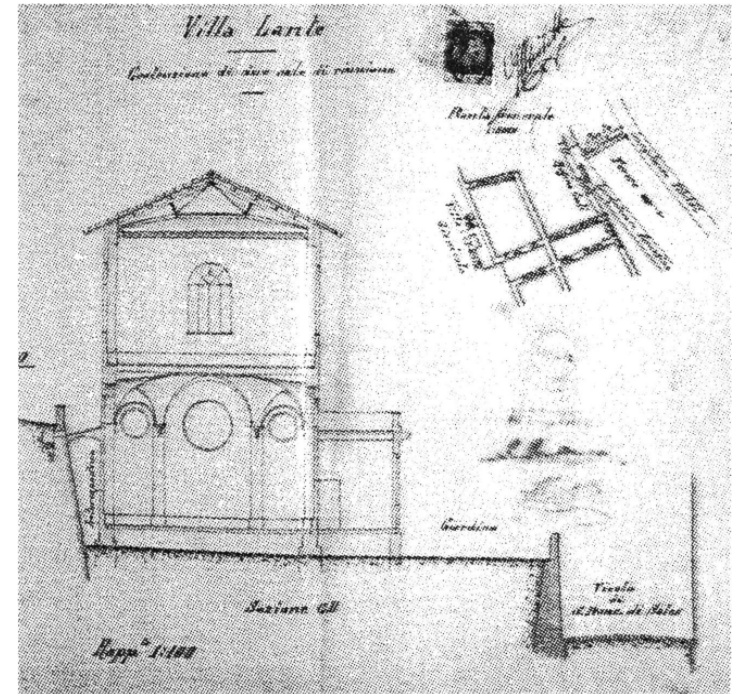
In the high and flat part of the Villa there is the "Cottage of Delights", the work of Giulio Romano, where you can see all of Rome, the Roman countryside surrounding the city, the Tuscolani and Albani hills, and the Sabina and Sabazi Mountains (...). Ornate garden precedes the Cottage, another garden, called secret, vegetable garden, vineyard and lawns are also part of that high floor of the hill where there are buildings for housing animals, for the custody of products and houses of peasants, wash houses and more. At the slope of the hill also extend the vineyard, the vegetable garden and different productions of soil, nor do they lack avenues and places to enjoy the solitude of the countryside".

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

In 1896 it is certain that, as will be seen later on according to another file found in the *Archivio Storico Capitolino*, the Monastery underwent a minor enlargement by Carlo Busiri Vici, which affected the back of the apse of the church. In the early years of the 20th century, through further expansion, the religious complex was also equipped with an oratory designed by Giovan Battista Sciolette. The last intervention, of which we have evidence, is the raising of the body facing the wall along Via di San Francesco di Sales, an intervention carried out in 1947 and signed by Dante Cosimi.



On the left side, the design project made by Carlo Busiri Vici. On the right side, the oratory project of G.B. Sciolette



# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE

The Society of Sacred Heart in Rome was in possession, for some periods, not only of the 'Monastery of Villa Lante', but also of the convent and church of the Most Holy Trinity of the Mountains on the Pincio hill, in 1828, and that of S. Rufina in the Trastevere district, from 1833 to 1917.

According to the Guide to Charities in Rome, published in 1907, the institution of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the early years of the 20th century carried out various activities for the assistance of the needy and owned various properties for this purpose: boarding school and school in Piazza Trinità dei Monti; in the same location there was also a free girls' school where catechism and sewing were taught. In Villa Lante there was a conservatory, a novitiate and a workshop for young workers. In 1907 a boarding school was also in *Via della Lungaretta*, at number 92; this building also housed a free primary school and a nursery school, also free of charge. The activities of the institution must have had a great following and notoriety if between 1911 and 1912 it was decided to expand the Monastery by building an oratory near the surrounding wall of the complex, along *Via di San Francesco di Sales*.

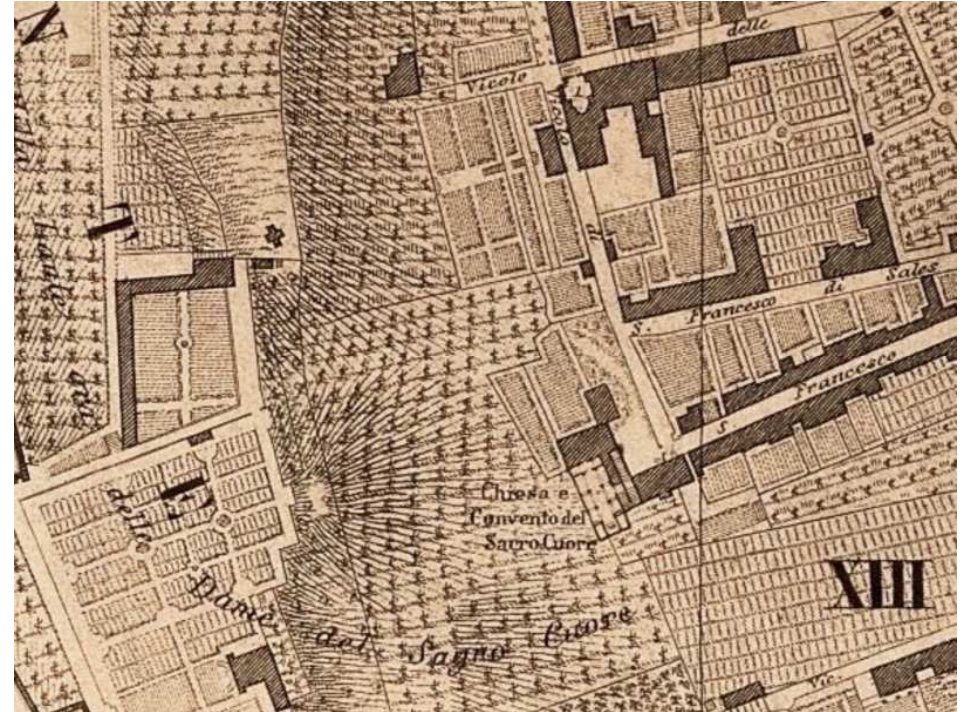


# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE - THE CHURCH

The document of the first years of the 19th century, preserved in the Lante della Rovere Archive and concerning the "Account of the works carried out by Andrea de Marchis Chiavaro at the service of the Lante family" supports the hypothesis of the presence of a chapel inside the suburban complex since it reports some payments made in relation to the "*Villa alla Longara*, especially for the locks on the doors of the kitchen, the cellars, the chapel room".

It is probable that when the Sisters, after having purchased all the former Lante della Rovere fund in 1837, decided, a few years later, to rent the 'cottage of delights' and move permanently to the lower part of the property closer to the city, having the building rearranged at number 18 in Via di San Francesco di Sales, on the same occasion they also had the chapel restored from the beginning, probably annexed to this building.

The builder, although defined in some texts dedicated to the churches of Rome as "architect", was probably a simple master builder named Girolamo Vantaggi, as testified by the Diary of the House of Villa Lante in which he is named "Maestro Vantaggi". He decided to work without any remuneration and with the only compensation to have a chapel inside the church, dedicated to his family, creating the first sacred building in Gothic style in the town, followed by the one of S. Alfonso dei Liguori in via Merulana, completed in 1858.



The church's first appearance in a map, Pontifical Census, 1866

# HISTORY OF VILLA LANTE - THE CHURCH

The chapel was rebuilt between 1842 and 1843, according to the design of two nuns who had conceived a three-nave room, covered with Gothic ribbed vaults, supported by four beamed pillars, with pictorial decorations in branches, according to a floral Gothic style unusual for the churches of Rome:

(...) this unpredictable little church (is) the work of an isolated artist so independent that it remains practically unknown. Its meaning naturally transcends the intrinsic value of architecture, in substance rather poor and rudimentary, yet clear and spontaneous as a natural fact, precisely as the first manifestation in the field of sacred art in Rome of that romantic tendency to return to nature. And it seems to want to accentuate the imaginative use of clearly 'flowery' decorations in the capitals and vaults painted with abundant ramifications that seem to spring from the thin four-lobed pillars as if they were born from tree trunks “.

(C. Ceschi, *The churches of Rome from the beginning of the neoclassical period to 1961*, Florence, 1963, p. 86)

