

A Closer Look at Gianlorenzo Bernini's
Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius

(Senior Thesis Research)

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November 10, 2009

Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), often called “the sculptor of the Roman Baroque” or “the architect of Rome,” was pivotal in shaping the face of Rome during the 17th century, and his impact extends beyond his time to the appearance of Rome today.

Topic: While scholars acknowledge that the sculpture *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius* is important as a transitional piece in Bernini’s oeuvre, they disregard its original importance to Cardinal Borghese and its significance to the Catholic Church.



Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius
(1618-19)
Gianlorenzo Bernini
Marble, 7'2"
Galleria Borghese
Rome, Italy

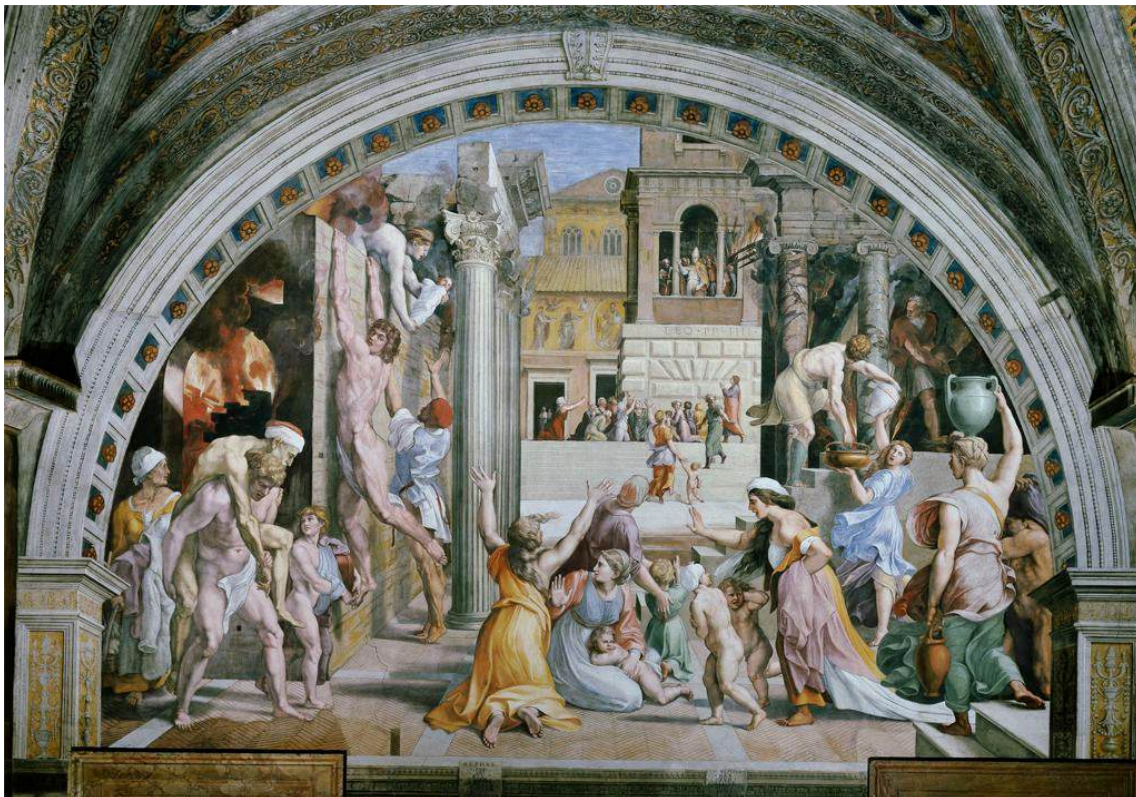
Aeneas' Connection to the Catholic Church:

Aeneas, the protagonist of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, is the legendary founder of Rome, and by extension, the Catholic Church. The image of Aeneas was selected as the subject of additional works

commissioned by the Catholic Church and the Clergy during the Renaissance and Baroque periods.



Aeneas' Flight from Troy
(1598)
Federico Barocci
Oil on Canvas, 179 x 253 cm
Galleria Borghese
Rome, Italy



Fire in the Borgo (1514-17)
Raphael (or his studio)
Fresco
Stanza del Fuoco, Vatican Museum
Rome, Italy



Detail of Aeneas, Anchises, and
Ascanius
Fire in the Borgo

Christian Symbolism in a Mythological Work:

The depiction of Aeneas with his father, Anchises, and his son, Ascanius, symbolizes filial love. The penates, small statues of household gods, symbolize the group's devotion to the gods. Together, filial love and Godly devotion comprise *Caritas*, or charity. According to Paul, charity is the greatest Christian virtue.



Detail of Ascanius
Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius



Detail of Anchises
Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius

Bernini's Adherence to the Original Text:

During the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church stressed the importance of adhering to the original text when producing works of art. While this mainly addressed Biblical texts, this concept can also be applied to Bernini's depiction of Aeneas. If the Catholic Church saw Aeneas as the founder of the Holy City, it would be just as important to follow Virgil's story of the Flight from Troy.

"So come, dear father, climb up onto my shoulders!

I will carry you on my back. This labor of love will never wear me down. Whatever falls us now, we both will share one peril, one path to safety.

Little Iulus [Ascanius], walk beside me...

And you, my father, carry our hearth-gods now, our fathers' sacred vessels. I, just back from war and fresh from slaughter, I must not handle the holy things—it's wrong—not till I cleanse myself in running springs."

- Virgil's *Aeneid*: Book II,
lines 880-895



The Significance of *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius* to Cardinal Borghese:

Cardinal Scipione Borghese was Bernini's earliest patron, and it was the Cardinal who commissioned some of Bernini's first important pieces, such as *Apollo and Daphne*. *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius* was one of Bernini's first Borghese sculptures, but scholars have unfortunately neglected its significance. This negligence could be attributed to the disregard for the statue after the Cardinal's successor, Principe Don Marcantonio, renovated the Stanza di Apollo e Dafne sometime between 1780 and 1785. Originally, *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius* was the first large statue a visitor would see upon entering the room from the chapel (see Diagram II and III). Across from this work, the sculpture *Apollo and Daphne*, like the *Aeneas*, faced into the room. A common misinterpretation is that Bernini's sculptures were meant to be displayed in the center of a room so that it could be viewed from all angles; scholars note that the *Aeneas* sculpture is not meant to be seen in this way. However, the placement of these statues in the center of a room so as to be viewed on all sides was a result of the Prince's remodel and not Bernini's intention.



Bust of Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1632)
Gianlorenzo Bernini
Marble, 78 cm in height
Galleria Borghese
Rome, Italy

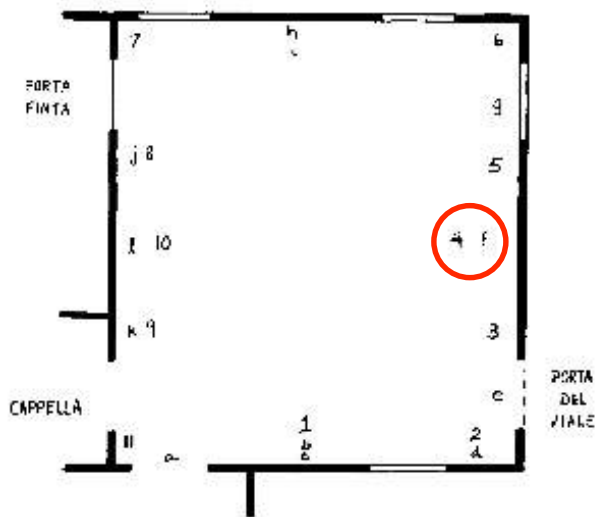


Diagram II Northeast room according to Manilli (author's drawing)

ca. 1650

4. *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*, Bernini

f. *Aeneas' Flight from Troy*, Barocci

(from Joy Kenseth's "Bernini's Borghese Sculptures: Another View" in *The Art Bulletin*)

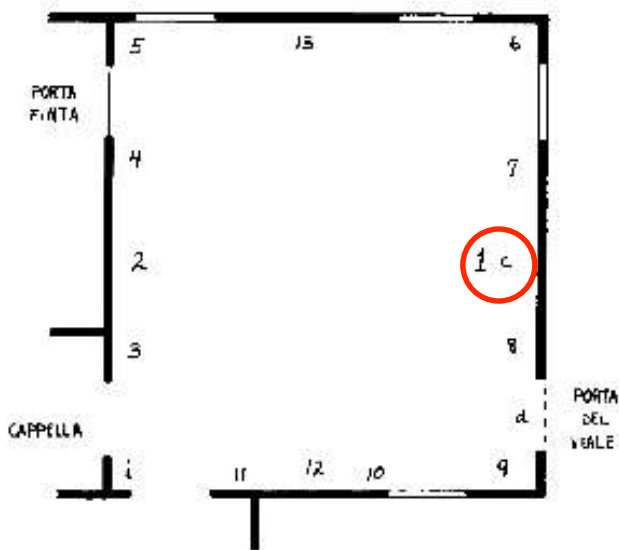


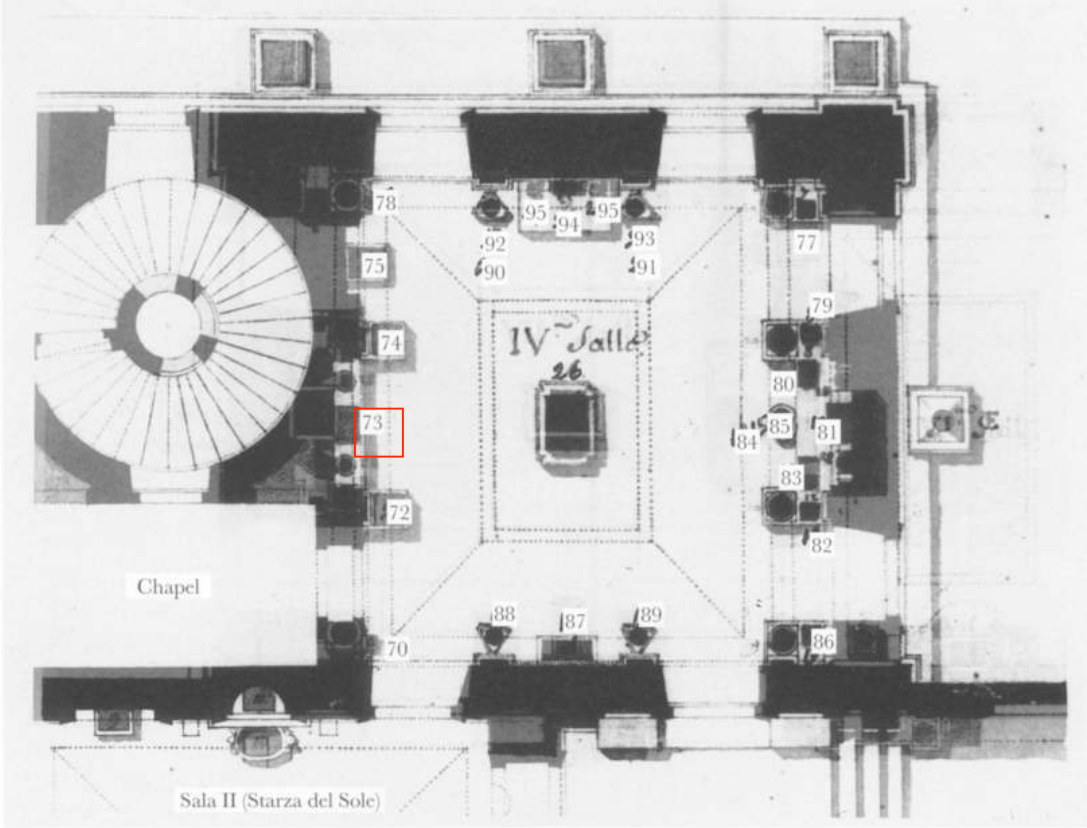
Diagram III Northeast room according to Montelatici (author's drawing)

ca. 1700

1. *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*, Bernini

c. *Aeneas' Flight from Troy*, Barocci

(from Joy Kenseth's "Bernini's Borghese Sculptures: Another View" in *The Art Bulletin*)



64. Ground-plan of the Sala IV (Stanza di Apollo e Dafne) of the Villa Borghese, by Pierre-Adrien Pâris. c.1808 (Bibliothèque Municipale, Besançon). The numbers refer to the Fig. references given in this article.

73. *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*, Bernini

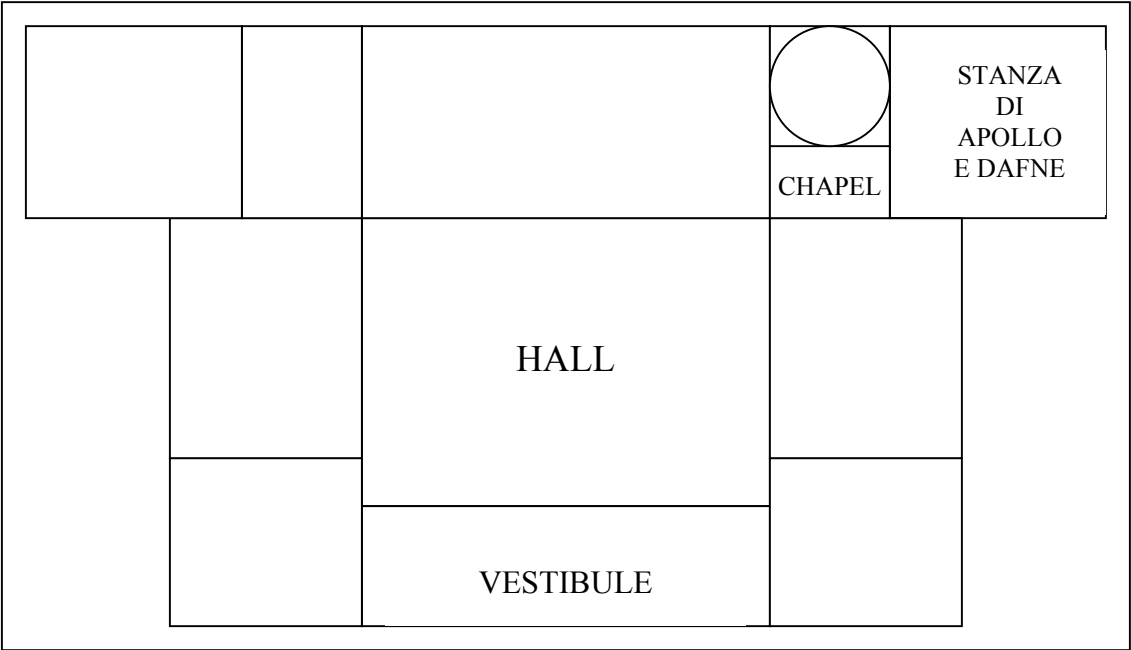


Diagram of the Galleria Borghese



Perspective View of the Stanza di Apollo e Dafne (ca. 1786)

Charles Percier

Watercolor and Pencil, 19.5 cm in diameter

Institut de France, Paris

-This drawing shows the new position of the *Aeneas*, *Anchises*, and *Ascanius* after the renovation of the Stanza di Apollo e Dafne between 1780 and 1785.

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