



PALAZZO MADAMA  
TORINO

PRESS RELEASE

**BAROQUE FEASTS**  
**Ceremonies and pageants at the Court of Savoy between the**  
**Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

**Palazzo Madama, Sala del Senato**  
**April 7<sup>th</sup> – July 5<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**Preview for the press: Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup> at 12 A.M.**  
**Palazzo Madama - Piazza Castello, Torino**

As of the second half of the Sixteenth Century, **the House of Savoy began to reform life at Court, drawing inspiration from the greater European dynasties**, and in particular from the Royal Houses of Spain and France. Trends and amusements were imported, artists and men of letters were invited and precious objects were offered as gifts in order to flaunt the exceptional technical quality of local craftsmanship. **Besides providing entertainment and their being a political metaphor as well as a tool for propaganda, feasts in the Baroque Age** represented important moments in the Dynasty's day-to-day life. Opportunities for celebration stemmed from the calendar of civil and religious holidays (such as Carnival and the exhibition of the Holy Shroud), from special events in the Princes' lives (baptisms, birthdays, weddings, funerals, coronations and triumphant entrances into cities) and from changes of season, with sleigh races in the snow and pageants on river shores and in the gardens of stately homes. **This is where Palazzo Madama's project starts off from.** Based on what the selected works are able to relate about a phenomenon that is irremediably over, the exhibition aims to convey the marvellous sounds and bright colours of an exceptional ritual.

Curated by **Clelia Arnaldi di Balme** and **Franca Varallo**, **the exhibition** originates from **a meticulous investigation on the works preserved in Palazzo Madama**, and in particular on its graphic anthologies and fabric collections. Such investigations identified works relating to Court ceremonies in Piedmont from the second half of the Sixteenth Century to the early Eighteenth Century. **An exhibition path of objects, coming from Italian and foreign historical libraries and archives**, capable of recalling the wealth and sumptuousness of an extraordinary phenomenon, celebrated with impressive yet ephemeral pomp, has been arranged around this initial nucleus. The exhibition is organised in **sections relating to the succession of Savoy Monarchs and to the types of celebrations** held for events such as baptisms, birthdays, betrothals, weddings, receptions of ambassadors and monarchs, military victories and alliances, as well as funerals. Visitors will have the opportunity to appreciate **thirteen manuscripts ascribed to designer and Secretary to the Duke Tommaso Borgonio**, which describe scenes and characters of ballets held in the territories of the House of Savoy between 1640 and 1681. Besides the aforementioned manuscripts, currently preserved in the **Biblioteca Nazionale and Biblioteca Reale in Turin**, the exhibition will present various items of evidence of other kinds of celebrations (fishery festivals, patron saints' days, tournaments and equestrian ballets), such as **musical instruments, parade armours, jewellery, garments and costumes, ceremonial crockery and silverware**. The layout is designed to evoke the

ephemeral pomp of long lost celebrations. Besides displaying various types of works, the exhibition also presents a replica of the “**Joy Boat**” constructed for Madama Reale’s (Princess Royal) birthday, celebrated in Palazzo Madama in 1628, while a Seventeenth Century sleigh evokes the atmosphere of the races held on the snow and described in the festivity reports of those days. Furthermore, a number of **multimedia devices** will allow visitors to examine the pages of the ballet albums in a virtual manner.

**Event planning was a powerful economical and organisational machine** that involved painters, sculptors, scholars, actors, musicians, cooks, tailors, carpenters, animal tamers, pyrotechnicians and hydraulic engineers. A large group of workers, either local or from other courts, formed by intellectuals and craftsmen, made its living on these contracts, extending the resulting economical and cultural benefits to society on the whole.

**Feasts were an out and out metaphor of power**, in which monarchs flaunted a poetic, consistent and official image of their authority. Political ideals and dynastic ambitions were concealed, and emerged, beneath the pretence of a fabulous tale, underneath the sumptuous disguises of fantastic creatures. The personal hallmark left by monarchs in planning such feasts is a surprising yet documented fact. **Charles Emanuel I** wrote out, in his own hand, the invention of a new tournament, *la Selva Incantata (the Enchanted Forest)*, including the names of the knights, with their respective colours, and outlining the points of intersection of their paths on the ground.

Prominent figures of these court pageants were **Marie Christine of France** and her daughter-in-law **Marie Jeanne Baptiste of Savoy-Nemours**. With true feminine intuition the two Princess Royals realized the communicative power of celebrations, exploiting it to their utmost advantage. The contents of these events were carefully controlled and processed, concentrating elegant, though unequivocal, political and dynastic allusions in the messages to be conveyed. On her arrival in Turin, the betrothed bride of Victor Amadeus I, Marie Christine of France brought the French Court’s fad for ballets, documented in Tommaso Borgonio’s exceptional set of finely drawn albums, along with her.

The Monarch and the Court did not attend such performances as spectators, but as actors: playing convenient roles, reflecting Court hierarchy, dressed up in magnificent costumes, singing and dancing in compliance with established choreographies.

At the end of the Seventeenth Century, the second Madama Reale’s approach changed: feasts were no longer, or not only, held inside the Court but extended to the entire town, transformed into a magnificent stage, a setting for flaunting the Duke’s power, which rose to Royal dignity in 1713.

The exhibition has been organized **in conjunction with the Biblioteca Nazionale and Biblioteca Reale in Turin**, who have graciously loaned the complete corpus of the ballet manuscripts that will be on show in its entirety for the first time ever. The exhibition will present works coming from private collections that have never been on show before, providing visitors with the opportunity to discover a vast heritage, usually not accessible to the public for conservation reasons on account of the extreme delicacy of materials (parchment, paper and fabric). A rare occasion also for the Museum, which is given the opportunity to establish investigation and co-operation liaisons with major Decorative Art Museums in Italy and Europe.

In fact, Palazzo Madama was able to count on the extraordinary courtesy of public and private, national and international museums, libraries and collections, such as the **Musée du Louvre** and **Bibliothèque Nationale de France** in Paris; the **Rüstkammer** (Collection of Arms) in Dresden; the

**Castello Sforzesco, Museo del Teatro alla Scala, Biblioteca Braidense, Conservatorio di Musica "Giuseppe Verdi"** in Milan; the **Biblioteca Estense Universitaria** in Modena; the **Accademia Filarmonica** in Verona; **Palazzo Reale, Galleria Sabauda, Armeria Reale, Archivio Storico della Città, Archivio di Stato and Conservatorio Statale "Giuseppe Verdi"** in Turin.

During the Exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to attend a number of **in-depth investigation and entertainment events devised for adults, families, schools, university students and groups**. The project, conceived in conjunction with the **Centre Culturel Français in Turin** and the **French Embassy**, aims to enhance French-Piedmontese relationships in various artistic fields, with a particular focus on the Baroque Age. Scheduled events include concerts, conferences, film screenings, workshops, guided tours and theme dinners.

The **catalogue** presents essays by Franca Varallo, Mercedes Viale Ferrero, Clelia Arnaldi di Balme and Anna Colturato on multidisciplinary aspects of the Baroque feast phenomenon, on various types of ceremonies and pageants and their evolution in time, on the involved workers and music. The appendix lists a repertory of print sources relating to Piedmontese celebrations between the Sixteenth and early Eighteenth Centuries.

**High definition pictures are available for download upon registration in the PRESS section at [www.palazzomadamatorino.it](http://www.palazzomadamatorino.it) or [www.fondazionetorinomusei.it](http://www.fondazionetorinomusei.it)**

**Opening hours:** Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10 A.M to 6 P.M.; closed on Mondays.  
The ticket office closes one hour in advance.

**Entrance fees:** € 7.50, reduced fee € 6.00.

**Information to the public:** +39 011 4433501

**Web sites:** [www.palazzomadamatorino.it](http://www.palazzomadamatorino.it) and [www.fondazionetorinomusei.it](http://www.fondazionetorinomusei.it)

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