

# Sant'Angelo in Pescheria



**Sant'Angelo in Pescheria** is a 16th century conventual, former parish and titular church containing 8th century fabric in the rione Sant'Angelo, which is named after it. The postal address is Via della Tribune di Campitelli 6, but this is the little convent at the back of the church. The front faces Via del Portico d'Ottavia, and the entrance in routine use is on Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria on the left hand side. The dedication is to St Michael the Archangel. [1]

## History

### Portico of Octavia

The church is famous for having a ruined propylaeum or gateway of the Portico of Octavia as its narthex. The Porticus Octaviae was built by the emperor Augustus in honor of his sister, Octavia the Younger, sometime between 33 and 23 BC and replacing a smaller forerunner. Rather than being a simple colonnade as the name implies, it was a temenos enclosure containing two temples and other public institutions, surrounded by colonnaded walks on all four sides and located next to the Theater of Marcellus. The dimensions were 132 by 119 meters. The temples of Jupiter Stator and Juno Regina stood side by side within, honoring the alpha male and female in ancient Rome's god-crew. The complex was burned in 80 AD and was restored, probably by Domitian, and rebuilt again after a second fire in 203 AD by Septimius Severus and Caracalla. The present ruin dates from this latter restoration after the earthquake of 442AD. [1]

The church contains the relics of a set of obscure martyrs, St Symphorosa and her companions. These were associated with a set of catacombs on the Via Tiburtina. The legend attached to these martyrs is entirely fictional, and is a re-writing of the martyrdom of the mother and seven sons in the Second Book of Maccabees. According to the legend, the group consisted of Symphorosa and her seven sons, Crescens, Julian, Nemesius, Primitivus, Justin, Stactus and Eugenius, who were martyred together at Tivoli in the reign of Hadrian. Associated with them were two other earlier martyrs, Zoticus as her husband and Amantius as her brother-in-law. [1]

The relics of these latter martyrs were taken to Sant'Angelo in the 8th century. These relics were rediscovered in a buried casket in 1610, bearing a lead plate with the inscription documenting the discovery. On the wall on the right hand side of the entrance is a long epigraph on a marble slab dated 755, listing a substantial collection of relics held in the church. Hence, we have here the foundation of a church with a diaconia in the mid 8th century, at a time when what was left of the population of the city was abandoning the hills in order to live on the flood-plain of the river. This was because the failure of the aqueducts made the supply of water on the hills problematic. A diaconia was a Church institution for the practice of practical charity, such as giving food to hungry people or the provision of medical services. [1]

### Layout of 8th century church

The first church was built around 755 by the will of the primicerio Theodotus, uncle of Pope Hadrian I. Initially dedicated to St. Paul, however, it was quickly re-dedicated to San Angelo because this is how it is listed in the *Itinerary of Einsiedeln*, which is a pilgrim's guide written at the end of the 8th century. The appellation *in Pescheria* (Latin *in Foro Piscium*) was added by the 12th century, as it occurs in the *Catalogus Camerarii* of 1192. This refers to the fish market, which was possibly first established in the gateway but which spread down the street to the west. [1] [4]

Fabric of the original 8th century church survives in the crypt, and also in the sacristy accommodation flanking the present sanctuary. It is clear that the original church had three apses, the central one being larger. This layout is thought to have derived from the Holy Land originally, and this is the earliest example known in Rome. [1]

Something strange was done to the street frontage of the gateway before the 13th century. There used to be four columns holding up the pediment, but two were removed and replaced with a carefully built brick arch aligning with the entrance of the church. This was very odd, since it left the gateway looking ugly. No satisfactory explanation seems forthcoming for this, although perhaps a powerful person or institution wanted to rob a pair of columns for use elsewhere and was prepared to preserve the gateway instead of demolishing it. [1]

The church was rebuilt some time in the high Middle Ages, around the 13th century, as can be deduced from the evidence of the crypt. [1]

In the late 13th century, a two-story Romanesque campanile was built which unfortunately collapsed in the 17th century. A new bell tower was built in the 19th century restoration. According to the inscription on the edge of the main bell, it was made by **Guidotto Pisano** and was donated in 1291 by Pandolfo Savelli, brother of Honorius III and several times senator of Rome. [4]

In the *Catalogue of Turin* of 1320 the church is listed as a cardinalial diaconal title, with a college of eight secular clerics. By then it was parochial, and an important church pastorally. [1]

In 1347, Cola di Rienzo gathered his forces here before setting off to seize power in Rome and proclaim a republic. His place of birth was close to the church, so he was a parishioner. [1]

### Rebuilding, and the Fishmongers

The Confraternity of Fishmongers (*Università dei Pescivendoli*) adopted it as their church, and appointed **Martino Longhi** to reconstruct the right hand aisle for their use in 1583. The result was the Chapel of St Andrew, since that fisherman apostle was their patron. Later, the fishmongers became dissatisfied with the cramped nature of their chapel and built their own oratory next door, Sant'Andrea dei Pescivendoli. This amounted to a church in its own right, which is now deconsecrated (the interior decoration survives). [1]

The church was mostly rebuilt to its present form in a major restoration, commissioned by Cardinal Andrea Peretti, titular of the church, in 1610, by **Giacomo della Porta**. There was another restoration in 1741. [1]

In 1867, Pope Pius IX commissioned **Alessandro Batocchi** to effect a thorough restoration of the church. This restoration involved the provision of a new campanile, as well as the rebuilding of the apse. Both tasks involved the reconstruction of the priests' house, now the convent. [1]

In 1909, the parish was finally suppressed and the church was given to the Clerics Minor Regular, known as the *Caracciolini*, who moved here from San Lorenzo in Lucina. They remain in charge, hence the church has only been conventual for just over a century in its long history. [1]

In the 20th century, many of the surrounding buildings were demolished to expose the ancient Roman remains. This also involved digging out the ground in front of the church in order to reveal the ancient ground level, which has left the front door hanging in mid-air (a staircase has now been provided). [1]

It is now used by the *Comunità Maria*, a charismatic Marian lay worshipping community. [1]

## Exterior

The fabric of the ancient gateway hides the frontage of the church. The only part visible from the street is the left hand side wall on the Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria. The presbyterium and apse are part of the fabric of the convent, which is on the Via della Tribuna di Campitelli. On the roof of this by the far right hand corner of the church is the 19th century campanile, which in outline is in the form of a miniature church façade with two bell-arches in the first storey and one in the second, and a tiny triangular pediment on top. [1]

On the brick entrance arch are coats of arms of titular cardinals, and on the tympanum of the porch survive remains of frescoes of the 13th century with the Archangel Michael in the center and on the sides the Virgin and another saint, perhaps St. Paul. [4]

The front door is not in the center of the gateway, but off to the right. Also, the major axis of the church is not that of the portico, but angles to the right. The latter oddity especially hints that a street plan had already been laid out in the ruined *Portico of Octavia* when the church was built in the 8th century. [1]

The site of the mediaeval campanile was just to the left of the entrance bay, at the start of the left hand aisle. [1]

## Propylaeum

As mentioned, the ancient *propylaeum* or gateway into the *Portico* was preserved as the approach to the church. [1]

Originally, the gateway was a timber-roofed building with four sides and a flat ceiling. The thoroughfare sides were identical, and each had four large ribbed Corinthian columns assembled from drum sections. At the outer corners are a pair of brick Corinthian pilasters (the technical name for pilasters flanking an entranceway is *antae*). All these support a deep entablature topped by a large triangular pediment. The entablature of the outer side still displays an inscription recording the 203 restoration, and if you look on the inner face of this entablature and the pediment you can tell that the work was done using masonry scavenged from elsewhere (the ancients could not have known, because the ceiling would have hidden the evidence). The side walls are in brick, each with a large archway each which originally gave access to the colonnades running round the *Portico*. The brickwork was originally revetted with marble; the ancient Romans never thought that naked brickwork in architecture was acceptable (unlike some 20th century church restorers in Rome). [1]

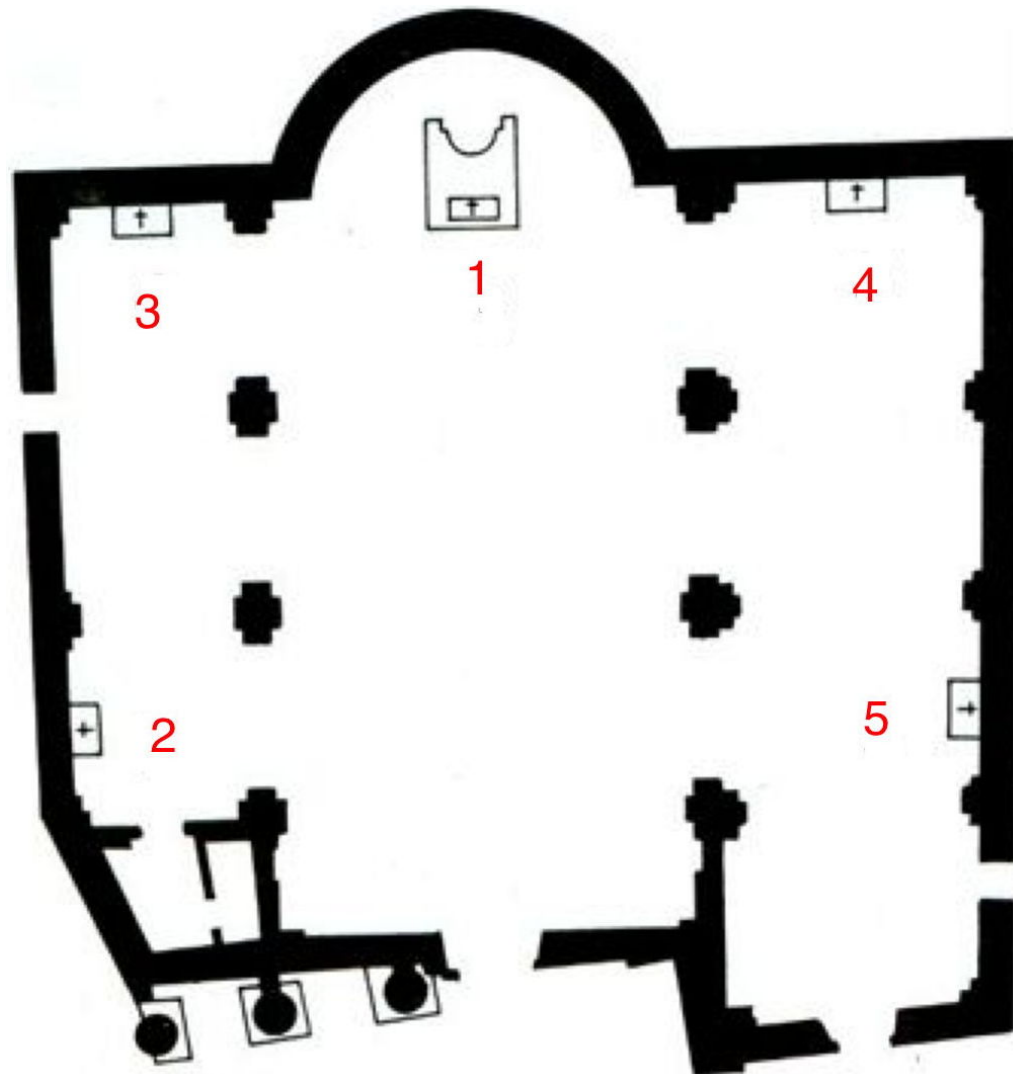
The mysterious mediaeval brick archway, replacing two columns, is well constructed and has a pair of imposts scavenged from Doric pilasters. There are faint traces of frescoes showing coats-of-arms of cardinals on the brickwork of this. Also, in the tympanum of the pediment are remains of 13th century frescoes of St Michael, the Blessed Virgin and St Paul (?). [1]

The carved imposts of the side arches are modern replacements. [1]

The inner frontage of the *propylaeum* is incorporated into the church fabric, which is joined to the right hand side. One of the four pillars here has been removed to make way for the entrance. [1]

By the entrance, there is a plaque on the wall. It explains that the head, and the body up to the pectoral fin, of any fish longer than the plaque was to be given to the city magistrates. The fishes so collected were probably used in the soup kitchens providing food for the poor. This "tax" was in place until 1798. [1]

## Plan



## Interior

The plan is that of a small basilica, with a nave and aisles, and is typical of a mediaeval Roman parish church. After the main entrance there is a single unaisled bay, then three bays with aisles having arcades with two pillars on each side. Then comes a half-bay with side exits, a narrower presbyterium of one shallow bay, and finally an external apse with conch. At the bottom of the right hand aisle is a small room which used to be the baptistery, and which has its own entrance between the ancient gateway and *Santi' Andrea dei Pescivendoli*. [1]

The aisles of the nave are narrower than the nave itself. The aisle arcades have two large pillars each, and each of these has a pilaster in (fake?) grey marble with a rather naïve Ionic capital. Above the entablatures which these support are narrow walkways which run down the sides of the church. The arch imposts are Doric, and their pilasters are in the same sort of grey except for the Chapel of St Andrew in the far right hand corner. [1]

The pilasters of the triumphal arch are in the same style. Tucked away in the corner on each side of these are two exits, to the sacristy and convent. The upper nave walls have four round-headed

windows each, three over the arcade and the fourth over the exit. The walls in between them have 19th century paintwork in heraldic motifs surrounded by fake marbling. There is no ceiling; the trussed and planked roof is open. [1]

The counterfaçade has a gallery bearing what is apparently the original organ installed in the 18th century restoration; it is not now playable, as can be seen from the state of the pipes. Below, to one side of the entrance door, is the Epigraph of Theodotus. Above, the odd bit of carved masonry sticking out of the wall is part of the ancient gateway. [1]

### Sanctuary

The high altar (1) is brought forward to the presbyterium. It is decorated with the coats of arms of Pope Pius IX and covers an allegedly paleo-christian marble sarcophagus installed in the 19th century restoration, which has two flying angels in relief holding onto a pierced wreath containing a Chi-Rho symbol. The piercing allows you to see inside, where some relics of the martyrs Cyrus and John of Alexandria are enshrined. These were originally brought to Rome and enshrined in the suburban church of Santa Passera, but were kept in this church from the 14th century until 1600 when they were taken to Naples. It is believed that the relics here, brought back in 1867 are of Cyrus rather than of John. [1]

Near the altar is a little grated loculus which contains the relics of SS Symphorosa and companions. [1]

The apse is 19th century, with fake painted hexagonal coffering containing rosettes in the conch. Behind, a set of wooden choir stalls runs round the apse. The altarpiece of *St Michael Defeating the Devil* is a copy, signed by the **Angelo Augero**, of Guido Reni's painting in Santa Maria della Concezione, and he replaced a Saint Michael of the Cavalier d'Arpino school. [1] [3]

On the presbyterium walls flanking the altar are two 19th century paintings of *St Francis Caracciolo*, founder of the Clerics. The oil on canvas paintings are by **Francesco Manno**, dated 1808. They come from the church of S. Lorenzo in Lucina, probably commissioned to celebrate the canonization of the saint of 24 May 1807. [2]

### Chapel of the Crucifix (2)

This is at the beginning of the left hand aisle, just to the right of the side entrance. It is a result of the 1599 restoration, and is a Baroque work in gilded, painted and glazed stucco made to resemble [majolica](#). The rich altar houses a sculptural group of Christ on the cross with the *Our Lady* on the left and *Saint John the Evangelist* on the right; in the background a fresco landscape. [1] [2]

The side panels are in red, white and blue support two entablatures, on which an arch decorated with rosettes is set; on the top of the pillars are the statues of two seated prophets, with a table in their hands. The work, of great refinement and decorative effect, can be dated to the eighteenth century and was probably commissioned by the rector of the church Paolo Bonafaccia, as evidenced by a plaque placed on the second pillar of the nave. [1] [2]

In the floor in front of the altar there are various tombstones of the nineteenth century and the commemorative one that recalls the restoration carried out in 1741, during the pontificate of Benedict XIV. [2]

### Chapel of Madonna (3)

This is at the end of the left hand aisle, and used to be dedicated to Our Lady of Graces (*Madonna delle Grazie*). The altar has a pair of Ionic columns in black marble veined in white which support a triangular tympanum. The work, stylistically referable to the seventeenth century, should date back to the restorations carried out in 1610 by the will of Cardinal Andrea Peretti, who gave a new look to the church. [2]

The altarpiece was a *Virgin and Child* by Pietro di Belizo of the 16th century, but this was stolen in the late 20th century. Now, there is a modern crucifix in the blank frame and a picture of **St Francis Caracciolo** on the altar itself. The crucifix is a little bronze sculpture of some merit. [1]

### Fresco of Our Lady

There is now no altar dedicated to Our Lady in the church. However, on the wall to the right of the above chapel is a detached fresco of her with angels by **Benozzo Gozzoli**, executed 1447-1450. This superb work used to be on the outside wall of the present convent, but was moved here in order to protect it from the elements. [1]

### Chapel of Sant'Andrea dei Pescivendoli (4)

The treasure of the church is the Baroque Chapel of St Andrew at the far end of the right hand aisle, the one which belonged to the Confraternity of Fishmongers (*Università dei Pescivendoli*). In 1579 the chapter of S. Angelo in Pescheria gave the University of Pescivendoli the chapel to dedicate it to the cult of Sant'Andrea, granting permission to restore it and decorate it. The works were carried out between 1579 and 1619. [1] [2]

It is richly decorated in gilded stucco with frescoed panels by **Innocenzo Tacconi**, and this treatment is extended to the intrados and pilasters of the arcade arch. The panels on the ceiling vault show events in the life of St Andrew. There are fishes on the arch intrados, including a flying fish. The panels flanking the altar by **Tacconi** show *St Francis of Assisi* (left), and *St Francesca Romana* (right). The work dates certainly to just after 1598, which is when the artist arrived at Rome. [1] [2] [b]

The altar has two Ionic columns in black and white veined marble supporting a triangular pediment. The altarpiece shows the *Crucifixion of St Andrew*, and is attributed to **Marco Tullio Montagna**, but early guide books attribute the work to **Giorgio Vasari**. The painting on the right hand side wall shows *The Vocation of St Andrew*, and is oil on canvas by **Bernardino Cesari** (1619). [1] [2] [3] [a]

The floor of the chapel is a glorious piece of opus sectile work in polychrome marble, and shows the shield of the confraternity. On it is a pair of geese, a deer and a large fish which is a sturgeon. [1]

### Chapel of the Trinity (5)

This is in the first bay of the right hand aisle, and is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The altar frontal is a 17th century work of intricately scrolled polychrome marble work with plant motifs woven around a central round with a cardinal's coat of arms. [1] [2]

The altarpiece shows the *Holy Trinity with SS Lawrence and Cyrus* by **Giovanni Battista Brughi**. There is no other decoration. [1]

In the next bay of the aisle is a funeral monument to Giacomo Girolamo Ricchebacchi, 1841, who had been a priest here and was noted as an astronomer and mathematician. [1] [2]

### Crypt

The church has a crypt, a fact little known because the only access is by a trapdoor. It is under the sanctuary, and dates in its present form to about the 13th century. [1]

The main chamber is semi-circular in plan, with a cross-vault and two white marble Ionic columns. The layout approximates to that of the original 8th century apse, with two blocked side corridors which originally allowed pilgrims to file through from stairs flanking the sanctuary. In the nave side wall is the entrance to a rectangular chamber which used to be the shrine containing the relics of the martyrs venerated here. [1]

The left hand corridor now passes through into a third chamber the curved wall of which is the lower part of the left hand side apse of the first church. There are fresco fragments still (at least recently) visible, which are also from the 8th or 9th century and hence belonging to that church. [1]

### Access and liturgy

The front door is rarely open. For access from the Via del Portico dell'Ottavia, look for a little gateway in a mediaeval house immediately to the left of the portico. This passes through to the Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria, a dead-end street, and the usual entrance to the church is on the right. [1]

The church is normally only open for liturgical activities. On Saturday at 17:30 there is charismatic prayer and Mass, and on Wednesday at 18:00 there is Exposition and Mass. On every third Monday of the month there is prayer and Mass for sick people. [1]

Those Catholic visitors who perhaps are unfamiliar with the practice of charismatic prayer need to familiarize themselves with what it entails before attending a liturgy here. [1]

The church is closed in August. [1]

### **Burials:**

Luigi Cardinal [CIACCHI](#) (1788-1865)

Giacomo Girolamo Ricchebacci (d. 1841),  
Italian astronomer and mathematician

### **Artists and Architects:**

Alessandro Batocchi (19<sup>th</sup> cent.), Italian architect

Angelo Augero (19<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian painter

Benozzo [Gozzoli](#) di Lese (1421-1497), Italian painter of the Renaissance period

Bernardino [Cesari](#) (1565–1621), Italian painter of the late-Mannerist and early Baroque period

Francesco [Manno](#) (1754-1831), Italian painter and architect

Giuseppe [Cesari](#), aka Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640), Italian Mannerist painter

Giacomo [della Porta](#) (1540-1602), Italian architect and sculptor

Richebach Richebach (1776-1841), Italian sculptor

Giovanni Battista [Brughi](#) (1660-1730), Italian painter and mosaicist

Giuseppe [Ghezzi](#) (1634–1721), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Guidotto Pisano (13<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian sculptor, founder

Innocenzo [Tacconi](#) (Taccone) (1575-1625), Italian painter

Lazzaro [Baldi](#) (1624-1703), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Marco Tullio [Montagna](#) (c.1594-1649), Italian painter

Martino [Longhi](#) the Elder (1534-1591), Italian architect

### **Location:**

Address: Via della Tribuna di Campitelli, 6

Coord: [41° 53' 33.7" N, 12° 28' 43.3" E](#)

### **Info:**

**Telephone:** 0039 06 68801819

### **Opening times**

Wednesday 16:00-21:00 Saturday 16:00-21:00

### **Links and References:**

1) [Roman Churches Wiki](#)

2) poloromano.beniculturali web site (no longer online)

3) [Info.roma web-page](#)

4) "Medioevo.roma" web-page (no longer online)

a) Scrase, David; *St Andrew in the Church of S. Angelo in Pescheria, Rome*; The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 127, No. 992, Special Issue Devoted to Old Master Drawings in Honour of Philip Pouncey (Nov., 1985), pp. 789-790+792-793 (882343)

b) Wood, Carolyn H.; *Giovanni da San Giovanni and Innocenzo Tacconi at the Madonna dei Monti, Rome*; The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 143, No. 1174 (Jan., 2001), pp. 11-18 (882343)

**Other sources:**

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["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

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