

San Bernadino da Siena in Panisperna



San Bernardino da Siena ai Monti is a 17th century former convent church in rione Monti (I), dedicated to St Bernardino of Siena, a 15th century Franciscan. Due to its location on Via Panisperna it is sometimes referred to as **San Bernardino in Panisperna**. Today it is the only church in Rome of this name. [1] [2]

History

The 19th century Italian historian, Mariano Armellini wrote the church was erected on the ruins of an ancient monastery and oratory dedicated to St Venera (or Veneranda). He got this from Fioravante Martinelli, writing in the 17th century, who stated that there was a hospice (*ospizio*) here before the early 14th century, which belonged to the Benedictine monastery at San Lorenzo in Panisperna nearby. [1]

A community of Franciscan Tertiary nuns were established at the ancient basilica of *Sant'Eupemia* at the end of the 15th century, at a site on or near the present church of Bambin Gesù all'Esquilino. Their church was demolished for some reason then (perhaps it fell down), and so the nuns needed a new home. Construction was started here in the late 15th century under Pope Clement VIII, and the church was consecrated in 1623 by Cardinal Giovanni Garzia Millini, as can be seen from the dedication plaque on the inner wall above the entrance. [1] [2]

In 1656 Pietro Paolo Caroli left an inheritance to his sister, Sister Maria Chiara, to pay for a new apse and altar. In commemoration there is a memorial inscription, and the family Caroli's coat-of-arms was placed in the middle of the arch above the apse. [2]

During the 17th century the Church was decorated with stucco and faux marble painting. [2]

In 1669, the convent of the Church of Santa Croce a Montecitorio merged with the convent of San Bernardino, and the newly arrived nuns brought two paintings from their old church which now are above the two side entrances to the church.

During the French occupation of Rome (1808-1813) the monastery was closed and the nuns had to abandon their convent.

It was restored by Pope Pius VII in 1823, but when it was sequestered by the Italian government after 1870. The monastery became a girl's school, and various orders apparently used the church until 1910, when the building was sold. [1]

From then on it was served by diocesan clergy, but was allowed to fall into a bad state as it had no pastoral justification.

In 1967 it was finally restored properly, as the church of the *Centro Giovanile di San Bernardino* (Youth Center of St Bernardine). There was another restoration on the façade in 1992, and some more work done on the side elevation in the early 21st century. The responsibility for the church belonged to the clergy of the parish of Santa Maria dei Monti. [1]

The convent buildings have been replaced by early 20th century structures. The girls's school abuts the church, as does the former youth center on the Via di Sant'Agata dei Goti to the south. [1]

In 1999 a native Taiwanese priest, belonging to the Franciscan Conventuals, began a ministry to expatriate Chinese people in Rome. In 2003 the church was made available for this outreach, presumably after the youth center had closed. [1]

Exterior

From the outside, the church is just a plain box on a square plan and with a high elevation for its footprint. It has a pitched and tiled roof, and on the far right hand corner there is perched a small campanile which is invisible from the street. [1]

Façade

The original 17th century façade (1), restored in 1992, is simple. It has two stories separated by a simple cornice with frieze rather than a proper entablature. The central vertical zone of the façade is brought forward slightly, which is a hint that the original design did envisage decorative elements being added. [1]

The first storey has a pair of pilasters without capitals at the corners. The entrance has an unmolded Baroque doorcase with two little curlicues on the sides. Over this is a simple dedicatory inscription: *In honorem S[ancti] Bernardini Senensis*. In the center of the storey is a rectangular window with a molded Baroque frame, and this intrudes into the dividing frieze. [1]

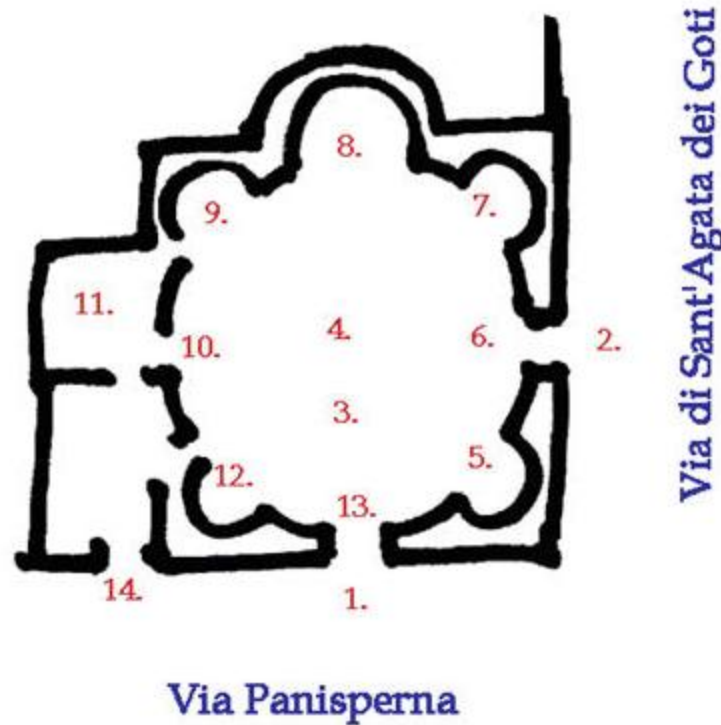
The second storey is about two-thirds of the height of the first, not counting the crowning triangular pediment with blank tympanum. Here there is another pair of blank corner pilasters, and a narrower rectangular central window with no frame. [1]

The façade has been rendered in ochre yellow with architectural details in white. [1]

The right side wall (2) to the Via di Sant'Agata dei Goti is quite simple, with a side door and two large windows. To the left of the church on Via Panisperna located in No. 256 Centro San Bernardino and No. 255 school "Istituto Tecnico per il Turismo Cristoforo Colombo" is the former convent building. [2]

Plan

The church has a very simple floor plan consisting of a elliptical space with a semi-circular-shaped deep apse opposite the entrance door and 2 chapels in each side. [2]



Interior

It is on an elliptical plan (3) with a dome, and is richly decorated. The ellipse is on the major axis, and is almost a circle. It has deep apse opposite the entrance and two shallow chapels on each side.

The Franciscan Tertiary nuns who owned the Church were very poor, but with the help of donations from benefactors they managed to decorated the interior mainly with stucco work and marble-imitating painting. A number of stucco pilasters throughout the height rises between apse. They are equipped with gilded carved capitals and supports a protruding edge that carries dome construction.

Above this edge (4) is a narrow frieze of boxes with inscriptions and painted niches with busts of popes and Franciscan saints. Above it rises an intermediate wall piece, fitted with four large windows. Between the windows are painted four square niches with allegorical figures:

- Church
- Synagogue
- Santa Chiara and
- Santa Elisabetta d'Ungheria.

The spaces between the painted niches are filled with flowers, columns, frames, garlands, candelabras and cherubs.

The dome is false, since it is covered by a pitched roof, and has no lantern or drum. The dome spans the entire church room and is very beautifully painted. It is lifted by an intermediate wall piece, provided with 4 large windows, which provide most of the natural light in the church. The false dome was painting in 1639, "sponsored" by the Sisters Caterina Angelica, Maria Vincenza and Maria Antonina, three sisters of the family Effetti, whose coat of arms is painted in one of the large windows in the dome. [1] [2] [3]

The fresco on the false dome is by Bernardino Gagliardi, in 1653, and depicts the *Glory of St Bernardino and Franciscan Saints*; a riot of angels, putti and other Franciscan saints are around Christ as he welcomes the saint into heaven. They all turned in prayer to the risen Christ, who sits surrounded by angels and cherubs on a cloud higher up. At the top of the dome is the Holy Spirit represented by a dove with outstretched wings. [1]

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a large apse with a conch. The triumphal arch of this reaches up to touch the entablature of the dome, and is flanked by a pair of gigantic ribbed Ionic pilasters with swagged and gilded capitals, in what looks like white marble veined in red. [1]

Behind the high altar are two frescoes flanking the altar. On the right is the *Preaching of St Bernardine* and on the left the *Death of St Bernardino*, both by Clemente Maioli. He also executed the figures around the main paintings. Unfortunately, there has been damp penetration which has caused damage. [1]

In the center is *St Bernardino in Glory with Angels and Cherubs*, by Antonio Amorosi is from 1738. A gilded stucco frame with a segmental pediment crowned by 2 stucco angels that carry a gold plated cross, frames the painting. St Bridget of Sweden is said to have come to kneel and pray before the crucifix behind the high altar. [1] [2]

The ceiling of the apse has another fresco by Maioli, depicting the *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. [1]

The apse is framed by a high gilded stucco and on each side there are pilasters. On the inside of the arch and pilasters show the paintings in raised gilt stucco frames: [2]

- *Santa Maria Egiziaca* (St. Mary of Egypt)
- *San Girolamo* (St. Jerome)
- *Santa Maria Maddalena* (St. Mary Magdalene)
- *San Giovanni Battista* (St. John the Baptist)
- *La Speranza* (Hope)
- *La Fede* (Faith).
- *La Prudenza* (Prudence)
- *La Fortezza* (Strength).

In the middle of the arch is the Caroli family crest, made of gilded stucco. The inscription at the bottom of the pilaster is in commemoration of Pietro Paolo Caroli and Maria Chiara sponsoring the construction and decoration of the apse and altar. The inscription on the opposite pilaster commemorates the assistance of Pope Alexander VII. [1] [2]

Side chapels:

There are four side chapels on the diagonals, in large arched niches. Above the arches of these are coretti, basically opera boxes covered with gilded grilles for the use of the nuns. [1]

Chapels are small, square room with barrel-vaulted ceiling and an altar in stone and decorated with stucco angels above altarpiece frames. The entrance to the niches consists of a gilded stucco in the wall. They have all been much restored in the 1823. [2]

Cappella di S. Verdiana

On the left side, the first chapel (12) is dedicated to St Verdiana. This chapel was paid for by the Attavanti family, who had a number of houses in this area, and are of the same family as the saint. The altarpiece, by an unknown painter, shows the couple Attavanti (Bernardo and his wife) in prayer in front of a saint of their own kin, Santa Verdiana, a rather obscure Italian 12th century saintly hermit, who is venerated here because the Franciscans claimed her as a tertiary. [2] [a]

The altarpiece is framed by a marble border with pillars on each side. These are crowned by Ionic capitals which there is little stucco angels. At the top there is a broken gable with a cross. This arrangement may be made by the sculptor Giovanni Battista Palombo. The room was possibly also decorated with frescoes, but it was later restored and completely repainted. On the walls seen on the right, *Santa Verdiana's Death*, and to the left, *Santa Verdiana's Miracle*. In the lunette above the altar is painted a *Gloria of Santa Verdiana*, and on the inside of the arch pilasters you can see frescoes of: [2]

- *San Bonaventura*,
- *San Francesco*,
- *Santa Chiara*, and

- *Santa Elisabetta d'Ungheria.*

Above the door (10) between the two chapels on the left side leading out to the sacristy (11), hangs the painting, *Sts Anthony of Padua, Clare and Elizabeth of Hungary* by Giovanni Baglione from 1617. This painting was also brought from the monastery of Santa Croce di Montecitorio by the nuns. [1]

Cappella della Immacolata

The second chapel on the left (9) is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, and the altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child* is by Biagio Puccini from 1717. Puccini also executed the frescoes on the walls and intrados. The tablet that the pair of angels are holding over the altarpiece reads *O quam pulchra es, amica mea* ("O how beautiful you are, my girlfriend"), which is a quotation from the Song of Songs. The rest of the decor consists of frescoes, *The Birth of the Virgin*, on the left wall and various Franciscan saints on the inside of the arch pilasters. [1]

The decoration of this chapel was paid for by Gerolamo Maffei, and after his death in 1676 restored by the monastery's abbess Eufemia Massari. [2]

Cappella della Passione di Gesù

The first chapel on the right of the sanctuary (7) has an altarpiece showing *Christ Carrying His Cross* with the Madonna, St John and St Veronica, attributed to Giovanni Alberti from the early 17th century. St Bridget of Sweden is said to have venerated this picture before it was brought here. The paintwork of the chapel is showing damp penetration, which hopefully the latest restoration has cured. On the inside of the arch pilasters show: [2]

- *L'Orazione Nell'Orto* (The Agony in the Garden)
- *La Flagellazione* (The Flagellation)
- *Cristo deriso* (The Mocking of Christ)
- *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) and
- *La Crocifissione* (The Crucifixion)

The decoration of the this chapel is from the 1620s and paid for by the Countess Laura Theodoli Carafa, whose arms seen the altarpiece tympanum between four angels and the Archangel Michael. [2]

Over the side entrance door (6) is a painting of *Santa Elena and San Francesco in prayer in front of the Cross*. Formerly attributed to Giovanni de 'Vecchi, some scholars believe today that it is done by a different artist of the year 1631, as indicated on the frame. The painting comes from the monastery of Santa Croce di Montecitorio, where the indigenous nuns moved to the convent of San Bernardino ai Monti about 1669. [2] [a]

Cappella S. Francesco

The second chapel on the right (5) is dedicated to St Francis of Assisi, and the decoration is by Giovanni de' Vecchi. The altarpiece shows *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, from the first half of the 16th century. Other fresco panels on the side walls, some damaged by damp and partially restored, show scenes from his life : [1] [2] [3]

- *Death of the Saint*, and
- *Pope Honorius III Approval of the Rule.*

On the inside of the arch pilasters show "

- *San Ludovico as Tolosa*
- *San Bonaventura*
- *Santa Chiara* and
- *San Francesco in Estasi*

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 .. by some attributed to painter Emilio Savonanzi from Bologna

This chapel was founded in 1688 by a donation from Francesco Jacobelli to his nephew Domenico Allegri, who passed it to his cousin Maria Dionisia, who lived as a nun in the convent. [2]

On the counterfaçade (13) Above the entrance there is an inscription in memory of the Church's

inception in 1625 by Cardinal Giangarzia Millini, and another to commemorate the restoration in 1823 of Pope Pius VII.

Notes:

The feast of St Bernardino of Siena is celebrated with great solemnity on 20 May.
Online open hours may be incorrect

Artists and Architects:

Antonio [Amorosi](#) (1660-1738), Italian painter of the late-Baroque
Bernardino [Gagliardi](#) (1609-1660), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Biagio [Puccini](#) (1675-1721), Italian painter
Clemente [Majoli](#) (Maioli)(17th cent), Italian painter
Giovanni [Alberti](#) (1558-1601), Italian painter from Arezzo
Giovanni [Baglione](#) [aka *il Sordo del Barozzo*] (1566-1643), Italian Late Mannerist and Early Baroque painter
Giovanni Battista Palombo (17th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni [de' Vecchi](#) [aka *dal Borgo*] (1536-1614), Italian painter of the Renaissance period

Location:

Addr: Via Panisperna 256, 00184 Roma

Coord: [41° 53' 45.6"N 12° 29' 21.3"E](#)

Info:

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Links and References:

1. [Churches of Rome Wiki](#)
 2. [Annas Rome Guide](#). (Danish)
 3. [Romapedia blog](#)
- a. Erwee, Michael; THE CHURCHES OF ROME, 1527-1870; Pinder Press, 2013; pp 143-144