

# Santi Bonifacio e Alessio



The **Basilica dei Santi Bonifacio e(d) Alessio all'Aventino** is a heavily remodeled early 13th century monastic and titular church on the western point of the Aventine Hill, in rione Ripa (XII). It is also known as Sant'Alessio all'Aventino. The dedication is jointly to St Boniface of Tarsus and St Alexis. <sup>[1]</sup>

The convent complex and the Basilica of Saints Bonifacio and Alessio are located on the Aventine between the church of Santa Sabina and the villa of the Knights of Malta with the church of Santa Maria del Priorato. <sup>[k]</sup>

## History

The foundation of the church is not documented, but, scholarly consensus posits a date in the 4th century, built by a rich lady by the name of Aglaë in honor of St Boniface. The church was built near the ruins of the pagan Temple of Jupiter Dolichenus and the ruins were discovered in 1935. <sup>[k]</sup> <sup>[1]</sup>

The present church has a double dedication. There are two stories, one for each of the saints, which hint at a common origin. Alexis was allegedly the only son of a rich Roman Senator, Euphemianus, of the 5th century, who as a teenager was forced to marry against his will and on the night of his nuptials he left home and led the life of a pilgrim in the East, in the city of Edessa, where an ancient image of the Madonna was venerated. He returned to Rome after seventeen years to live unrecognized by his parents in a toolshed under a wooden exterior staircase at the family home on the Aventine near or under the present church. He died under the staircase, and they found a paper in his hand revealing his identity. His body was rediscovered in 1217 in the ancient church of S. Boniface. The plot has been attached to the names of other early saints, and the story seems to derive ultimately from Edessa (now Urfa in Turkey). He is listed in the revised Roman martyrology, which makes it clear that the story is traditional not historical. <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>[i]</sup> <sup>[k]</sup>

The story of St Boniface was allegedly obtained from a Greek source in the 7th century. According to it, he was a native Roman slave who had a sexual relationship with his owner, a rich expatriate Greek lady called Aglaë who had a house on the site of the church. They repented of their behavior,

and she suggested that he go off to the Middle East to help persecuted Christians. He was martyred in Tarsus (now in Turkey), she had his remains brought back and then converted her house into a church in the early 4th century as a shrine for them. It is now thought that this story is a forgery, and that the saint never existed. Unusually for a saint with a Roman church dedicated to him, he has been deleted from the Roman martyrology. [a] [k] [l]

The first hint at the existence of a monastic church dedicated to St Boniface lies in the biography of St Boniface of Crediton, the Apostle of the Germans. He was originally a Saxon from England called Winfrith, but when he went to Rome as a missionary monk the pope ordained him bishop in 717 and, importantly, renamed him Boniface. The first direct evidence for the church's existence is from the *Liber Pontificalis* for Leo III (750-816) where it is described as a diaconia or center for social and charitable works. [1] [6] [a] [k] [l]

In 936, the religious people who officiated at the church obtained from Alberico II of Spoleto, governor of Rome from 930 to 954, some adjacent houses which, re-adapted, formed the first nucleus of the monastery placed under the care of Saint Odo of Cluny (ca. 878–942), inspirer of the Cluniac reform. [6]

The monastery emerged into history in 975 when Pope Benedict VII awarded the nobler title of Basilica, then in 977 entrusted the church to a community of Basilian monks, who had taken refuge in Rome together with Archbishop Sergius of Damascus, forced by the Saracens to flee from his city. Sergius brought with him the Madonna which, according to tradition, was venerated by St. Alexius when he was in Edessa. Sergius established a community of both Latin and Byzantine rite monks, and the monastery very quickly became famous as a missionary center for some of the most important evangelizers at that time. In 990 Saint Adalbert, bishop of Prague, took refuge in the convent complex, and from then on the monastery became the seminary for the missions in Hungary and in the Slavic areas (with the consequence of importing the cult of Saint Alexius to Rome and uniting it with that of Saint Boniface). In 986 the Basilica was also named after Saint Alexis, on whose father's house, according to tradition, it had been built. [1] [2] [6] [k] [l]

However, in the early 11th century the breakdown of relations between Eastern and Western churches led to the Byzantine-rite monks leaving. They were replaced by Benedictines from Cluny Abbey. This was in the context of the Cluniac Reform of monastic life in Western Europe. The Catalogue of Turin, c. 1320, mentions only five monks in the monastery which was too few to maintain monastic life. As a result, they were dispossessed and replaced by Premonstratensian canons in 1231. By this time, the Aventine was totally depopulated except for the inhabitants of the fortress-monasteries, and most of the land was taken up by vineyards and hay fields. [1] [k] [l]

Meanwhile, the complex was entirely reconstructed by Pope Honorius III in 1217, when the bodies of Sts Alexius and Boniface were discovered and placed under the high altar, and were last seen in 1603. The church was described at the time as a basilical type with nave and aisles, and with eight arcade columns on each side. It is uncertain as to when this was actually built, or how much the pope had rebuilt. [1] [6] [l]

In 1426 the Premonstratensians were replaced by the "Hermits of St Jerome of the Observance", otherwise known as the Hieronymytes (Gerolimini) of Lombardy who had been founded by the Spaniard Lupo de Olmedo as a reform of their Order two years previously. They were responsible for the restorations of 1431 and 1582. [1] [6] [k]

From 1635 to 1639 the church was restored by Cardinal Gianfrancesco Guidi di Bagno, including the construction of his funerary chapel between the sacristy and the left transept. [2] [e]

To celebrate the Holy Year of 1750, the Hieronymite brethren embarked on a huge project of restoration which turned the church into the Baroque edifice that it now is. The plan was by **Giovanni Battista Nolli**, the execution by **Tommaso de Marchis** and the person who paid for it was Cardinal Angelo Maria Quirini. Of the building reconsecrated by Honorius III in 1217 only the campanile and mosaic floor remain. [1] [2] [k]

In 1800 the French suppressed the convents. Consequently in 1807 the Hieronymite monks were removed from the convent. In 1810 the convent became the property of the king of Spain, Charles

IV, who came to Rome with his wife Louisa of Parma, living in Palazzo Barberini and preferring to use the convent as a summer residence. In 1814 Charles IV returned the convent to the Hieronymites, who remained there until 1846. [k] [l]

The later 18th century was a disaster for the Hieronymites, and the last of their monasteries in Spain were suppressed in 1835 (although the Order has been re-founded there). So in 1846 the Somaschi Fathers (Order of Clerics Regular of Somasca) were installed in the church, and as a result further alterations were carried out between 1852 and 1860. However, they lost the main part of the monastery when this was confiscated by the Kingdom of Italy in 1873, subsequently passing into that of the Italian Republic, which still manages it today through the Fondo Edifici di Culto (FEC). [1] [2] [6] [l]

However, the congregation was taking little interest in the church which was reported as being rarely open. This had to change in 1929, when the Somaschini lost their Roman headquarters after the Fascists confiscated and demolished their convent and church at San Nicola dei Cesarini. As a result the headquarters was moved to here, where it remained until a new Generalate was built in the suburb of Casal Morena in the late 20th century. [1]

In 1908 the terracotta floor was restored. In 1912, restoration work in the crypt and the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament was undertaken by **Antonio Muñoz**. In the 1950s, the two altars, the choir and the brick floor were restored. At the end of the 20th century the Superintendence for Architectural Heritage and for the landscape and for the artistic, historical and demo-ethno-anthropological heritage of Rome carried out a series of restorations in the convent complex and in the church and crypt. [k]

The church is today a subsidiary place of worship of the parish of Santa Prisca. [6]

The church has its very own church choir, Coro dell'Aventino, which performs in several churches in Rome. Church concerts are always free. Concerts are also held on weekday evenings. They are often announced on church bulletin boards in vestibules/halls. [g]  
[[http://www.romaincanto.com/coro\\_aventino.asp](http://www.romaincanto.com/coro_aventino.asp)]

### Cardinalate

The church has been titular since 1587, and at present the cardinal is Paulo Cezar Costa from Brazil (2022). [3]

### **Exterior**

The church and monastery occupy the crest of the Aventine hill overlooking the Tiber, with a spectacular view over Trastevere in the direction of the Vatican. The complex is just west of the larger one of Santa Sabina, and is adjacent with a boundary wall separating the two properties. Just to the east is the church of the Knights of Malta, Santa Maria del Priorato. [1]

The church stands back from the road, and is oriented south to north. Santa Sabina is at exactly ninety degrees, west to east, and the two churches demonstrate that the traditional insistence of orienting churches to the east does not hold in Rome. To the west, on the church's left hand side, is the monastery occupying four sides of a cloister which has its arcaded walkways under the ranges. In between the church and the street is an entrance court, with another wing of the monastery to the west and a further one to the south along the street, with the outer gateway passing underneath. The east side of the court is the boundary wall with Santa Sabina. [1]

Located next to the church, practically against the external wall of the right nave, is a small garden. On the external wall of the entrance courtyard is a small fountain which was moved here in 1937 from the courtyard of the 17th-century Palazzo Rusticucci-Accoramboni, demolished in the same year for the construction of Via della Conciliazione. In the same garden there is also the statue dedicated to St. Joan of Arc, donated to the Municipality of Rome in 1935 by the French sculptor Maxime Real del Sarte. [2]

The church faces a small piazza, and its entrance from the street consists of a covered portico adorned externally with two columns of grey granite, and pierced by four windows, decorated each

with two small columns, six of which are of *marmo salino*, and two of *paonazetto brecciato*, and internally with six columns of *marmo salino*. Inside the portico is a square courtyard in which are ten columns and on the left is the campanile. At the further extremity of the portico is the covered narthex of the church.

On the right of the portico there is a small fountain adorned with a triangular spire with the portraits of St. Alexis (on the left) and St. Boniface (on the right), coming from the medieval church of Pope Honorius. Below there is a gravestone with a mutilated Roman epigraph from the 2nd century AD which translates to: [1]

**"In honor of the Imperial House, Tiberius Claudius Second tax collector, together with his son Tiberius Claudius Second of Tiberius Quirinus, tresvir (or triumvir) responsible for the safety of travelers and quadrumvir, had (this) school built at his own expense with statues and portraits and all the ornaments".**

The Boncompagni Borghese's family branch publishes charity services at the church premises. On the right side of the portico, the charity distributes breakfast, lunch and dinner at the time of the clock for homeless and poor. [g]

The nave and transept are separately roofed, being each pitched and tiled. In front of the nave is an entrance loggia with a flat-roofed parvise above, and this occupies the entire width of the church. [1]

### Campanile

A fine brick Romanesque campanile of five storeys from the 13th century rebuilding was preserved in the Baroque re-ordering. It is over the near end of the right hand aisle, and has a tall blank lower story. The second story has two arches on three faces, the fourth being blocked by the nave roof, but the subsequent three storeys have two pairs of arches on each face. Each pair is separated by a stone column with impost, and a string course runs around each story at the level of the arch springers. A dentillate cornice separates each story, and tops off the final one. [1] [b]

### Monastery buildings

The former monastery of the Somaschi fathers can be accessed outside the church. It has been taken over by the State, and is used as a center for Roman studies. To visit the cloister, ring the bell at the first door past the main church entrance going west. [1]

The monastery has ranges around the four sides of the slightly rectangular cloister, and a fifth on the west side of the atrium. The back wall of the east side of the cloister is the west side wall of the church. There are arcades on all four sides, with rooms above, and a well in the center. The arcades contain 28 ancient granite columns, and on the walls are some important epigraphs. The one to bishop Sergius of Damascus dates to 981, and the one to Leone dei Massimi is of 1012 and is the earliest historical evidence of this family. The epigraph to one Crescentius is of 996, although he died twelve years earlier. [1]

In the atrium courtyard, there is a porter's lodge where postcards of the church are sold. Embedded in the bottom of the right side wall of the courtyard is a Roman tombstone from the 1st century. [1]

### Narthex/Façade

The 18th century narthex (1) has a range of rooms above, and hence is a two-story composition. There are five open arches to the loggia, the central one being slightly larger and crowned with a triangular pediment. Above the arches is a plain entablature with a projecting tiled cornice, and the pillars between the arches as well as the outer corners are decorated with Doric semi-columns in a dark yellow limestone. Inverted plinths connect the capitals of these columns with the cornice, and this is a design feature of the façade. [1] [k]

The second story has five rectangular windows, and six Corinthian pilasters each of which is triply clustered. These support a cornice in the same style as the story below. The roofline is balustraded, and has six finials in the form of flaming funerary urns with lions' masks. [1]

The nave frontage peeps over the façade, and shows a triangular pediment with a small oculus in its recessed tympanum. The cross finial on the apex does not look like much, but is apparently a 9th

century survival. [1]

In the right hand side of the narthex there is a stucco (2) statue of Pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730) which stands on a marble base, erected by Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini in 1750 to celebrate the completion of the Baroque re-ordering. Pope Benedict was the cardinal's benefactor. At the left extremity of this narthex is the entrance (3) into the monastery. [1] [6] [k]

The main entrance door has Cosmatesque work probably from the mediaeval church from the time of Honorius III (1216-1227). (The original aisle entrances were blocked up to create chapels.) Flanking the entrance, on the wall, is a pair of candle-holders in the form of statues of deacons. These are thought to come from a lost memorial to Pope Honorius IV, and to be of the school of Arnolfo di Cambio. [1] [k]

## Interior

The church is a T-shaped basilica, with a nave and aisles and a transeptal presbyterium forming the crossbar of the T. There is an external segmental apse. [1]

### Nave

The nave has five pillars to the arcade on each side. The first pair is small, where are the two side chapels. Then come three pairs of massive pillars, decorated with two Composite pilasters each supporting an entablature that runs round the entire church. The last pair is angled to include the double Composite pillars supporting the triumphal arch. The arcade arch springers are supported by Ionic pilasters with swagged Ionic capitals. Above the entablature is a barrel-vaulted ceiling with four inset lunette windows on each side. [1]

The nave decoration is 19th century, by **Michele Ottaviani**. The entablature, lunettes and vault are in white, blue and gold; the vault has square coffers in blue with rosettes in gold, which have different designs. The lunettes have octagons surrounding a star, and the entablature frieze has blue squares showing alternate crosses and rosettes. [1] [6]

The inscription over the entrance commemorates the restoration and redecoration by Cardinal Angelo Maria Quirini in 1750.

There is beautiful mediaeval Cosmatesque work in strip-panels on the nave floor, which was restored in the 18th century. Almost at the entrance is a holy water stoup in red porphyry. [1]

In the floor on the left near the sanctuary is the (25) tombstone of William Curtoys, who was the English born Ambassador of King Charles III of Spain to the Vatican, who died in Rome in 1826. In the right side of the nave floor near the sanctuary is the (26) tombstone of Don Felice Maria Nerini, Abbot of the monastery here, who died in 1786. [1]

### Crypt

The crypt is accessed by gated stairs (21) on either side of the steps to the transept. The crypt is Romanesque, from the 11th century; it is the only crypt in that style in Rome. It's closed to the public most of the year but at Christmas a crib, one of the most popular in Rome, is set up here. [1]

The rectangular room is illuminated by four windows and is divided longitudinally by four columns, of different marbles, with squared capitals and without bases. The hall is covered by small cross vaults, ending on similar stone capitals. A seat runs along the perimeter walls, interrupted by the episcopal chair at the apse basin. [k]

Among the surviving frescoes is a 12th century fresco of the *Agnus Dei* with the symbols of the Evangelists, and behind the altar is a tiny apse frescoed with a *Madonna and Child* venerated by two saints (probably Peter and Paul). Other frescoes are full-length portraits of saints including nuns, and these are 17th century. [1]

On the opposite longitudinal wall, in correspondence with the bishop's seat, stands the chapel, with a square plan, supported by pillars. The altar mensa is on a column, claimed to have had St Sebastian tied to it while being tortured. Relics said to be of St Thomas Becket of Canterbury are preserved in

the mensa. In front of the altar there is also a bishop's chair as a continuation of a brick seat that runs along the perimeter of the crypt. [1] [2] [k]

When Thomas Becket came to Rome to escape his arrest, he was housed in the Convent of Saints Boniface and Alexis. The crypt of the basilica was consecrated in 1218 for the centenary of the birth of the archbishop, who had been canonized in 1173. In 1872 some relics preserved here were donated to the Bishop of Edinburgh. [7]

### Sanctuary/Transept

The sanctuary/transept is raised over the crypt, and hence is accessed by three steps. The decoration of the apse and transept vaults is also 19th century, by **Carlo Gavardini**. Over the crossing is a small saucer dome, the spandrels of the dome has the *Evangelists*. The vault of the apse has the image of the *Redeemer* with two angels. [1] [6] [7]

The high altar (15), at the center of the transept crossing, is dedicated to St Boniface. The altar is covered by a richly decorated ciborium with a hemispherical dome having eight ribs, supported by Greek marble columns. The internal surface of the dome (intrados) presents a rich stucco decoration which divides the space into boxes within which *Saint Luke, Saint Mark, Saint Matthew and Saint John* are painted. The evangelists are depicted sitting in the act of writing, and are recognizable by their usual attributes. Each side of the ciborium features a tympanum with heads of winged angels. On the bases of the pillars, decorated with slabs of shell breccia, the coats of arms of the Girolamini family and of Cardinal Gonzaga, who commissioned the work, are visible. The ciborium is 16th century, but the altar itself is 18th century, created by **Tommaso De Marchis**. The latter has a grating, through which can be seen the shrine of the two patron saints of the church. [1] [2] [k]

There are four tomb-stones behind the high altar. From left to right, they are: [1] [e] [l]

- Pietro Savelli, (19) a deacon, of 1288; the figure is in priestly robes, with a stole; the hands crossed; he wears a biretta. The Savelli arms on either side of the figure, at the level of the hips. There is a border of very coarse opus Alexandrinum, mere rude fragments set in cement, with Gothic letters. His family had a fortress on the Aventine.
- Gian Vincenzo Gonzaga, (28) the first cardinal of the church, of 1591.
- Lupo de Olmedo, (16) of 1433, who was the founder of the reformed Hieronymytes of the Observance; a high relief slab with the figure in the robe and cowl of the Order, beneath a triple canopy with Gothic detail; hands crossed; no coat of arms. The work is inferior, though the subject is interesting.
- Ottavio Paravicini, (27) of 1611, a cardinal of the church and its benefactor.

In the left side of the transept is a memorial inscription of Fabrizio Guidi di Bagno, marquis of Montebello who died serving King Philip IV in Flanders, father of Cardinal Gianfrancesco Guidi di Bagno. [2]

The door in the left transept leads to short antechamber then to the (24) sacristy, and then to the convent. The antechamber contains the (23) funerary chapel of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Guidi di Bagno, built in 1640, according to his will. On the tomb is a reclining figure of the cardinal in white Serravezza marble, by the sculptor **Domenico Guidi**. The chapel is elliptical in shape and surmounted by a small dome which receives light from four side windows and a central oculus. The interior of the dome, made of mosaic with a gold background, is decorated with large intertwined acanthus spirals. [e] [k]

The apse (20) contains the choir stalls of the Hieronymite monks. In the center of the choir is an inscription in honor of St Alexis that dates from before the 13th century. It is flanked by a pair of little marble columns with incredibly intricate Cosmatesque decoration. On one of the columns there is an inscription naming the artist as **Jacopo di Lorenzo di Cosma**. There used to be nineteen of them, and they were originally in the basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola. When the choir was re-ordered in 1638 they were brought here, but the fathers in the church say that the seventeen missing columns were carried off by Napoleon, and possibly lost. [1] [k]

The inscription in the center of the apse is in praise of Cardinal Angelo Maria Quirini, who financed the restoration and redecoration of the church.

In front of the stalls there is a wire-frame model of the basilica. [7]

The (17) Chapel of St. Jerome Emiliani opens off the left hand side of the transept. It used to be the early 17th century mortuary chapel of the di Bagno family, whose coat-of-arms are over the entrance arch. The chapel was renovated in the 18th century by **Carlo Murena**. The Somaschi re-dedicated it to their founder, St Jerome Emiliani, in about 1850. The decoration is by **Michele Ottaviani**, of that period, and the altarpiece of *St Jerome Emiliani Presenting an Orphan to Our Lady* is by **Carlo Gavardini**, painted between 1852 and 1860, and is a photographic copy of the original, which was stolen in 2006. [1] [2] [7] [k]

In the south transept (18) is the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. It was built by Abbot Angelo Porro in 1674, remodeled with the rest of the church in the 18th century and restored by **Antonio Muñoz** in 1935. Above the marble altar is a bronze glory holding a Byzantine icon of *Our Lady*. According to tradition, the icon was venerated by St. Alexius when he was in Edessa, and was brought to Rome by Archbishop Sergius of Damascus in the 11th century. According to experts, however, the icon was created by a Roman painter between the 12th and 13th centuries, in tempera on canvas and fixed on a wooden board. It seems to have been retouched in the 17th century, but was carefully restored in 1952. It is highly venerated, under the title of *Our Lady of Intercession* because she is not holding the Christ-Child but is in a position of supplication. The icon may have originally been on the right hand side of a Deesis once, a representation of Christ flanked by the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist with their hands raised in supplication (which is what the word 'deesis' means). On the wall above the icon is a bas-relief sculpture depicting the *Recognition and Blessing of the Body of St. Alexis*, with the representation of Pope Innocent I, Emperor Honorius III and the Saint's family. Outside of the chapel is the coat-of-arms of Charles IV of Spain who had it embellished in 1814 during his period of exile in the convent. [1] [2] [6] [7] [8]

On the altar of the chapel there is the small and precious tabernacle made in the first decade of the 17th century, commissioned by Cardinal Ottavio Paravicino. It was originally placed on the main altar of the church and decorated with the prelate's coat of arms and 16 figures in gilded metal supported by 8 small lions in bronzed metal. The work remained on the main altar until 1810, when by decision of the French government it was put up for sale at a public auction, together with all the sacred furnishings of the church and monastery. The tabernacle, purchased by Abbot Ippolito Monza, general of the Order, was placed in a safe place where it remained until 1814. Once the French occupation ended it was returned to the church and placed in the Chapel of the Madonna, above a new altar erected by order of King Charles IV. For the occasion, the king had "all the metals re-gilded, the marbles cleaned and then made a chest with a gilded metal door to store the Holy Pyx, since the ancient one was made of wood lined with silk". [k]

The chapels, monuments and art in the aisles will be described starting from the back of the left aisle and proceeding in a clockwise direction.

### Left Aisle

The (8) Chapel of St. Alexis, at the near end of the left hand aisle, is dedicated to St Alexis, and contains what is traditionally claimed to be the wooden staircase under which he died. Below this is a stucco statue of the dying saint above the altar. It shows him in pilgrim's clothes, clasping the letter which revealed his identity after death. The staircase is in a large reliquary of glass and gilded wood, placed diagonally between four granite columns with derivative Corinthian capitals. The altar table of yellow Siena marble and a balustrade of white marble conclude the decoration of the chapel. [1] [6] [k]

Since the end of the 13th century the Savelli family owned the chapel. It was commissioned by Pandolfo Savelli, several times senator of Rome and also founder of the other well-known family chapel in basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Before the construction of the chapel the space was occupied by the empty tomb (cenotaph) of Honorius IV, of the Savelli family, pope for two years until his death in 1287 on the Aventine at the family palace. The chapel was completely modified around 1755 with the works carried out by the Roman sculptor **Andrea Bergondi**. [h] [j]

In the floor of the aisle, just in front of the chapel, is a tombstone of an unnamed person, dated 1639. The inscription states that the person was a devotee of St. Alexis and this is the only place he wanted to be buried. [h]

In the next bay is the (9) funerary monument of Cesare Fanti, a Roman who died at the age of 33 in 1867. The monument was provided by his parents, as the inscription states. The 19th-century pyramid monument features two cinerary urns, some profiles, noble coats of arms of a man in armor with a sword, and the bust of Cesare. The monument was moved here from the demolished church of Santa Lucia dei Ginnasi. [2] [6] [7]

The third bay (11) has an oil on canvas painting showing *St Jerome Emiliani introduces the Orphans to Our Lady*; by an expatriate Frenchman in Rome, **Jean-Francois de Troy** (1740). The duplication in subject matter is because this work originally belonged in the demolished church of San Nicola dei Cesarini, which also belonged to the Somaschi. Below that is the tomb of Somaschi Father Domenico Savarè, attorney general of Somaschi (1895). [1] [2] [6]

Also in the third bay is the (10) octagonal well, located between the second and third pillars, closed by an iron grate with an edges smoothed by the touching of the hands of the faithful, made in devotion to St. Alexis, as this would be the well from which the Saint, an anonymous guest in his home, drew water every day for the family who gave him shelter. The water, used until the last century, had miraculous powers, as documented in a church manuscript. [2] [k]

The fourth bay of the aisle (12) has the Altar of St Jerome, the Doctor of the Church. The altarpiece shows *St Jerome with St Marcella*. The work is Roman, of the 18th century. Under the alter is an urn painted to look like green marble. The chapel is in bad need of restoration. [1]

In the floor here is the tombstone for Paolo Posi of Siena (d. 1776). He was an Italian architect of the late-Baroque period. [1]

In the fifth bay of the left hand (13) aisle is another painting of *St Jerome Emiliani Praying to Our Lady*, a 20th century copy of one by **Pietro Gagliardi**. [1] [6]

In the floor here is the tombstone of Chiara Britti. She died in 1860 at the age of 78.

In the floor of the sixth bay is the tombstone of Giacomo Silva. He died in 1679 at the age of 49. [1]

On the last pier in the left aisle (14) is a memorial relief slab for Giuseppe Brippi (d. 1457). The slab is much worn by traffic, when it was in the pavement. It is much superior to the slab of Olmeto. The head has the shell canopy behind it. He was the humanist author of the poem "The Legend of St. Alexis" in the 15th century. The epigraph, placed under the tombstone, reads as follows: [1] [2]

“O dear Giuseppe Brippio, who have always loved poetry, now welcome these verses worthy of your tomb. You who have practiced sacred studies have obtained distinguished recognition. For this reason I intend to insist on your other praises, these: the fact that always, from your earliest years, you have preserved the never-scratched gift of your chastity and you have not followed those false values which alone constitute the pasture of mortals. But now more than this I want you to rest in a placid peace, the true and good one which alone benefits the deceased and which was always desired by you, while you lived: life, peace and rest. And when someone reads these verses, then pray for yourself, so that God may be merciful to your soul. Died in Rome on August 22 in the Year of Our Lord 1457. He lived 79 years.”

### Right Aisle

In the floor are the tombstones of Abbot Ippolito Monza (1845), last general of the Girolamini of the Congregation of Lombardy and last abbot of S. Alessio, and Marchesa Claudia Lucia Melchiorri (d. 1864). In the floor of the 6th bay of the right aisle is the tombstone of Canon Ugo D'Aveto. Here also is an funeral inscription about Fr. Luigi Zambarelli (d. 1946), general provost of Somascan Order between 1926 and 1932. [5] [d] [f] [1]



Just before the right hand steps up to the presbyterium is (27) a 17th century Byzantine-style devotional Icon of St Alexis.

In the next bay is the tomb (7) of Princess Eleonora Boncompagni Borghese, wife of Giovanni Battista Borghese, Prince of Sulmona and Duke of Palombara, of 1693. The tomb is extraordinary in size, relative to other female tombs of that period. The monument was designed by **Giovan Battista Contini** and executed by the sculptor **Andrea Fucigna**. It was moved here in 1936 from the demolished church of Santa Lucia alle Botteghe Oscure. At the time it was moved it was determined that her remains are actually in the monument. It has an engaging gang of putti as well as her bust in a very Classicizing style. Here too is a beautiful inscription: [1] [2] [4] [9] [k] [m]

“To Eleonora Boncompagni Borghese, princess of Sulmona, to her ashes placed under this marble, the nuns of the Body of Christ of the Gymnasiums as an eternal monument of a grateful soul. By will heirs built. She lived 53 years, died September 9, 1695”.

The Altar of the Crucifix (6) in the 4th bay of the aisle has an anonymous oil on canvas painting of the *Crucified Christ*, of Roman origin. The painting is said to be a copy of the famous Crucifixion of Guido Reni, by one of his pupils, from that of S. Lorenzo in Lucina. Under the altar is a sarcophagus painted to represent green stone. [6] [i]

In the 3rd bay of the aisle is the memorial (5) for Antonio Mancini (d. 1930). He was a famous Italian Impressionist painter, and his memorial was designed by **Antonio Muñoz** in 1935. [1]

The second bay is empty except for what appears to be (22) a poster for a 500 year jubilee for the Somaschi Order. The translation of the quoted Latin script is "You Released my Bonds".

At the near end of the right hand aisle (4) is the memorial to Cardinal Metello Bichi from Siena. He studied civil and canon law and was called to Rome by his fellow citizen Orazio Borghese. Having then passed into the service of Camillo Borghese, the future Pope Paul V, he received the task of managing his house during his nunciature in Spain and, in the meantime, he was raised to episcopal dignity by Clement VIII, who in 1596 made him bishop of Soana. After the election of Paul V, Bichi, who had renounced the bishopric of Soana, was first appointed a Vatican canon, then a pontiff of the Consulta, then vice protector of the Dominican Order, and then rose to the rank of titular cardinal of the basilica in 1611, and who died in 1619. The inscription, which appears at the center of the monument, reads as follows: [1] [2]

“To God Ottimo Massimo

To Metello Bichi, patrician of Siena, very generous Cardinal titular of S.Alessio, whose equal nobility was virtue, elevated for the benefit of Pontifex Massimo Paolo V by the Episcopate of Sovana in the light of purple of Rome and the excellence of the Archbishopric of Siena, a virtue that shone very brightly but for a very short time, Vincenzo and Bernardino, very sadly, built from their brother taken away prematurely. However, they mitigate their sad regret for this sole reason that the ashes of a most illustrious extinct virtue are still colored purple. He died at the age of seventy-eight on the first of July 1619.”

At the foot, in front of the monument, there is a square tomb slab in white marble, which covers the prelate's remains, with the inscription that translates to:

“To God Ottimo Massimo

Bones of Metello Bichi Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church of Senese”.

The monument was raised by his brothers Vincenzo and Bernardino. [f]

### Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Bergondi](#) (18<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian sculptor

Andrea [Fucigna](#) (Fusina, Fucina) (c.1660-1711), Italian sculptor

Antonio [Muñoz](#) (1884-1960), Italian architect

Antonio Tommaso de Marchis (1692-1759), architect

Carlo [Gavardini](#) (1811-1869), Italian painter

Carlo [Murena](#) (1713-1764), Italian architect of the late-Baroque period

Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period. (also see [here](#))  
Jacopo di Lorenzo (early 13<sup>th</sup> cent), [Cosmati](#) family  
Giovanni Battista [Contini](#) (1641-1723), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period  
Giovanni Battista [Nolli](#) (1701-1756), Italian architect and surveyor.  
Jean-Francois [de Troy](#) (1679-1752), French Rococo painter and tapestry designer  
Michele Ottaviani (19<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian painter  
Pietro [Gagliardi](#) (1809-1890), Italian painter (also see [here](#))  
Tommaso [de Marchis](#) (1693-1759), Italian architect

### **Burials:**

Giovanni Vincenzo Cardinal [GONZAGA](#), O.S.Io.Hier., (1540-1591)  
Ottavio Cardinal [PARAVICINI](#), (1552-1611)  
Buried on the left side of the main altar  
Metello Cardinal [BICHI](#), (1541-1619)  
Giovanni Francesco Cardinal [GUIDI DI BAGNO](#), (1578-1641)  
Mario Cardinale [THEODOLI](#), (1601-1650)

Lupo da Olmeto, (1370-1433)  
Abbot and founder of Hieronymite monks  
Pietro Savelli, (d. 1288)  
Deacon  
Domenico Savarè (1813-1895)  
Chaplain, Coadjutor, Confessor, Spiritual Assistant, Teacher, Presbyter, Rector  
Antonio [Mancini](#), (1852-1930)  
Italian Impressionist painter  
Princess [Eleonora Boncompagni Borghese](#), (1642-1695)  
Girseppe Brippi, (d. 1457)

### **Location:**

Addr: Piazza Sant'Alessio 23, 00153 Roma  
Coord: [41° 53' 1.62" N, 12° 28' 43.1" E](#)

### **Info:**

Telephone: 06-57.43.446

### **Links and Sources**

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
  2. [Roma Segreta web site](#)
  3. [Catholic Hierarchy.org](#)
  4. [Dizionario-Biografico entry for Fucigna](#)
  5. [Find-a-Grave web site](#)
  6. [Cathopedia.org web site](#)
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  8. [Corinus blog](#)
  9. [Villa Ludovisi web site](#)
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