

Sant'Eusebio all'Esquilino



Sant'Eusebio is an 18th century former monastic church, on ancient foundations and possibly containing 13th century fabric, at the north corner of the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II in what is now the rione Esquilino (historically, rione Monti). The church is now parochial and titular, but not a minor basilica. The dedication is to the obscure martyr of the fourth century [St Eusebius of Rome](#).

[1] [2]

History

The saint

The identity of the saint to whom this church is dedicated is a problem, since there has been serious historical confusion as to who this St Eusebius really was. [1] [b]

One tradition used to be that he was martyred with some companions in the reign of the emperor Valerian, about 255. The historical consensus now is that this particular martyr never existed, and so he has been deleted from the Roman martyrology. [1] [b]

There has been confusion with St Eusebius of Vercelli, a 4th century Italian bishop famous for making his cathedral clergy live a life in common as canons. He is counted as one of the founders of the Canons Regular -and was not a martyr. A fable was later invented that this bishop had been starved to death for supporting the Nicene creed against the Arian emperor Constantius II, but this is demonstrably false. [1] [b]

The revised Roman martyrology (2001) has decided against identifying the church's St Eusebius with this bishop of Vercelli, and has listed the saint merely as having given his name to the church. In other words, it is now admitted that no-one knows who he was. [1] [b]

The church's St Eusebius is now listed by the Roman martyrology on 14 August. (St Eusebius of Vercelli has his feast-day on 2 August.) [1] [b]

Early days

The church was financed by St Eusebius of Bologna (not St Eusebius of Vercelli), a friend of St Ambrose, and has its first historical mention in a graffito of the year 474 in the catacombs of Santi Marcellino e Pietro ad Duas Lauros. However, archeological remains hint at an original construction date of about the turn of the fifth century. This means that it is one of the oldest churches of any sort in Rome. It was also one of the tituli or first parish churches, and was known as the *Titulus Eusebii* certainly by 499. Later tradition alleged that it was made so during the reign of Pope Liberius (352-66). [1]

Ruins dating to ancient Roman times have been found south of the transept and behind the sanctuary. The style of wall construction appears to date from the end of the 2nd century, and epigraphs discovered here in 1875 suggests that a sanctuary of Jupiter (Iuppiter Dolichenus) was here or nearby. The suggestion that these remains were the original house church has no archeological backing. [1]

The titulus became a church around 745, widely restored by Pope Zacharias (741-752) following the collapse of the roof. There were also restorations by Hadrian I, Leo III and Gregory IV. [2] [e]

Honorius III had the church rebuilt from the foundations, and it was re-consecrated in 1238 Pope Gregory IX. A tablet commemorating the rebuilding may still be found in the porch of the church, to the right of the door. Around the same time, the bell-tower or campanile was added. [1] [2]

The church was granted to the Celestine congregation of reformed Benedictines (now extinct) in 1289. The order had been founded in 1259 by the Italian hermit Pietro da Morrone, later Pope Celestine V. The monks built a monastery, which still exists to the right of the church and which was elevated to the dignity of an abbey in 1627. [1] [2]

The high altar, presbyterium area and choir were remodeled by **Onorio Longhi** in 1600. [1] [2]

A rebuilding of the church was begun in 1711 by **Carlo Stefano Fontana** (nephew of the more famous Carlo Fontana) under the patronage of Cardinal Enrico Enríquez. He was definitely responsible for the façade, but apparently for not much else, the body of the mediaeval church was still intact in 1748. [1]

The rebuilding was actually begun in 1753 by **Nicolò Picconi**, and it took about six years. He was the designer of the present interior, although the choir fittings and the high altar from the work by **Longhi** were kept. [1]

A consequence of the urbanization works of the late nineteenth century for the new Esquilino district and the construction of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II in 1877-1880, the church appears raised above the street level. So now access to the church is by way of a double flight of steps. [2]

There is an argument as to how much, if any, of the fabric of the 13th century church survives under the 18th century work. It is known that there used to be fourteen ancient columns in each nave arcade, and some of these might be entombed in the present pillars. The original campanile was left alone, however. [1]

The Celestine congregation was dispersed by the French Revolution, and was formally suppressed by order of the Napoleonic imperial government in 1810. It was not revived afterwards, but the complex was granted to the Society of Jesus who used the monastery as a retreat house. They in turn were expelled in 1873, when the monastery was seized by the state, and the future of the church was finally settled in 1889 when the parish was erected and staffed by diocesan clergy. The monastery is now occupied by the Pubblica Sicurezza. [1] [2]

The stuccos and the painting inside the church, also equipped with a new organ, were renovated in 1938 by the parish priest Monsignor Dottarell. [2]

Exterior

Layout and fabric

The church has a nave with aisles, with a presbyterium on a square plan flanked by sacristies. It shelters its nave and presbyterium, with sacristies, under one pitched and tiled roof. There is no external apse. [1]

Façade (1)

The façade dates from 1711 and, as a result of late 19th century suburban development lowering the street level, has now to be approached by steps (2). They consist of two transverse upper flights meeting at the top of a longitudinal lower flight. There is an internal loggia (3), and the first storey frontage has four gigantic Doric pilasters supporting an entablature. In between these are five arches, with their own impostes, leading into the loggia. The central one is slightly wider than the others, with its arc decorated with volutes enclosing laddering and with a scallop shell on top. Placed in the central arch is the statue of the *White Madonna* made in the 20th century by the sculptor **Guarino Roscioli**. [1] [4] [f]

The second storey has five equally sized rectangular windows separated by four Ionic pilasters with swagged capitals. The pediments of the windows are treated playfully; three have ogee curves, and two are coved triangles, with inward curves. The pilasters support an entablature with a dedicatory inscription and the date, 1711. The crowning cornice forms a semicircle in the center, containing a seriously damaged coat-of-arms of Pope Clement XII. The church is decorated in the balcony with sculptures of saints represent (from the left) *Sant'Eusebio*, *San Celestino V*, *San Benedetto da Norcia* and *Santa Scolastica*, and kneeling angels (central gable), while the upper tympanum, surmounted by a metal cross, is slightly set back from the falsely Palladian façade. [1] [2] [3]

The actual entrance door to the church is flanked by a pair of marble plaques announcing indulgences offered to visitors. The older one on the right dates from the 1238 restoration, and that on the left records those conferred by Pope Gregory XIII in 1572. On the wall between the door to the church and the door to the monastery is a crucifix. [1] [3]

Campanile

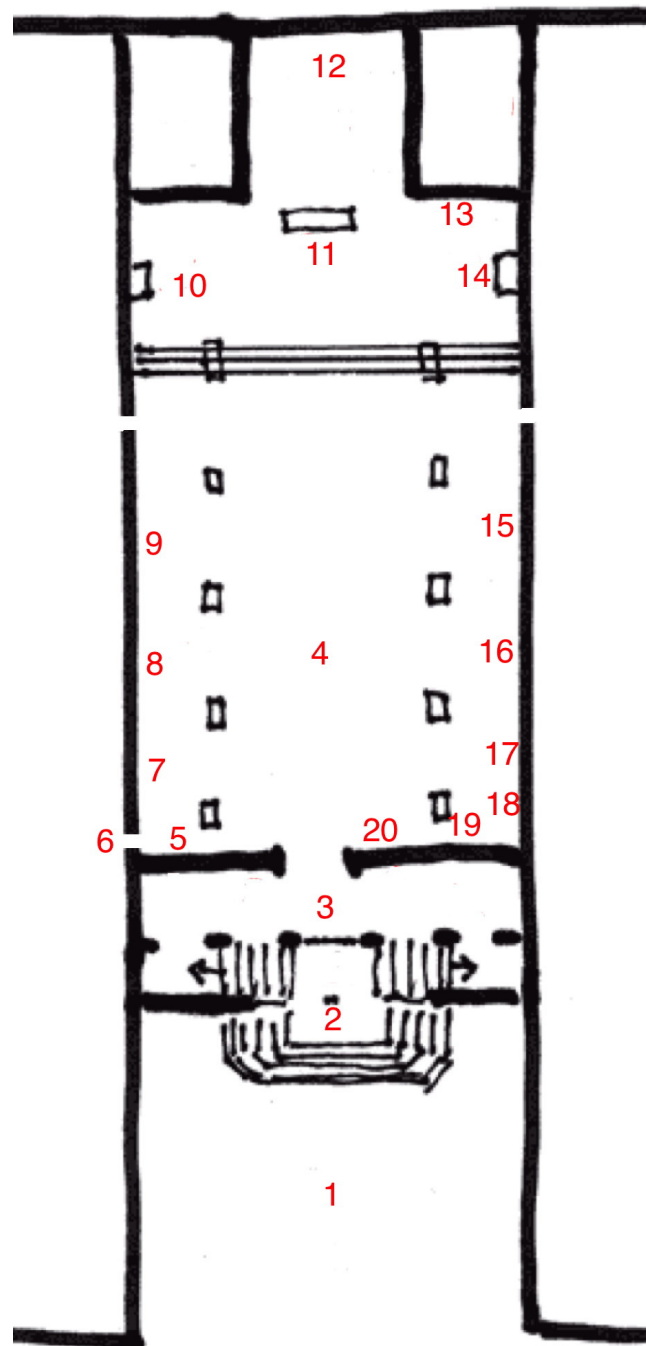
The 13th century brick campanile can be seen peeping over the right hand side of the façade. It is actually at the northern corner of the monastery cloister, and is enclosed by monastic buildings. [1] [d]

There is a tiled pyramidal cap, and each face has three soundholes formed by an arcade with each arch separated by a limestone column with a cushion capital. Examination with binoculars will reveal brown ellipses above and below the soundholes, which are the ends of tie-bars inserted to hold the structure together. Above the soundholes facing the street is also what looks like a damaged disc of green serpentine, indicating that the campanile was originally decorated with polychrome stonework. [1]

Presbyterium wall

The window behind the high altar has an impressive Baroque exterior surround, which can be inspected from the Via Principe Amedeo. It is shaped like a trapezium with a curved top, and the stone frame is decorated with volutes, tassels, a scallop shell and a winged putto's head. [1]

Plan



Interior

Nave (4)

The interior space is divided into a central nave and two side aisles. The nave is separated from the aisles by arcade arches (four on each side) separated by gigantic doubled Ionic pilasters, decorated with white and gilded stuccos. The aisles are vaulted with shallow elliptical saucer domes. [1] [2]

The main nave ceiling is barrel-vaulted, with transverse ribs running between the round-headed nave windows. It displays a fresco of *St Eusebius in Glory*, a neoclassical masterpiece by Anton Raphael Mengs of 1757. This is the most important artwork in the church. [1]

Over the triumphal arch is the coat of arms of Cardinal Enrico Enríquez, below which is a long inscription on marble executed to look like cloth and held up by two angels. This is an impressive

piece of stucco work, by **Tommaso Righi** (1860). [1] [c]

Inside the church there are also paintings by **Baldassare Croce** (*Jesus, Mary and Saints* near the high altar), **Cesare Rossetti** (altar crucifix), **Pompeo Bastoni** (*Madonna with Child* at the high altar) and **Francesco Solimena**. [2] [4]

In the balcony on the counterfaçade above the entrance is an organ (20) installed in 1938.

Sanctuary

The high altar (11) is a dominating Baroque work, with four Corinthian columns in red and white marble. The altarpiece is an icon of the *Madonna and Child* by **Pompeo Batoni**, set within a glory which is itself part of a stucco relief. The latter features two saints venerating the icon; the one on the right holding a palm of martyrdom is presumably St Eusebius, and the left hand one St Ambrose (?). There is another painting inserted into the pediment, depicting *The Apotheosis of St Eustace*, and the frame of this has its own segmental pediment. The artists responsible for icon and pediment painting seem to be unknown. The altarpiece as it now is looks 19th century, and the icon is based on that of Santa Maria della Consolazione. [1] [3] [a]

The relics perhaps of St Eusebius of Bologna, who financed the church, are interred beneath the altar. By tradition there are three saints here: Eusebius, Orosius and Paulinus. The latter two feature in the mediaeval romance and are certainly spurious. [1] [2] [b]

Above the sacristy door, on the right side of the sanctuary, is a cantoria (13) for a small choir.

Choir (12)

Behind the high altar is a finely carved set of wooden choir-stalls from c. 1600, provided for the Celestine monks and apparently carved by one of them in walnut. The painting to the right is a *Virgin Mary with the Saints Eusebio, Vincenzo, Lorenzo and Serafino* painted by **Baldassarre Croce**. It was the former altarpiece on the main altar, from which it was moved in the late 1800s. The painting on the left is by **Cesare Rossetti** and represents *Christ on the Cross with the 3 Maries*. In the center is a *Madonna*, attributed to the Guido Reni School, 1600 [1] [3] [a] [f]

Chapels

There are four altars in the aisles on each side. They are worth looking at for the varied Baroque designs in differently colored polychrome stonework. [1]

Starting from the bottom left hand corner and proceeding clockwise around the church, they are:

On the counterfaçade of the left aisle is the Altar of Our Lady of Lourdes (5).

In a small alcove in the corner is the Baptistery (6).

The second altar (7) has a modern Pietà, but the columns flanking this look like alabaster. [1]

Next is a statue of St. Rita (8) is what looks like veined alabaster.

The next altar (9) has a polychrome glazed pottery statue of the *Madonna and Child*, in a niche in blue with fleur-de-lys. Again, the aedicule is of high quality. [1]

The altar (10) in the left sanctuary has an original painting by **Andreas Ruthart**, who was actually a monk of the monastery with the religious name of Charles Borromeo. of *The Election of St Peter Celestine*. This is one of the better quality altars, with Corinthian columns in red and white Sicilian jasper. [1]

The altarpiece of the altar on the right side of the sanctuary (14) is also by **Ruthart**. The subject of the painting is *St Benedict Receives His Disciples Maurus and Placid*. The design is very similar to the altar

on the left side. [1]

The next altar (15) has an altarpiece of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*. If it's real, the yellow marble from Siena in the Ionic pilasters, frame, frontal and elsewhere. [1]

Next is a large Crucifix (16), and a small statue of Padre Pio.

The next altar (17) features a 19th century painting of the *Madonna and Child*, being venerated by St Catherine of Siena and St. Dominic. [1]

In the rear corner of the right aisle is a statue of St. Antony Abbot (18), with his pig. [1]

On the counterfaçade of the right aisle is an altar (19) with a statue of St. Anthony of Padua, with the Dove of the Holy Spirit in a Baroque sunburst above. [1]

Access

The church is open, according to the Diocesan web-page, from 7:30 to 9:00 and from 17:30 to 19:00. This, if correct, must be for Monday to Thursday -see below.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:

Weekdays, 7:30 and 18:30 with an extra Mass on Fridays at 9:00. In June, July and August the 18:30 Mass is at 19:00.

Saturdays, 9:00 and 18:30 (19:00 in June, July and August).

Sundays 9:00, 10:30, 12:00 (not June, July and August) and 18:30.

There is Eucharistic adoration on Fridays, and the Blessed Sacrament is exposed from after the 9:00 Mass until 18:30.

On the feast-day of St Anthony the Great of Egypt, 17 January, there is a blessing of animals in the piazza. This is an old tradition, and used to be performed in front of the church of Sant'Antonio Abate all'Esquilino until motor traffic made it dangerous in the 20th century. It used to be the case that farm animals were brought along, in the days when much of the land inside the city walls was still open farmland, and up to fairly recently horses were much in evidence. The blessing was so popular in the early 19th century that in 1831 the Diocese threatened priests of other churches with suspension if they copied it. Nowadays it only concerns pets.

Relics

St Eusebius of Bologna

Artists and Architects

Anton Raphael [Mengs](#) (1728-1779), German Neoclassical painter

Baldassare [Croce](#) (1558-1628), Italian painter of the late-Mannerist period

Carl Borromäus Andreas [Ruthart](#) (1630-1703), German painter (also see [here](#))

Carlo Stefano Fontana (1675-1740), Italian architect

Cesare [Rossetti](#) (d. 1627), Italian painter

Francesco [Solimena](#) (1657-1747), Italian painter of the Baroque era

Guarino [Roscioli](#) (1895-1978), Italian sculptor

Nicolò Picconi (18th cent.), Italian architect

Onorio [Longhi](#) (1568-1619), Italian architect

Pompeo [Batoni](#) (1708-1787), Italian painter

Tommaso [Righi](#) (1727-1802), Italian sculptor and stuccator

Location

Addr: Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 12a 00185 Roma

Coord: [41° 53' 46.3" N 12° 30' 13.3" E](#)

Info

Telephone: 0039 06 4466170

Opening times:

weekdays: 7.30-9.30 18.15-19.15 (winter)
8.30-9.30 18.15-19.15 (summer)

Holidays: 8.30-12.30 18.15-19.45 (winter)
8.30-11.30 18.15-19.45 (summer)

Masses

Holidays 9.00-10.00 (winter)-10.30 (summer)-11.30 (winter)-18.30-19.00 (summer)

weekdays 7.30-8.30-9.00 (summer)-18.30-19.00 (summer)

before holidays 18.30 (winter)-19.00 (summer)

Links & References

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 2. [sottterraneidiroma.it](#) (accessed from Internet Archive)
 3. [Anna's Guide](#)
 4. [Info.roma web-page](#)
- a. Donovan, Jeremiah: ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS: 1847
 - b. Watkins, Basil, OSB; THE BOOK OF SAINTS; Bloomsbury Publishing; 8th ed.; 2016
 - c. Minor, Vernon Hyde; "Tommaso Righi's Roman Sculpture: A Catalogue"; *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 126, No. 980 (Nov., 1984), pp. 668-675 [881872]
 - d. Priester, Ann; "Bell Towers and Building Workshops in Medieval Rome"; *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp.199-220 (990786)
 - e. Armellini, Mariano; THE CHURCHES OF ROME FROM THE FOURTH TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY; 1891; published [online](#) (translated)
 - f. Bisti, Ilaria & Fumini, Veronica; "Church of Sant'Eusebio at the Esquiline, History, Restoration, Interpretations; published [online](#) (translated)

Other links

[English Wikipedia page](#)

[Station church on PNAC web page](#)

[www.060608 web page](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

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