

San Girolamo dei Croati



St Jerome of the Croats is the 17th century titular church of the Pontifical Croatian College of St Jerome, and the national church of Croatia. The main entrance is on the Via Ripetta south of the Mausoleo di Augusto. It is very close to San Rocco, and the two form a landmark pair on the Tiber at a point which used to be the Porto di Ripetta (a landing place on the river for cargo before the Lungotevere was built). The dedication is to St Jerome. [1]

History

The church was first recorded in the 11th century, and was then called Santa Marina de Posterula. Nothing is known about its foundation or original function. The name is unique among Roman churches, and has caused problems in the past, Maria and Martina have been given as alternatives. The actual word is a direct Latin translation of the Greek Pelagia or "girl of the sea", so this church was possibly dedicated to St Pelagia of Antioch. [1]

The church was formerly known as **San Girolamo degli Schiavoni**, St Jerome of the Slavs. The name was changed after Croatia gained independence from Yugoslavia. The name **San Girolamo degli Illirici**, St Jerome of the Illyrians is also used; Illyria is the name of the Roman province in present-day Croatia.

The church fell into ruin in the 15th century. Pope Nicholas V, at the request of the priest Girolamo di Potomje (Potoma), with the Apostolic Bull *PIIS fidelium votis* of April 21, 1453, gave the pious association of the Croatian the then dilapidated church of Santa Marina, virgin and martyr, on the left bank of the Tiber, near the mausoleum of the Roman Emperor Augustus. Along with the church they also received permission for the construction of a hospice and a hospital for their countrymen. [1] [2] [a] [b]

Meanwhile, the incursions of the Turks into Illyria and Slavonia drove many of its inhabitants to Rome as refugees. Among them was the last Bosnian queen Katarina Kotromanić Kosača († 1478) who spent the rest of her life in Rome with the support of the Apostolic Treasury. She was buried

in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli on the Capitoline Hill. Her court lady Pavka Mirković is buried in the church of San Girolamo of the Croats. ^[1] ^[2]

They repaired the church and re-dedicated it to St Jerome, their patron who had been born in Illyria (actually in a place called Stridon near the present Ljubljana in Slovenia). Hence, the church was named San Girolamo degli Illirici or degli Schiavoni. ^[1]

On the 8th of February in the year 1566 Pope Pius V raised the Church of St. Jerome to the title of cardinal. Third titular cardinal became, in 1570, by Felice Peretti di Montalto, "... a descendant of a family originally from Dalmatia Croatia", which held the title until 24 April 1585 when he was elected pope under the name of Sixtus V. ^[2]

The expatriates were organized into a formal confraternity, and in 1587 Pope Sixtus V had the church completely rebuilt for the Croatian-speaking community in Rome. The architects were Martino Longhi the Elder and Giovanni Fontana. The new construction of San Girolamo was the first papal commission after a century and a half for a church and a decorative programme that was executed in its entirety. It also remains the only church built by Sixtus V, chiefly known for his urban renovation projects. The iconographic program of the frescoes were executed by a team of painters (Antonio Viviani, Andrea Lilli, Paris Nogari, Avanzino Nucci and Paolo Guidotti) led by Giovanni Guerra, all veterans of Sixtus V's fresco campaigns in the Vatican library and elsewhere. The church was built in just over two years. ^[a] ^[b] ^[c]

He also established a college of eleven Slav-speaking priests called the Capitolinum to conduct the liturgy there. Notoriously, the remnants of a spectacular ancient architectural monument called the Septizodium on the Palatine was demolished to provide materials for the church's decoration. ^[1] ^[2]
^[a]

In 1790 Pope Pius VI founded a seminary here for Croat candidates for the priesthood, a separate institution from the Capitolinum. It functioned intermittently until 1901, when Pope Leo XIII combined the two into a new pontifical college. Non-Croatian Catholic Slavs, especially from around Kotor (the former Cattaro) in Montenegro, protested at its being named the Croatian college, so it was officially called the Pontifical College of the Illyrians. The Croats found this offensive, and Pope St Paul VI finally changed the name back in 1971. The church has been named dei Croati since then. ^[1] ^[a]

In 1847, by the will of Pope Pius IX, it underwent an overall restoration. This is when the enormous fresco cycle by Pietro Gagliardi was executed. ^[1] ^[2]

As a result of the 2016 earthquakes in Italy there was another restoration in 2018-2020, under the supervision of the director of engineering and architect Aymen Herzalle from Studio Croci, a renowned Italian office for structural design and statics.. The restoration of the frescoes was performed by the restorer Daniela Storti with her professional team. ^[3]

Exterior:

The plan is based on a Latin cross, with a fairly short nave of three bays which structurally has side aisles. These are divided into side chapels by blocking walls inside, which rise externally to become buttresses for the central nave walls. Then comes a transept, and finally a rectangular sanctuary and choir. ^[1]

The fabric is in brick rendered in a very pale orange, with stone window frames and roofline cornices. The façade is also entirely in travertine limestone. The roof is pitched and tiled, and is hipped over the apse and transepts. There is no central exterior dome. ^[1]

Façade (1)

The façade is in the late Renaissance style. The architect was Martino Longhi the Elder. The façade was a slightly updated design that Longhi previously devised for Santa Maria in Vallicella, similar to Santa Caterina dei Funari and Santa Maria ai Monti. ^[a]

It is in white travertine, with two orders. The first order has three rectangular Ionic pilasters on each side of the entrance, with swags on their capitals and more swags and lion's masks in between them. In between each pair of these pilasters is an empty arched niche, with a blank rectangular (almost square) panel above and another one below. The frieze of the entablature that the pilasters support has a dedicatory inscription mentioning Pope Sixtus V: [1] [2] [c]

SIXTUS V PM ORD. MIN. TEMPLUM AT FUNDAMENTIS EREXIT PONT. ON ANN. IIII S.AL MDLXXXL/III

The doorway has a raised triangular pediment, with more swags on the lintel and a pair of volutes on edge at the top corners of the doorcase. [1]

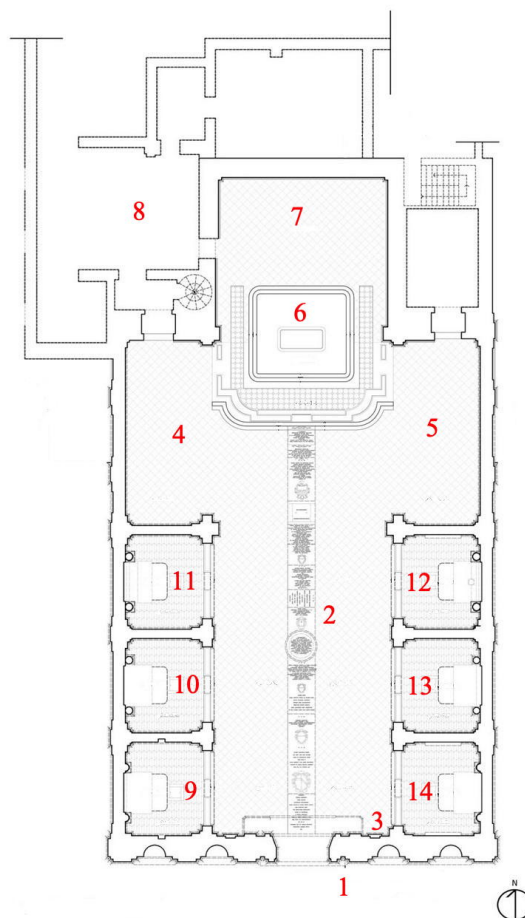
The second order has four ribbed Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature and triangular pediment, the latter containing the coat-of-arms of Pope Sixtus V flanked by gigantic swags. The frieze of this entablature has a dedicatory inscription with the saint's name. In the center of this order is a large rectangular window with swags below and a winged putto's head above. In between the pilasters are lions, either side of the stylized three mountain device. The three finials on the gable of the pediment have this form also. [1] [2]

Campanile

The campanile is a tower tucked in between the sanctuary and the far left hand side of the transept. It has three storeys above the roofline, and is in bare yellowish brick. [1]

The first storey is low, with a square window in each face. The second is tall, with a narrow arched soundhole on each face flanked by four brick Doric pilasters supporting an entablature with a projecting stone cornice. The third storey is also low, a chamfered square with a round soundhole within a sunken square panel on each face. Four stone obelisks are inserted into the chamfers, and the parapet has four vase finials. The cupola, in lead, is also on the plan of a chamfered square and bears a stylized mountain finial consisting of four sugar loaves, one on top of three. This device, together with a eight-pointed star, occurs elsewhere on the façade and is an emblem of Pope Sixtus V. [1]

Plan



Interior

The interior is very richly decorated and has figurative fresco work on almost every surface. There are three chapels on each side of the nave, formed by inserting cross-walls in the aisles. The crossing has a false saucer dome, extremely lush in its decoration. The sanctuary is square in plan, and doubles as a choir. [1]

The new church resumed the general layout of the post-Tridentine churches, with the single nave flanked by rectangular chapels, the transept and the large presbytery with the two sacristies, all inscribed in an elongated rectangle. [c]

Nave (2)

The overall fresco work is by **Pietro Gagliardi**, and is an enormous achievement. The chapel arcade arches are separated by gigantic Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature, and on these pilasters are frescoes of the *Apostles*, each having a helpful putto above with a label bearing his name. [1]

The barrel-vaulted ceiling has three window lunettes on each side, and in between these are the four *Major Prophets* (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel and Daniel*). The large central panel depicts the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross*. [1] [2]

On the counterfaçade are *Popes Nicholas V and Sixtus V*, also by **Gagliardi**. Also here is a memorial to Paolo Gozze (3) (d. 1660). It is a superb design, showing his bust as if standing at a window with the sill draped with a black marble cloth with his epitaph. The memorial was created in 1680 and is the work of an unknown artist, most likely an apprentice or an imitator of the famous Alessandro Algardi. [1]

The floor is black and white checker design, with a strip of funeral inscriptions in a line in the middle of the floor.

Transept

The central crossing of the transept has an internal cupola, frescoed by **Giovanni Guerra**, 1590. It has a trompe-l'oeil effect, giving you the impression of looking into a colonnaded drum of a real dome with fantastically ornate columns. The central scene shows *The Trinity, being venerated by St Jerome and pointed out by John the Baptist*. [1]

The pendentives are frescoed with the *Evangelists* by **Paolo Guidotti**. The transept side vaults have angels and the host of heaven, in three fresco panels each by **Andrea Lilli**. [1] [5]

The ends of the transept have two frescoes executed between 1847 and 1852 by **Gagliardi**. In the lunettes on either side of the window are frescoes of Slavic saints, painted between 1588-1590.

In the left side (4) is a *Crucifixion*. In the lunette are *St. Cyril*, on the left, and *St. Methodius*, on the right. On the forward wall is the *Emblem of Slavonia and Bosnia* by **Antonio della Bitta**. On the right wall is the *Coat-of-Arms of Pope Nicholas V*, also by **Antonio della Bitta**. In the corner is a sculpture *St. Jerom,*" attributed to **Francesco Grassia** (XVII century).

The painting in the right transept (5) is the *Adoration of the Magi*. In the lunette are *San Doimo Archbishop of Salona*, on the left, and *San Rainerio Archbishop of Split*, on the right. On the side wall are the *Coat-of-Arms of Pope Sixtus V*, and the *Emblem of Dalmatia and Croatia* by **Antonio della Bitta**.

[1] [2] [b]

Sanctuary

The sides of the square sanctuary are occupied by the stalls of the college clergy, forming a choir. The altar is in the form of an ancient sarcophagus in verde antico, with fittings in gilded bronze. It has no baldacchino, but above is a floating canopy in crimson and gold, embellished with tassels

and cross-flowers and containing the *Dove of the Holy Spirit in glory*. There is no altarpiece. [1]

The altar (6) sits on a marble platform, two steps above the level of the sanctuary, which is one step above the level of the nave. There is a marble balustrade at the edge of the sanctuary floor.

The frescoing of the sanctuary (7) was done by several artists: **Guerra**, **Antonio Viviani** and **Lilli**.

The back panel shows *The Ordination of St Jerome as Priest at Antioch* in Syria (the lion was not there in reality, but is his symbol). The side walls show, to the right, *St Jerome Debates on the Scriptures Before Pope Damasus*, and to the left *St Jerome Disputes on Doctrine in the Desert of Chalcis*. [1]

In the lunette on either side of the window is *Dalmatian Pope Caius* on the left and *Dalmatian Pope John IV* on the right. [2]

The sanctuary vault shows *St. Gerome* in a central tondo, attributed to Paris Nogari, with side panels depicting *Angelic Glories*, attributed to **Giovanni Guerra**. [1] [3]

The chapels are described in clockwise order, beginning to the left of the entrance.

Chapel of St Jerome (9)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to St Jerome, and the altarpiece, oil on canvas by **Giuseppe Puglia**, (1631-1633) shows *St Jerome studying the Scriptures as a hermit*. The side wall frescoes show *St John the Baptist* and *St Paul* are by **Pietro Gagliardi**. [1] [2] [3]

Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows (10)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, and the altarpiece depicting the *Pietà* (1631-1633), oil on canvas by **Giuseppe Puglia**. [1] [2] [3]

Side wall frescoes depict the *Agony in the Garden* and the *Crowning with Thorns* by **Gagliardi**. On the vault, *Trinity* and *Landscapes* (1590-1592), frescoes by **Andrea Lilli**. [1] [3]

Chapel of SS Cyril and Methodius (11)

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to SS Cyril and Methodius, apostles of the Slavs, and the altarpiece depicting *Saints Cyril and Methodius show the relics of St. Adriano to Clemente II* (1650) is by **Benignio Waug**. [1] [3]

On the left wall is a little statue of the Black Madonna of Marija Bistrica, the best known Croatian shrine of the Virgin Mary. On the right wall is a little copy of Nuestra Señora de Luján, a celebrated 16th-century icon of the Virgin Mary, on display in the Basilica of Luján in Argentina.

Chapel of St Anne (12)

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St Anne, and is the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament. The altarpiece showing *St. Anne with Our Lady and the Christ-Child* is by **Giuseppe Puglia**. Here also is a memorial to Luigi Lezzani, 1861 by **Ignazio Jacometti**. [1] [2] [3]

Chapel of Our Lady of the Star (13)

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to Our Lady, as Madonna della Stella. The altarpiece is thought to be by **Filippo Bracci**, 1745. The side wall frescoes are by **Gagliardi**; to the right is the *Birth of Our Lady*, and to the left the *Assumption of Our Lady*. The latter is unusual, as it shows her at the point of leaving her tomb. [1] [3]

Chapel of St Anthony of Padua (14)

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, and the altarpiece is *Annunciation and Saints Filippo Neri, Francesco di Paola and Anthony of Padua* (1718) by **Michelangelo Cerruti**. [1] [3]

Location:

Address: **Via Tomacelli 132, 00186 Roma**

Access

Open times:

Every day 7.00am-9.00am 5.00pm-7.00pm

Sunday 10.00am-1.00pm 5.00pm-7.00pm

Masses:

Weekdays 7.00am 7.30am 8.00am 6.30pm

Sundays 10.30am 12.15pm 6.00pm(Croatian)

Croatia's Statehood Day is 25 June, and the feast-day of St Jerome is 30 September

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 99694410 –
06 6878284

Email: croaticum@catholic.org

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Lilli](#) (1570-1631), Italian painter

Antonio della Bitta (1807-1882), Italian sculptor

Antonio [Viviani](#) [aka *Il Sordo di Urbino*] (1560-1620), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance and early-Baroque

Avanzino [Nucci](#) (c.1552-1629), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance period

Aymen Herzalle (21st cent), architect

Benigno Waug [aka *Il Vangelini*] (17th cent), Italian painter

Filippo Bracci (17th cent), Italian painter

Francesco [Giangiaco](#) (1783-1864), Italian painter

Francesco [Grassia](#) [aka *Franco Siciliano*] (1600-1670), Italian sculptor

Giovanni [Fontana](#) (1540-1614), Dominican friar and late-Mannerist architect

Giovanni [Guerra](#) (1544-1618), Italian draughtsman, painter and stucco artist

Giuseppe [Puglia](#) [*del Bastaro*] (1600-1636), Italian painter

Ignazio [Jacometti](#) (1819-1883), Italian sculptor

Ivan Dulčić (20th cent), Czech painter

Ivan [Meštrović](#) (1883-1962), a Croatian and Yugoslav sculptor

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

Michelangelo [Cerruti](#) (1663-1749), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Daniela [Storti](#) (21st cent.), Italian art restorer

Paolo [Guidotti](#) [aka *Cavalier Borghese*] (1560-1629), Italian painter (also see [here](#))

Paris [Nogari](#) [aka *Romano*] (1536-1601), Italian painter of the Renaissance period

Pietro [Gagliardi](#) (1809-1890), Italian painter (also see [here](#))

Buried:

Pavka Mirković

Court lady to the last Bosnian queen

Juraj [Barakovic](#) († 1628)

Croatian poet of Zadar, buried in the crypt

Ivan [Lučić](#) of Traù († 1679)

Historian

Ivan Pastric [*Pastrizjo*] († 1708)

Professor Oriental languages and "polemical theology" at the Collegium Urbanum

Stjepan [Gradic](#) [*Gradl*] († 1683)

Prefect of the Vatican Library and professor at the University La Sapienza

Juraj Jurjevic [*Georgiceo*] († 1711)

Benefactor and canon of San Girolamo

Petar Medvidović († 1729)

Archbishop of Bar (Antivari), poet and diplomat

Franjo Jurjevic (Juričin) († 1729)

Luigi [Lezzani](#) (1818-1861)

Italian poet and translator of Greek classics into Italian
Pavao [Gučetić](#) [aka *Paolo Gozzeti*] († 1660)
Representative of the Republic of Dubrovnik
Petar Božidarević († 1685)
Rafael Levaković († 1648)
Franciscan Archbishop of Ohrid
Juraj [Križanić](#) († 1683)
Josip Juraj [Strossmayer](#) († 1905)
Bishop of Đakovo (Giacovo) and Srijem (Sirmium)
Ivan [Kukuljević](#) († 1889)
Croatian historian, politician and writer
Franjo [Racki](#) († 1894)
Priest and historian.

Links and References

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 2. [Cathopedia](#)
 3. [Web site of the Pontifical Croatian College of San Girolamo](#)
 4. [InfoRoma web site](#)
 5. [Roma non per Tutti blog](#)
- a. Gudelj, Jasenka; "The Hospital and Church of the Schiavoni / Illyrian Confraternity in Early Modern Rome"
 - b. Gudelj, Jasenka; "San Girolamo degli Schiavoni in Roma Communis Patris"; *RIHA Journal* 0242, 30 March 2020
 - c. Gudelj, Jasenka; [San Girolamo dei Croati in Rome: the Schiavoni and the Sistine construction site](#); *Identità e rappresentazione: Le chiese nazionali a Roma, 1450-1650*; 2015; Pp. 297-326

Other links

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