

San Giovanni della Malva



The **church of San Giovanni della Malva** is a 19th century church of Rome in the Trastevere district, near Ponte Sisto, in the piazza of the same name. It is the national church of Albania.

The dedication is to both St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist as well as Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, which is unusual. The full name is **Santa Maria Immacolata e Santi Giovanni Battista ed Evangelista**.

Where the present name of Malva comes from is a mystery; the word means "mallow", but it has been thought that it may be a corruption of mica aurea, after the golden sand of the Janiculum. (6)

History

The church is ancient and dates back to medieval times. The church was attested by a bull of Calixtus II in 1123 under the name of *Sancti Iobannis prope portam Septimianam* (at the Door Settimiana), is known in the 14th century by the name of *Sancti Iobannis to Ianiculum* (al Gianicolo). The church is certainly older than this, but its origins are unknown. By the time it received its first documentary notice, it was parochial. The current name, attested only from 1367.

On the occasion of the Jubilee of 1475, Pope Sixtus IV had it restored because the simultaneous construction of the Ponte Sisto placed the church along the path that led pilgrims to the Vatican, and again in 1641 when the parish priest responsible got into trouble for using memorial slabs as building materials. (1) (3)

Unfortunately, in the following centuries the church was gradually abandoned because of the church's strong state of degradation. In 1818 the decision was made to demolish it. (3)

In 1851 the church was rebuilt on a new project of **Giacomo Monaldi** and paid for by the Grazioli family. The motivation seems to have been high Marian piety, as witnessed to by the new dedication. It was again restored recently.(1)

The church was granted to an Albanian expatriate worshipping community in 2004, the first such church in Italy. (1)

Exterior

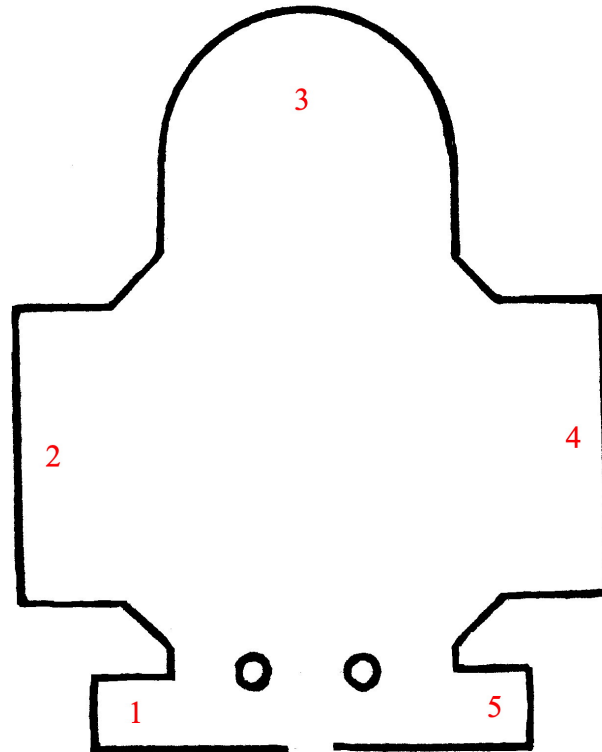
The façade, rebuilt in neoclassical style in the 19th century, is rendered in stucco to look like white travertine limestone, very crisply carved. Four gigantic pilasters of a derivative Composite order support an entablature and triangular pediment containing coat-of-arms of the Grazioli family, who financed the rebuilding. The frieze of the entablature has a dedicatory inscription in gilded letters, giving the full dedication:

DEO SACR IN HONOR DEIP IMMACVL ET SS IOAN BAPT ET EV

The plain doorcase has a raised triangular pediment, and a vertical rectangular window on each side. Above the entrance is a rectangular panel featuring a relief of *St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist venerating Our Lady*. The very unusual iconographic feature of this is that Our Lady is not holding the Christ Child, but is being venerated on her own. Above the windows are two square panels featuring hexagonal medallions decorated with ribbons. One depicts a lamb as the symbol of the Baptist, the other an eagle as that of the Evangelist. (1)

The little square is embellished by an 18th century *madonnella*.

Plan



Interior

The interior is a Greek cross (while the old church had three naves), with central dome. The entrance atrium is separated from the church by two large ribbed Corinthian columns. The atrium has a flat coffered ceiling and a small chapel on either side. Above the atrium is the choir. (1) (3)

The dominant color is a pale bluish grey. The interior of the dome is decorated with a geometric pattern of linked trapezoids, and there is a glazed oculus at the top. Each of the four spandrels supporting the dome has a tondo containing a text extolling one of the patrons, and around the bottom rim of the dome itself is the text *Domum tuam decet sanctitudo, Domine, in longitudine dierum* (holiness is fitting to your house, Lord, for length of days). This is the last verse of Psalm 93 (Hebrew numbering), and originally referred to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here, it is applied to Our Lady. (1)

In the center of the floor, directly below the dome, as a memorial for the Grazioli family, dated 1851.

Of the ancient interior decorations there is nothing left, only works of the 18th century and the 19th century, mostly by artists unknown or uncertain.

To the left of the entrance is a small chapel (1) with a confessional and a painting of an unidentified saint.

Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe (2)

The left hand side chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the altarpiece is a copy of the famous icon. The aedicule here is more neo-Classical than Baroque, with a pair of peach-colored Corinthian pilasters supporting a low triangular pediment. The pilasters contrast with a violet-veined marble surrounding the altarpiece, which has a frame in pinkish marble with green and red panels.

Sanctuary (3)

The sanctuary bay is bounded by a pair of pilasters. The entrance to the sanctuary is guarded by a low screen with black marble balusters, and the floor at the entrance is in polychrome marble. The conch and vault are of the same design and decoration as the dome.

The Baroque altar is itself of polychrome stonework. The altarpiece aedicule has a pair of Corinthian columns in veined red marble supporting a segmental pediment, and enclosing an altarpiece of *Saints John the Evangelist and John the Baptist Venerating the Holy Family*. The name of the artist is unknown. (1)

Chapel of St Camillus (4)

The right hand side chapel is dedicated to St Camillus, and has an altarpiece of the saint by **Gaetano Lapis**. The aedicule is similar to, but not the same as, that of the altar opposite.

Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (5)

The chapel on the right in the vestibule is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, and has a spectacular neo-Baroque altar in polychrome stonework.

Location:

Piazza di San Giovanni della Malva, 00153 Roma
Coordinates: [41°53'31"N 12°28'9"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 64491839

Artists and Architects:

Giacomo [Monaldi](#) (1819-1905), Italian architect

Gaetano [Lapis](#) (1704-1776), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period

Links and references:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [Wikipedia page](#)
3. [Roma Segreta web page](#)
4. [Rome Art Lover web page](#)
5. [Info Roma.it](#)
6. [060608.it](#)