

San Giacomo in Augusta

(San Giacomo degli Incurabili)



San Giacomo in Augusta is a parish, titular and former hospital church built at the dawn of the 17th century, in the rione Camp Marzio. The dedication is to St James the Great. Augusta refers to the proximity of the Mausoleum of Augustus. The remote ancestor of the church also had this name. When the present church was built, it took the name of San Giacomo degli Incurabili and this is how it is still often referred to in modern publications. [1] [2]

History

The first sacred building here was a small chapel attached to a hospital originally dedicated to St. James the Apostle for the care of poor sick pilgrims, which was founded in 1339 by means of a legacy from Cardinal Pietro Colonna in memory of Cardinal Giacomo Colonna. The Colonna family was to keep an interest in the institution. In 1451 the institution was entrusted to a confraternity based at Santa Maria del Popolo nearby. [1] [2]

The hospice was recognized by Pope Leo X in 1515 as an Archispedale dei Poveri Incurabili, hence the alternative name for the church of San Giacomo degli Incurabili. Initially it seems to have been intended for lepers and plague sufferers, but it quickly specialized in the care of those of both sexes with incurable syphilis. This was a real charity, since the disease in Italy back then was extremely virulent. [1]

The hospital was then run by a confraternity of the same name. In 1550, it was granted the revenues of the chapel of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (the predecessor of the present church of the same name), and the miraculous icon was taken to the hospital for safe-keeping. It is now in the church, the one in Santa Maria dei Miracoli being a copy. [1]

From 1579 to 1584, St Camillus de Lellis was director of the hospital, and it was here that he gained the inspiration to found his religious order, the Camillians. He left after he was ordained in order to

pursue this project. [1]

At the end of the 16th century, the hospital buildings having been finished, Cardinal Antonio Maria Salviati sponsored a project to provide the hospital with a proper church on the site of the little chapel. Construction started in 1592, and the work was initially overseen by **Francesco da Volterra** assisted by **Filippo Breccioli**. However, when **da Volterra** died, **Carlo Maderno** took over. The church was completed and consecrated in 1602. Cardinal Salviati was also buried in the church. [2]
[a]

The hospital remained functional as part of the city's hospital network until the 21th century, administered until 1870 from the Ospedale di Santo Spirito in the Borgo. [1]

The church was made parochial in 1824, as part of a major re-organization of parishes in the centro storico. In 1843, the hospital was given into the administration of the Brothers Hospitallers of St John of God, who remained in charge until the institution was taken over by the State after 1870. The hospital was almost entirely rebuilt in 1840 by the architect **Pietro Camporese**. [1]

The church was sacked in the anti-clerical riots by a mob led by Angelo Brunetti in 1849 during the Roman Republic, and its interior fittings burned in a bonfire in the Piazza del Popolo together with those of other churches nearby. Then it was converted into a stable. The subsequent restoration, commissioned by Pius IX and carried out by **Gaetano Morichini** between 1861 and 1863, involved the entire church which was repainted, while the vault was frescoed and the marble floor was laid. Another restoration from 1912 involved the former baptistery, to the right of the entrance. [1] [2]

The church remains parochial. However, the hospital (latterly an out-patients clinic) was finally closed down in 2011. It had been modernized in 1953, but the buildings were hopelessly unsuited to the needs of modern medical practice. [1]

In 2014, the church was made titular. The first cardinal priest is Chibly Langlois. [1]

Exterior

The plan is elliptical, with the major axis of the ellipse being that of the church. There are three external chapels on each side, and a sanctuary with apse. [1]

The fabric is in brick, mostly rendered in a pale tan with architectural details in travertine limestone. The main nave has a pitched and tiled roof in several sectors, with much lower separate roofs covering the chapels. These are separated by massive external buttresses supporting the upper nave wall, four on each side. The sanctuary is also external, with one high bay having its own roof leading into a semi-circular apse with a lower roof. [1]

The hospital still exists behind the church, and many visitors have been misled by the façade of a ward on the Via di Ripetta which was designed to look exactly like another church. [1]

Façade (1)

One oddity in the church's plan is that its major axis parallels the Via Antonio Canova, and hence the original hospital buildings. This puts it at an angle to the Corso, so in fact the façade is not at ninety degrees to the church. Not many visitors notice this, but try looking through the entrance door from the other side of the street. [1]

The façade itself is in travertine limestone, and is in two storeys. The lower storey is by **Francesco da Volterra**, while the upper was completed in 1600 by **Maderno**. [1]

The architectural orders are used according to classical principles, with the heavier rectangular Doric pilasters on the lower level and the lighter Corinthian ones on the upper. There is a pair of separate pilasters each side of the entrance, and these support an entablature with the frieze decorated with triglyphs. The entrance itself is flanked by a pair of Ionic green marble columns in the round, and these support a segmental pediment. The upper storey also has two pairs of pilasters, but the inner pair is doubletted to make it look as if another pair is partially hidden behind. These support a

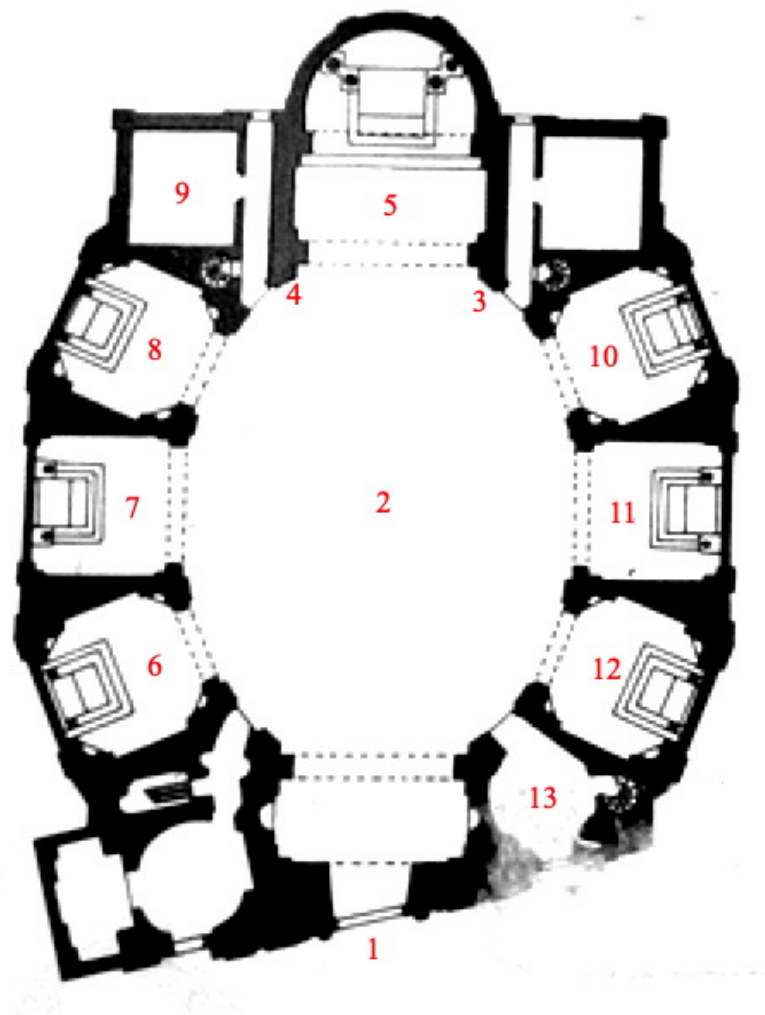
triangular pediment containing the carved coat-of-arms of Cardinal Anton Maria Salviati; unusually, this is tilted downwards so as to be visible from the street (the narrowness of the Corso here makes it difficult to view the façade properly). [1]

In the center of the upper storey is a recessed arched window with a scallop shell carved on its conch, and set into a frame crowned by a pediment broken at the top. The scallop shell is a reference to the patron saint, St James the Great whose attribute it is. The window is preceded by a balustraded balcony, and either side of this storey is a gigantic single volute. The upper storey is actually false, as it is wider than the nave of the church behind. [1]

Campanili

The two identical bell-towers, designed by **Maderno**, were a novelty in Rome. They are located either side of the sanctuary, and are in bare red brick. Each has two storeys, the first a simple brick cube and the second with a large round-headed soundhole on each face. Each roofline has a little triangular pediment and on top is a cupola in lead. They are invisible from the street, and are perhaps best appreciated in the views from the Pincio or the dome of St Peter's. [1] [2]

Plan



Interior

The church was the first in Rome to be built on an elliptical plan, and has three chapels on each side entered through arches. The central ones on either side are larger, and are flanked by Composite pilasters in what looks like red marble. These support an entablature with its frieze in the same stone and modillions on its cornice, which runs round the entire church including the apse. [1]

The smaller chapels have alabaster panels above their arches. In between these smaller chapels and the sanctuary on one side, and the entrance on the other, are four doorways with triangular pediments and niches containing statues above them. These doorways are flanked by further red marble pilasters, making a total of six on each side. [1]

The dome (2) rests on an attic above the entablature cornice. It has three window lunettes on each side, the central one being larger, and these are embellished with scrollwork. The dome surface is completely occupied by a fresco showing the *Apotheosis of St James* by **Silverio Capparoni**, painted between 1862 and 1863. This was the first important commission of the painter. He was assisted by his teacher, **Francesco Podesti**. [1] [a]

Just outside of the triumphal arch for the sanctuary, on the left wall is a ambry or the *Olea Sancta* (4) (receptacle for holy oil), marble with a bronze door. On the right side is a bas-relief sculpture in marble (3) of the *Baptism of Jesus*, a gift from Arturo Wroblewski in 1925, and a marble baptismal basin. [a]

On the counterfaçade, on either side of the entrance, are two monuments for men of the same name, Antonio Vincentini. One died in 1830, the other in 1863. Presumably father and son. In the center of the counterfaçade is the coat-of-arms of Cardinal Anton Maria Salviati in alabaster panels.

Sanctuary (5)

The large and impressive main altar, with four Corinthian columns in black and white veined marble supporting a triangular pediment, is by **Carlo Maderno**. The columns were allegedly plundered from the Tomb of Augustus. The altarpiece of the *Trinity* is by **Francesco Grandi**, 1864, and is lit by a pair of side windows. It depicts the Father and the Holy Spirit accompanied by angels, looking down at the Crucified Christ on the tabernacle below. This work replaced a lost painting by Giovan Battista Ricci featuring the same subject. [1] [a]

The tabernacle is in the form of a miniture temple, with doubled marble columns, topped with an circular dome on a red marble drum. On the front is a bas-relief of the *Resurrection*, in gilt bronze. On the altar are four gilt statues representing *John the Baptist*, *St. Peter*, *St. James*, and *St. Paul*.

The “people’s altar” in front of the main altar is made from an ancient sarcophagus.

The frescoes on the apse wall flanking the altar are by **Francesco Nappi** and **Vespasiano Strada**, and date from the church's original construction. **Nappi** did the *Evangelists* to the top left, and **Strada** those to the top right. The panels flanking the altar show *The Manna in the Desert* (**Nappi**, 1600) to the left, and *Abraham and Melchizedek* (**Strada**, 1600) to the right, but these have been heavily restored. Also, an epitaph and coat-of-arms in bronze of Cardinal Salviati have been stuck over them in a very crude way. The vault fresco, representing *Angels worshipping the Trinity* below, is also by **Nappi**. [1] [a]

On the right choir of the apse there is the pipe organ, built by the Borghese family between 1655 and 1666 and subsequently modified and enlarged several times; it has 14 registers on a single manual and pedal and is mechanical transmission. [2]

The chapels are described in clockwise order, beginning with the left hand side at the entrance.

Chapel of the Sacred Heart (6)

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The chapel is octagonal, with the alternating wide and narrow sides. The short sides have niches with scallop shell conchs, each containing a statue of an angel holding candles.

The altarpiece depicting *The Sacred Heart Appearing to St Margaret Mary* is by **Achille Buzzi**, 1911. This replaced a work by Francesco Zucchi. The oil on canvas paintings on the side walls are by **Ettore Ballerini** (c.1910), and feature *The Supper at Emmaus* (left side) and *The Agony in the Garden* (right side). The dome features angels carrying the *Instruments of the Passion*. The figures of saints in

the pendentives are painted to appear as if they were mosaics. [1] [a]

Chapel of St James (7)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St James the Great, and the altarpiece is a 16th century white marble statue of the saint by **Ippolito Buzzi**. The statue was commissioned by Cardinal Anton Maria Salviati, who had the church rebuilt. The Salviati coat-of-arms is carved on the altar column plinths. [1] [a]

Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary (8)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. The altarpiece is a copy by **Ettore Ballerini** of the icon of *Our Lady of Pompei*. Below this on the altar is a picture of *St Joseph with the Christ-Child*. On the right sidewall is a work by **Antiveduto Grammatica** which shows *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. The canvas was originally the altarpiece, but was removed in the early 20th century restoration. The painting on the left side is a copy of the *Immaculate Conception* by **Bartolomé Murillo**. The original is in the Prada Museum in Madrid. [1] [a]

In front of the altar there is what looks to be a bronze sarcophagus.

The scallop-headed niches flanking the altar contain modern statues of *St Francis* and *St Rita*. The vault is a dome with pendentives, frescoed by **Ballerini** with angels in the former and prophets on the latter. Unfortunately, the rain has got in and done some serious damage. [1]

Chapel of St Joseph (10)

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St Joseph, but confusingly the altarpiece features *The Baptism of Christ* by **Domenico Crespi, Il Passignano**. This replaced a lost work depicting the saint. The lunettes have 19th century frescoes depicting *The Escape to Egypt* and *The Death of St Joseph*. [1]

The painting on the left wall depicts *St James Inviting Invalids to Venerate the Miraculous Icon*. It is by **Bernardino Gagliardi**. On the right wall is a 19th century Crucifix that used to be the altarpiece of the last chapel on the right. [1]

Chapel of Our Lady of Miracles (11)

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to Our Lady of Miracles, and is claimed to contain the original icon a copy of which is in the nearby church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli in the Piazza del Popolo. It is thought to be 15th century. In 1717 it was inserted into a large, superb marble sculpture in high relief by **Pierre Le Gros the Younger**, which features *St Francis of Paola venerating the icon being held by putti*. [1] [a]

The two paintings on the side walls, featuring miracles performed by St Francis of Paola, are by **Giuseppe Passeri**. The vault stucco figures and the putti scattered around the walls are all by **Le Gros**. [1] [a]

In the floor of the chapel are grave stones from the 17th century.

Chapel of Atonement (12)

On the altar of the first chapel on the right is the *Resurrection* of the mannerist painter **Giuseppe Passeri del Pomarancio**. Until recently the chapel was dedicated to the Crucifixion, and had a 19th century wooden crucifix as the altarpiece which is now in the Chapel of St. Joseph. The altar has a pair of black marble Corinthian columns, and is flanked by two statues of angels in niches with scalloped conchs. [1] [2]

The side walls have two paintings, *The Souls in Purgatory* and *A Soul Delivered from Purgatory* by **Ettore Ballerini**. The same artist executed the frescoes of angels in the pretty cupola, there being an angel in each of the eight sectors which are divided by garlanded ribs.

In the middle of the chapel is a modern sculpture of the *Crucified Christ*.

Old Baptistry (13)

The last small chapel on the right is the old baptistry. The altarpiece now in the Chapel of Atonement used to be here. On the right wall is an oil on canvas painting of *The Virgin, St. James and Vittoria Tolfia*, the donor, from 16710 by **Francesco Zucchi**. [a]

Artists and Architects:

Achille Buzzi (1846-1928), Italian painter
Antiveduto [Grammatica](#) (1571-1626), Baroque Italian painter
Bartolomé Esteban [Murillo](#) (1618-1682), Spanish painter
Bernardino [Gagliardi](#) (1609-1660), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Carlo [Maderno](#) (1556-1629), Swiss-Italian architect [also see [here](#)]
Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) [aka *Il Pomerancio*] (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter
Domenico [Crespi](#) [aka *Il Passignano*] (1559-1638), Italian painter of a late-Renaissance or Contra-Maniera (Counter-Mannerism) style
Ettore Ballerini (1868-1942), Italian painter
Filippo Breccioli (1574-1627), Italian architect
Francesco [Capriani](#) da Volterra (1535-1594), Italian architect
Francesco [Grandi](#) (1831-1891), Italian painter
Francesco [Nappi](#) (1565-1630), Italian Mannerist painter from Milan
Francesco [Podesti](#) (1800-1895), Italian painter
Francesco [Zucchi](#) (1526-1622), Italian painter, sculptor
Gaetano [Morichini](#) (d. 1895), Italian architect
Giuseppe [Passeri](#) (1654-1714), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Ippolito [Buzzi](#), [or Buzio] (1562-1634) Italian sculptor
Pierre [Le Gros](#) the Younger (1666-1719), French sculptor from Paris
Pietro [Camporese](#) the Younger (1792-1873), Italian neoclassical architect
Silverio [Capparoni](#) (1831-1907), Italian painter
Vespasiano [Strada](#) (1582-1622), Italian painter of the early Baroque period

Burials:

Antonmaria Cardinal [SALVIATI](#), (1537-1602) [also see [here](#)]
Buried next to the main altar

Info

Address: Via del Corso 499, 00186 Roma
Telephone: 06-32.19.419
Open times: 8:00 to 12:00, 16:00 to 19:00.

Location

Coord: [41°54'27"N, 12°28'38"E](#)

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:
Weekdays 17:30,
Sundays 8:30, 11:30, 17:30.

The patronal feast of the church is that of St James the Great, 25 July.
On the first Sunday in the same month the feast of Our Lady of Miracles is kept.

There is a Saturday Mass at 18:30 at Santa Maria Porta Paradisi on the Via di Ripetta round the back, which used to be the hospital's house chapel. This is a good opportunity to visit a beautiful little church which is otherwise almost never open.

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
 - a. Information plaques in the church

Other sources:

[Official diocesan web-page](#)
[English Wikipedia page](#)
[Pictures of the church at Wikimedia Commons](#)
[Nolli map](#) (look for 476)
["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)
[Info.roma web-page](#)
[Roma SPQR web-page with gallery](#)
["Romeartlover" web-page](#)
[History of hospital](#) (pdf)
[060608.it](#)