

Santa Maria in Monserrato degli Spagnoli



Santa Maria in Monserrato degli Spagnoli is a 16th and 17th century national and titular church, named after the [abbey of Montserrat](#) in Spain. It is in the rione Regola. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her special title of [Our Lady of Montserrat](#). This is the national church for expatriates from the Kingdom of Spain. However, its history derives from what is now Catalonia. ⁽¹⁾

History:

The image of the Black Virgin, which appeared in the mountains near Barcelona, is very popular in Spain. The original image is venerated in the Monastery of Montserrat in Spain. The church was built on the site of a house bought by Pope [Innocent VI](#) (1352-1362) as a hospice for Catalan pilgrims. The first hospice on the site was established in an existing house by a lady from Barcelona called Jacoba Ferrándiz, who took over the old church in 1354 with the approval of Pope Innocent VI (1352-1362). She dedicated the institution to St Nicholas, hence it was called San Niccolò dei Catalani, and the church was re-dedicated to the same saint apparently. Later in the century she was helped by another lady called Margarita Pau who was from Mallorca. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁶⁾

The expatriates from the old Kingdom of Aragon had formed a confraternity to run their hospice. They determined to build a new church dedicated to Our Lady of Montserrat. Construction started in 1518, led by [Antonio Sangallo the Younger](#), with support from Pope [Alexander VI](#) Borgia (1492-1503). Because of political conflicts between Rome and Spain, and because the Borgia pope was hugely unpopular, the church was not completed for more than a century later. ⁽¹⁾

Sangallo died in 1546, but his successors as architects respected his plan. Bernardino Valperga took over, and Francesco Capriani da Volterra provided the first storey of the façade. Even the latter project was a struggle to complete, the right half being done in 1584 and the left half nine years later. Then work stopped here, with the façade unfinished. The high altar was only consecrated in

1594 and the nave vault installed in 1598. The confraternity then abandoned further work for three-quarters of a century. ⁽¹⁾

After he had his conversion experience when convalescing as a wounded soldier St Ignatius of Loyola hung up his sword at the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat in Catalonia in 1522. Hence, he had a devotion to this church and preached and catechized here as Master General of the Jesuits before his death in 1556. He was highly regarded, despite having a poor grasp of Italian. ⁽¹⁾

The confraternity were not satisfied with the sanctuary arrangements, and their next project in the church was the rebuilding of the apse and the provision of a new high altar in 1675, which was done by Giovanni Battista Contini. The confraternity was able to attract funds to furnish the six side chapels by granting them to rich private benefactors as funerary chapels. ⁽¹⁾

As soon as the French took control in Rome in 1798, the confraternity was dispossessed and the church closed together with San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, the Spanish church on Piazza Navona. In 1807, during a period between French occupations, the pope united the two churches under one national administration. Then the French shut them again, and after the Papal government returned in 1815 the Spanish had two churches in bad repair. For some reason, they decided to concentrate on this one. San Giacomo was stripped and abandoned, some of its artworks being brought here and others shipped to Spain.

This church was given a thorough restoration from 1818 to 1821, and a new high altar was consecrated in 1822. The architects were Giuseppe Camporese and his son Pietro Camporese the Younger. The confraternity's headquarters was rebuilt in the same campaign, to become the Palazzo del Collegio Spagnola, and a cloister or courtyard was provided behind the church for the purpose of displaying some of the transferred artworks. ^{(1) (5)}

In 1926, the façade was finally given its second storey by Salvatore Rebecchini. ⁽¹⁾

The church remains the National Church of Spain. Some more radical Catalan nationalists consider that it had been stolen from Catalonia. ⁽¹⁾

Exterior

The façade has two storeys, the bottom one being 16th century and the top one 20th century. This is easily spotted, as the travertine stonework is of different colors owing to the amount of weathering it has had. The first storey fronts the first pair of side chapels as well as the central nave. The latter has four Corinthian pilasters supporting an ornate entablature. This has a blank frieze, but the architrave is embellished with a little line of zig-zag and the cornice has both dentillations and foliated modillions interspersed with rosettes. The frieze has iron hooks, indicating that some sort of wooden board (with name of church?) used to hang here. ⁽¹⁾

The large single doorway is flanked by a pair of Composite columns, supporting a pair of posts set diagonally. In between these is a large and impressive sculpture representing some rocky crags among which the *Madonna and Child* sits. The Christ-Child is holding a fret-saw (a real one, in iron), and he is using it on one of the rocks. This is a pun on the name of the church; Montserrat means "Saw-mountain". The doorway is an addition to the original design, being designed by Tommaso de Marchis in 1726. The sculpture was by Carlo Mondaldi from 1731. ⁽¹⁾

The entablature continues across the two chapel frontages, which are slightly recessed. Below on these frontages, and in between the pilasters on the main façade, are six identical empty round-headed niches with scalloped conchs. These have little triangular pediments containing winged putto's heads. ⁽¹⁾

On the second storey an attic is provided, running on top of the first storey's entablature, and over this are four Composite pilasters supporting the crowning triangular pediment which has modillions and rosettes like those on the cornice of the first storey. In the center is a large rectangular window. The areas delineated by the pilasters and attic cornice have large shallow rectangular recesses. This

storey was completed in 1926 by Rebecchini, but the project to provide it was begun in 1855 by Giuseppe Sarti. There was a recent restoration of the roof. ⁽¹⁾

Cortile

The courtyard is also called a cloister, even though it has never been part of a convent. It was designed to be the new home of many funerary monuments brought from San Giacomo. An early 20th century list, starting from the right of the exit from the church, gives: ⁽¹⁾

Giovanni de Mella, 1467; anonymous, 15th century; a bishop called Giacomo, 1484; Francesco da Toledo, 1479; Roderico Sanchez, 1551; Gabriele Gienn, early 16th century; Diego Valdes, 1506; Ferdinando da Cordova, 1486; Peter Suarez, 16th century; Alvaro Guzman, ditto and (the only modern one) Maria del Carmine Gutierrez del los Rios y Zapata, 1855. ⁽¹⁾ ^(b)

On the right at the far end of the cloister is the entrance to a vestibule, and this had four stucco angels by the same Moratilla who did the monument to the Borgia popes. Also here were coats-of-arms of the 17th century and the monuments to Pietro Giaconi, 1581 and Giuseppe de Vides, 1665. ⁽¹⁾

Interior

The interior layout is simple. A single rectangular nave with three chapels on each side and a deep presbytery with semicircular apse with a conch. The vaulting of these are all at the same height, but the nave, presbytery and apse are divided from one another by two large transverse archivolts. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁶⁾

There are three side chapels on each side, each with their own dome, entered through large arches. In between these are gigantic Composite pilasters in shallow relief, which supports an entablature which runs around the whole interior. The modillions on the cornice of this are prominent. The apse has four such pilasters, slightly more round, and at the entrance of the presbytery is a pair of double engaged pillars in the same style. ⁽¹⁾

The nave and presbytery have barrel vaults, with lunettes for windows, one pair for the presbytery, three for the nave. The decoration of the vaults and interior walls is based on gilded stucco scrollwork, executed in the 19th century restoration. ⁽¹⁾

Many of the works of art to be found here were moved here from Nostra Signora del Sacro Cuore when that church ceased to function as the Spanish national church in the 17th century. ⁽¹⁾

Nave

The white marble floor of the nave was allegedly once at San Giacomo, and if this is true it shows how thorough the Spanish were at looting that edifice when they abandoned it. ⁽¹⁾

The bronze Stations of the Cross are by a Valencian sculptor called Carmelo Pastor, and date to 1958. The coats-of-arms of the Spanish regions are by Eugenio Cisterna (1929). ⁽¹⁾

There is a pair of frescoes over the arches into the central side chapels. On the right, the *Assumption of Our Lady* is by Francesco Nappi, and on the left the *Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven* is by Giovanni Battista Ricci da Novara. ⁽¹⁾

The half bay beyond the chapels, before the sanctuary, has a doorway on each side. Above these are a pair of statues in round-headed niches by Juan Adán. They seem to be his only work in Rome, and presumably were installed in the 19th century restoration. The saints represented are *St Elizabeth of Portugal*, on the right side, and *St Pedro de Arbués* on the left side. Both of them were Catalans. ⁽¹⁾

Sanctuary

With a broad and deep apse, the presbytery was heavily modified in the nineteenth century. The presbytery has a large arch on each side, echoing those of the side chapels, and into each is inserted a cantoria or raised balcony for singers and musicians. They are supported on marble columns, and

were installed in 1829. The church's organ was installed here, in two sections, in 1929. The present fittings of the sanctuary are all early 19th century. The large altarpiece, *The Crucifixion with the B. Virgin and S. John*, is by Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta, painted between 1564-65. (1) (4) (6) (a)

Chapels

The side chapels are described clockwise, starting from the back left. They are identical in architectural design, each having a little dome with pendentives. However, the decoration varies very interestingly.

Chapel of St Anne

The first chapel on the left used to be dedicated to St Eulalia, patron of Barcelona, and had an altarpiece of her by Vicente Palmaroli. This was replaced in 1821 by a marble sculptural relief of *The Madonna and Child with St Anne*, executed by Tommaso Boscoli in 1544, commissioned by the priest Pedro de Velasco, and brought here from San Giacomo. That church was also the origin of the aumbry or Tabernacle of the Holy Oils on the right hand pilaster, from the late fifteenth century, attributed to the Milanese sculptor Luigi Capponi. (1) (6)

The right hand wall has an anonymous monument to Ambassador of Spain Jose Narciso Aparici Soler, who died in Rome in 1845. (1) (4)

Sacristy

The sacristy is not accessible to visitors, but apparently contains more pictures taken from San Giacomo. Noteworthy among these was a 17th century Spanish depiction of *Isaac*. (1)

There used to be three busts executed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini here:

The bust of Cardinal Pedro Foix de Montoya, a benefactor of the church, is from 1621 and so is one of his early works. It is part of a monument not by him, which is now apparently in the dining hall of the college after being taken from the sacristy and replaced by a plaster copy. (1)

The *Blessed Soul* and the *Damned Soul* were commissioned from Bernini by Montoya in 1619. They were appropriated from the sacristy by the Spanish government, who put them in the Spanish embassy to the Holy See on the Piazza di Spagna. (1)

Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to Our Lady of Montserrat. It a riot of gilded stucco work, which is attributed to Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri. However, the original patron was a Catalan Bishop of Malta named Tomás Gargall who died in 1614, whose shield appears in the decoration of the chapel. (1) (6)

The wooden statue on the altar is a modern copy of the famous one at the Abbey of Montserrat, and was donated by the abbey in 1950. It is by Manuel Martí Cabrer, and was one of his last works. The statue was solemnly blessed by Pope Pius XII. (1) (6)

The fresco panels are all by Giovanni Battista Ricci da Novara. On the side walls are of *The Journey of St Raymund of Peñafort* to the right, and *The Holy Mountain of Montserrat* on the left. The pendentives of the dome have the *Evangelists*, the four dome panels feature prophets and sibyls with *Christ in Glory* in the oculus and the archivolt of the entrance arch are paintings, to the left, relating to S. John Chrysostom; and to the right are miracles of the Madonna. (1) (a)

Chapel of St James the Great

The third chapel on the left was originally dedicated to the Crucifixion when it was commissioned by the family of Francisco Robuster (d. 1570). However it was re-dedicated in the 19th century restoration to St James, Patron of Spain, and the former dedication applied to the high altar. The large statue of the saint over the altar is by Jacopo Sansovino, and was installed in in 1882 after having been at San Giacomo. (1) (2)

The memorials on the left wall are, above, Félix Aguirre (d. 1832) sculpted by Antonio Solá, and

below, the tomb of Bishop Alfonso de Paradinas (d. 1485), attributed to the workshop of Andrea Bregno. Bishop de Paradinas was the Bishop of Ciudad. He is described in the epitaph as a helper of the poor and of the oppressed, and the praise is deserved. He founded the Hospital of S. Giacomo degli Spagnuoli, in the Piazza Navona, in 1450, and was himself buried there; but in the year 1495 the tomb was moved here. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ ⁽⁶⁾ ^(b)

The top memorial on the right wall for Pedro de Villa Urrutia y Montalvo, a military officer who died at the age of 23 in 1853. The epitaph reads:

Here awaits the resurrection
Don Pedro de Villa Urrutia y Montalvo
Captain Militia Infantry
Born in Havana on July 3, 1829
He died in Rome on April 5, 1853
Pray for his soul

On the middle of the right wall is the memorial to Antonio Vargas Laguna, (d. 1824) Spanish ambassador to the Vatican, sculpted by José Alvarez Bougel. Below is the tomb of the bishop of Terni, and secretary to Pope Alexander VI, Juan de Fuensalida (died 1498), also attributed to Bregno. The tomb was erected by his brother, Lopez de Fuensalida, one of Csesar Borgia's field officers. It is a copy of the tomb of Paradinas on the opposite wall. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ ⁽⁶⁾ ^(b)

There are two tomb slabs in the floor. On the left is Gundisalvo de Fuentes (d. 1480), Protonotary Apostolic; Dean of Saguntum; once in the service of Card. Gianbattista Cibo (nephew of Innocent VIII.), who placed this slab here. It is almost obliterated. On the right is Petrus de Ferera (d. 1490); Doctor of both laws; Dean; Auditor. The slab is very much worn. ^(b)

Chapel of the Virgin of the Pillar

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to the Madonna della Colonna, or an apparition made to St. James the Greater in Spain, an ancient devotion based at Zaragoza in Aragon and very popular in Spanish-speaking countries. The rich polychrome marble decoration completed in 1765 by Antonio Francés and Miguel de Cetina, based on designs by a Canon from Barcelona, Francisco Gòmez García, (died 1778). The architect was Giuseppe Marchetti. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ ⁽⁵⁾ ^(a)

The altarpiece depicting *Our Lady of the Pillar with St James and St Vincent Ferrer* was painted by Francisco Preciado de la Vega. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

The painting on the left wall is *The Triumph of the Immaculate Conception* (1663) by Louis Cousin, also known as Luigi Primo and that on the right hand one is the *Assumption* (1551) by Francesco di Città di Castello. Both paintings came from San Giacomo. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

Chapel of the Annunciation

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady. It was paid for by a bequest from Gabriel Ferrer, whose tomb slab dated 1607 is in the floor and his shield is in the dome. The fitting out was done in 1624, with the pictures all being done by Francesco Nappi. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

The altarpiece shows the *Annunciation*, and the side walls have the *Birth of Our Lady* and the *Assumption*. The pilasters and archivolt of the entrance arch show prophets and Marian symbols, the *Tower of David* is in the keystone. The pendentives have putti holding further Marian symbols, and in the dome is *St Cecilia*. One lunette with *Meeting of Mary and Elisabeth*. In the tympanum above the altarpiece is the *Eternal Father*. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ ⁽⁶⁾

The two memorials in the side walls are of Spanish ambassadors who died at Rome in the 19th century, Julián de Villalba (d. 1843) and Salvador de Zea Bermúdez (d. 1852). ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

Chapel of St Diego of Alcalá

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Diego of Alcalá, although it was dedicated to SS Nicholas and Philip before the 19th century. The altarpiece depicting *San Diego di Alcalá* was painted by Annibale Carracci. The original patron was Cardinal Bernardino Rocci, and his tomb slab of 1599 is on the pavement. The heraldry of the Rocci family is in the lunettes of the dome. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

The remains of the two Borgia popes, Callixtus III (1455-1458) and Alexander VI (1492-1503), are buried here on the right after being moved from the Vatican grottos in 1889. The monument to the two popes was commissioned in 1881 by Spanish residents in Rome, and made by Felipe Moratilla.

(1) (2) (6) (a)

Below is the cenotaph of the deposed King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, who died in exile at Rome in 1941 after abdicating. His remains were interred here, until being transferred to join the other deceased Spanish royalty in the Pantheon of the Kings of the Monastery of El Escorial, in Madrid in 1980. The monument is a very simple slab of marble. (1) (2) (6) (a)

On the left there is a monument to the Catalan sculptor Antonio Solá, 1861 by José Vilches Llevada and, below, one to Francisco-de-Paola Mora de Lugros, son of the Marchese di Lugros, who died in Naples in 1842. (1) (2)

Location:

Via de Monserrato/Via Giulia 151, 00186 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 53' 45"N](#) [12° 28' 9"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6865865 - 06 6889651

Fax: 0039 06 688965710

Open Saturday 05:00pm-07:00pm

Sunday 10:00am-01:00pm 05:00pm-07:00pm

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Bregno](#) (1418–1506), Italian sculptor and architect of the Early Renaissance
Annibale [Carracci](#) (1560-1609), Italian painter of the Baroque
Antonio da [Sangallo the younger](#) (1484-1546), Italian Renaissance architect
Antonio [Solá](#) (1780–1861), Spanish Neoclassical sculptor
Bernardino Valperga, Italian architect
Carlo Francesco [Bizzaccheri](#) (1656-1721), Italian architect early Baroque and Rococo style
Carlo [Mondaldi](#) (1683-1760), Italian architect
Carmelo [Pastor](#) (1924-1966), Spanish sculptor
Eugenio [Cisterna](#) (1865-1933), Italian painter
Felipe [Moratilla](#) (19th cent), sculptor
Francesco [Capriani](#) da Volterra (1535-1594), Italian architect
Francesco [di Citta di Castello](#) (16th cent), Italian painter
Francesco [Nappi](#) (1565-1630) Italian Mannerist painter
Francisco [Peciado de la Vega](#) (1712-1789), Spanish painter
Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680), Italian Baroque **sculptor** and architect
Giovanni Batista [Ricci](#) aka Da Novara (1545-1620), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista [Contini](#) (1641–1723), Italian architect
Girolamo [Siciolante](#) da Sermoneta (1521-c.1580), Italian Mannerist painter
Giuseppe [Camporese](#) (1761-1822), architect
Giuseppe Marchetti (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe Sarti (19th cent), Italian architect
Jacopo [Sansovino](#) (1486-1570), Italian sculptor
José Alvarez [Bouguel](#) (1805-1830), Spanish sculptor
José Vilches Llevada (19th cent), sculptor
Juan [Adán](#) (1741-1816), Spanish neo-classic sculptor
Luigi [Capponi](#) (15th cent), Italian sculptor
Luigi [Primo](#), known as Louis Cousin or Luigi Gentile da Bruxelles (1605-1667), Flemish painter of the Baroque period
Manuel Martí [Cabrer](#) (1904-1951), Spanish sculptor
Pietro [Camporese](#) the Younger (1792-1873), architect
Salvatore [Rebecchini](#) (1891-1977), Italian architect and the 1st mayor of Rome under the new Republic

Tommaso [Boscoli](#) called Maso del Bosco (1503-1574), Italian sculptor
Tommaso [de Marchis](#) (1693-1759), Italian architect

Burials

Pope [Callistus III](#) {Alfonso de [BORJA](#), (1378-1458)}

Buried in a magnificent monument, built by his nephew Cardinal Rodrigo, in the chapel of S. Maria delle Febri, near the patriarchal Vatican basilica; the fragments of the monument are in the grotto of the basilica; during the reconstruction of the basilica, his remains were transferred in 1586 to another place of the church until 1605; later, they were transferred, together with the remains of Pope Alexander VI on January 30, 1610, to the church of S. Maria in Montserrat, the church of the crown of Aragón in Rome. On August 21, 1889, the remains were transferred to a modern tomb, work of Spanish sculptor Felipe Moratilla, with the medallions of both popes, in the chapel of S. Diego, in that church (now the Spanish national church in Rome and a cardinalial title since 2003).

Pope [Alexander VI](#) {Rodrigo de [BORJA Y BORJA](#), (1430/1432-1503)}

Originally buried in Old St. Peter's Basilica

Juan Cardinal de [MELLA](#), (1397-1467)

Enrique Cardinal de [CARDONA Y ENRÍQUEZ](#), (1485-1530)

Esteban Gabriel Cardinal [MERINO](#), (ca. 1472-1535)

Bartolomé Cardinal de la CUEVA Y TOLEDO, (1499-1562)

Monument only, he is buried in Cuéllar, Spain

Ciriaco Cardinal [ROCCI](#), (1581-1651)

Buried in his family's chapel

Bernardino Cardinal [ROCCI](#), (1627-1680)

Buried in the tomb of his ancestors

Bishop [Alfonso de Paradinas](#)

Bishop Juan de Fuensalida (d. 1503)

Antonio Solá

Neoclassical Catalan sculptor

Link and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)

2. [English Wikipedia page](#)

3. [060608.it web page](#)

4. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)

5. [Info.roma web-page](#)

6. [Spanish Wikipedia page](#)

a. Donovan, Jeremiah; [ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS](#); 1842

b. Davies, Gerald S.; [RENASCENCE: THE SCULPTURED TOMBS OF THE 15TH CENTURY IN ROME](#); 1916

[Nolli map](#) (look for 688)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

Facebook page of [church](#)

[Youtube video](#)

© [Skip Conde](#)
[Churches of Rome.info](#)