

Santa Maria della Scala



Santa Maria della Scala is an early 17th century titular church, found in the Trastevere neighborhood. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her special local title of "Our Lady of the Staircase". [1]

History

This is one of Rome's devotional churches. It was built as a new foundation 1593-1610 to house an icon of the Madonna, which had originally been placed on the landing of a staircase in a nearby private house, the Casa Pia. A deformed child whose mother often prayed before the image was cured in 1592, and the church was built in response to the veneration of the people that resulted. [1] [a]

The project was initiated by Pope Clement VIII in 1593, together with Cardinal Tolomeo Galli who was patron of the Casa Pia. They chose **Francesco Capriani da Volterra** as the architect. Unfortunately, **Capriani** died in the following year after having completed the nave and side chapels. **Girolamo Rainaldi** was the replacement architect. The façade was completed in 1624 to the design of **Ottaviano Mascherino**. [1] [2] [a]

In 1597 the unfinished church was entrusted to the administration of the Discalced Carmelites, who are still in charge, and as a result many of the artworks have Carmelite themes. The friars contracted with Matteo da Città di Castello and Ottaviano Mascherino to build their convent next door. In 1664

the cardinalate title was created. [1]

The friars continued a program of decorative works for the first half of the 17th century, culminating in the addition by **Rainaldi** of a spectacular aedicule for the high altar in 1650. The church was restored in the 1730's, and much of the decoration dates from then. [1]

During the Roman Republic of 1849 the complex was used as a field hospital for Garibaldi's irregulars fighting the French army intent on reconquering the city for the Pope. Most of the action was local to Trastevere, which is why the Garibaldi monument overlooks the church from the Janiculum. The convent was sequestered by the government in 1873 and turned into a police station, but the Carmelites were allowed to continue administering the church. At present, it rather overshadows the actual parish church of Santa Dorotea nearby. [1] [a]

Exterior

The plan of the church is based on a Latin cross, with short transepts which do not extend beyond the walls of the nave aisles. There is a central dome, having a shallow pitched and tiled saucer on an octagonal drum without fenestration. There is tall lantern, with its own little octagonal cap. A long rectangular presbyterium is beyond the dome, and on the far left hand corner of this is perched a little campanile of a single storey. The soundholes of this are extended arches, one on each face, and there is a pyramidal cap. [1]

Façade (1)

The façade of the church is rather restrained, although large and somewhat dominating in the little piazza. It is in travertine, of two storeys, and is higher than the nave behind it. The central portion of the first storey is brought forward slightly, and has two pairs of gigantic Corinthian pilasters flanking the doorway and supporting the blank entablature. Another pair of pilasters occupy the outer corners. The entrance has a pair of swagged Ionic columns, and over the door is a Baroque statue of the *Madonna and Child* in an ornate arched niche with a ribbed conch, volutes and a crowning triangular pediment intruded into by the conch. The sculptor was Francesco Cusart, who carved it in 1633. [1] [2]

The second storey has two pairs of pilasters of the same style as those of the storey below, except the capitals are Composite not Corinthian. They flank a large rectangular window with a balustrade and Ionic columns, and this has a raised segmental pediment. The crowning triangular pediment contains a simple coat of arms, and this storey is flanked by a pair of gigantic volutes. [1]

Pharmacy

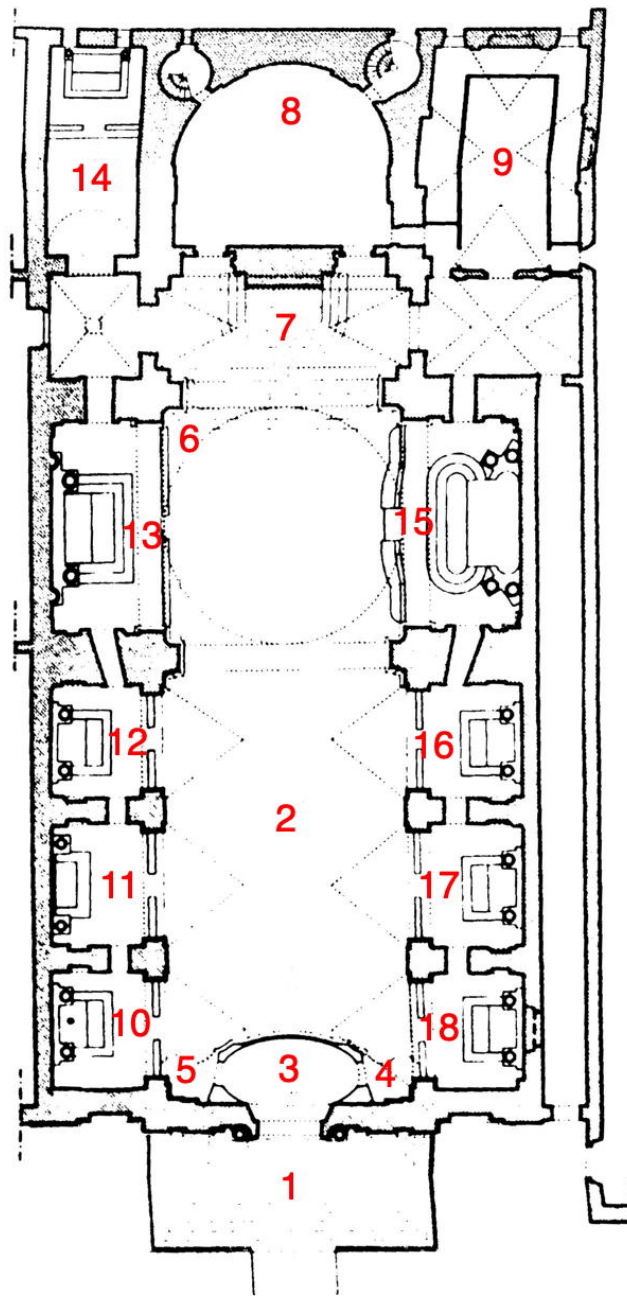
Adjacent to the church is a monastery famous for its 17th century pharmacy, where the original furnishings and equipment have been preserved. It used to supply the papal court, and survived as a business until 1954. Fortunately, nobody bothered to clear the premises out and they have now been restored as a museum. Access is by appointment. [1]

Interior

There are three chapels on each side of the single three-bay nave, then a transept with a domed crossing. There is an altar in each end of the transept. The sanctuary has a single bay, and is continued by a choir with an apse behind the high altar, which has a free-standing baldacchino or ciborio. [1]

The interior wall and ceiling surfaces of the church are richly decorated, although not all of the decoration is real. The vaults of the nave, dome, choir and left arm of the transept are decorated with painting intended to resemble mouldings; the attempt is not altogether successful. The right transept ceiling has the real thing, however, and is a very nice example of stucco relief. [1]

Plan



Nave (2)

The nave side chapels are entered through arches, having thinly molded archivolts on Doric impostes. Between them are gigantic Corinthian pilasters, revetted in what looks like red marble and with gilded capitals. These support an entablature having a cornice with modillions, which runs round the interior. Above the arches are windows, with lunettes above them in the ceiling vault.

The nave ceiling displays circular garlands set in octagonal frames, rather than a figurative fresco painting. All this is paintwork imitating stucco. [1]

Above the entrance (3) is a spectacular double-decker carved and gilded wooden gallery or cantoria for singers and musicians, which was commissioned by Cardinal Luigi Antonio di Borbone Spagna and designed by Giovanni Paolo Panini. The church organ occupies the center of the lower deck. The inscriptions has a date of 1756. In the arch above the upper cantoria is a stained glass window of the *Madonna del Carmine*. [1]

On the courterfaçade, to the left of the entrance is the funerary monument of (5) Leonora Perretti

(d. 1697). To the right of the entrance is the funeral monument of (4) the Marquis Mario Zandomarie of the Counts of San Cesareo (d. 1660). [a]

The floor has several interesting tomb slabs, and was remade in 1739. The tomb slab commemorating Julio Caesari Castellano of 1662 has a charming winged skeleton in opus sectile work. [1] [2]

Crossing

The dome has imitation square coffering containing rosettes, which is quite effective and has a touch of blue which contrasts with the overall decorative scheme of red and gold. [1]

The right hand transept vault has genuine stucco decoration in a diapered pattern, which contrasts interestingly with that in the opposite vault which is paintwork imitating the nave ceiling. [1]

Sanctuary

The high altar (7) and the baldacchino are by Carlo Rainaldi, c. 1650. The baldacchino is a free-standing domed structure (a tempietto) incorporating sixteen slender Corinthian columns of Sicilian alabaster. The four statues of the *Evangelists* on it look like bronze, but are terracotta since the originals were looted in 1849. However, the central *Lamb of the Apocalypse* in glory is in gilded bronze. [1] [a]

To either side of the altar are doors leading into the choir of the friars. Over these are statues of *St. Joseph* and *St. Teresa of Avila*, by Simone Giorgini, commissioned by Princess Violante Facchinetti Pamphili in 1706. [1] [a]

The choir is decorated with paintings reproducing moldings. It has a wooden floor with a large tombstone in the center and three rows of seats with walnut veneer and ends with an apse. The four large paintings that adorn it respectively represent the *Baptism of Christ*, the *Marriage at Cana*, the *Last Supper* and the *Ascension* by Lucas de la Haye (Fra Luca Fiammingo) who was a Carmelite friar. At the center is a painting of the *Queen of Heaven* by the Cavalier d'Arpino 1612. [1] [2] [3] [a]

The apsidal basin (8), on the other hand, is a recent painting (early 1900s) and presents a *Christ Redentor enthroned with the Virgin and St. Joseph Genuflecting at its feet and St. Teresa, the Blessed Mary of the Angels, St. Albert and St. John of the Cross*. [2]

To the left of the sanctuary, outside of the balustrade is a wooden sculpture covered with rich gold embroidered clothes of (6) the *Madonna del Carmine* by Giuseppe Peroni from 1737. [2]

Sacristy (9)

On the walls are placed massive walnut sideboards on which statuettes and papier-mâché are placed by the *Twelve Apostles*, made after the original bronze were stolen during the Napoleonic era. [a]

Chapels

The chapels contain very rich polychrome stonework. They will be described in clockwise order starting from the first chapel in the left rear.

Chapel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (10)

The first chapel on the left was built under the direction of Girolamo Rainaldi during the patronage of Cesare Pandini (1604). [1] [3] [a] [a]

The altarpiece depicts the *Virgin Handing the Scapular to St. Simon Stock with the prophet Elijah* by Cristoforo Roncalli (Il Pomarancio), who also executed the fresco of the *Eternal Father* above. [1] [3] [a]

Chapel of the Assumption (11)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, and was designed by Girolamo Rainaldi on behalf of the jurist Laerzio Cherubini. [1] [a] [b]

On the vault is painted a *Dove of the Holy Spirit*, while the side walls hold canvas paintings showing the *Marriage of Our Lady* and the *Birth of Our Lady* by **Giovanni Conca**. The altarpiece is the *Death of the Virgin* by **Carlo Saraceni**. [1] [2] [b]

This last work replaced a controversial work of Caravaggio, the eponymous *Death of the Virgin*. Caravaggio was suspected of having used the body of a prostitute drowned in the Tiber as a model (an alternative story is that she was one of his mistresses -alive, not dead), and so the friars rejected it with the alleged comment that doing such a thing lacked decorum and was almost heretical. The picture made its way to the Louvre. (see YouTube video link below) [1] [4] [b]

On the altar there is, in a niche of gilded wood, a statue of the *Holy Child of Prague*. In front of the altar is a statue of *St Teresa of Lisieux* in a glass box. [a]

Chapel of the Crucifixion (12)

The third chapel on the left contains a crucifix enshrined over an altar with black marble columns and an alabaster frontal. The side walls are covered with alabaster. The purple marble, known as the Persian of the Lord, predominates in this chapel. [a]

The corpus on the crucifix is of bronze painted wood by an unknown artist; it is being venerated by a sculpture of *St John of the Cross*, and a gang of cherubs executed in white marble. This composition was by **Pietro Francesco Papaleo** from Sicily of 1726, imitating Bernini. The paintings of the side walls, depicting *Christ derided* (right) and *Christ fallen under the cross* (left) and the vault decoration with *Angels with the symbols of the Passion* are by **Filippo Zucchetti da Rieti**. [1] [a]

Chapel of Our Lady of the Stairs (13)

The left hand transept altar enshrines the original miraculous icon in an altar with four large columns of red marble from Verona (marmo rosso di Verona). The image of the Madonna was crowned by the Vatican Chapter on 10 October 1647. The two paintings showing the *Coronation of the Virgin* (right) and the *Immaculate Conception* (left) are by **Lucas de la Haye (ca. 1682)** again. The balustrade has six small pillars with specimen of oriental flowered alabaster and friezes of broccatello of Spain and small columns of the Holy Door. [1] [3] [a]

This is also the funerary chapel of the Santacroce family, and the monument to the Marquis Santacroce is by **Alessandro Algardi**. That to Livia Santacroce is by **Domenico Guidi**. [1]

Chapel of the Relic (14)

The chapel to the left of the sanctuary is of rectangular plan with coffered barrel vault, built in the 18th century and decorated by the will of the Carmelite Alessio Maria della Passione, author of a life of Santa Teresa, and of Mons. Antonio Federici. The six canvases with *Stories from the life of Saint Teresa* arranged along the walls are by **Lucas de La Haye**. In 1905 the relic of the right foot of Santa Teresa, revered in the church since 1617, was transferred from the choir, and on that occasion the room was restored, as happened again in 1961. Now this precious relic is located above the altar in an artistic gilded bronze reliquary with silver decorations. [5] [a]

The floor is all covered with tombstones among which is very valuable that of Mons. Antonio Albergati (d. 1636), all inlaid with good marbles which, besides the beautiful decorations, also represent two skeletons seated, of exquisite workmanship. [5]

Chapel of St Teresa of Jesus (15)

The right transept altar is dedicated to St Teresa of Avila. The Discalced Carmelite Fathers took special care of the ornament and decoration of this chapel dedicated to their Reformer. The realization lasted 11 years and was inaugurated on October 14th 1745, the eve of the feast of the saint. The chapel was rebuilt with a drawing by **Giovanni Paolo Panini** in 1617, and is one of the most sumptuous chapels of Rome. [a]

The altar has four spirally ribbed columns veneered in verde antico marble and two marble angels by **Giovanni Battista Maini**. The altarpiece, the *Ecstasy of St Teresa*, is by **Francesco Mancini** 1745. [1]

The side walls have two marble reliefs depicting the saint in ecstasy again, the one on the right, *Saint Teresa pierced by a seraph*, by René-Michel Slodtz and the left, the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, by Filippo Della Valle (1738). The stucco reliefs above the altar which continue the theme are by Giuseppe Lironi. [1] [c]

Chapel of St Joseph (16)

The third chapel on the right is actually dedicated to the Madonna, St. Joseph and St. Anne, as stated by the plaque in gilded metal with an antique green frame, clouds of alabaster and lapis lazuli leaves.

The altarpiece showing the *Holy Family* is by Giuseppe Ghezzi of 1710. On the left is the *Marriage of Our Lady* by Antonio David, and on the right is the *Dream of Joseph* by Giovanni Odazzi. Antonio David also executed the vault fresco showing *The Apotheosis of St Joseph*. [1] [3] [a]

The picture of the *Sacred Heart* on the altar is a copy of 1780 of a famous picture by Pompeo Batoni. [1]

Chapel of St Hyacinth (17)

The middle chapel on the right is dedicated to St Hyacinth, which is also the funerary chapel of the Dionisi and Barisiani families. The coats of arms of the Barisians and the Dionysis are reproduced in bas-relief in the bases of the columns the inlaid in turquoise field of the floor, on the stone of the noble sepulcher we read the epigraph: LELIUS BARISIANUS ET LUCRETIA (LAVINIA) DIONYSIA - EIUS UXOR “. Two memorials belonging to the Sorbolongo family were moved here when the church was restored in the 18th century. [1] [a]

The altar has columns of pink cottanello marble, and an altarpiece of *Our Lady with SS Hyacinth and Catherine of Siena* by Antiveduto Grammatica. [1]

From the beginning of the 20th century in this chapel the icon on the altar, Madonna "Mater Purissima", is venerated. [a]

Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn van Thuán is buried here, as stated by the latin inscription on the altar.

Chapel of St John the Baptist (18)

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St John the Baptist, and the altarpiece, representing the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist in the prison*, is by the Dutch painter Gerard van Honthorst, painted between 1617 and 1618 by order of Giovanni Battista Longhi, the butler of Cardinal Galli, who was buried in the chapel. He was to have a brilliant career after returning to the Netherlands in the following year. The altar columns are of black marble, and the work also uses alabaster, Sicilian jasper and yellow marble from Siena. [1] [a] [b]

On the sides of the chapel there are the tombstones of Sinibaldi family members; and in the floor, which has many bands of Greek saline marble, there is the stone of the noble tomb with the inscription: "Familia de Sinibaldis - Romana - ad diem novissimum. [a]

Access

The church is open (church website, May 2019):
10:00 to 13:00, 16:00 to 19:00.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated (church website, May 2019):
Weekdays 18:30;
Sundays and Solemnities 11:30, 18:30.

The parish website of Santa Dorotea mentions a 10:30 Sunday in English, but the church website does not.

Artists and Architects:

Alessandro [Algardi](#) (1598-1654), Italian high- Baroque sculptor, architect
Antiveduto [Grammatica](#) (1571-1626), Baroque Italian painter
Antonio [David](#) (1698-1750), Italian painter
Carlo [Rainaldi](#) (1611-1691), Italian architect of the Baroque period
Carlo [Saraceni](#) [aka *Veneziano*] (1579-1620), Italian painter of the early-Baroque
Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) [aka *Il Pomerancio*] (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter
Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period
Gerard [van Honthorst](#) [aka *Gherardo delle Notti* or *Gherardo Olandese*] (1592-1656), Dutch painter from Utrecht
Filippo [della Valle](#) (1698-1768), Italian late-Baroque or early Neoclassic sculptor
Filippo Zucchetti (1648-1712), Italian painter and draughtsman
Francesco [Capriani](#) da Volterra (1535-1594), Italian architect
Francesco di Cusart (17th cent), sculptor
Francesco [Mancini](#) (1679-1758), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista [Maini](#) (1690-1752), Italian sculptor of the Late-Baroque period
Giovanni [Conca](#) (1690-1771), Italian painter from Gaeta
Giovanni [Odazzi](#) (1663-1731), Italian painter and etcher of the Baroque period
Giovanni Paolo [Panini](#) (1691-1765), Italian painter and architect
Girolamo [Rainaldi](#) (1570-1655), Italian Mannerist architect
Giuseppe [Peroni](#) (1710-1776), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe [Cesari](#) [aka *Cavaliere d'Arpino*] (1568-1640), Italian Mannerist painter
Giuseppe [Ghezzi](#) (1634-1721), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Giuseppe [Lironi](#) (d. 1746), Italian sculptor
Lucas De La Haye aka *Fra Luca Fiammingo* (17th cent.), Flemish painter
Ottaviano [Nonni](#) [aka *Il Mascherino*] (1536-1606), Italian architect, sculptor, and painter from Bologna
Pietro Francesco Papaleo (18th cent), Italian sculptor
René-Michel [Slodtz](#) [aka *Michelangelo Slodtz*] (1705-1764), French sculptor from Paris
Simone [Giorgini](#) (18th cent), sculptor

Relics:

St Teresa of Avila

Burials:

Giovanni Antonio Cardinal [FACCHINETTI DE NUCE](#), *iunior*, (1575-1606)
Cesare Cardinal [FACCHINETTI](#), (1608-1683)
Buried in the chapel of S. Teresa
Marco Cardinal [GALLI](#), (1619-1683) [also see [here](#)]
Giovanni Antonio Cardinal [GUADAGNI](#), O.C.D., (1674-1759) [also see [here](#)]
Buried in the monument he had built for himself
François-Xavier Cardinal [NGUYÊN VAN THUÂN](#), (1928-2002) [also see [here](#)]
Originally buried in the Chapel of the Canons of St. Peter's Basilica, Campo Verano cemetery, Rome.
In 2012, the body was buried in the church of S. Maria della Scala, his diaconate.

Location:

Addr: Piazza della Scala, 23, Rione Trastevere
Coord: [41° 53' 28.2"N, 12° 28' 4.8"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: +39 06 5806233
Fax: +39 06 5806233
Opening times
Open 9:00am-12:00pm 03:30pm-06:00pm

Mass Time :

Holidays: 11:30 to 17:30

Weekdays: 17:30

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 2. [Abitarea Roma web site](#)
 3. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=962
 4. [YouTube of Caravaggio's Death of a Virgin in the Louve](#)
 5. [Church web site](#)
- a. Information from plaques in the church
- b. Borsook, Eve; "Documents concerning the Artistic Associates of Santa Maria della Scala in Rome"; *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 96, No. 618 (Sep., 1954), pp. 270-273+275 (jstor.org 871402)
- c. Minor, Vernon Hyde; "Passive Tranquillity: The Sculpture of Filippo Della Valle"; *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, Vol. 87, No. 5 (1997), pp. i-xii+1-304 (jstor.org 1006652)

[De Alvariis photo gallery](#)

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Santa Maria della Scala %28Rome%29](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Santa_Maria_della_Scala_%28Rome%29)

<http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi90a.htm#S.%20Maria%20della%20Scala>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Maria_della_Scala

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/santa-maria-della-scala.html>