

San Rocco all'Augusteo



San Rocco is a 17th century church built for a hospital, located in the rione Campo Marzio, between Ponte Cavour and the Mausoleum of Augustus. The dedication is to St Roch (13th century).

History

Various kinds of epidemics, including the bubonic plague and malaria had been decimating the population of Rome for centuries. They were an act of God, which the inhabitants of Rome attempted to halt through prayers and processions. The greatest trust was placed in the Virgin Mary, but prayers were also said to St. Roch, to whom particular skills were attributed in combating diseases. It is to him that a church located near the Mausoleum of Augustus is dedicated, found in a former port district of Ripetta. The port was a place where diseases spread most rapidly. They were brought to Rome by sailors, but also by the centuries-old spreaders of all germs – rats. [5]

The direct cause for the decision of building the church, also the hospital which is a part of it, was the epidemic of the plague which erupted in Rome in 1477 and decimated the populace of the city. The initiative of "Brotherhood of San Rocco", dedicated to the saint of Montpellier and approved in 1499 by Pope Alexander VI. In the early sixteenth century the religious association, created to help the sick on the initiative of boatmen and the residents who lived near the Tiber, was allowed to build a hospital near the ancient church of San Martino *iuxta flumen* ("the river"). The place is very near an ancient river port of Ripetta, the district around the ruins of the Mausoleum of Augustus. In 1502 the church was named San Rocco and San Martino. [1] [5]

After the proclamation of the Holy Year of 1500, the port on the river became very busy with the import of goods and pilgrims. Because the now chronic lack of hygiene (the Roman aqueducts were interrupted for centuries) there thrived infectious diseases. Since ancient times, moreover, the area of Ripetta was known as the district of brothels called *Lupanaria Schiavonia*, (for the presence of slave colonies), a district, therefore, high incidence of venereal diseases. The brotherhood of St. Rocco was one of many free associations of citizens who since the Middle Ages dedicated to health care of the poor.

The small church, devoid of particular artistic ambitions, was completed in 1503 with an interior decoration, partly by Baldassare Peruzzi and the façade was painted with *Stories of Saint Rocco* by the painter Avanzino Nucci. It was dedicated to the 14th century French hermit St. Roch of Montpellier, protector of plague victims [1] [3]

In 1654 a copy of the famous icon of Santa Maria delle Grazie, the original of which was first venerated at Santa Maria delle Grazie al Foro Romano, was reported as having performed miracles. As a result of the devotion this caused, the confraternity was able to attract enough money and interest to rebuild the church. This was completed in 1657 to a design by Giovanni Antonio De'

Rossi, the major donor being Cardinal Odoardo Vecchiarelli. The major additions were the dome, the sacristy and a new chapel for the miraculous icon. Between 1654 and 1680 De' Rossi performed internal transformations and embellishments with the transformation of the apse from circular to rectangular, and a new high altar, funded by Cardinale Francesco Barberini. [1] [3] [6]

However, the confraternity ran out of funds before completing the façade. This was only added in 1834 by Giuseppe Valadier, in a very accomplished Neo-Classical style. Giuseppe Vitelli, by his will, financed the construction of the new façade. The façade design was copied from the façade of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice by the great architect Andrea Palladio. In 1852 there were interior renovations and a new floor, as commemorated by the inscription in the floor of the transept. The interior was restored again in 1885. [1] [3] [6]

The first radical transformation of appearance of the area occurred in 1890 with the scrapping of the port of Ripetta due to the construction of Lungotevere and the Cavour Bridge.

Subsequently, there were radical renovation of the district close to the Ara Pacis and between 1934 and 1938 were demolished the dense constructions near the Mausoleum of Augustus. During the work the hospital (rebuilt between 1772 and 1775) and the bell tower of the church were demolished. [6]

There was a restoration in 1940, when the bridge linking the church to the Croatian college was built across the street to the right. In 1953 began the second life of Saint Rocco with the complete restoration of the building and the recovery of the works contained, like painting by Baciccio, the altarpiece of Giacinto Brandi, the fresco by Baldassare Peruzzi and the exhibition of art in San Rocco

The Confraternita di San Rocco survived all vicissitudes, and is still in charge. They have an international outreach known as the Amici di San Rocco. [1]

Exterior

Apart from the façade, the exterior is rendered in orange and white over brickwork. The side chapels are lit by a row of three large lunette windows on each side. The central nave walls are supported by buttresses, in between which are windows with slightly curved tops. [1]

Dome

The dome is elliptical, with a proportionately high drum in brick. It is disproportionally small in relation to the church building. However it is a neat design, with eight large rectangular windows in Baroque frames separated by pairs of Doric brick pilasters supporting an entablature with a dentillate cornice. The dome itself, in lead, sits on a plinth above this. The lantern is also carefully designed, with Ionic semi-columns separating narrow windows and supporting a cog-wheel entablature. The final cupola is onion-shaped. [1]

Façade (1)

The façade is a *unique* Roman neoclassical architecture by Valadier. The façade was planned from before the French occupation, but was only finally finished in 1834. Valadier lifted the design from the design by Palladio for the church of San Giorgio Maggiore at Venice. [1]

The church has a nave with lower side aisles, and most churches of this design in Rome solve the problem of the layout of the façade by dividing it into two horizontally and treating each storey as a separate design element. Palladio took two separate design elements, but put them one in front of the other instead. [1]

The lower part of the façade fronting the nave and the side aisles have a large triangular pediment supported on six Ionic pilasters. The two pairs at the outer corners are conjoined, but the inner two pairs are spaced apart. Placed in front of this design element is an enormous propylaeum, which incorporates the upper nave frontage. It has two pairs of ribbed Corinthian columns, each pair sharing a high plinth, supporting an entablature with swags, ribbons and tassels on its frieze. Above this is a triangular pediment with dentillation and modillions (appropriate to the Corinthian order of architecture), and in the tympanum of the pediment is a wreath with a ribbon. In the center of the

façade, above the main entrance, is a large rectangular window. [1]

The two “Angels holding candles” on the façade were placed here in 1984. [3]

There are three entrances, the central one being much larger than the two side ones (the left hand door is sealed from the inside). All three have projecting cornices supported by strapwork corbels, but the central doorway has strigillate decoration below the corbel and the coat-of-arms of Pope Gregory XVI above. Above the side doors are a pair of large tablets in frames decorated with zig-zags: [1]

The left hand one reads: [1]

**Sedente Gregorio XVI P[ontifici] M[aximo] frons templi S[ancto] Rocho peste infectis
opifero dicati, Iosephi Vitelli aede legato a fundamentis erecta absoluta AD
MDLCCCXXXVIII**

("During the reign of Pope Gregory XIV, the frontage of the temple dedicated to St Roch, the helper of those infected with the plague, was erected complete from its foundations by Joseph Vitelli, superior of the house, in the year 1834.")

The right hand one reads: [1]

**Ne dira attingat mortalia corpora pestis, sordida ne foedent immortales animos
crimina, precibus age tuis inclite Roche**

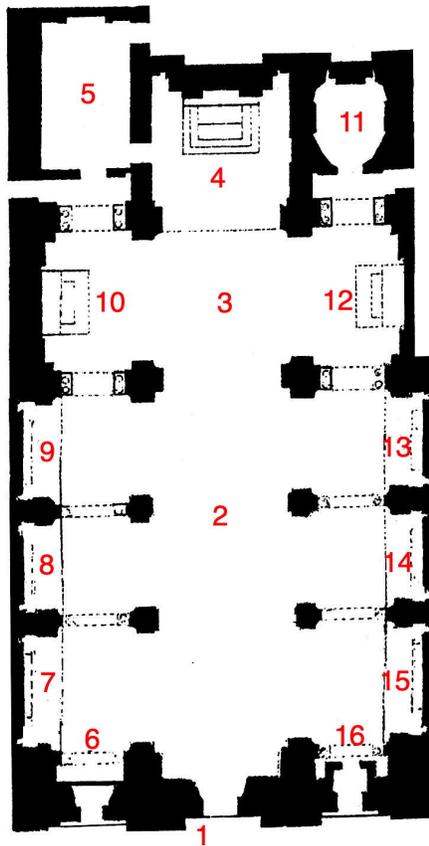
("So that dangerous plague does not affect mortal bodies and dirty bad actions pollute immortal souls, act with your prayers O venerable Roche.")

In 2006 a new building enclosing the rebuilt Ara Pacis (altar of piece) from the time of Augustus, designed by the American architect Richard Meier, was opened immediately in front of the facade.

Idrometro di Ripetta

Just round the corner to the right of the façade is a tall, thin marble slab for measuring the height of the floods on the Tiber (*Idrometro di Ripetta*), installed by 1821. The worst reported flooding is that of 1598 with a record of 4 meters (13 ft) above the current street level. The original idrometro was divided into four parts arranged along a scale steps. [1] [3]

Plan



Interior

The church has a single nave, a domed transept and a square-ended presbyterium. There are three chapels on each side of the nave, entered through arcades springing from square piers, and also an altar at each end of the transept. [1]

The church was a popular place for funerals, and many interesting memorial tablets decorate the interior. Most of these are 19th century, as are the very impressive wall and ceiling frescoes. [1]

Nave (2)

The decoration is rich, typically so for the Baroque style, and features Corinthian pilasters on the arcade piers revetted in pink marble and with gilded capitals, supporting an entablature with a strongly projecting cornice resting on modillions which runs round the entire church. [1]

The ceiling is barrel-vaulted, with three shallow lunettes on each side for the windows in the central nave walls. The large central fresco shows *The Funeral and Apotheosis of St Roch*, and is by Achille Scaccioni, who was active in Rome from 1858 to 1866 and was well-known as a restorer of old paintings. [1] [6]

The pulpit to the left of the left transept altar, cantilevered out from the wall, has a superb curving staircase, with a balustrade having little pink marble balusters. Relief sculptures occupy the front and side. The pulpit was gifted by Pope Benedict XV in 1914. [1] [6]

The carved organ case and balcony (cantoria) over the entrance doorway is impressive, and dates from 1721. [1]

Here are several monuments to ladies: Nicola Francisci of 1867 near the entrance door, Teresa Spada of 1852 on a pilaster, and Luisa Krimini of Corfu (1859) and Virginia Sebastiani (1857) on the walls. [1]

Transept and Dome (3)

It is worth looking into the dome, which has a set of eight frescoes in a charming and rather naïve style, featuring angels playing musical instruments. These are separated by wide ribs in molded and gilded stucco. The pairs of ribbed Corinthian pilasters separating the windows in the drum echo the exterior design. These frescoes, and those of prophets on the pendentives, are by Francesco Rosa and Vincenzo Pasqualoni. The lantern oculus contains the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*. [1]

Sanctuary (4)

The sanctuary is rectangular, with no curved apse. The main altarpiece features *The Apotheosis of St Roch* (1674) and is by Giacinto Brandi. It is set in a magnificent Baroque altar, made by Giuseppe Giorgetti, with two pairs of mottled pink and red marble Corinthian columns. The broken segmental pediment of the altar has a little aedicule set into it, containing an image of the *Dove of the Holy Spirit* in glory. [1] [3] [6]

The fresco in the tympanum above the altar shows *Christ in Majesty* by Scaccioni. The side walls have two frescoes by Cesare Mariani (1885). The left hand one depicts *St Roch in a Hospital* and the right hand one, *St Martin Sharing His Cloak with a Beggar*. Above these are cantoria or opera-boxes for solo musicians. [1]

The ceiling has a barrel vault, with two large frescoes either side of a central panel containing a tondo of *God the Father* by Vincenzo Pasqualoni (1870). The side frescoes are by Scaccioni again, and show *The Multiplication of the Loaves* to the left and *The Healing of the Paralytic* to the right. [1] [6]

Side chapel/altars

Each chapel is entered from the nave through a wide arch between large pilasters. The chapels are interconnected through a large opening between them through shallow arches supported by brown-orange marble columns. This, in effect, creates side aisles. Each altar is recessed with a barrel vault

above it. In front of each altar, over the aisle, is an oval dome with lantern that contains a large window. Above each arch between chapels are lunettes with frescoed scenes. On the inside piers of the arches are funeral memorials.

The side altars are described starting from the left hand side, and moving clockwise.

Altar of St Nicholas of Bari (6)

At the back of the left aisle, closing off the side door on the façade, is the altar of St Nicholas of Bari. The 18th century altarpiece depicts *St Nicholas venerating the Madonna and Child*. [1]

Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes (7)

The first chapel on the left has been fitted out as a grotto with St Bernadette having a vision of Our Lady. At either side of the grotto are stucco large stucco angels holding candelabras. [1]

Chapel of the Nativity (8)

The second chapel on the left is also known as the Cappella del Presepe. It was restored by Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri in the 17th century, with delicate and intricate stucco work in the domed vault and side lunettes. The four frescoes in the dome are of *Virtues* as little boys, with labels in the other four sectors. The lunettes have *King David* and what looks like a sibyl. [1] [6]

The fresco altarpiece is of the *Nativity*, by Baldassarre Peruzzi. This was retouched by someone from the school of Baciccio, but then very badly restored in the 19th century after being damaged by flood waters. Peruzzi had more frescoes in the church, destroyed by Tiber floods. [1] [6]

To one side is a 16th century painting on wood, depicting various saints. This used to be in the third chapel on the right. The work is now regarded as anonymous, although Antonio du Châtel has been suggested as the artist. Also here is a copy of the *Infant of Prague* in a glass box. [1]

Chapel of St Anthony of Padua (9)

The third chapel on the left has an altarpiece of *St. Anthony with the Christ-Child* (c.1650) by Gregorio Preti. The unribbed elliptical cupola shows *St. Anthony in Glory*, and the lunettes show scenes from his life. These frescoes are early work of Francesco Rosa, from 1663. [1] [2] [3]

Here also are a statue of *St Rita of Cascia*, who is popular in Rome, and a copy of the icon of *Our Lady of Pompei*. [1]

The pilaster on the right has a monument of 1825 to Giuseppe del Medico, professor of anatomy.

Chapel of St Martin (10)

The left hand end of the transept has an altar with two Corinthian columns of porphyry. The altarpiece shows *St Martin Dividing His Cloak with a Beggar* by Donato da Formello. This is poorly lit. The altar has a large picture of the *Sacred Heart*, which obviously is the focus of devotion here. [1]

Over the arch leading to the vestibule that leads to the sacristy, and to the side exit, is a small cantorium, flanked by frescoes of angels. In the vestibule is a memorial to Francesco Orioli, doctor and philosopher, 1854 by Antonio Cipolla. Also here is a painting of Sts. Peter and Paul. [6]

Sacristy (4)

The sacristy is at the end of the left hand aisle, to the left of the sanctuary. It contains a fresco altarpiece, from 1660, the first Roman masterpiece by Giovanni Battista Gaulli featuring *Virgin Mary and Christ Child with Sts. Anthony Abbot and St. Roch and the Plague Victims*, which used to be in the second chapel on the right. Also, the *Miracle of San Vincenzo Ferreri*, (1720) by Giovanni Antonio Grecolini. [1] [3] [6]

Chapel of Our Lady of Graces (11)

At the end of the right aisle is the separate shrine-chapel containing the 17th century image of the *Madonna delle Grazie*, "Our Lady of Graces". It has its own little oval cupola, and its own side entrance from the street. The decoration is luscious, featuring ribbed Corinthian columns and pilasters in a grey marble or jasper with blood-red flecks as well as panels in alabaster and grey

granite. The cupola frescoes are dated (1657) and signed by Giovanni Antonio Carosio; the main one depicts the *Assumption*, and the pendentives have *Doctors of the Church*. [1] [4]

Built in 1655, it is a masterpiece, by Giovanni Antonio De Rossi for Pope Urban VIII Barberini (1623/44) with influences Borromini. Much of the polychrome work was done by Niccolò Menghini. [3] [6]

The memorials in here are of the Carelli family, 17th century. Also buried here is Cardinale Giovanni Domenico Paracciani. [1] [6]

Over the arch leading into the Chapel of Our Lady of Graces is a small cantorium, flanked by frescoes of angels.

Chapel of the Crucifix (12)

The right hand end of the transept has an altarpiece which is a mediaeval-style painted wooden crucifix. A pair of pictures of angels assisting souls in Purgatory flank the altar, and above them are *King David* and *Moses*, by Ettore Ballerini in 1909. In the vault and on either side of the window are *Scenes from the Passion*. In front of the crucifix is an unusual modern portrait of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, with her face glowing. [1]

Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (13)

The third chapel on the right is now dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. The altarpiece by Pietro Gagliardi (1854) shows the *Madonna and Child being venerated by Sts Nicholas and Julian*. The frescoes in the dome are by Filippo Bigioli. [1] [6]

On either side of the altar are statues of *St. Rita* (left) and *San Pio da Pietrelcina* (right). The elliptical cupola has very rich stucco work, and frescoes of prophets on a blue background. The pendentives have sibyls.

On the pilaster following is a memorial to Raffaele Segni. [1]

Chapel of St Joseph (14)

The second chapel on the right used to be dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot, and its former altarpiece is now in the sacristy. It is now dedicated to St Joseph. [1]

The altarpiece is of *St Joseph with the Christ-Child*, by Giuseppe Gagliardi (1912). To one side is a work by Giovanni Antonio Grecolini. (1721). [1] [6]

At the left side of the altar is a statue of St Anthony the Abbot.

A treasure of the church is a silver reliquary containing an arm and hand of St Roch, designed by Domenico Gregorini in 1754. [1] [6]

The next pilaster has a memorial to Lelio Serafini. [1]

Chapel of St Francis of Paola (15)

The first chapel on the right hand side has an altarpiece by Antonio Amorosi showing the *Ecstasy of St. Francis* (1719). [1] [3]

The cupola, pendentives and lunettes have pretty 19th century frescoes. The cupola has putti holding labels reading *Tota Pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te* ("You are wholly beautiful, my girlfriend, and no flaw is in you") which is a quotation from the Song of Songs. The pendentives have Old Testament antecedents of Our Lady, and the lunettes have Our Lady watching as Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden, and the latter two with her at the Crucifixion. [1]

Near the side door are memorials to Francesco Folicaldi (1859), and to Giuseppe Vitelli (16) {right aisle, back wall} (1830), who financed the building of the façade, by Giuseppe de Fabris. [1] [6]

Artists and Architects:

Achille [Scaccioni](#) (19th cent.), Italian painter
Antonio [Amorosi](#) (1660-1738), Italian painter of the late-Baroque
Antonio Carisi, Italian painter
Antonio [Cipolla](#) (1822-1874), Italian architect
Baldassare [Peruzzi](#) (1481-1536), Italian painter and architect from Siena
Carlo Francesco [Bizzaccheri](#) (1656-1721), Italian architect early Baroque and Rococo style
Cesare [Mariani](#) (1826-1901), Italian painter
Domenico [Gregorini](#) (1692-1777), Italian architect
[Donato da Formello](#) (16th cent.), Italian painter, sculptor
Ettore Ballerini (1868-1942), Italian painter
Filippo [Bigioli](#) di Sanseverino (1798-1878), Italian painter
Francesco [Rosa](#) (1638-1687), Italian painter from Genova
Giacinto [Brandi](#) (1621-1691), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Giovanni Antonio [Carosio](#) (c.1606-1667), Italian painter
Giovanni Antonio [de Rossi](#) (1616-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period
Giovanni Antonio [Grecolini](#) (1675-1736), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista [Gaulli](#) [aka *Baciccio*] (1639-1709), Italian painter of the High Baroque (also see [here](#))
Giuseppe [de Fabris](#) (1790-1860), Italian sculptor of the Neoclassic period
Giuseppe Gagliardi (20th cent.), Italian painter
Giuseppe [Giorgetti](#) (active 1668-1682), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe [Valadier](#) (1762-1839), Italian architect and designer, sculptor, urban planner and archeologist, a chief exponent of Neoclassicism in Italy
Gregorio [Prete](#) (1603-1672), Italian painter
Niccolò [Menghini](#) (1610-1665), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period
Pietro [Gagliardi](#) (1809-1890), Italian painter (also see [here](#))
Vincenzo [Pasqualoni](#) (1819-1880), Italian painter

Location:

Address: Largo San Rocco 1, 00186 Roma
Coord: [41 ° 54' 20" "N 12 ° 28' 32" E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6896416

Open:

Weekdays 7.30am-9.00am 4.30pm-8.00pm

Holidays 8.30am-13.00pm

Masses

Holidays 9.00am 10.00am 11.00am 12.00am 5.30pm 7.15pm

Weekdays 7.40am 8.30am 5.30pm 7.15pm

The day before a holiday 5.30pm 7.15pm

Burials:

Giandomenico Cardinal [PARACCIANI](#), (1646-1721)

Buried in the tomb of his family in the chapel of the *Madonna*.

Links and References

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