

Santa Maria in Publicolis



The Church of **Santa Maria in Publicolis** is a 17th century Baroque convent church, situated on Via in Publicolis at Piazza Costaguti in the rione VIII of Sant'Eustachio, is the only Roman church dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a little church built near the palace of the patrons, the Santacroce, who claimed to descend from Publio Valerio Publicola, a Roman consul who in 509 BC promulgated laws in favor of the lower classes.

History

The first mention of this church is in the papal bull of 1186 issued by Pope Urban III, listing the parish churches dependent on the basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso. Here it is called Sanctae Mariae de Publico. The last word seems to refer to the public property (publicum) of the ancient Roman state, and it is thought that it might derive from the Porticus Minucia Frumentaria. This was a large colonnaded square or portico immediately to the east of the present Largo di Torre Argentina, and was a major center for the distribution of the free wheat ration to the city's ordinary inhabitants. [1] [4]

The foundation of the church is unrecorded, but it would have been one of many small parish churches built in the city in the 10th or early 11th centuries. In the 13th century it came under the patronage of the Santacroce Publicola family. [1] [2]

The church was apparently restored in 1465 by one Andrea Santacroce, a lawyer who attended the Council of Florence.

The name changed as a result of patronage by the noble family of the Santacroce to whom he belonged. They claimed that they were lineal descendants of the ancient Roman consul called Publius Valerius Publicola, and the first evidence of this is claimed to be an epitaph of 1471. Then they became parishioners in 1501, when Antonio Santacroce built a nearby palazzo in a rather old-fashioned style for the time. The first examples of the name Publicolis for the church occur later in that century.

In the early 17th century the church fell into disrepair, and so Cardinal Marcello Santacroce had it completely rebuilt in the Baroque style to a design by **Giovanni Antonio de' Rossi** in 1643. Marcello conceived it as a private chapel of the Santacroce family, whose symbol was the pair of pelicans represented also in the façade. [1] [2]

The church was restored in 1727 for Prince Scipione Publicola Santacroce. [2]

However, in 1864 the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, founded by St Cajetan Errico (Italian: Gaetano), established themselves next door. The congregation was founded at Secondigliano, now a suburb of Naples, in 1833 and received approval in 1846. The new convent was then turned into the Generalate or congregational headquarters. The Congregation still today officiates the church. [1] [3]

Meanwhile, in 1867 the last of the Santacroce family, Antonio Publicolo Santacroce, died without male heirs. [1]

The church now functions as the convent chapel, and contains a venerated statue of the founder. [1]

Exterior

The little church has a single nave of three bays without aisles, and with a pair of shallow side chapels off the central bay. The sanctuary forms a fourth bay.

Apart from the façade, the fabric is invisible from the street because of neighboring buildings. The nave has a pitched and tiled roof, which is hipped at the entrance end to stop it peeping over the façade. The sanctuary is incorporated in a convent block.

The campanile is a brick slab over the right hand sanctuary wall next to this block. It has a pair of round-headed apertures side by side, and an ogee curved top with a finial. It is invisible from the street.

Façade [1]

The three-storey façade is vertically divided into a central half-width, which is brought forward from the two quarter-widths on either side.

The first storey has a single entrance door is crowned by a segmental pediment, which is elevated above the lintel on strapworks posts to make room for a fresco of *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* by **Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi** from Bologna, has almost disappeared. This intrudes into the tympanum of the pediment via a broken cornice. The doorway is flanked by a pair of Ionic semi-columns with their capitals decorated with swags and heads of putti. The quarter-widths are bounded by pilasters with capitals in the same style, and these flank empty round-headed niches crowned by tablets featuring winged heads of putti protected by little gables. The pilasters nearer the door are half-hidden by the columns. The pilasters and columns support an entablature bearing an inscription giving the name and year of construction. [1] [2]

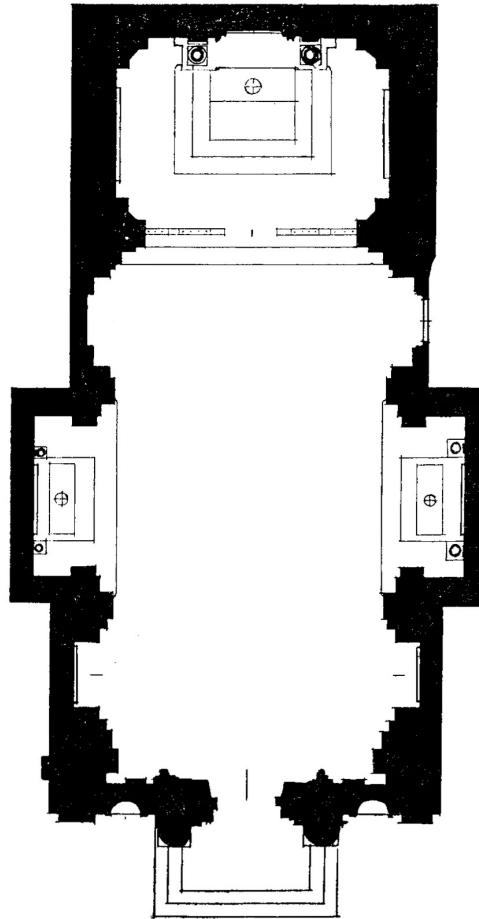
Deiparae Vergini in Publicolis MDCXLIII
(To the Virgin Mother of God in Publicolis in 1643)

The second storey has two pairs of Doric pilasters framing a large window with a molded Baroque frame and a triangular pediment, again raised above the lintel on posts and with a broken cornice into which a scallop shell is intruded. The inner pair of pilasters is doubletled along the outer edges. The pilasters support a simple cornice (not an entablature), above which is the third storey. The window pediment interrupts the cornice. [1]

The low third storey has a crowning segmental pediment which is supported by a pair of posts with strapwork decoration. This pediment also has a broken cornice, and a window is fitted into the tympanum with its top matching the curve. The posts are flanked by a pair of small incurving double volutes topped by a pair of little oval porthole windows. At the top corners are plinths with

two pelicans in piety (extracting blood from their breasts to feed their chicks), this allegedly being the emblem of the Santacroce family. [1]

Plan



Interior

The little interior has had few changes since the 17th century. There is a small nave of three bays, with a pair of side chapels off the central bay. The sanctuary occupies a further bay. The interior is chiefly notable for the Santacroce tombs, which are rich in polychrome marble decoration. These are in the sanctuary, and flanking the entrance.

Nave [3]

The bays of the nave are divided by Corinthian pilasters, made to look as if they are revetted in red marble. The capitals are in white, with gilded highlights, and support an entablature that runs around the interior. This has a frieze with the same red marble effect.

The side chapels are entered through large arches with Doric impost, the archivolt of which interrupt the architrave and frieze of the entablature. The other two bays of the nave have large rectangular niches with horizontal cornices, one on each side (a total of four).

The nave ceiling is in three parts. The near and far bays are barrel vaulted, with three octagonal panels each. The central bay is cross-vaulted, also with geometric panels and with a large lunette on each side. The left hand one contains a genuine window, but the right hand window is blocked by the convent building. The decoration is very simple, the geometric panels being picked out in a variety of pastel colors.

Over the entrance [2] is the organ gallery, cantilevered out. The balustrade has an interesting ropework effect along its top. The Mascioni opus 307 pipe organ was built built in 1912.

The top right hand niche contains the sacristy entrance [8], and here is the tomb-slab of Angelo Tucci, a canon of St Peter's (1435).

The top left hand niche contains a 19th century painted wooden crucifix [7], with an interesting panoramic background intended to be Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion.

There are some interesting tomb slabs in the floor. The one to Alfonso Santacroce, the restorer of the church, dates from 1472 and shows his effigy in shallow relief. Next to that is one to Clemenzia Santacroce, who was only 24 when she died in 1571. It has polychrome marble inlay. [1] [4]

There is a statue of St Cajetan Errico, founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

The walnut confessional [5] was made by the carpenter Giovenale Gauthier in 1708. [a]

Nave wall monuments

Two spectacular funerary monuments are over the nave side niches near the entrance.

The one on the left [5] is to Antonio Publicola Santacroce (died 1707) and his wife, Girolama Naro. Their two half-length effigies are shown as if they were standing in a balcony with a draped cloth in black marble bearing the epitaph. He is looking towards the high altar in an attitude of supplication, while she is reading a book. Below the drape is a winged skull, and to the sides are a pair of putti (the right hand one is blowing his nose). There is an arched aedicule behind the figures, with a pair of Ionic columns and a scallop shell in the tympanum. This is flanked by a pair of Ionic pilasters, revetted in what looks like genuine verde antico. The combined heraldry of husband and wife is in the crowning shield, which is joined to the pilaster capitals with festoons. [1] [a]

The busts and putti are by Lorenzo Ottoni, with "Winged Death" by Andrea Fucigna, and the overall design is ascribed to one Giovanni Francesco Zannoli. Below the memorial is a walnut confessional was made by the wood-worker Giovenale Gauthier in 1708. [2] [a]

The memorial on the right [10] is to Prince Scipione Publicola Santacroce (1749), the son of the above couple, who died in 1747. This was designed and partly executed by Giovanni Battista Maini, with ornamental elements executed in 1750 by the youthful Tommaso Righi (this was his first public commission). The work shows a red marble plinth in the form of a truncated cone bearing the epitaph, on which is a medallion portrait of the deceased. This is accompanied by a pair of putti who are holding onto a length of draped cloth in white marble. [1] [2] [a]

Sanctuary

The sanctuary [4] is entered through a semi-circular triumphal arch, the molded archivolt of which is fitted into the nave vault. It springs from a pair of posts in the entablature, themselves supported by two proud pilasters which have Composite capitals doubletted forwards (note the duplicated volutes).

The sanctuary vault is a little saucer cupola in pale blue, with a glory in the middle.

The altar aedicule is against the far wall. It has an oversized segmental pediment, supported by a pair of Corinthian columns with gilded capitals and ribbing. The altarpiece is *The Nativity of Our Lady* (1644) by Raffaello Vanni. Polychrome marble altar table made in 1727. [1] [2]

The wall above the aedicule has a monochrome depiction of *The Exaltation of the Cross*, and to the sides are little icons of *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* and *The Immaculate Heart of Mary*, installed by the brethren in honor of their charism.

The side walls have a matching pair of monuments of the Santacroce family. Each has four tondo

portraits in oil on copper over four conjoined black marble epitaph tablets. On the right side are portraits of lay members of the Santacroce family, by Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi. [1] [2]

On the left are Four portraits of clergy members of the Santacroce family by Alessandro Grimaldi, son of Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi. The first portrait of clergyman on the right is Monsignor Prospero Publicola Santacroce, the one who introduced the use of tobacco in Rome from Portugal where he was nuncio. Tobacco was then called Santacroce Grass. [1] [2]

Side chapels

The two side chapels have similarly designed matching altar aedicules.

The one on the right [9] is dedicated to St Helena the Empress, and the altarpiece, *St. Helena adores the Cross miraculously found on Mount Calvary* (1644) by Raffaele Vanni from Siena. Helena was the name of the mother of the patron Marcello Santacroce, and it was furthermore believed that the merit of carrying the Cross to Rome was of members of the Santacroce family. [2]

The one on the left [6] is dedicated to St Francis of Assisi, and the altarpiece, *St. Francis in Meditation* (1655) is by Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi from an original by Annibale Carracci. Here are matching wall monuments to the last of the Santacroce, Antonio Publicola Santacroce (1867) and his Irish wife Catherine Scully (1864). They have cameo portrait medallions.

Artists and Architects

Alessandro Grimaldi (1630-1663), Italian painter
Andrea [Fucina](#) (d. 1711), Italian sculptor, architect
Annibale [Carracci](#) (1560-1609), Italian painter of the Baroque from Bologna
Francesco Cerott, Italian stonemason
Francesco de Gasperi, Italian stonemason
Giovanni Antonio [de' Rossi](#) (1616–1695), Italian Baroque architect
Giovanni Battista [Maini](#) (1690-1752), Italian sculptor of the Late-Baroque period
Giovanni Francesco [Grimaldi](#) [aka *Il Bolognese*] (1606-1680), Italian architect/painter
Giovanni Francesco [Zannoli](#) (c.1666-1717), Italian architect
Giovenale Gauthier, Italian carpenter
Lorenzo [Ottoni](#) (1658-1736), Italian sculptor
Raffaello [Vanni](#) (1590-1673), Italian Baroque painter
Tommaso [Righi](#) (1727–1802), Italian sculptor

Burials

Prospero Cardinal [SANTACROCE](#), (1514-1589) {additional info [here](#)}
Antonio Cardinal [SANTACROCE](#), (1598-1641) {additional info [here](#)}
Marcello Cardinal [SANTACROCE](#), (1619-1674) {additional info [here](#)}
Andrea Cardinal [SANTACROCE](#), (1655-1712) {additional info [here](#)}

Alfonso Santacroce
Marquis Antonio Publicola Santacroce and his wife Girolama Nari (1709)

Location

Address: Via dei Falegnami 23, 00186 Roma

Coordinates: [41°53'37.6"N 12°28'34.4"E](#)

Access and liturgy

Mass was being celebrated at 18:30 on weekdays, and 11:00 on Sundays.

The e-mail contact for the convent (according to its website) is

msscc.roma@libero.it

Info

Telephone: 0039 06 6861679

References and Links

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 2. [ROMAPEDIA blog](#)
 3. [Roma Insueta blog](#)
 4. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
- a. Montagu, Jennifer; "The Santacroce Tombs in S. Maria in Publicolis, Rome"; *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 139, No. 1137 (Dec., 1997), pp. 849-859 (jstor 887651)

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