Santissimo Nome di Maria al Foro Traiano

The **Church of the Most Holy Name of Mary at the Trajan Forum** is an 18th century confraternity and titular church, the larger one of the two familiar domed landmark churches at the north end of the Imperial Fora, just by Trajan's Column. The church should not be confused with the church Santissimo Nome di Maria in Via Latina in South-East Rome. It is one of the two so-called "sister churches" of the Roman Forum together with the nearby St. Maria di Loreto.

History

The first church on this site was San Bernardo a Colonna Traiani, which had been taken over by the Confraternita di San Bernardo in 1440 (the church is first recorded in 1418). This was a secular confraternity devoted to charitable works, originally founded at the Cistercian abbey of Tre Fontane and using the church of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio alle Tre Fontane located there. The little church was also dedicated to Our Lady, and had on its high altar an ancient icon of the Blessed Virgin which had once been in the chapel of San Lorenzo in Laterano. The confraternity remained here until 1585, when they moved to Santa Susanna. They were then responsible for setting up the Cistercian nunnery there. The church of San Bernardo became nothing more than a devotional chapel, attracting pilgrims wishing to venerate the icon. (1)

The feast of the *Holy Name of Mary* was introduced by Pope Innocent XI after the victory of the Austrian-Polish armies under the command of John III Sobieski over the Turks at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. Abbot Giuseppe Bianchi instituted a cult of the Most Holy Name in 1685 at Santo Stefano del Cacco, and soon afterwards established the Congregation of the Most Holy Name of Mary, which was formally approved in 1688. Soon after, he established a Confraternity of the Most Holy Name of Mary (Confraternita del Santissimo Nome di Maria) which was formally approved in 1688 in order the propagate the devotion. In 1694 they moved to San Bernardo, which was in a bad state of repair by then, and renovated the building. (1)

However, they decided that the old church was too small, so they acquired the adjacent plot and built the present church from 1736 to 1741. The architect was French, **Antoine Dérizet**. The older church was only demolished in 1748. The stucco work on the dome was done by several artists in 1750, and the main altar installed by **Mauro Fontana** in the same year. (1)

The actual site the confraternity acquired was the north-eastern corner of the small *Piazza di Colonna Trajana*, so that the new church was only attached to other buildings for a quarter of its circumference. The famous column was in the opposite, south-western corner of the piazza. (1)

Dérizet's design proved faulty. It originally provided for a pair of side entrances, but in 1751 the dome demonstrated structural problems and these entrance were walled up and converted to side chapels as a result. (1) (4)

Opposite the new church were the back doors of the monasteries of Sant'Eufemia and Santo Spirito ai Monti. These were demolished for archaeological excavations even before the French occupation, in order to uncover the *Basilica Ulpia* of the Forum of Trajan. Thus the present, anomalous situation of the church began to be created, whereby it looks over a vast excavation containing a few ancient Roman bits. (1)

In 1811, a detailed plan was drawn up by **Giuseppe Valadier** to demolish the church and create a new piazza with the Trajan's column in the centre. After this was abandoned the same architect provided the confraternity with a private oratory, the façade of which is to the left of the church. (1)

One hundred years after construction was completed, it was again necessary to reinforce the walls of the church and a major renovation was carried out by the architect **Luigi Gabet** in 1858 because there had been some major cracks in the dome. At the same time the Church's interior was renovated; columns and walls were painted like marble and gilding was refreshed.

Exterior

<u>Church</u>
Like **Dérizet'**s other church in Rome, Santi Andrea e Claudio dei Borgognoni, this is a dome with a church tucked underneath. The ground-plan is based on a square with the front corners chamfered. Superimposed on this is the dome itself, which has a very tall drum and is just slightly elliptical. (1)

The exterior walls are all in white. The first storey has pairs of Composite pilasters occupying its corners, and supporting an entablature. Two pairs of semi-round Composite columns flank the entrance, and above the entablature corresponding to these is a blank segmental pediment with its central section recessed. The rest of the entablature is crowned by a balustrade all the way around which is adorned with eleven free-standing travertine statues of prophets and evangelists, created by many different artists, including some French sculptors, between 1739 and 1741. These are statues of: (1) (4)

> *St. Mark*, by **Domenico Scaramuccia**,
> Prophet *Daniel*, by **Pascal Latour**,
> Prophet *Nahum* by **Charles Nicolas (Niccolò) Crone**
> *Solomon* and *St. John the Evangelist*, by **Salvatore Bencari**,
> Prophet *Zechariah*, by **Jean (Giovanni) Hermot**
> Prophet *Haggai*, by **Pietro Paolo Campi**,
> Prophet *Hosea*, by **Jean Baptiste Boudard**,
> *St. Luke*, by **Jules Marchant**, and
> *St. Matthew* and the Prophet *Obadiah*, by **Michelangelo Slodtz**.

The drum of the dome, proportionately very high, has eight pairs of double Corinthian pilasters, and in between these are eight large round-headed or centinate (not arched) windows with curved raised lintels above looking rather like eyebrows. (1)

The dome itself, in lead and with eight large ribs corresponding with the paired pilasters, has eight

round windows in Baroque frames with volutes. The intricately designed lantern has eight little swagged Ionic columns with tall arched windows in between and eight flaming torch finials above. There is an ogee cupola supporting a central ball finial. (1)

The campanile is behind the church, and is in the form of a triumphal arch with a tall, narrow single arch in travertine containing two bells. There is a crowning triangular pediment. (1)
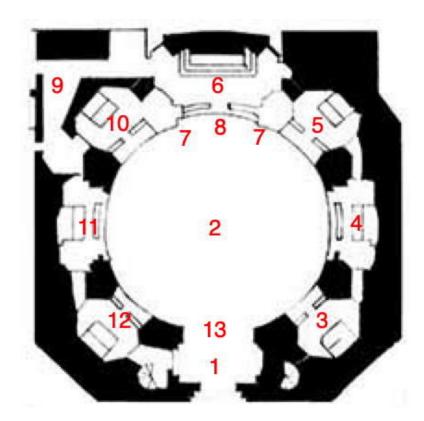
<u>Oratory</u>

The private oratory that Valadier designed for the confraternity was erected between 1812 and 1815, and the interior fittings finished in 1839. (1)

The simple façade is rendered in pale orange, and has two storeys. The first storey only has the entrance, approached by a short flight of steps. It has a molded doorcase, over which is a cornice on brackets which acts as a sill for a semi-circular lunette window. The archivolt of this is also molded. (1)

The storeys are separated by an entablature with a very wide frieze and a tiny cornice. On this is a serliana, or a horizontal set of three windows the central one of which is arched. There is a crowning pediment, slightly oversized. (1)

Plan and Layout

The interior of the church is slightly elliptical, punctuated by pilasters and arches. There are six small side chapels, the four original ones being on the diagonals and the two to the sides occupying the original side entrances. Their plans are in the form of irregular, squashed hexagons. The interior layout fits into the chamfered square of the exterior by means of having very thick and solid walls which help support the dome. The exception is the far left hand corner, where there are passages leading to the sacristy and oratory.

Interior

The decoration of the interior of the church took place from 1743, when Agostino Masucci and Mauro Fontana assembled a group of artists and people to work on the many paintings. The interior is richly decorated in polychrome marble and gilded stucco, much of it the result of the 19th

century restoration. The side chapels contain good paintings of the mid 18th century, and are also rich in polychrome stonework including alabaster. (1) (4)

The side spaced are separated by gigantic Corinthian pilasters in veined pink marble, with gilded capitals. These support an entablature running round the interior, with a post in shallow relief above each pilaster and the cornice embellished in gilded stucco acanthus fronds. The architrave bears four ultramarine plaques bearing titles of Our Lady, one over each major archway. (1)

The sanctuary, entrance and main side chapels are entered through arches with their archivolts springing from a subsidiary entablature which runs round the interior behind the main pilasters. This entablature is supported in turn by Composite half-pilasters in verde antico with gilded capitals, a major design feature of the interior. (1)

The chapels on the diagonals are entered through lower arches, with the archivolts springing from Doric imposts fitted within pairs of these green half-pilasters supporting the subsidiary entablature. Above are galleries, with balustrades having a bowed ogee curve. These galleries or cantoria sit on the chapel vaults. (1)

Above the entrance is the Church organ, (**13**) which dates from around 1750 and is decorated with gilded garlands and angels making music. (4)

Dome
The interior of the dome (**2**) is decorated with white and gold stucco work, with garlands and palm fronds and eight medallions with reliefs. A symbol of the Trinity is in the oculus. Four lapis lazuli plaques bearing titles of Our Lady are on the entablature below. (1)

The drum of the dome is of the same dimensions as the space below, so that there are no pendentives. It has eight large windows with the frames embellished with gilded festoons and acanthus, and these are separated by shallow pilasters panelled in polychrome marble arranged in concentric rectangles. The dome itself is ribbed, and these eight ribs spring from the pilasters and meet at the lantern oculus. A symbol of the *Trinity* is in the oculus. The ribs have gilded stars and rosettes. At the top is the lantern decorated with stucco work by **Michelangelo Slodtz**. (1) (4)

The eight sectors of the interior of the dome are decorated with white and gold stucco work, with garlands and palm fronds. Eight tondi with reliefs depicting scenes from the life of Our Lady are at the bottoms of these sectors, supported by angels and putti. The reliefs show: (1) (3) (4)

> *The Presentation in the Temple*, by **Michelangelo Slodtz**,
> *Mary's birth*, by **Francesco Queirolo**,
> *Mary's Coronation*, by Carlo Tandardini,
> *The Assumption*, by **Bernardino Ludovisi**,
> *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*, possibly by **Maini**,
> *The Visitation*, by **Francesco Queirolo**,
> *Immaculate Mary*, by **Carlo Tandardini** and
> *Annunciation*, by **Giovan Battista Maini**.

Sanctuary
The sanctuary is square, and has a saucer cupola with pendentives. Beyond is a segmental apse with a conch, the latter embellished with ribs in the same style as those of the dome. (1)

The main altar is against the curved apse wall, and its wings are actually matched to the curve. It was designed by **Mauro Fontana**, was consecrated in 1750.

The altar has as its altarpiece the ancient icon of *Madonna and Child*, the work of the Roman school of the first half of the 13th century enshrined in a spectacular Baroque *Glory* of *Angels* in stucco by **Andrea Bergondi** from 1750. The icon originally hung in the chapel Sancta Sanctorum at the Lateran, but Pope [Eugene IV](#) (1431-1447) gave it to the old Church of San Bernardo alla Colonna Traiana, in about 1430, and was believed to have been painted by St Luke. The spectacular Baroque Gloria is inserted into the apse in between a pair of ribbed bronze Composite semi-columns. This Gloria consists of a gang of angels and putti in stucco, in front of gilded rays and holding both the

icon and the monogram of Ave Maria. On top of the glory is an enormous bronze crown, supported by a further pair of angels. The Gloria is by **Andrea Bergondi**. (1) (4)

On the pilasters on each side of the presbytery there is a bronze eagle that acts as a candleholder (**7**). These were given to the Church by Cardinal Ludovico Pico della Mirandola, buried in front of the altar (**8**) under a large marble mosaic of his coat of arms, laid down in the floor (1)

Because of the shape of these diagonal side chapels, their vaults have an unusual shape with a kidney-shaped cupola on pendentives. The frescoes of putti on cupola and pendentives are from the 19th century restoration. The chapels are depicted in clockwise order, beginning at the left of the entrance.

Left side chapels:

Cappella dei Santi Pietro e Paolo (**12**)
   Altarpiece: *SS. Peter and Paul*, painting by **Lorenzo Masucci** (1737)
   Right side: *Saint Teresa of Lisieux* , (19th century)
   Left side: *Saint Joseph with the Infant Jesus*, (18th century)
   Vault*: Glory of Angels*, fresco of the Roman school 19th cent)
   Underpainting: *Saint Giuda Taddeo* { The Apostle Jude Thaddeus }

Cappella di San Bernardo di Clairvaux (**11**)
The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St Bernard of Clairvaux, with an altarpiece by Niccola Ricciolini of 1751. It shows him writing while having a vision of Our Lady
   Altar: *The Bl. Virgin appears to Saint Bernard*, painting signed by **Niccolò Ricciolini** (1751)
   Underpainting: *Saint Vincenzo Ferrer*

Cappella del Crucifisso (**10**)
The third chapel on the left is dedicated to the Crucifixion, and has a large 16th century wooden crucifix. There are 18th century side wall frescoes, of Our Lady to the left and St John the Evangelist to the right, and the vault has a 19th century fresco of The Triumph of the Cross.
   Altar: *Crucifixion*, wooden (16th century), from the old church of San Bernardo
   Left wall: *San Giovanni Evangelista* painting from the school of Masucci (1750)
   Right wall: *Bl. Virgin*, painting from the school of Masucci (1750)
   Vault: *The Triumph of the Cross*, fresco (19th century)
   Underpainting: *Our Lady of Sorrows*

Sacristy (**9**)
In the Church vestry are suspended various paintings with religious motifs and the side panels from an altarpiece from the 17th century, a 1700 painting of the *Madonna and Child* in a large gold frame, a painting of Pope Innocent XI, and a wall hanging, which was war booty after his victory over the Turks at Vienna. It comes from the Turkish Grand Vizier's tent.   (4)

Right side chapels:

Cappella di San Giuseppe (**5**)
The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St Joseph, with paintings by **Stefano Pozzi**. The altarpiece shows the death of the saint, while the oval paintings on the side walls show him being instructed by an angel, and with the Holy Family. The stucco work depicting angels and putti is by **Andrea Bergondi**. (1)
   Altar: *Death of St. Joseph*, by Stefano Pozzi (1757)
   Right side: *The Holy Family*, French school (1700) (a)
   Left side: *St. Joseph and the Angel*. French school (1700) (a)
   Stuccoes by **Andrea Bergondi**
   Underpainting: *San Vincenzo Pallotti* (18th cent)

Cappella di Santa Anna (**4**)
The second chapel on the right is dedicated to St Anne, with an altarpiece showing her teaching Our

Lady to read by **Agostino Masucci** of 1751. Here as well are a sculpture of *Our Lady* from the previous church dating to about 1550, and an 18th century fresco of the *Immaculate Conception*. (1)

The small 17th century crucifix on display belonged to Pope Innocent XI, who has been beatified. In a small space between this and the next chapel is a marble sculpture of the Madonna and Child, dating from the earlier church. (1) (4)

> Altar: *Education of the Bl. Virgin*, painting signed by **Agostino Masucci** (1757)
>
> Right side: *The Immaculate Conception*, **painting gift from Cardinal Mercurelli** (c. 1850)
>
> Left side: a crucifix of ebony and ivory that belonged to Pope Innocent XI. (4)
>
> Underpainting: *Jesus Christ with a Crown of Thorns*, (c. 1850)
>
> Left side hollow (door): *The Virgin with the Infant Jesus*, marble from the church of San Bernardo

Cappella di San Luigi Gonzaga (**3**)

> Altar: *St. Aloysius Gonzaga venerates Christ Crucified*, Oil on canvas by **Antonio Nesi** (1740)
>
> Vault: *Angels*, fresco (c. 1850)
>
> Spandels: *Glory of Angels*, fresco (1750)
>
> Underpainting: *The Sacred Heart*, (c. 1850)

Liturgy

Once a year, the icon is taken in solemn procession from the site of the now destroyed church of San Bernardo to its present place in this church.

The feast-day of the Name of Mary is 12 September.

Artists and Architects:

> Agostino Masucci (1691-1758), Italian painter of the late-Baroque or Rococo period
> Andrea Bergondi (18th cent), Italian sculptor
> Antoine Dérizet (1697-1768), French architect of the Late Baroque period, from Lyon
> Antonio Nesi (1739-1773), Italian painter
> Bernardino Ludovisi (1693-1749), Italian sculptor
> Carlo Tandardini (18th cent), Italian sculptor
> Charles-Nicole Cronè, (18th cent), French sculptor
> Domenico Scaramuccia (18th cent), Italian sculptor
> Francesco Queirolo (1704-1762), Italian sculptor, from Genova
> Giovanni Battista Maini (1690-1752), Italian sculptor of the Late-Baroque period
> Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839), Italian architect and designer, sculptor, urban planner and
>   archeologist, a chief exponent of Neoclassicism in Italy
> Jean Hermot (18th cent), French sculptor
> Jean-Baptiste Boudard (1710-1768), French sculptor
> Jules Marchant (18th cent), French sculptor
> Lorenzo Masucci (d. 1785), Italian painter
> Luigi Gabet (d.1878), Italian architect and engineer
> Mauro Fontana (1701-1767), Italian painter, architect
> Niccolò Ricciolini (1687-1763), Italian painter
> Pascasio Latour (1702-1756), Belgian sculptor from Liege
> Pietro Paolo Campi (1678-1764), Italian neo-Classical sculptor
> René Michel Slodtz aka Michelangelo Slodtz (1705-1764), French sculptor from Paris
> Salvatore Bencari, (18th cent), Italian sculptor
> Stefano Pozzi (1707?-1768), Italian painter, designer, draughtsman and decorator

Burials:

> Lodovico Cardinal PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, (1668-1743)
>> His heart was buried in the church of S. Prassede

Location:
Address: Foro Traiano 89, 00187 Roma
> Coordinates: 41° 53' 46"N   12° 29' 3"E

Info:
Contacts
    Telephone: 0039 06 6798013
Opening times
    Open 10:00-13:00 16:00-18:00 Closed Friday
    Mass is celebrated on Sundays at 11:00

Links and References:
1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)

2. [Tourist info on 060608.it](#)

3. [Info Roma web site](#)

4. [Anna's Guide Web site](#) (Danish)

[English Wikipedia page](#)

[Roma SPQR web site](#) (translated)

[Panoramic Earth blog](#)

[Rome Art Lover web site](#)

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

a. Informational plaques provided in the church