

# San Stanislao alle Botteghe Oscure

## San Stanislao dei Polacchi



The 18<sup>th</sup> century Church of **San Stanislao dei Polacchi**, located in the rione Sant'Angelo (XI), is one of the two national churches of Poland. The dedication is to St Stanislaus, martyr and patron of Poland. The church is also referred to as Santissimo Salvatore e San Stanislao in older sources, and this is the name inscribed on the façade. The Polish name is Kościół Świętego Stanisława w Rzymie. It is the only National Polish church in Italy. [1] [5]

The shrine, with its pilgrimage center and student hostel, was a well-known religious and cultural center for Polish and Lithuanian communities from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had become an important center of Lithuanian studies. [6]

### History

The first church here, known as “San Salvatore in Pensili de Sorraca”, was dedicated to the Savior, and is mentioned in documents from 1174 and 1209. A large marble inscription of Pope Honorius IV now kept in the entrance hall of the Busiri palace on via Aurora refers to the reconstruction of the church, made on 27 October 1285 "for Venerabilem Hieronymum episcopum Prenestinum". This stone is all that remains of the medieval church. It was built on the ruins of the Circus Flaminius and hence would obtain the name for Armellini the *cupboards* where the prostitutes worked. For others it was a distortion of the German *pisil*, furnace, in reference to the furnaces of the circus. The name *of Sorraca* refers instead to a family with that name. [1] [a] [b]

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century the area around the church was the Polish center. The Polish Cardinal Stanislaw Hosius (Hozjusz in Polish) was in Rome during the Jubilee year of 1575. He was struck by how the Polish pilgrims had nowhere of their own to stay. So he initiated a project to found a hospice complex for Polish pilgrims and expatriates in Rome, and was granted the derelict church in 1578. Immediate financial assistance came from King Stefan Batory and his wife, Queen Anna Jagiellonka to build the hospice and rebuild the church. Hosius died only a year later, but his

secretary Rev. Stanislaw Reszka took over and the church was finished in 1580 according to the inscription on the façade. The complex was completed in 1591, and the rebuilt church was consecrated in that year, when it was rededicated to St Stanislaus, martyr and patron of Poland. The consecrator was Cardinal Jerzy Radziwill, bishop of Cracow, who is buried in the Gesù nearby. [1] [2] [3] [c]

Cardinal Hosius was buried in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere. Rev. Stanislaw Reska was buried in the Church of Il Gesù , next to the church of St. Stanislaw. [6]

The church was completely rebuilt from 1729 to 1735, the architect of the fabric being **Francesco Ferrari** and the supervisor of the interior decoration, **Ignazio Brocchi**. The hospital was also rebuilt, and the overall project was completed in 1757 although some of the decorative details in the church took longer. This project was sponsored by King [Stanislaw August Poniatowski](#) who was the last king of Poland. His coat of arms is above the presbytery. He appointed the bishops of Cracow as patrons, which proved important later. [1] [2] [6]

During the whole of the 17th century many tombs and memorials of Poles of all classes were placed in the pavements and walls of the building. [c]

When the French took over Rome in 1798, they ejected the Poles from the complex and turned it into an army barracks. Then, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Tsar of Russia was given the title of King of Poland. This meant that the church and complex passed into the possession of the Russian government, who turned it into a hospice for Russians (Ospizio Imperiale di S. Stanislao per Pellegrini della Nazione Russa). The church was transformed into an Orthodox church. The Russian administrator sold all historically and artistically valuable items belonging to the church. Only the reliquary donated by Bishop Zaluski and the monstrance donated by Prince Poniatowski, the King's nephew, have survived. [1] [2]

The so-called Second Polish Republic was established in 1918 after the collapse of the Russian Empire, and successfully laid claim to the hospice and church. Thanks to the efforts of the Bishop of Krakow, Prince Adam Stefan Sapieha, the church was regained in 1920. It was extremely neglected and dilapidated. The first rector of the church in the interwar period, Fr. Monsignor Józef Florczak began a systematic renovation of the temple, and his successor, Fr. Monsignor Janasik continued the work he had started, among others, funding new altars. The outbreak of war in 1939 interrupted the work that was undertaken by the new rector, Archbishop J. Gawlina. After 1947 the final renovation of the church was carried out by the rector, Fr. Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly before the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the consecration, thanks to the significant help of the Polish diaspora around the world and Pope John Paul II. [2]

In 1948, the hospice was made the Pastoral Center for the Polish Diaspora (Centralny Ośrodek Duszpasterstwa Emigracyjnego i Polonijnego), and the Society of Christ Fathers for Poles Living Abroad was later put in charge. In 1982 the church obtained the status of a Polish national parish in Rome. From 1980 to 2007, the priest in charge was Szczepan Wesoly, who oversaw a major restoration of the church. However, the Pastoral Center ended its career in 2004. The hospice now flourishes, and the Christ Fathers now (2014) have thirteen priests in Rome. Because the church is too small, the outreach to Polish expatriates and pilgrims in Rome now also includes events and liturgies at Sant'Alfonso de'Liguori all'Esquilino. [1] [3]

## Exterior

The 18<sup>th</sup> century façade (1) is simple, with two storeys each having four pilasters. The fabric is rendered in light grey, with architectural details in travertine limestone. The first storey pilasters are Doric, and support an entablature which has a dedicatory inscription on the frieze: [1]

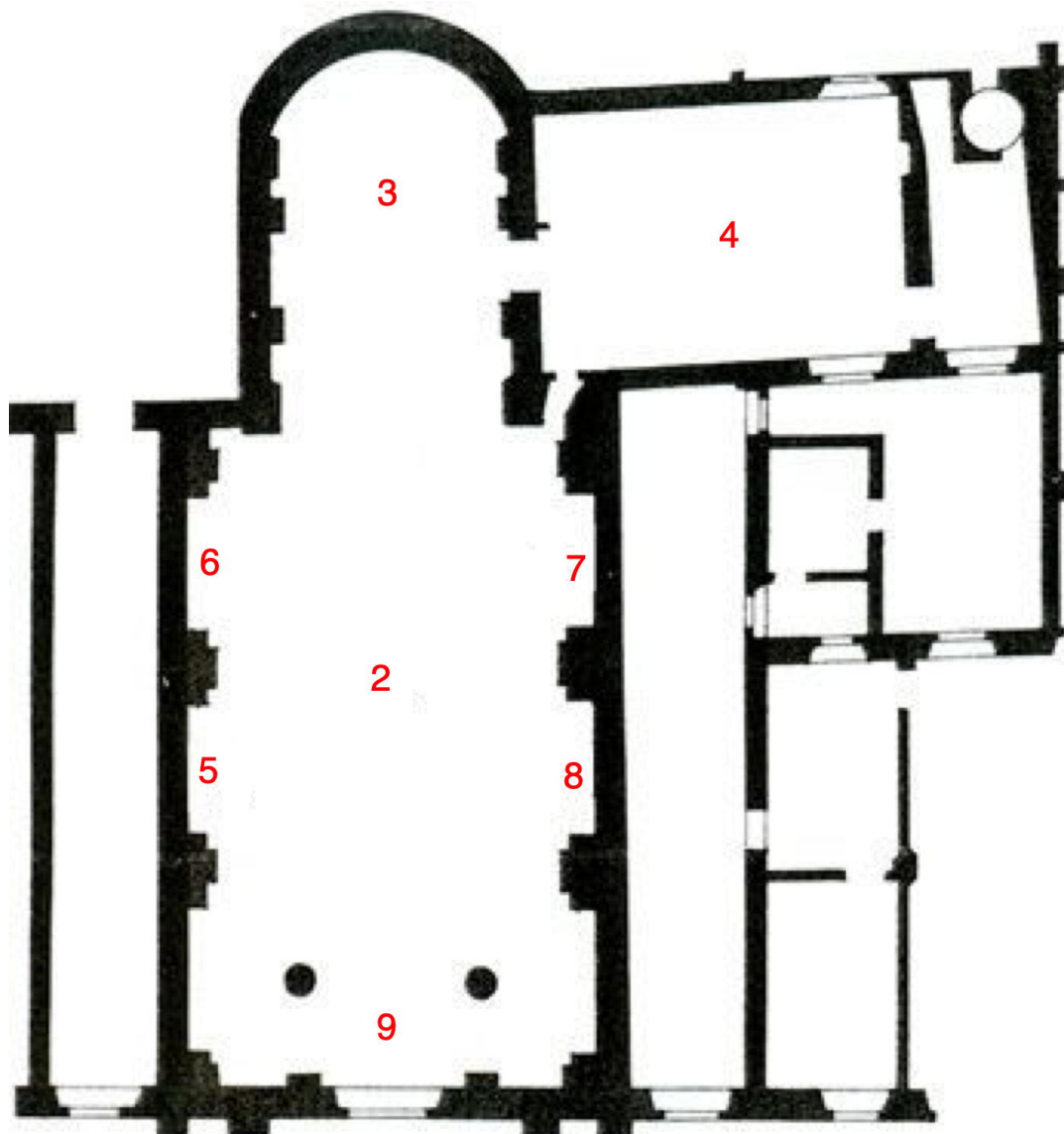
Templum S[ancti] Salvatoris et S[ancti] Stanislai,  
Hospit[ium] nat[ionis] Polonor[um] MDLXXX.

The central portion of the façade, in between the inner pair of pilasters, is recessed slightly and so these two pilasters are doubletled at the corners thus created. The single entrance has a molded doorcase, over which is a blank framed tablet flanked by a pair of triglyphs with tassels. Above this in turn is a triangular pediment. [1]

The second storey has Corinthian pilasters, with the same doubletting. They support a triangular pediment with a blank tympanum, no part of which is recessed. There is a large rectangular central window, set deep in an archway with dished sides and archivolt. The former have fringed stucco decorations, the latter rosettes. The window is flanked by a pair of Doric pilasters with recessed panels containing stucco chains of little bells, and these support a pair of curlicued brackets which in turn support an entablature over the window. On this are two fragments of a segmental pediment, with parabolic curves and curlicued inner ends. [1]

There is a very small campanile over the far right hand side of the nave, but this is invisible from the ground. [1]

## Plan



## Interior

The plan consists of a single aisle with deep presbytery and barrel vault richly decorated, and two altars on each side. The interior, embodying a unique nave, is rich of stuccos and decors and houses works by Polish artists of the 18th century on the side altars. [1]

### Nave. (2)

There is a small nave of three bays, the first of which is occupied by the organ gallery over the entrance. The other two have a side altar on each side, four in all, and these are inserted into shallow arched recesses in the thickness of the side walls. These arches have molded archivolts with the

intradosed decorated with diapering, springing from Doric impostes. They are flanked by Ionic pilasters supporting an entablature which runs around the church interior, and this has a molded architrave and a cornice decorated with egg-and-dart. [1]

The impost and entablature pilasters, as well as the frieze of the entablature, are marbelled in a lemon yellow color which dominates the church's interior decoration. [1]

The ceiling has a barrel vault which springs from the entablature, and which has side windows in lunettes. The stucco decoration is rich. There is a central fresco panel by **Ermenegildo Costantini**, depicting *The Apotheosis of St Stanislaus* (1775). This artist was of the school of Marco Benefial, and was one of the last exponents of the Baroque style of painting in Rome. [1] [2]

The organ gallery has a solid balustrade in white and gold, with outwardly curving side sections. The central part over the entrance is supported by a pair of Doric columns made to look like verde antico, with gilded capitals. The organ dates from 1936. The window behind the organ, the one in the center of the façade, has modern stained glass showing the *Madonna and Child*. [1] [3]

The entrance itself is flanked by a pair of wall memorials. That to Eustachy Adam Sluzka is to the right, and that to Canon Marcin Katlewski is to the left. [1]

### Sanctuary (3)

The rectangular sanctuary has a segmental apse, which is entered through a high triumphal arch. The archivolt of this, of several orders of molding, springs from the interior entablature and is fitted under the curve of the nave vault. It is supported by a pair of piers in the same style as the nave pilasters, which have accompanying half-pilasters tucked into the corners. [1]

On the left side of the triumphal arch pilaster is an image of the *Divine Mercy*, and on the right side is an image of *St. Pope John Paul II*.

The barrel vault is embellished with gilded stucco, and has a central oval tondo showing *God the Father* by **Costantini** again. [1]

The aedicule of the main altar has two high Corinthian columns in what looks like green verde antico but is not, and these support an entablature with a frieze in the same material. Above is a split segmental pediment, with an angel and putto supporting a cross in the gap. [1]

The altarpiece depicts *Christ with SS Stanislaus, Adalbert and Hyacinth*, and is by **Antiveduto Grammatica**. It is considered to be one of his best works, and is considered by historical sources to be the first public work carried out in Rome by the artist. The tablet that Christ carries bears a Greek inscription, and this is thought to have been added by the Russians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This altar is dedicated to Christ the Saviour, which explains why St Stanislaus has his own chapel in the church. [1] [2] [4]

The side walls, under the two choirs, the two plaques commemorating the reconstruction of the church by Cardinal Hosio (right) and the generous donation of silver furnishings by Queen [Anna Jagiellonka](#), wife of Stefan I Botary, (the Russians sold or otherwise disposed of the latter). The window above the altar has more modern stained glass, which also shows the *Madonna and Child*. [1] [4]

On the pier to the left of the triumphal arch is a neo-Classical memorial to the noted mosaicist Giacomo Raffaelli, 1863. He became very famous for having executed in the years 1810/17 a real size copy in mosaic of the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte, who had not been able to detach the original masterpiece from the wall. Since 1818 the mosaic is in the Minoritenkirche Church in Vienna. [5]

In the middle of the floor is the memorial inscription and coat-of-arms for Bishop Stanisław Żaluski, who was the first protector on the church. [2]

### Sacristy. (4)

In the sacristy are three paintings with “Stories of St. Stanislaus” attributed by **Franciszek**



## Side altars

The four side altars are described clockwise, beginning from the left of the entrance.

The first altar on the left (5) is dedicated to Saint [John Cantius](#), on the occasion of his canonization in 1767. He was named patron of Poland and Lithuania by Pope Clement XII in 1737. The altarpiece showing him giving his possessions to poor people is by **Salvatore Monosilio** from Sicily, of the school of Sebastiano Conca. The little picture on the altar shows *St Stanislaus Kostka receiving Communion from an angel*, and is attributed to **Szymon Czechowicz**. Kostka, who died in Rome in 1568 at just eighteen years old, was the first among the blessed of the Jesuit order. [1] [2] [4]

The second altar on the left (6) is dedicated to Queen [St Jadwiga](#) (Hedwig). The altarpiece showing *St Jadwiga Adoring a Crucifix* is by **Szymon Czechowicz**, commissioned in 1724 on the occasion of the Jubilee of 1725. The little icon on the altar is a copy of *Our Lady of Mercy at the Dawn Gate*, donated by the Lithuanian countess Janina Umiastauskienė The original is in Vilnis. [1] [4] [7]

The second altar on the right (7) is dedicated to St Stanislaus, the titular saint of the church, bishop of Krakow, killed in 1079 by King King Boleslaw II (the Bold), who threatened him with excommunication, while he was celebrating Mass. The altarpiece showing *St Stanislaus Raising Piotronin From the Dead* is by **Tadeusz Kuntze** who is often known as Taddeo Polacco in Italy. **Kuntze** is considered to be among the most talented Polish artists working in Rome in the 18th century. The little icon on the altar is a copy of the famous *Black Madonna of Czestochowa*. [1] [4]

The first altar on the right (8) is dedicated to Saint [Casimir](#), son of Casimir IV of Poland. and the altarpiece showing *The Miracle of St Casimir* is by **Franciszek Smuglewicz**. He was to have an important and influential career as an artist both in Poland and in Lithuania. [1] [4]

## **Artists and Architects:**

Antiveduto [Grammatica](#) (1571-1626), Baroque Italian painter  
Ermenegildo [Costantini](#) (1731-1791), Italian painter of the late-Baroque (also see [here](#))  
Francesco [Ferrari](#) (18<sup>th</sup> cent.), Italian architect and painter  
Franciszek [Smuglewicz](#) (1745-1807), Polish-Lithuanian draughtsman and painter  
Ignatius Brocchi (18<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian architect  
Salvatore [Monosilio](#) (1715-1776), Italian Painter  
Szymon [Czechowicz](#) (1689-1775), Polish painter of the Baroque  
Tadeusz [Kuntze](#) [aka *Taddeo Polacco*] (1732-1793), Polish painter

## **Burial:**

Leonardo [Sormani](#) (d. 1589), sculptor

## **Location:**

Address: Via delle Botteghe Oscure

Area: District Sant'Angelo

Coord: [41° 53' 41.3"N 12° 28' 45.3"E](#)

## **Info:**

Open hours:

Monday to Saturday 6.30am-7.30am 5.00pm-7.00pm,

Sunday 7.00am-1.00pm 5.00pm-8.00pm,

Masses:

Weekdays 7:15, 18:30 (Saturday 18:00, first Mass of Sunday).

Holidays 9.00am, 10.00am, 11.00am, 12.00am, 6.00pm.

The day before a holiday 6.00pm.

Telephone: 0039 06 6795347

Note: The church stands right on the street and there is no vestibule, so it has been the practice to keep the entrance door closed during opening hours. This makes the church look locked

up, so give the door a push to see if it is open.

### Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
  2. [Church web site](#)
  3. [Info.Roma blog](#)
  4. Poloromano web site (no longer online)
  5. [Romapedia blog](#)
  6. [itlietuviai blog](#)
  7. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
- a. Hülsen, Christian; **The churches of Rome in the Middle Ages**; Florence 1927, pp. 449–450
  - b. Armellini, Mariano; The churches of Rome from the fourth to the nineteenth century; Rome 1891, p. 569
  - c. Lewine, Milton; THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580; 1963, pp. 451-484