

Sant'Anna dei Palafrenieri



Sant'Anna dei Palafrenieri is a church dedicated to St Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The official title is Sant'Anna in Vaticano. This is the parish church of the Vatican City located at the Porta S. Anna, the commercial entrance to the Vatican (the Palafrenieri are the traditional noble grooms of the popes and cardinals), across the street from the barracks and stables of the Swiss Guard. [1] [b]

History

In 1378, Pope Urban established a Confraternita dei Palafrenieri (now usually spelt Parafrenieri), which was a pious confraternity (later archconfraternity) or guild for the papal grooms, who were originally court gentlemen with trusted positions in less important tasks. When the confraternity was formed it took St Anne as their patron. At that time, the Palafrenieri used to pray at the altar erected by Urban VI in old St. Peter's. [1] [3] [b]

Pope Pius IV authorized the confraternity to build a new church for themselves in 1565. Design and construction probably began about 1568. The architect was **Jacopo Barocci da Vignola**; after his death in 1573 his son **Giacinto Barozzi** took over. Between 1577 and 1581 the work was suspended due to economic problems of the brotherhood, but in the following years it was possible to continue the construction. The church was consecrated in 1583 without a façade and with a temporary roof. [1] [3] [a] [b]

The building was completed in stages. A door and window on the side of the church were bricked up in the early 17th century in order to create the altar dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo on the left side on the nave (now dedicated to St. Pellegrinus). The façade was finished in 1720, the high altar was altogether renovated in 1728. [1] [a]

Until the early-18th century, the inner walls of the church were white and the columns showed the natural color of the travertine stone, typical of Renaissance churches. Influenced by the rise of the

Baroque in Rome, the Archconfraternity started redecorating the church with more lavish decorations and plenty of gilt and stucco. The façade was re-decorated in the Baroque style by **Alessandro Specchi** who added the upper facade to **Vignola's** church, including the portal, the balustrade and the bell towers. The sculptors **Michael Maille** and **Francesco Moderati** sculpted the angels at the sides of the pediment. At the same time, the opening of the window in the façade and the insertion of the oval frame that today contains the depiction of *St. Anna and the Madonna*. [3]

The Palafrenieri commissioned in 1746 the sculptor **Giovanni Battista de' Rossi (Il Rosso)** to redecorate the church with angels holding garlands in stucco above the doors. **G. B. de' Rossi** also made in stucco shells with festoons decorating the frescoes. The decorator **Annibale Rotati** colored the walls in blue, cream and light gray. The doorjambs were decorated with marbled stucco by **Giacomo de Rocchi**. The gold and silver stucco was made by **Pietro Ricci**. Despite the Baroque decoration, the initial plan of the church is still visible. [2] [3]

Between 1744 and 1745 the structure of the dome, the roof and the new attic was radically changed by the architect **Giovanni Domenico Navole**, which raised the building of about 4.50 meters and in the new drum eight windows were inserted, thus greatly increasing the brightness inside. The roof had the dome shape it still holds. The four old windows were closed and in their space were placed four paintings depicting episodes of S. Anna's life. Other restorations were carried out in 1897 and 1931 only for conservative purposes, without in any way altering the lines and stylistic features already acquired from the façade. [3] [5]

In 1882 the floor was relaid. The interior was completely redecorated in 1902-3 to its present appearance. The modern entrance to the Vatican was built under **Pius XI**, whose heraldic symbols (an eagle on top of three pills) are sculpted in "lictorial" style on top of the pillars ("lictorial" is called the style prevailing in the late 1930s in Italy). A large wrought iron set of gates with high stone gatepost pillars was installed right outside in 1930. There was another restoration in 1964, when the floor of the presbyterium was relaid in Sieneese marble. [1]

The church belonged to the Archconfraternity until the **Lateran Treaty** of 1929, which constituted the Vatican City. At that time Pius XI instituted the pontifical parish of Sant'Anna in the Vatican, entrusting it to the Augustinians. Today it is the parish church of the Vatican. [1] [3]

Exterior

The façade (1) is entirely in travertine, with one story and three vertical zones. The center is dominated by an enormous propylaeum, behind which is the entrance bay of the church. A pair of gigantic attached Doric columns support an entablature and triangular pediment. The entablature is continued on the two wings of the façade, where it is supported by six Doric pilasters; the inner pair is partly hidden behind the columns, and the two outer pairs are slightly proud with their entablatures. [1]

In between the two pilasters nearest the entrance on each side is a round-headed niche containing a relief of a flaming torch, and with scallop decoration in the conch. The entablature has a simple proclamation of the church's former ownership: *Venerabilis arciconfraternitas Sanctae Annae stratorum urbis*. A pair of angels sit on the pediment, and these are by **Michael Maille** and **Francesco Moderati**. [1]

The entrance has a high molded semi-circular archivolt on thin Doric pilasters almost touching the entablature. The tympanum of this contains a lunette window with a curlicued wrought iron guard. The doorway itself, which is large, is flanked by another pair of Doric pilasters set at an outward facing angle and with a pair of triglyphs below the capitals. Above the lintel is an elliptical tondo with a stucco relief of *St Anne teaching Our Lady to Read* by **Giovanni Battista de' Rossi** (1746), and this is embellished with a dished molding, a pair of stucco cornucopias and a curlicued archivolt on top. It conceals much of the lunette. [1] [5]

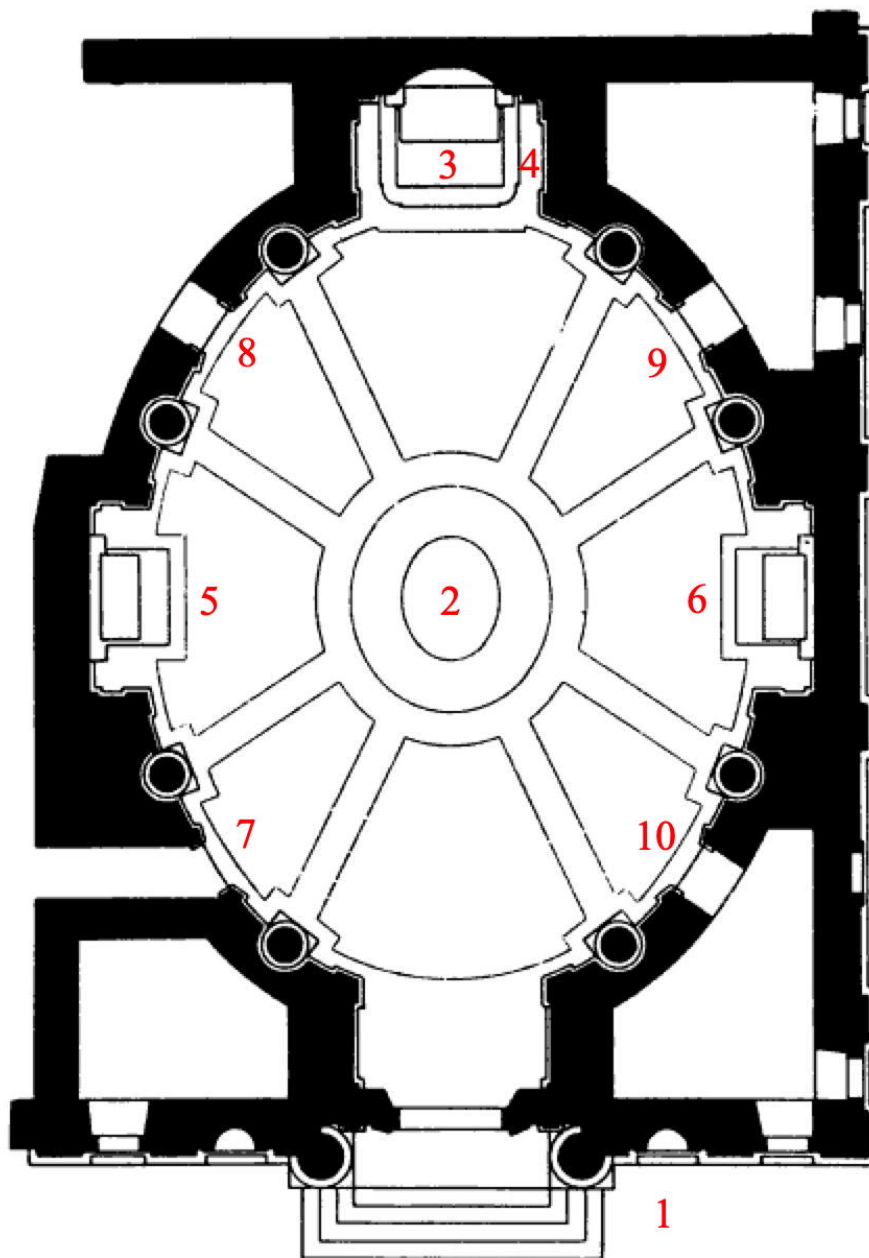
Above the entablature there is a balustrade, which is solid where it angles over and behind the pediment but otherwise has pin balusters. On the corners is a pair of campanili. They are kiosks,

octagonal in plan with four open arches separated by tripletted Doric pilasters which are supported by volutes. Above are two onion cupolas in lead with ball finials, and which are decorated with curlicues recalling that over the entrance tondo. [1]

The fabric of the dome is in pink brick, with architectural details in travertine limestone. The exterior plan is in the form of a rectangle. The drum of the dome is quite high, in a yellow ochre render and with a molded cornice just below the roofline. The plan is an irregular hexadecagon with the drum made up of sixteen flat walls of unequal widths. Seven of these have round-headed windows, including one over the entrance. The tiled dome roof has sixteen unequal flat pitches, with the largest pair at the sides being rectangular and meeting at a ridge. [1]

Plan

The interior, built to Vignola's design, is elliptical with the main altar and entrance located on the major axis, and two altars on the minor axis. The dimensions are 28 by 12 meters. The church is the first example in elliptical plan church in Rome. The new form gained such success that was used in many other buildings during the Baroque period. [1] [3]



Interior

The apse, entrance bay and these two altars are identically treated. Each has a doorway into the ancillary quarters in that corner, which is pedimented with stucco reliefs of putti above by **Giovanni Battista de' Rossi**, 1746. The doorway is flanked by a pair of gigantic Corinthian columns, eight in total in the church, which hold up an entablature which runs round the church below the dome. These travertine columns have fake marbling in brown on white, and the same is on the frieze of the entablature. The architrave and cornice of the entablature is picked out in light grey and white marbling. The sacred area of the main altar is a square enclosed by four arches as a clear counterpoint to the oval part of the church. The main altar is set within its own recessed chapel. [1] [3]

Near the entrance is a memorial plaque for Marquis Del Grillo Onofrio (1714-1787). He was an eccentric character famous for his practical jokes, a member of the palafrenieri and immortalized in the great 1981 film *Il Marchese del Grillo* directed by Mario Monicelli with the comedian Alberto Sordi. His tomb is in the church of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini. [5]

Above the doorway pediments are four frescos of the life of St Anne, by **Ignazio Stern**. They occupy the locations of four windows which were here before the dome was built. The pictures are: [1]

St Anne Giving Alms,
The Vision of SS Joachim and Anne Predicting the Birth of Our Lady,
St Anne Teaches Our Lady to Read, and
The Apotheosis of St Anne.

Dome (2)

The interior dome is very simply decorated, in grey with white and dark grey highlights. Eight ribs focus on an elliptical oculus which contains a gilded stucco relief of the *Dove of the Holy Spirit* in glory. This is by **Pietro Ricci**. The ribs spring from plinths with the same brown and white marbling as the columns, and in between them are lunette vaults over the eight windows. The window over the apse is blocked, and bears a commemorative inscription on a marble tablet. [1]

Sanctuary (3)

The sanctuary is a shallow rectangle with a small segmental apse containing the altar, as well as a shallow arched niche on either side. The right hand one contain (4) the pipe organ, built in 1931 by **Giuseppe Migliorini**. Under the organ loft is this modern painting of the *Madonna and Child*. The ceiling vault and the niche arches are decorated with stucco coffering; the vault has four ribs, four large tondos containing reliefs, and eight small ones making an overall octagonal pattern. The stucco work is mostly in white and light grey, with some highlights in gilt. There is a central lantern lighting the altar, which has eight small arched windows. [1] [4] [c]

The altar is Baroque, in polychrome stonework, set into the apse which has its own richly decorated arch. The altarpiece by **Arturo Viligiardi** is a 1927 copy from an original by Alessandro Franchi, and shows *St Anne Teaching Our Lady to Read*. The lilies and roses in the background are well executed. The artist was more famous as an architect in the 19th century. The altarpiece frame is a pretty arched aedicule with two Ionic pilasters in what looks like verde antico marble. On the archivolt is a small pair of putti, with garlands on each side. [1] [5]

Side altars

The altars are identically designed. Each has an altarpiece in a yellow frame, on a grey background which has bishop's insignia in stucco under a triangular pediment. Fitting into the vault is an archivolt with a single arc of coffers, alternately containing rosettes and stars. [1]

The altar on the left is dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo (5). The altarpiece, *Saint Borromeo between two angels*, is the work of a very minor artist working in the late 1620's. The whole altar was probably decorated in 1628-1629. It is a copy of the opposite altar that belonged to the original fabric of the church. [1] [a]

The dedication of the right hand altar is not obvious (6). The rather dirty altarpiece actually shows St Giles as a monk in a black habit, having a vision of the Madonna and Child. [1]

The floor is from 1882.

In the summer of 1999, the confessional penitentiary was created by the architect Rosario Scrimieri, who made the best use of a small space on the right side of the church, once used as a storage and connecting point, through a trapdoor, with the underlying graveyard. Although small in size (14 square meters), its location near the main entrance of the church and its direct connection with it have suggested a use more suited to the needs of a parish community, particularly for the realization of a functional and organic place for confessions. [3]

Access

The church is open to the public during liturgy. If the church is open the Swiss Guard stands back from the church to allow the public to enter through the Porto Sant'Anna gate.

Artists and Architects:

Alessandro [Specchi](#) (1668-1729), Italian architect and engraver
Annibale Rotati (c. 1673-1750), Italian painter
Arturo [Viligiardi](#) (1869-1936), Italian painter, sculptor, architect and urbanist.
Francesco Moderati (1680-1721), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Domenico [Navole](#) (1698-1770), Italian architect
Giacinto Barozzi (16th cent), Italian architect
Giacomo (Jacopo) [Barozzi da Vignola](#) (1507-1573), one of the great Italian architects of 16th century Mannerism
Giacomo de Rocchi (18th cent), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista de' Rossi (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe Migliorini (20th cent), Italian organ maker
Ignazio [Stern](#) [aka *Ignazio Stella*] (1679-1748), Austrian Baroque painter
Michel [Maille](#) [aka *Michele Maglia*] (1643-1703), French sculptor
Pietro [Ricci](#) (1606-1675), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Rosario Scrimieri (20th cent), architect

Burials

[Alfonso Cardinal LÓPEZ TRUJILLO](#), (1935-2008)
Buried in the crypt

Location:

Via di Porta Angelica, 00193 Roma (Vaticano)
Coordinates: [41°54'15"N 12°27'27"E](#)

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [English Wikipedia Page](#)
3. [Church web site](#)
4. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
5. [Romapedia blog](#)

(a) Lewine, Milton j., "VIGNOLA'S CHURCH OF SANT'ANNA DE' PALAFRENIERI IN ROME"; *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No.2, 1965

(b) Lewine, Milton; *THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580*; 1963, pp. 451-484

(c) Donovan, Jeremiah; *ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS*; 1842, Vol. II, pg 85

[RomeArtLover web site](#)

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

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