

## Santi Michele e Magno



**Santi Michele e Magno** is a church dedicated to St Michael the Archangel and St Magnus, Bishop of Anagni. It is the national church of the Netherlands. It's also known as the Kerk van de Friezen.

It is situated on a small hill called Palazzuolo (Palatiolum in Latin), which forms the northern-most part of the Gianicolo hill. Palazzuolo rises to the left of Piazza di San Pietro. Walking along Borgo di Santo Spirito, a street which runs parallel to Via della Conciliazione, you reach Largo degli Alicorni, from which you climb a steep flight of steps, the so-called Salita dei Santi Michele e Magno, which leads up to a small square. To your left you will discern the somewhat simple façade of the church.

### History

The foundation of the church is not documented, but it is confidently surmised that it originated as the chapel of the Schola Frisiani. It was a place where Frisian pilgrims (people from the coast of what is now the Netherlands) and expatriates could lodge, meet and arrange their affairs, and was one of four such Germanic national institutions around the Old St Peter's in the Middle Ages (the others belonged to the Franks, Lombards and Saxons; the last one has a memory in Santo Spirito in Sassia). This one was first recorded in 799, although the church is only mentioned in 854. Undocumented tradition claims that an earlier church here was built by St Boniface (675-754). (1)

The early church was probably founded by St. Leo III (795-816), or possibly by St. Leo IV (847-855), who dedicated it to Michael the Archangel, who liberated Rome from the plague in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Saracen pirates raided Rome in 845, and plundered St Peter's and the surrounding area. As a result, a defensive wall was built around the schola, and remains may still be found of this. However, the old

church was apparently badly damaged or destroyed in the Sack by the Normans in 1084. Hence it was completely rebuilt in 1141, and the surviving campanile added. At this time the relics of St Magnus of Anagni were enshrined, and the church's dedication hence changed when the new building was consecrated by Pope Innocent II. (1)

In 1440 the church was in a state of delapidation, and it was restored anew. Pope Eugene IV suppressed the Schola in 1446, and from then on the church belonged to the Chapter of St Peter's. It was entrusted to an Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament, but became a parish church in 1508. (1)

In the 1750s the church underwent a major restoration in 1756–1759 by Carlo Murena. (1)

A major fire in 1860 caused serious damage. The church was restored in 1860, and again in 1908, and in 1985.

In 1923 the church was made extraterritorial; that is, it remained part of Italy, but administered exclusively by the Vatican. The parish was suppressed, and since 1989 the church has been used by the Dutch community in Rome. In 1990, UNESCO put the church on the World Heritage List as part of its inclusion of the Extraterritorial Properties in the Centro Storico. A major new restoration was completed in 2011, and the church now looks very smart and in good condition. (1)

## Exterior

The church is surrounded by taller buildings to north and west, and is invisible from the street. It is perched on the northernmost outlier of the Janiculum hill, which is why access is by stairs. (1)

The Romanesque campanile is more than 20 metres high, and was built around 1150. It was in bad shape for a long time, but was restored in 1993. It is located over the right, south aisle of the church, near the entrance, and is at an angle to the major axis. (1)

Despite its lack of civic presence, the campanile is a high quality design. It is in brick, and has three storeys above the roofline. Two opposing faces of each storey have arcades of three arches, separated by stone columns with imposts. The other two faces have two arches. String courses run round the tower at the level of the arch springers, and are continued over the arches, and there are projecting cornices separating the storeys as well. (1)

The façade is very simple. There is an entrance porch with parvise above, which forms a narrow two-storey frontage. The first storey just has an arched portal without imposts, and the second one a rectangular window with a heraldic coat-of-arms above. The storeys have very shallow Doric pilasters at the outer corners, and are separated by an entablature frieze without architrave or cornice. There is a triangular pediment, which is now blank but looks as if it once contained a fresco. Everything is rendered in bright white. (1)

Peeping over this façade is the nave end of the church itself, which has a segmental lunette window in its pediment. (1)

Attached to the church is the so-called Titus Brandsma Hall, which is a visitor facility for lectures and receptions. It contains a modern bust of Brandsma, by Josephine Kortman-Hilders. (1)

[Brandsma](#) was a Dutch Carmelite friar, Catholic priest and professor of philosophy, who was vehemently opposed to Nazi ideology and spoke out against it many times before the Second World War. He was imprisoned in the infamous Dachau concentration camp, where he died.

## Interior

There is a nave with aisles, and a flat ceiling which runs uninterrupted from the entrance end to the triumphal arch of the apse. The arcades are interesting; there are three large arches on each side, but these are separated by two rectangular openings in lieu of arches. Above the rectangular openings are large tondi showing saints, with two more near the triumphal arch making six in all. The saints are:

- St. [Boniface](#), martyred in Friesland in the 8<sup>th</sup> century
- Pope St. [Leo](#) III, crowned Charlemagne on Christmas day, 800
- St. [Abundius](#), 5<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Como
- Bl. Antonius Fatati, 15<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Ancona
- St. [Willibrord](#) of Northumbria, patron saint of the Netherlands
- St. Charles [Borromeo](#)
- St. Theodorus
- St [Suitbert](#) of Kaiserswerdt, “Apostle of the Frisians”

Above the arches are clerestory windows, with two more near the triumphal arch making a total of six. These are separated by panels with stucco decoration. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century restoration, each arcade had seven marble columns and the present pillars still apparently contain these. (1)

The ceiling is coffered, and is tricked out in grey, white and orange. There is a large stucco figure in the middle, showing the Keys of St Peter being held by angels. The keys are not crossed, which is the heraldic signifier for the Chapter of St. Peter which owns the church and is commemorated in the inscription next to the triumphal arch. (1)

The high altar painting shows *Michael the Archangel appearing before Saints Gregory and Magnus*. It was executed by Niccolò Ricciolini. The left side-altar has a painting which depicts *Saints Peter and Paul*, a work by Ludovico Stern. The right side altar painting of *Pope Leo IV* is by Antonio Concioli. (4)

The baptismal font is by Bert Kreijen. All that remains of the Cosmatesque pavement is a rosone in the middle of the central nave.

In the left aisle is the tomb of Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), a famous German painter, active in Italy and Spain. Mengs was a friend of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and he was one of the protagonists of the Roman Neo-Classicism. The tomb of Mengs was designed by Vincenzo Pacetti. There is also a memorial for Nicola [Spedalieri](#) (1740-1795), Italian priest, theologian and philosopher, who wrote books on human rights.

In the left aisle we also find the top of the church's own Scala Santa, one of Rome's holy stairs. Next to the entrance of the church is the funerary inscription and two fragments of a tombstone of a Frisian knight called *Hebus* that died in 1004 in Rome.

A burial crypt was made between 1618 and 1628. An interesting thing about this crypt is that men, women and children were buried separately. Three signs marked virorum, mulierum and infantium mark their respective sections. (1)

### Artists and Architects

- Antonio [Concioli](#) (1739-1820), Italian painter
- Bert Kreijen (20<sup>th</sup> cent), Dutch sculptor
- Carlo [Murena](#) (1713-1764), Italian architect of the late-Baroque period
- Ludovico Stern (1708-1777), Italian painter
- Niccolò Ricciolini (1687-1763), Italian painter
- Vincenzo [Pacetti](#) (1746-1820), Italian sculptor

### Burials

- Anton Raphael [Mengs](#) (1728-1779)  
< German painter >

### Location

Address: Largo degli Alicorni, 21  
Borgo Santo Spirito 21/41, 00193 Rome  
Coordinates: [41°54'2"N 12°28'10"E](#)

### Info

Open times: Wednesday and Saturdays from 10:00 to 13:00  
Tuesday and Fridays from 15:00 to 18:00

**Links and References:**

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
  2. [friezenkerk.nl](#)
  3. <http://web.comhem.se/~u13117202/ssmichemagno.htm>  
(no longer online)
  4. [Info Rome page](#)
  5. [Rome Art Lover blog pag3](#)
  6. [de Alvaris photo catalogue](#)
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- a. Priester, Ann; "Bell Towers and Building Workshops in Medieval Rome"; *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp.199-220
  - b. 48) Donovan, Jeremiah; ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS; 1842