

Santa Maria Annunziata in Borgo



Santa Maria Annunziata in Borgo is an 18th century confraternity church or oratory, rebuilt on a different site in the 20th century, in the rione Borgo. This is near the north end of the Ponte Vittorio Emanuele II. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the aspect of her Annunciation.

History

Hospital confraternity

The oratory was originally built in 1745 for the Archconfraternity of the Holy Spirit (Arciconfraternita di Santo Spirito), which was attached to the nearby Hospital of the Holy Spirit (Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia).

The origins of the confraternity lie in the formal foundation of the hospital, which was authorized by Pope Innocent III in 1198. The actual founder was Guy de Montpellier, from France, who was granted the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia in 1201 (the hospital was originally dedicated to Our Lady, but changed its name after being so endowed). Members of the confraternity worked at the hospital, or supported it financially, or sometimes both.

This hospital was one of the best in mediaeval western Europe, and many rich and powerful people were members of the confraternity. In the mediaeval period it seems to have met in the church of Santo Spirito, but in the reign of Pope Leo X (1513-21) it is known to have taken over the nearby small church of San Lorenzo in Piscibus.

First oratory

The confraternity decided to set up their own private oratory in 1659, and moved out of San Lorenzo. The site was just to the east of the hospital as it then was, between the Borgo Santo Spirito and the river about where the end of the Ponte Vittorio Emanuele II now is.

The first building must have been unsatisfactory, because the confraternity decided to rebuild in 1688. The architect was Carlo Buratti, who provided a rectangular edifice with a single altar. Angelo Massarotti was commissioned to paint five pictures: The Annunciation, The Birth of Our Lady, The Nativity, The Deposition of Christ and The Dormition of Our Lady. The first was the altarpiece, and gave the new edifice its dedication. The frescoing of the interior was done by one Benedetto Morra.

The confraternity had the oratory restored by Domenico Gregorini in 1741, when a sacristy and priest's house were added. The money was wasted, however.

Second oratory

Unfortunately, the oratory was in the way of the expansion of the hospital. The east wing of the latter was commissioned by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742, and the oratory had to be demolished. The confraternity salvaged re-usable materials and artworks, and was granted a site on the other side of the Borgo Santo Spirito to rebuild. They were also given 400 scudi as compensation, which very wisely they used to buy some houses as an investment instead of spending it right away.

The new site was just to the west of the present edifice, and work on the new oratory was begun in 1744. It was finished two years later, the architect being Pietro Passalacqua. He provided ancillary accommodation over the oratory to serve as the confraternity headquarters.

The government sequestered the confraternity's capital assets in 1890, and the resulting financial insecurity was responsible for the oratory falling into disrepair. However, after being closed for safety reasons for a short period it was restored and re-opened in 1925.

Third oratory

The Via della Conciliazione was built in 1940. As part of the project, a spur road was built to the Ponte Vittorio Emanuele II which is now the Via San Pio X. The oratory was in the way, and was demolished. However, fortunately much of the dismantled fabric was put into store.

In 1950, the oratory was rebuilt on its present site using the salvaged materials. This was extremely well done, as you would not guess that this was not an original 18th century building from a casual visit.

This was not the only confraternity to lose its home in the period. The demolition of the nearby church of Sant'Angelo in Borgo in 1938 meant that the Arciconfraternita di San Michele Arcangelo a Corridoio di Borgo had also been made homeless.

It was decided to create a consolidated charitable confraternity in 1969, which is now called the Venerabile Apostolica Arciconfraternita di Santo Spirito e di San Michele Archangelo nell'Oratorio della Santissima Annunciata. The St Michael crew brought with them some artworks from their lost church, which were installed in the oratory in 1970.

There was a restoration of the interior in 1971, which was repainted in its original colour scheme. The façade was restored in 2000.

Exterior

Layout

The church is entirely subsumed within a mid-20th century office block, and only the façade shows. There is no campanile.

The office block concerned was part of the Via della Conciliazione scheme, and was designed by the Fascist architects Marcello Piacentini and Attilio Spaccarelli.

Façade

The façade is exactly the same as it was before the demolition and rebuilding. However, two items were apparently lost in 1849 during the Roman Republic. The tympanum of the pediment used to have a relief coat-of-arms of Pope Benedict XIV by Giovanni Moneti, and the lintel of the entrance had a bas-relief of the Annunciation by Andrea Bergondi.

The architect was Pietro Passalacqua, who is better known for his work at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and here was obviously influenced by Borromini (a hostile critic might describe the result as badly proportioned, and only timidly Borrominiesque). Although there are two side entrances in the composition, these do not belong to the church.

There are three vertical zones, the wider central one fronting the church and the two narrower ones over the side doors. The central zone has a pair of Composite pilasters supporting an entablature having posts over the capitals. Flanking the entrance are two tall Composite columns, and over the capitals of these are two prouder posts in the entablature, which are rotated outwards diagonally. Above these posts is a segmental pediment, the outer sections of which are also brought forward and rotated. On top of the pediment is a relief of the Dove of the Holy Spirit in glory, sheltered by an arc cornice.

The church entrance has a pair of thin Composite columns supporting an entablature with posts, and with curlicues over the posts. The lost central relief has been replaced by a pair of putti. Over this is a very large oval window with a curlicued frame, having hanging festoons and the sides and a winged putto's head on top.

The central part of the façade has a sort-of second storey. There is an attic plinth with posts on top of the entablature cornice, part of which is hidden by the pediment. This serves as a balcony for ancillary accommodation over the church, the frontage of which is set back and has three French windows. These are separated by a pair of sort-of Corinthian pilasters supporting a cornice which curves out at either end. On this is a second pediment, containing a scallop-shell relief and with a complex Baroque curve to its top.

The two side zones are identical, and are bowed (convex). Each has a transom window over the door, framed by a pair of C-curlicues below an ogee cornice. Above is a rectangular window with a molded archivolt forming a blank tympanum, then comes an arc cornice and then a continuation of the entablature of the central zone. This is defaced by a tondo containing a relief of two crossed lily sprays tied with ribbon, in front of a cross fourchy which is the symbol of the confraternity. This has two crossbars, and the six ends shaped like arrowheads facing inwards.

Interior

Layout and fabric

The interior is a rectangular room of three bays with rounded corners, having a shallow little rectangular apse containing the only altar. The attractive décor is in white with architectural details in pink. The stucco decorations are by the firm Fratelli Bucci.

The design begins with six cantorie or little opera-boxes for solo musicians, which have bow-fronted balustraded balconies on corbels with putto's heads below. Four are in the rounded corners, and two in the middle of the side walls. These have high round-headed tops, crowned with ogee cornices topped by heraldic shields.

These cantorie are flanked by tripletted Composite pilasters, a total of twelve in all. These support an entablature that runs around the church but is broken at the sanctuary and entrance (the cantorie arches also intrude into it). The ceiling vault springs from this, having eight lunettes and twelve wide ribs meeting at a central fresco panel.

You might notice that some of the cantorie don't have any access, which is one of the few hints to be found in the interior of the oratory's 20th century rebuilding.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary has a triumphal arch supported by a pair of pavonazetto marble columns with gilded Corinthian capitals. The entablature is terminated by a pair of prominent posts in grey-veined marble above these, and the archivolt of the triumphal arch springs from these posts. This archivolt has a Baroque tablet on its keystone, flanked by gilded stucco swags, which proclaims altare privilegato (this means that pilgrims can obtain an indulgence by praying at it).

The sumptuous polychrome marble aedicule fits snugly into the barrel-vaulted apse. It does not have pilasters or columns, but instead a pair of flanking stucco angels holding candlesticks. The split and curlicued ogee-curved pediment is on an entablature with floating posts supported by putto's heads. The pediment fragments flank a monogram of Our Lady in glory, adored by another pair of angels. The stucco work is by Pio Eroli.

The altarpiece is the original one, The Annunciation by Angelo Massarotti.

The tympanum of the apse contains the confraternity's cross in glory, executed in stucco. There are fresco putti flanking its oval frame, and also in the two lunettes in the barrel vault. The central fresco of the latter shows The Holy Spirit in Glory. The fresco work is by Giulio Oddi and Giulio Sordoni.

The altar pro populo in front of the high altar is made from decorative marble salvaged from the demolished church of Sant'Angelo.

Nave

The ceiling fresco was provided when the third oratory was built. It shows The Triumph of the Cross, with the cross itself in the form of the symbol of the confraternity. This is a 20th century work imitating the Baroque; the artist was Angelo Urbani del Fabbretto (1903-74), who reproduced the fresco lost in the 1940 demolition.

The floor is in polychrome marble, with the confraternity's cross featuring again.

Over the entrance is a large oval window, with good stained glass showing The Vision of St Bernadette at Lourdes, 1958. Above this in turn is a tablet commemorating the rebuilding of 1746.

Artworks

The artworks in the nave are described in anticlockwise order, beginning from the right of the entrance.

In the corner to the right of the entrance is a bronze statue of St Michael Conquering Satan by Louis-Albert Lefevre, which was briefly in the demolished Sant'Angelo in Borgo.

Then comes The Deposition of Christ by Massarotti.

Below the side cantoria to the right is an arched niche containing a venerated wooden sculpture of Christ Falls Beneath the Cross.

Then comes The Dormition of Our Lady by Massarotti. Scenes from the Stations of the Cross are in a row below. The set is 18th century, but the way that they are displayed contradicts the Church's instruction on this devotion. To acquire the indulgence offered, you have to be able to walk from one scene to the other.

Below the cantoria in the far left hand corner is a framed 16th century fresco fragment of the Madonna della Salute, part of a larger lost work at the hospital.

Massarotti's Birth of Our Lady comes next, with the rest of the Stations of the Cross huddled together below it.

Below the side cantoria on the left is a fresco transferred from the demolished church of Sant'Angelo, which depicts Our Lady suckling the Christ-Child. This is attributed to Antoniazio Romano, and was venerated in the former church under the title of Refugium Peccatorum.

The last of the five paintings by Massarotti follows, this one showing The Nativity.

Below it is a lunette fresco of The Apparition of the Archangel Michael to Pope St Gregory the Great. This shows the legend that the pope held a penitential procession during an epidemic, and saw the angel standing on top of the Castel Sant'Angelo sheathing his sword. The work is by Giovan Battista Montano, and again came from the demolished Sant'Angelo.

Finally there is a modern statue of St Teresa of Lisieux.

Sacristy

The sacristy is in the second storey, over the church. It is accessed via a spiral staircase. The antechamber has several marble memorial slabs, and the altar has a painting of Christ by Alessandro Depoletti, 1857.

The terrace over the church façade is accessible from here.

Access

The church is open for Mass, as detailed below. Otherwise, contact details for the confraternity are here.

Contact info:

Arciconfraternita di S. Michele Arcangelo in quella di Santo Spirito in Sassia

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info@operapiasanmichelearcangelo.it

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite (Tridentine Mass) at:
Weekdays 7:00, Sundays 10:30.

Location:

Addr: Lungotevere Vaticano 1, 00193 Roma

Coordinates: [41°54'7"N 12°27'49"E](#)

Links:

[Roman Church Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 1245) Shows the church on its original site.

[Confraternity website](#)

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

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