

Santa Maria d'Itria o di Costantinopoli

Santa Maria Odigitria al Tritone



St Mary Hodegetria at the Triton is a 19th century confraternity, regional and titular church on 16th century foundations at Via del Tritone 82, north of the Quirinal Palace in the rione Colonna. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her ancient title of Hodegetria or "She Who Shows the Way", Odigitria in Italian. Two alternative names of Santa Maria d'Itria and Santa Maria di Costantinopoli have been used in the past.

Hodegetria

The title Odegetria refers to an ancient devotion to Our Lady in Sicily. Hodegetria is Greek for "Showing the Way", and refers to a very old style of Byzantine icon depicting the Madonna and Child. In this, perhaps the most familiar of Byzantine icon types of Our Lady, she is depicted holding the Christ Child on one arm and pointing to him with her other hand.

According to the Sicilian legend, the devotion arose when a flotilla of ships from the island helped to defeat an attack on Constantinople by "Turks" in the 8th century when the island was still part of the Byzantine Empire. This is a garbled remembrance of the Siege of Constantinople by the Rus' in 860, when an apparition of Our Lady helped the Byzantines to score a victory. The event is still celebrated in Orthodox churches as the Pokrov or Skepe, meaning "protection". Itria is a corruption of the word Hodegetria, not a reference to Istria.

History

The church has its origins in an association of six Sicilian expatriates resident at Rome, at a time when Sicily was ruled by the Kingdom of Aragon (by then united to Spain). They obtained recognition as a pious Confraternity from Pope Clement VIII in 1594, and immediately began building a headquarters with a church. With the help of a large benefaction from King Philip II of Spain, they were able to have it consecrated in 1596.

They had possession of an ancient Byzantine icon of Our Lady, which they enshrined in their new church and which also gave its name to the confraternity: Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria Odigitria dei Siciliani, which still exists as a charitable organization. The church became the national church of

Sicily in Rome.

In 1798, the pope was deposed and a Roman Republic declared in response to the French Revolution. The army of King Ferdinand of the Two Sicilies briefly occupied the city, and a liturgy of thanksgiving was celebrated in the church. However, the king retreated in the face of Napoleon's advance and the returning French troops despoiled and desecrated the church in revenge. The building was rented out as a small shop, but seems to have fallen into complete ruin. The confraternity was suppressed temporarily.

The confraternity was refounded by 1805, and set about the project of rebuilding. However, this was a slow process. The complex was ready for occupation in 1814, and the church was rebuilt by 1817 to a design by Francesco Manno (better known as a painter). King Ferdinand put up much of the cost.

In the early 20th century, the confraternity became run-down and was almost dispersed. However, matters were taken in hand and the church was restored in 1970. In 1973, it was made titular. A replacement icon for the main altar was donated by Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, and in 1988 the side altars were given new altarpieces by Sicilian artists.

A renewal of interest in the confraternity has led to the creation of a faculty of theology, and a study center for Sicilian history and culture.

Cardinalate

The title is that of a cardinal deacon. The present incumbent is Paolo Romeo, archbishop of Palermo.

Exterior

The church is on the plan of a simple rectangle, with a shallow apsed sanctuary the same width as the nave. It is possible that fabric from the earlier church was preserved in the present one after rebuilding, but the side walls cannot be examined because of adjacent buildings. There is a small campanile or bellcote over the apse, but this is invisible from the street.

Façade

The two-storey façade is very plain, in travertine limestone. The door has a horizontal floating cornice, and the corners of the first storey are carved with blind pilasters in shallow relief. These support an entablature with a projecting cornice but no architrave. The only decoration in this storey is a tablet with a short dedicatory inscription. Two wings on either side of the main frontage of this storey have vertical ovoid windows.

The second storey of the façade has a large semi-circular lunette window, below a triangular pediment having a recessed blank tympanum.

Interior

The small but richly decorated neo-Baroque interior is basically a rectangular box, with four side altars. It is dominated by Corinthian pilasters in yellow marble with travertine capitals in a derivative style, which support an entablature running round the church. The barrel-vaulted ceiling, which has window lunettes, sits on this. It is coffered in panels of different sizes embellished with gilt vine-scrolls, and with heraldry in the larger ones. The large semi-circular window in the counterfaçade has stained glass featuring the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*.

Sanctuary

The famous icon is enthroned over the altar, in a very large gilt glory. There is no proper aedicule, two of the Corinthian pilasters (doubletted here) forming a frame instead. A triangular pediment is over the entablature. The altar frontal is in red marble and alabaster.

Side altars

There are four side altars, and the paintings over them since 1988 are: *Popes Leo II and Agatho, and St Methodius of Constantinople* by Giuseppe Migneco; *St Lucy* by Salvatore Fiume; *St Agatha* by Sebastiano

Milluzzo and *St Rosalia* by Mario Bardi. All of these were Sicilians (in the case of Pope St Agatho, only allegedly).

Oratory

The Archconfraternity's private oratory, which is adjacent to the church, has another painting of *St Rosalia* by Gaetano Sottini.

Info:

Open times:

Every day from 7.30 to 10.30 and from 16.30 to 19.00

Sunday Closed

Address

Address: Via del Tritone, 82

Area: Rione Trevi (Quirinale-Tritone-Barberini) (central Rome)

Coordinates: [41°54'11"N 12°29'9"E](#)

Contacts

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Location:

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Coordinates: [41°54'11"N 12°29'9"E](#)

Exterior links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 372)

[Roma SPQR web-page with gallery](#)

[Website of Archconfraternity](#)

[Wikipedia article on Hodegetria icons](#)

[Roman Despatches](#) - blog with gallery

[060608.it Web page](#)