

## San Paolo Primo Eremita

(Deconsecrated)



St Paul the First Hermit is a deconsecrated 17th century Baroque convent church at in the rione Monti. The dedication was to St Paul the First Hermit (not the apostle).

### History

The origins of the church are unclear, but it is thought to have been founded as a devotional chapel dedicated to St Robert of Molesmes by the Cistercian monks at the abbey of Santa Pudenziana nearby.

This edifice was completely rebuilt in 1669 as the Roman headquarters for the Order of St Paul or the Paulines, a monastic order which took its inspiration from St Paul the First Hermit and which was popular in eastern Europe. According to St Jerome, the only source, St Paul was the first Egyptian to embrace the eremitic life in the 3rd century, even before St Anthony the Great.

The church was renovated by Clemente Orlandi by 1775, the year of his death. He added the façade in the style of Borromini.

The Pauline monks probably found this tiny convent very cramped. They moved out in the reign of Pius VI (1775-95), and the pope granted the complex to the Conservatorio della Santissima Trinità. The order now has its Roman convent at Via Alcamo 12/A (there is no chapel with architectural identity here), and administer the parish at Santi Urbano e Lorenzo a Prima Porta.

The little monastery was home to the sisters of Sant'Eufemia from 1848, after they had had their own convent demolished. But the complex was finally sequestered by the Italian state, and the church deconsecrated, in 1873.

At the start of the 20th century the church edifice was the assembly hall of a state institution, the Regia Scuola d'Igiene, but its present function is unclear.

### **Exterior**

The façade is concave, of one storey, with a triangular pediment over an entablature supported by a pair of gigantic doubletented Composite pilasters on high plinths. A round-headed window with its own molded architrave intrudes into the entablature.

The entrance door has a segmental pediment, and is sheltered by a flat-roofed segmental porch. This has a pair of L-shaped draped Ionic pilasters where it joins the façade, and a pair of matching free-standing round columns.

On the roof of this porch is the coat-of-arms of the royal house of Savoy (later of Italy) supported by lions, carved in the round. According to the evidence of surviving engravings, the shield was added after the church was deconsecrated. It replaced a palm-tree and crow, which were the emblems of the saint (he lived on dates at his desert oasis). The lions were undisturbed; they are by a sculptor called Sartorio.

### **Interior**

This was a very small church, on the overall plan of a rectangle perpendicular to the major axis. The interior was on the superimposed plan of a Greek cross, with a central dome richly decorated in stucco.

Above the altar was a relief of St Paul in his cave, by Andrea Bergondi, lit by a hidden window. This sculpture is now in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

### **Location:**

Address: Via Agostino Depretis 95

Coordinates: [41°54'0"N 12°29'36"E](#)

### **External links**

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