

## Santa Lucia in Selci



This quite insignificant exterior belongs to the convent and church of **Santa Lucia in Selci**, dedicated to [Saint Lucy](#), a 4th century virgin and martyr of Syracuse.

### History:

The church has had several different names through the centuries. The most common, Santa Lucia in Selci, derives its name from the ancient paving-stones of the adjacent street, Via in Selci (the ancient Clivus Suburanus), which were made of pebble ("selci" in Italian, "silex" in Latin). Other variations of the denomination "in Selci" are "in silice", "in silicata" and "in siricata". For some time the church was named "Santa Lucia in Orfea", which alludes to the "Lacus Orphei" (in Italian "Fontana di Orfeo"), a magnificent fountain adorned with a statue of the mythological Orpheus. This fountain was located in the vicinity of the church.

The church of Santa Lucia in Selci is an ancient *diaconia*. The diaconia derives its meaning from the "annona" (annual proceeds of corn) of ancient Rome. The annona was kept in big storehouses (so-called "horrea"), where one stored, at the expense of the state, large amounts of corn, which, in dear times, were to be handed out to the needy at a reduced price or for free. As the power and infrastructure of the Roman empire disintegrated, the Christian authorities successively took over the storehouses and created their own. Thus the diaconia was a storehouse for food-products, which were given to the poor. The diaconias were located close to the main streets of the city as to facilitate distribution. Several of the diaconias were eventually turned into churches. The church of Santa Lucia in Selci, which is built no later than the 8th century above the ruins of an ancient Roman

building, the Portico of Livia. The tradition claiming that the first church was built under Pope Symmachus (498-514) is uncertain, but not unlikely. It is documented that it was restored by Pope Honorius (625-638), and again by Pope Leo III (795-816).

In the 13th century, a monastery was built on the site, enclosing the church. 1370, the church was granted to the Carthusians. In 1534, it was given to the Benedictines, and in 1568 Pope Pius V granted it to the Augustinians, who still serve the church.

The monastery was enlarged in 1603 according to designs by Bartolomeo Bassi, active in Rome 1570-1619. However, all that remains of this amplification is the portal of the exterior. The church was reconstructed by Carlo Maderno in 1604.

Pope Urban VIII had the monastery altered in 1624, enlarging it and dividing it into three parts. One was kept by the Augustinians, one was given to Dominican friars and the last was given to the Poor Clares.

The church was restored 1637-1638 by Francesco Borromini.

In 1878 the Italian state expropriated the convent of the Clarissian nuns of San Lorenzo in Panisperna, but the nuns found a place of refuge here.

### **Exterior:**

The wooden door is from the 17th century. To the left of the entrance, you can see traces of a 5th century building, with travertine pilasters.

In the atrium wall is a wooden wheel with drawers with which abandoned newborn children were given to the Poor Clares.

### **Interior:**

Having entered the main doorway, the entrance to the church proper is to the left.

The church is built on a rectangular ground-plan, and it has a barrel-vault. It has a single nave with three shallow lateral chapels on each side, an architectural theme occurring frequently at the end of the 16th century and in the beginning of the 17th century.

The painting of the vault, the *Glory of Saint Lucy*, is a 19th century work by an anonymous artist, which replaced one with the same motif by Giovanni Antonio Lelli.

The painting above the high altar depicts the *Annunciation* and is a work by the Florentine painter Anastasio Fontebuoni from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The high altar itself (19th century) replaces one made by Borromini. However the grating is by Borromini. In the choir of the nuns there are several paintings by Baccio Ciampi, e.g. *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, *Saint Ambrose*, *Saint Lucy* and *Saint Carlo Borromeo*.

On the counterfaçade is the cantory, another work by Borromini, and the painting *God the Father* by Cavalier d'Arpino.

The first chapel to the left, the Landi chapel, is the work of Borromini, who was commissioned by the prioress Vittoria Landi. The chapel is decorated in a delicate style of stucco. Here Borromini for the first time applies an innovation, which he later would use on the exterior cornice below the

dome of the church of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza: Borromini transforms the egg-and-tongue mouldings so that the eggs are cherub's heads and the tongues are formed by their wings. The painting above the altar depicts *The Holy Trinity with Saints Augustine and Monica*, a work by Cavalier d'Arpino.

The tabernacle in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, the second on the left, is in polychrome marble and gilt bronze. It, and the alabaster statues of Saints Elizabeth of Hungary, Augustine, Lucy and Monica, the mother of Augustine, are attributed to Carlo Maderno. The high altar itself is from the 19th century, and replaces one made by Borromini. The mensa of the older altar was reused. The altarpiece by Anastasio Fontebuoni depicts the *Annunciation*.

The first chapel on the right hand has Giovanni Lanfranco's *Martyrdom of Saint Lucy* with the saint pointing upwards to the heavenly Light.

The second chapel has the *Vision of Saint Augustine* by Andrea Camassei. Some say, that the painting is a work by Giovanni Battista Speranza.

The choir is attributed to Francesco Borromini.

### Special Notes:

The church is usually closed on weekdays. After ascending the steps leading to the door, you will find the church entrance on the left and the convent gate on the right. If the church is closed, ring the bell by the convent gate (within reasonable hours), and ask to be let in. Many of the sisters are from the Philippines, so you should be able to find someone who speaks English. There is no entrance fee, but a donation should be given. You will find it open on Sunday mornings.

The feast of St Lucy is celebrated with great solemnity on 13 December.

### Artists and Architects:

- Anastasio [Fontebuoni](#) (1571-1626), Italian (Florence) painter of the Baroque period
- Andrea [Camassei](#) (1602-1649), Italian Baroque painter and engraver
- Baccio [Ciampi](#) (1574-1654), Italian painter of the late-Mannerism and early-Baroque style
- Bartolomeo [Bassi](#) (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian **architect** and painter
- Carlo [Maderno](#) (1556-1629), Swiss-Italian architect
- Francesco [Borromini](#) (1599-1667), leading figure in the emergence of Roman Baroque architecture
- Giovanni Battista [Speranza](#) (ca 1600-1640), Italian Baroque painter
- Giovanni [Lanfranco](#) (1582-1647), Italian Baroque painter
- Giuseppe [Cesari](#), aka Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640), Italian Mannerist painter

### Location:

Address: Via In Selci, 82

Coordinates: [41°53'41"N 12°29'48"E](#)

### Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 4827623  
open Sunday 9.30am-10.30am

#### Orario Messe:

Festivi: 9.30

**Links:**

[http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa\\_Lucia\\_in\\_Selci](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Lucia_in_Selci)

<http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi143.htm>

[http://74.125.91.132/translate\\_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa\\_di\\_Santa\\_Lucia\\_in\\_Selci](http://74.125.91.132/translate_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_Santa_Lucia_in_Selci)

<http://web.comhem.se/~u13117202/sluciaselci.htm>

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/santa-lucia-in-selci.html>

[http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=398](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=398)