

Santa Cecilia in Trastevere



Santa Cecilia in Trastevere is a 9th century monastic and titular church and minor basilica dedicated to St Cecilia, 2nd or 3rd century Roman martyr and patron of musicians. ^{1 h}

History

The church is located in what was the most densely inhabited part of Trastevere in early Roman times; its large population mainly due to its proximity to the river Tiber. Where there are now convent buildings there were once four Roman streets surrounding a *domus*, above which the church was built. It is in the *domus* that the *titulus* of a Christian woman named Cecilia was housed. The river would have provided the *domus* with water for its bathhouse and tannery. ⁱ

The account of Cecilia stated that she had persuaded her husband Valerian to be baptized. He was subsequently put to death, along with his brother, Tiburtius, and a man named Maximus. Cecilia was then taken before the prefect and sentenced to death by way of suffocation in the *caldorinm* of her own bathhouse. When this treatment failed to kill her, a soldier was sent to behead her but he struck three blows without succeeding, and she died of the wounds three days later. The remains of the executed men are known to have been buried in the Catacomb of St Praetextatus but the truth of the account and their connection with it is uncertain. ^{6 h j}

A sanctuary was built on the house of her husband, Valerianus. This became the ancient *Titulus Ceciliae*, one of the original twenty-five parishes of Rome. The baptistery from this church was found during excavations, situated underneath the present Chapel of Relics. A house from the Imperial era was also found, and tradition claims that the church was built over the house in which St Cecilia lived. The first unambiguous documentary reference is in the list of priests attending a synod under Pope Symmachus in 499. In 545, Pope Vigilius was celebrating the saint in the church, when the emissary of Empress Theodora, Antemi Scribone, captured him. ^{1 6}

According to the the [Liber Pontificalis](#), in 821 the body of the Saint was found in the Catacombs of St. Calixtus, wrapped in a robe of gold tissue, as it had been originally interred, and with it some linen cloths dipped in her blood. In 822 Paschal I (817-824) had the church rebuilt, then he placed

the body beneath the new great altar and he adorned the tribune with a mosaic. Also, the relics of SS Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus were transferred from the Catacomb of St Praetextatus and enshrined in another marble sarcophagus. Also, the bodies of two popes, Saints Lucius I and Urban I were brought into the church. ^{1 6}

Mediaeval additions

There were several additions and alterations to the church in the 12th and 13th centuries. The surviving portico and campanile were added in 1140. The ancient baptistery was filled in, to raise the floor level to match that of the church. At the end of the 13th century a program of embellishment of the interior was carried out, which involved frescoes on the walls and a new ciborium over the main altar was put up in 1283. The ciborium is intact, but of the frescoes only a damaged work by **Pietro Cavallini** survives on the counterfaçade wall. It is known that there were other frescoes in the main nave from the evidence of small surviving fragments, and these seem to have been by Cavallini also or of his school. The whole project was executed between 1291 and 1293, and seems to have resulted in a fresco cycle featuring scenes from the Old and New Testaments. A Cosmatesque floor was laid, and this has also gone. ¹

17th century restoration and re-discovery of the relics

The church was updated in 1599, financed by Cardinal Sfondrati, nephew to Gregory XIV. The interior restorations focused on a re-ordering of the saint's shrine, and involved the disinterment of the relics in 1599 in the presence of witnesses. Three marble sarcophagi were discovered. One sarcophagus, exactly matched the description in the Liber Pontificalis, in one of which was found the body of S. Cecilia. In another the bodies of the two brothers SS. Tiburtius and Valerian, and that of S. Maximus, and in the third those of SS. Urban and Lucius, Popes, all transferred hither from the Catacombs by Paschal I, as is attested by an inscription in the Confessio. Cardinal Caesar Baronius recorded the events and supervised the exposition of the relics which took about five weeks. The famous archaeologist Antonio Bosio also left a description. The sculptor Carlo Maderno also attended the exposition, based his sculpture of the body on what he saw and left an inscription stating this to be so. ^{1 i}

Unfortunately, this restoration resulted in the destruction of surviving fragments on the 9th century atrium, leaving the courtyard ranges looking much as they do now. ¹

18th century restoration

The present appearance of the interior of the church is partly the result of a restoration performed on the orders of the titular cardinal, Francesco Acquaviva. The campaign lasted from 1712 to 1728, and the supervising architects were **Domenico Paradesi** and **Luigi Berrettoni**. Some older elements were preserved, notably the baldacchino and apse mosaic, but a new ceiling barrel vault in a restrained Baroque style was inserted. Also, galleries above the arcades were enclosed to form passages to a choir above the entrance; these features were for the use of the nuns. Since they were enclosed, they were not allowed into the body of the church. Tragically, the Cosmatesque floor was ripped up and replaced by boring terracotta slab work. Even worse, the Pomarancio frescoes in the apse were destroyed together with part of the mosaic. ¹

Ferdinando Fuga was responsible for the remodeling of the façade in 1741, with its bombastic inscription in praise of the cardinal. Fortunately, he left alone a strip of mediaeval mosaic just under this. He may also have been responsible for the convent entrance block on the piazza, erected in 1742 and with an impressive propylaeum bearing the coat-of-arms of Cardinal Troiano Acquaviva d'Aragona who had inherited the cardinalate title from his uncle in 1733. ¹

19th century restorations

The interior was partly restored in 19th century by Giuseppe Cardinal Doria-Pamphilj, also titular priest of the church (1818-1837), who had the columns of the interior enclosed in pillars, with a view to strengthen them to support the weight of the 18th century ceiling vault. The unfortunate solution was to box the columns into thicker pillars, trabeate every other arch and infill its tympanum. This altered the appearance of the basilica much more radically than the 18th century works. The architect was **Pietro Bracci**. ^{1 8}

Improvements were made to the crypt in 1889, and during the work remains of Roman houses from the Republican period were found. This led to the large, richly decorated crypt now existing, the

architect of which was **Giovanni Battista Giovenale**. The relics of the saints were moved to new shrines; the silver casket containing St Cecilia was not opened in the process. ¹

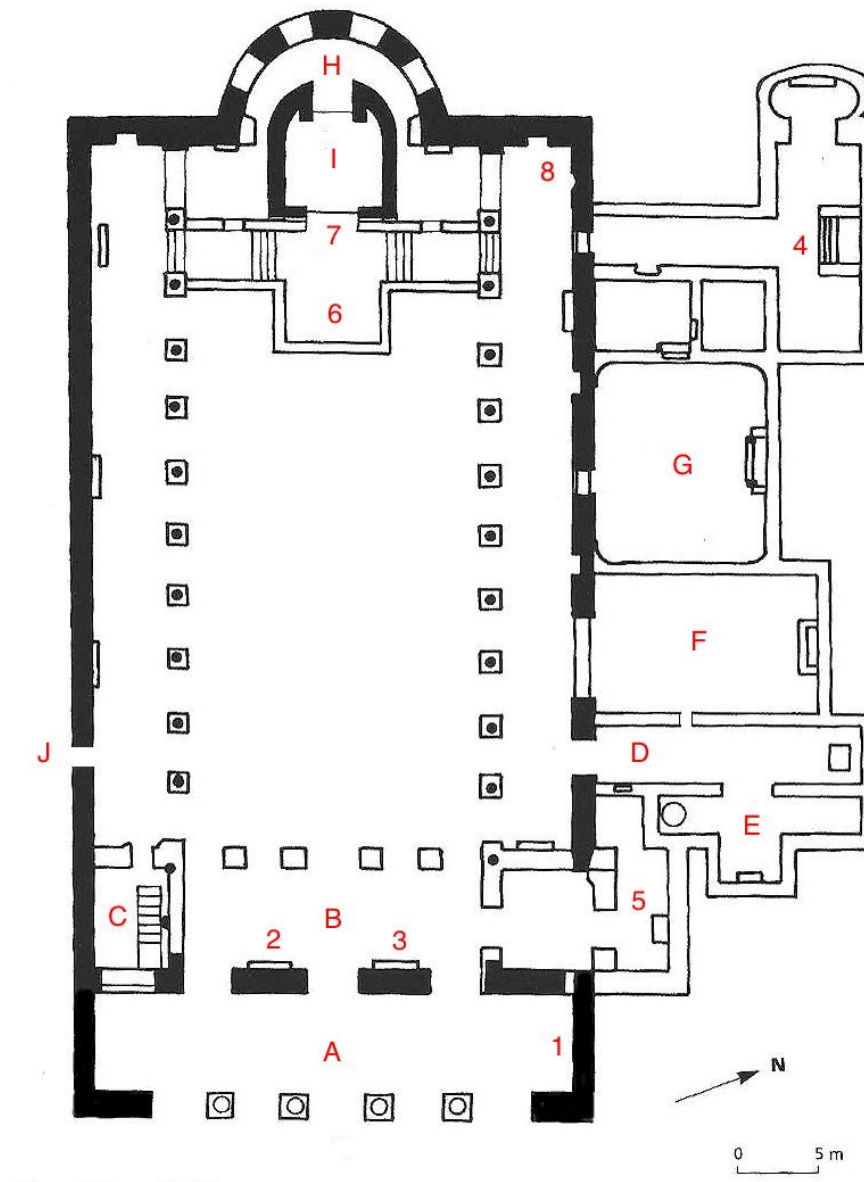
In 1900, in the same restoration, the damaged fresco by **Cavallino** was discovered behind wooden panelling in the nuns' choir over the entrance vestibule. ¹

20th century

The church courtyard was just empty space until 1929, with the ancient cantharus on a plinth at the right hand side being used as a plant pot. In that year **Antonio Muñoz** converted the yard into a garden with the cantharus as the centrepiece of a pool surrounded by low formal box hedging. The latter did not last, and has been replaced by rose beds. ¹

In 1962 the sanctuary was restored, under the supervision of **Igino Pineschi**. The last restoration of the fabric was in 1990. ¹

Plan



In plan and in its fabric the church remains a 9th century basilica. It has a central nave with two side aisles, separated by arcades with twelve ancient columns each (now hidden inside pillars). There is a semi-circular external apse (**H**), but no transept or side apses. The apse originally had three round-headed windows, traces of which can be seen from the outside. ¹ j

Because the monastic cloister is immediately against the left hand side wall of the church, there are no external chapels there. However, on the right hand side there are several ancillary structures. Firstly, opening off the second bay of the aisle, is a narrow corridor (D) with two doors on its right. The first leads through a tiny antechamber to the Cappella del Crucifissione (5) (which is actually adjacent to the right hand ancillary chamber of the entrance vestibule), and the second opens into (E) St Cecilia's Bath-House. ¹

The left hand wall of this corridor is party to the adjacent Cappella Ponziano (F), which is rectangular, and beyond that is the Chapel of the Relics (G) which is square. Then comes a set of ancillary rooms, which include an entrance to the crypt through a door at the end of the right hand aisle. The Cappella Rampolla (4) is a modern addition at the end of a corridor leading from this door. ¹

From the Via Acilia at the back of the church, you can see the ancient wall of the apse which has a decorative brick cornice. The structural fabric of the church is re-used Roman brick, visible here. Above the apse, in the gable, is a round window which lights the void in between the nave ceiling and the roof. ¹

Exterior

The grand entrance is from the early 18th century remodeling by **Ferdinando Fuga**. The putti over the over columns are by **Agostino Corsini** from 1725. ⁸

Courtyard

In front of the church is a beautiful courtyard. It is especially nice in the spring, when the flowers are in bloom, and the roses are impressive in season. The garden was laid out as an initiative by Cardinal Bonaventura Cerretti in 1929. ¹

In the center is a rectangular pool with a large stone vase, a cantharus, which is ancient. Its provenance is unknown, but it was obtained for the new church by Pope Paschal. The original location was here, but it was moved to the right side of the courtyard in the Middle Ages and only put back in 1929 by **Antonio Muñoz**. ¹

This courtyard used to be a colonnaded atrium, provided by Pope Paschal. The mediaeval convent buildings on each side that replaced it are picturesque, but of little architectural interest. The visible structures are 15th century. ¹

When Fuga restored the façade, he lowered the surface of the courtyard so that the level matched that of the floor of the church. ¹

Portico

The external entrance loggia (A) is mediaeval, erected in the 12th century but altered by Fuga. The portico has a single-pitched tiled roof hiding behind a parapet. This portico leads into an entrance vestibule, over which is a room which used to be the nuns' choir. ¹

The portico is supported by four antique Ionic columns and two piers with Corinthian capitals, the inner pair of pink granite from Aswan in Egypt and the outer pair of pavonazzetto marble from what is now Iscehisar in Turkey. The columns and piers support an entablature with a rather idiotically boastful inscription on the frieze. It merely reads: Franciscus, titu[lus] Sanctae Caeciliae car[dinalis] de Aquaviva. The architrave below this is a strip of 12th century mosaic in a vine tendril pattern, the dominant colors being blue and gold with spots of red. The scrollwork is embellished with flowers and little animals, and also with little tondi containing portrait busts representing those saints whose relics had been placed in the confession by Paschal I. These are tentatively identified as St Cecilia twice, and SS Agatha, Tiburtius, Urban and Lucius. Over the central portal is an alpha-omega monogram with a cross. ^{1 i}

The solid balustrade above the entablature was added by Fuga, and has five flaming urn finials. ¹

Several interesting medieval tomb slabs and inscriptions, as well as fragments of sculpture, can be

seen attached to the walls of the loggia. The Gothic grave slabs include one of Battista Ponziani dating from 1480 and with an effigy of her in contemporary dress. These slabs were once laid in the floor, as can be seen from the wear that they have suffered. Other slabs with epigraphs are ancient, and were found in the excavations. There are also three large 16 and 17 century papal inscription granting indulgences. ^{1 m}

The intricate early Baroque funerary monument (1) at the right hand end of the loggia is worth more than a glance. It is of Paolo Emilio Sfondrati, the cardinal who arranged the exhumation of St Cecilia in 1599 and who died in 1618. It has been attributed to Carlo Maderno, and certainly looks as if it could have been by him. However, the present received opinion is that the work is by **Girolamo Rainaldi**, with the statuary by **Pietro Bernini** who was father of the famous Gian Lorenzo. Over the bust of the deceased is a relief showing the discovery of the relics of St Cecilia. The monument was moved to here in 1957 because it was obstructing the entrance to the Ponziani Chapel. ^{1 8}

Façade

The façade above the loggia was designed in 1725 by **Ferdinando Fuga**, who had been commissioned by Francesco Cardinal Acquaviva d'Aragona, titular priest of the church 1709-1724. The cardinal's coat-of-arms is displayed in the tympanum of the pediment, incorporating a cardinal's hat. ¹

The church façade above the loggia fronts the central nave only; the aisles have no frontages (the right hand side is occupied by the campanile, and the left hand side by the internal access to the nuns' choir). There are six pilasters in a derivative Composite style, two pairs at the outer corners and the other two between three large rectangular windows with molded frames. These light the nuns' choir. Above each window is a scallop shell and curlicue motif. The entablature above has a blank frieze, and the crowning triangular tympanum has the cardinal's coat-of-arms in it as mentioned. ¹

The composition is flanked by a pair of gigantic incurved volutes, which are echoed to a smaller scale on the central finial on the pediment. This finial has a form that imitates those on the parapet of the campanile. There are six flaming torch side finials accompanying it. ¹

A 1599 woodcut of the church by Girolamo Francino survives, and this shows that the façade used to have a large central oculus (round window) flanked by a pair of round-headed windows. The tympanum of the pediment had a smaller oculus, matching one still to be found at the other end of the church. ¹

Campanile

The Romanesque brick campanile was erected in 1140, and is typical of the period. There are five storeys above the aisle roofline, separated by decorative dentillated cornices. The first storey has a row of three shallow recesses in the form of arches, and this is a common design feature of these campanili. The second storey has two arched orifices on each face, and the third one three; each archivolt has a double arc of bricks with the lower one recessed, and the archivolt springers of both storeys are connected by a string course. The fourth and fifth storeys contain the bells, and both have an arcade of three arches on each face separated by limestone columns with block capitals. There is a very shallow tiled pyramidal cap, and an unusual set of four finials on the corners in the form of cubes with little pyramidal caps. The campanile has had a slight lean for a long time. ¹

Interior:

Entrance vestibule

There are three entrance doors, the central one being much larger than the other two. The mediaeval doorcases are molded, in pavonazzetto marble. Once inside, you find yourself in a shallow vestibule (B) separated from the main nave by an arcade with four ancient columns, again enclosed in pillars.¹

To the right of the main door is the tomb (3) of Cardinal Adam of Easton in Norfolk, England (died 1398), who was titular of this church. As a cardinal he was imprisoned and almost executed by Pope Urban VI, but was spared through the personal intervention of King Richard II of England. As well as his own coat-of-arms, the monument displays that of the House of Plantagenet (which

was the English royal family at the time), and this might have been in gratitude. The monument was made by **Paolo Romano**, [from Ref i: “Attributed to the **Florentine Giovanni d’Ambrogio**...”] and was only finished several decades after the cardinal died. The monument was dismantled during the 1600 restoration, and reassembled at the present location. It is in the form of a Gothic tomb-chest, with a recumbent effigy on top. Note that the chest has spiral columns at its corners; formerly there was a canopy supported by similar columns, when the monument was at its original location near the apse. In the center, under the effigy of the Cardinal is the arms of the king of England. ^{1 c b}

On the opposite side is the tomb (2) of Cardinal Niccolò Forteguerri (died 1473), Vicar of Rimini, who had commanded the Papal forces against Sigismond Pandolph [Malatesta](#). Pope Paul II employed him to root out the strongholds of the robber lords of the Campagna. By all accounts he was a man of high and manly character and simple life. The tomb, partly built by **Mino da Fiesole**, is a very attractive Gothic composition, with another recumbent effigy shown on a bier and with a relief carving above of the *Madonna and Child* in a mandorla. The monument had been dismantled and the bits dispersed, but was reunited and restored in 1895. Mino did the Madonna, but the pair of saints flanking her (SS Nicholas and Cecilia) are from the workshop of Andrea Bregno. The black granite columns are ancient. ^{1 8 a b}

The vault is decorated with a representation of SS Cecilia, Valerian, Stephen, Urban and Laurence, surrounded by vistas and with depictions of hermit saints. These frescoes are thought to have been by **Fabrizio Parmigiano** and **Marzio di Colantonio**. ^{1 8}

To either side of the vestibule is a small square ancillary room, the right hand one entered from the vestibule and the left hand one from the left hand aisle. These are within the ancient plan of the church, and look like guard chambers. ¹

The left hand room (C) is now the access to the Roman buildings below the church. Here there is a series of rooms belonging to two Roman houses. These contain mosaic pavements, a number of Christian sarcophagi, and a small museum. One 2nd century room contains eight large brick-lined 'silos' in the floor which are believed to have been used as a tannery. A pagan household shrine contains a niche with a relief of Minerva in front of an altar. ⁱ

Nave

To enter the church is something of a disappointment, since the church has lost its primitive appearance through repeated restoration, and now reflects the taste of the 18th century. The roof of the church is rather low in proportion to its width, with a shallow curved ceiling vault. The marble floor is light and dark grey. The stucco work of the walls and ceiling is in light grey and white, with some gilded highlights. ^{1 c}

The nave has eleven bays, originally separated by twelve granite Corinthian columns in the arcades on each side. Because the church has no presbyterium or transept, the final bay has been sequestered for the sanctuary. Since the restoration of 1823, these columns have been encased in squat Doric pillars. ^{1 a}

The archivolt of the arcades are molded, and every other arch is infilled with a tympanum bearing either an eagle within a wreath with palm branches or a mitre with flower bouquets. Above the capitals of the pilasters on each side are strapwork corbels which support a cornice, and a higher cornice bears the springers of the ceiling vault. In between is a row of large grated apertures in the form of Baroque cartouches (some long, some almost circular), and these give light to galleries leading from the convent buildings to the nuns' choir over the entrance. Between these apertures are crossed palms and lilies in stucco. ¹

The ceiling vault has lunettes over round-headed windows, one over each arch of the arcade, and these give all the natural light in the church interior. The center of the vault has a large fresco by **Sebastiano Conca** from about 1727, depicting the *Coronation of St Cecilia in Heaven*. Note the organ being played, her attribute as patron of musicians. In the audience are SS Valerian, Tiburtius and Urban. At either end the vault has yet more epigraphs proclaiming Cardinal Francesco Acquaviva. ¹

Above the counterfaçade is the nuns' choir over the entrance vestibule. The frontage has a truncated

ogee curve, with windows so that the nuns could see into the church. ¹

The church has an upper gallery, originally used by women and now the nun's choir. In this gallery, you can see a fresco by **Pietro Cavallini** (1250-1330), *The Last Judgement* painted c. 1293, considered to be his masterpiece. This painting is considered a turning point in the history of art, as it was one of the main inspirations for Renaissance art and thus marks the end of the Byzantine style. It's also the only surviving painting by **Cavallini**. It was covered up by a wall for several centuries, until it was rediscovered in 1900 by Federico Hermanin. As the nuns live strictly enclosed, the gallery is closed most of the time to the public, but there is time after Sunday Mass (around 11 am) and usually late mornings on Tuesday and Thursday. ^{1 6 8 i}

Aisles

The paintings of saints in niches, in both aisles, are part of the Sfondrati restoration and were executed between 1600 and 1603. The commission was carried out by a team of artists comprising **Giovanni Zanna**, **Tarquino Ligustri**, **Marco Tullio** and **Vincenzo Conti**. Zanna did the putti in the vault. ^{1 8}

To make up for the relative lack of side chapels, the aisles of this church contain several altars. The description is in a counterclockwise direction, starting from the rear of the church.

Left aisle

At the bottom end of the left hand aisle is a room which now contains the entrance to the underground excavations for paying visitors. Here also you can buy guidebooks and postcards. ¹

The first altar on the left is adorned with two porphyry columns and dedicated to Sts. Stephen and Lawrence, deacons and martyrs. The altarpiece of the saints is by **Giuseppe Ghezzi**, of 1676. He was a prominent member of the [Accademia di San Luca](#), and so was a well-known contemporary artist in Rome.

The next altar is dedicated to St Andrew the Apostle. The altarpiece is by **Giovanni Baglione** (who seriously did not get on with Caravaggio), and was painted in 1601. ^{1 8}

Next is a monument here for Bishop Gregorio Magalotti, by **Giovanni Mangone** and **Guglielmo della Porta** in 1538. He was the Bishop of Chiusi in Tuscany, and appointed Governor of Rome by Pope Clement VII in 1534. ⁸

The next altar is dedicated to St Agatha, the other patron of the monastery. The artist responsible for the altarpiece is unknown, although it is in the style of the Cavalier d'Arpino. The saint is shown being martyred with bare breasts, a reminder of the horrible legend that she had them cut off the day beforehand, only to have St Peter put them back miraculously in the night.

Next is a monument for Cardinal Giacomo Luigi Brignole, by **Salvatore Revelli** in 1855. ^{1 8}

The altar dedicated to SS Peter and Paul is at the far end. This is by **Baglione** again, and was included in his 1601 commission. ^{1 8}

There is a marble copy on the wall here of the account by Pope Paschal of the finding of the body of St Cecilia. Also there is an enclosure doorway leading into the present nuns' choir, which has an altarpiece depicting a Crucifixion between SS Ursula and Cecilia. This chapel is private.

Right aisle

Passing to the right aisle, over the altar next the Confessio, a 15th century bas-relief of the *Virgin and Child*. The *Interment of St. Cecilia and her apparition to Paschal I*, to make known to him where her body lay in the Catacombs, painted on the wall to the right, is from the 9th century, and belonged to the ancient portico. ¹

Next is the door that leads to the Cappella Rampolla. Mariano Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro was titular priest of the church 1887-1913. The cardinal is interred in the tomb (4) made by **Enrico Quattrini** in 1929. 5th century frescoes have been moved here. The mosaic floor made in the Neo-Byzantine style by **G.B. Giovenale** in 1899-1901. ^{1 8 j}

Altar dedicated to St Mary Magdalen. The altarpiece is attributed to **Giovanni Baglione**, but an alternative attribution is to the school of Muziano. The saint is shown doing penance in the Judaeen desert. ¹

The Chapel of Relics (G) was designed by **Luigi Vanvitelli**, and is adorned in front with two spiral fluted columns of white marble. Among other relics it contains the heads of SS. Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus. The chapel is adorned with a painting of the *Apparition of the Angel to St. Cecilia and St. Valerian*, by **Baglione**. In the chapel is the tomb of Cardinal Giuseppe Maria Feroni (d. 1767). The tomb is by **G. B. Ceccarelli**, the bust is by **André-Jean Lebrun**, and the putto and drapery are by **Tommaso Righi**. ^{1 8 f}

Over the next altar is a painting of *St. Andrew*, also by **Baglione**. ¹

The Cappella dei Ponziani/Ponzianica (F) is closed off with a grille. The ceiling is decorated with frescoes of *God the Father with the Evangelists* (1470) by **Antonio del Massaro** (Antonio da Viterbo or il Pastura). The frescoes of *St. Jerome* and *St. Sebastian* on the left wall, and *St. George* and *St. Catherine* on the right wall are also by **Il Pastura**. The chapel bears the arms of the Ponziani family. It contains an oval painting of the Virgin, ascribed to **Annibal Caracci**. Beneath the floor is the sepulcher of Paul Paluzio de Ponzianis, the son of Santa Francesca Romana, who died in 1480, and whose effigy and epitaph still remain on the spot. ^{1 8 9}

The next altar is dedicated to St Benedict, because the nuns are Benedictine. The altarpiece of the saint is by **Giuseppe Ghezzi**, of 1676. ^{1 8}

The Chapel of the Bath (E) or balneum Ceciliae, reached through a corridor (D) off the right-hand nave, is said to be the bath in which St Cecilia was martyred. This is based on information in a Life from the 5th century, so it is uncertain. It has a tondo, *The Beheading of St Cecilia* from 1601, and a canvas, *The Angel's Coronation of Sts Cecilia and Valerian* from 1600, both by **Guido Reni** and commissioned by Cardinal Sfondrati. The floor and altar have Cosmatesque decoration. In the room on the right are frescoes depicting the stories of Sts Cecilia and Valeriano, by **Andrea Lilio**. The paintings in the corridor leading to the bath are by **Pomerancio** and **Paul Bril**. In a niche is a statue of *San Sebastian*, by **Lorenzetto**. ^{1 6 7 8}

The last chapel is the Cerretti Chapel (5) by **Antonio Muñoz** in 1936. The altarpiece, *Crucifixion*, and its painting on the wall, is 15th century. The monument for Cardinal Cerretti is by **Carlo Quattrini** from 1936. The background is the Cathedral of Orvieto. ^{1 8}

Tribune and Confessio

The apse is twenty-four feet deep, is reached by a flight of six steps from either aisle, and is a perfect semi-circle. The apse mosaic (H), in Byzantine style, is from about 820, showing *Christ blessing, crowned by the Hand of God*. Christ wears Roman clothes with *lati clavi*, a sign of high rank. He is flanked on the right by St Paul, St Cecilia, Pope Paschal I (with a miniature model of the church, identifying him as the builder and a square halo showing that he was still alive when the mosaic was made). Above Paschal I is a phoenix, a symbol of resurrection, perching on the branch of a palm tree. On Christ's left are Saints Peter, Valerian and Agatha. The figures are standing in a meadow of flowers with fruiting palm trees. Below are twelve sheep and the Lamb of God, with Bethlehem and Jerusalem to either side. An inscription in gold on a deep blue background reads: ^{1 9 a j}

THIS SPACIOUS HOUSE GLITTERS BUILT OF VARIED ENAMELS; THIS HALL, WHICH
ONCE IN ANCIENT TIME HAD BEEN DEMOLISHED, THE GENEROUS PRELATE
PASCHAL BUILT TO A BETTER STATE, SHAPING IT ON A FAMOUS FOUNDATION;
THESE GOLDEN MYSTERIES RESOUND WITH JEWELLED PRECINCTS; SERENE IN

THE LOVE OF GOD HE JOINED THE BODIES OF SAINT CECILIA AND HER
COMPANIONS; YOUTH GLOWS RED IN ITS BLOOM, LIMBS THAT RESTED BEFORE I
CRYPTS: ROME IS JUBILANT, TRIUMPHANT ALWAYS, ADORNED FOREVER

Traces of the mosaic of the triumphal arch can be seen above the half-dome. In the center of the arch is the monogram of Paschal I. On either side of the triumphal arch, facing the nave are busts of *Pope Innocent XII*, on the right, and *Pope Clement XI*, on the left. Both busts are by **Giuseppe Mazzuoli** in 1725. On the right side, below the bust of Pope Innocent is the *Madonna del Buon Consiglio*.^{1 8}

The marble revetment of the apse is from the 1901 restoration, by **Giovanni Battista Giovenale**.⁸

The Gothic ciborium (7) over the main altar was made, and signed, by **Arnolfo di Cambio** in 1292. It is supported by four columns of black and white marble, and has Cosmatesque decoration. To the right of the altar is a Cosmati candelabrum for the paschal candle.^{1 c}



In front of the sanctuary is the beautiful effigy in Parian marble (6), *Martyrdom of Saint Cecilia*, by the late-Renaissance sculptor **Stefano Maderno**. Pope Paschal's discovery of her body in a catacomb in the 9th century is depicted in a 12th or 13th century fresco at the end of the aisle. Paolo Cardinal Sfondrati, titular priest of the church 1591-1618, re-opened her tomb in 1599, and when he found her body intact and incorrupt he asked **Maderno** to make a sculpture of her. The sculptor's inscription can be seen on the floor, testifying that she was depicted just as he saw her. This statue could be conceived as proto-Baroque, since it depicts no idealized moment or person, but a theatric scene, a naturalistic representation of a dead or dying saint. The statue is striking, because it precedes by decades the similar high-Baroque sculptures of Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Melchiorre Caffà.^{1 9}

The gilt bronze angels above the statue, and the bronze reliefs on the sides of the altar, depicting Saints Valeriano, Cecilia, Tiburcio and Lucia, Urban, Massimo, are also by **Maderno** and cast by **Domenico Ferrerio** and **Orazio Censore**.^{8 k}

Crypt

The crypt (I) is of unknown date, and was improved by **Giovanni Battista Giovanale** between 1899 and 1901, ordered by Mariano Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro, titular priest of the church 1887-1913. At the back of the crypt is a grille, beyond which is the 9th century *confessio*, a small rectangular room. It contains the sarcophagi of the four martyrs Cecilia, Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus as well as those of Pope Lucius I (253-254). The crypt has lost all of its 9th century decoration.^{1 j}

Monastery

In 822 Paschal I (817-824) built the adjoining convent for Benedictine monks. In 1140, the monastic cloister to the south-west of the church was built (the monastery seems to have been originally founded by Pope Paschal). Unfortunately, the construction of monastery buildings destroyed the atrium. The monastery was dedicated to SS Cecilia and Agatha.¹

The monastery belonged to Benedictine monks after its 12th century rebuilding, but here as

elsewhere in Rome the monastic observance suffered a collapse by the start of the 14th century. As a result, this monastery was closed, and the complex given to a monastic order called the Umiliati in 1344. ¹

The Umiliati had an unfortunate career, and lost possession of the monastery between 1419 and 1438. They then became seriously corrupt, and were definitively ejected in 1527. After a group of them tried to assassinate St Charles Borromeo for daring to try and reform them, the male branch was punitively suppressed in 1571. ¹

The monastery was then given to the Benedictine nuns of the long-established monastery of Santa Maria della Concezione in Campo Marzio by Pope Clement VII (1523-1534). They provided a group of sisters as a nucleus of a new community, which started life in 1530. The nuns have been here ever since. ¹

One outreach that the nuns had was to provide a venue for the newly founded Accademia di Santa Cecilia, a musical conservatory under the patronage of the saint. It was here from 1562 to 1661. ¹

The new community inherited a very important tradition. There used to be a Benedictine nunnery at Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, but in 1479 Pope Sixtus IV shut it down because the sisters had become corrupt. However, they had been responsible for the production of pallia and the nuns at Santa Cecilia inherited this responsibility on their foundation. ¹

A pallium is an ecclesiastical vestment, rather like a large stole, which is worn by the Pope and by certain privileged archbishops. They are woven from lambs' wool, the lambs being provided by the Cistercian Trappists. They are first taken to Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura to be blessed, and are then shorn and the wool given to the nuns. Their job is to spin and weave the pallia, which are then presented to the deacons at San Giovanni in Laterano, who in turn pass them on to the deacons of St Peter's. There, they are placed in a golden casket above the tomb of St Peter before being ceremonially placed on their recipients. San Giovanni is involved because the canons there are in charge of Sant'Agnese. ¹

The nuns lost their freehold to the government in 1873 but, unlike those in most other Roman convents at the time, the nuns here have managed to stay put. In 1935 the convent was shared between the Benedictine nuns and a community of Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, but the latter are apparently now at Via dei Genovesi 11/A nearby. ¹

Excavations

Excavations were undertaken under the church in 1899, under the guidance of Cardinal Mariano Rampolla. Houses from the 2nd and 3rd century have been excavated, and one of them is said to have belonged to St Cecilia. Traces of buildings from the Republican period have also been found. The area was a commercial district, and brick basins in the structure indicates that it was owned by a craftsman; it may have been a coriaria, a tannery.

There are pagan shrines in the Roman houses. In a small niche in one of the rooms is a shrine to the Lares, the house deities. Such shrines would be found in all pagan Roman homes.

Many fragments of pottery, architectural elements and inscriptions are displayed in the crypt.

Further work was done in excavating under the church in 1958, resulting in the present underground area, and the baptistery under the Chapel of Relics was excavated in the 1980's and 1990's. ¹

It is possible to see the excavations, for a small fee, if you find one of the priests that serve the church.

Special notes

I recommend trying to see Cavallini's fresco in the gallery. As it is part of the convent, it is not open at all times. After Sunday Mass, at about 11:00 a.m., it is open for about 30 minutes, and it is also usually open on Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00 to 11:30. Only a limited number of people are

allowed to enter the gallery at any one time, and it might close earlier than the scheduled time. My advice is that you try to be there early, so that you can get in line to enter the gallery as soon as it opens. There is an entrance fee. You can ask here about a visit to the crypt as well.

On Sundays Mass and Vesper are sung, with Gregorian chants, by the Benedictine sisters.

Location:

Address: [Piazza di Santa Cecilia 22, 00153 Roma](#)

Coord: [41°53'15.2"N, 12°28'33.21"E](#)

Info:

Open: weekdays from 9.30am until 12.30 and then from 4pm until 7.30pm

Telephone: 06-58.99.289

Artists and Architects:

Agostino [Corsini](#) (1688-1772), Italian sculptor
André-Jean [Lebrun](#) (1737-1811), French sculptor
Andrea [Lilio](#) (1555-1642), Italian painter
Annibale [Carracci](#) (1560-1609), Italian Baroque painter.
Antonio del Massaro [da Viterbo](#), aka il Pastura (c.1450-1516), Italian painter
Antonio [Muñoz](#) (1884-1960), Italian architect
Arnolfo di [Cambio](#) (1240-1310), Italian sculptor
Carlo Quattrini (20th cent), Italian sculptor
Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) aka *Il Pomerancio* (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter
Domenico Ferrerio († 1630), bronze founder
Domenico Paradesi (18th cent), Italian architect
Enrico [Quattrini](#) (1864-1950), Italian sculptor
Fabrizio [Parmigiano](#) (17th cent), Italian painter
Ferdinando [Fuga](#) (1699-1781), Italian architect
Giovanni [Baglione](#) aka il sordo del Barozzo (1566-1643), Italian Late Mannerist / Early Baroque painter
Giovanni Battista Ceccarelli (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Battista [Giovanale](#) (1848-1934), Italian architect/restorer
Giovanni Mangone († 1543), Italian architect
Giovanni Zanna [aka *Pizzica*] (17th cent?), Italian painter
Girolamo [Rainaldi](#) (1570-1655), Italian Mannerist architect
Giuseppe [Ghezzi](#) (1634-1721), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Giuseppe [Mazzuoli](#) (1644-1725), Italian sculptor of the Baroque
Guido [Reni](#) (1575-1642), Italian painter of high-Baroque
Guglielmo [della Porta](#) (c. 1500–1577), Italian sculptor of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Igino Pineschi (b. 1933), Italian architect
Lorenzo [Lotti](#) aka *Lorenzetto*, (1490-1541), Italian sculptor
Luigi Barattone (Berrettoni) (18th cent), Italian architect
Luigi [Vanvitelli](#) (1700-1773), Italian Late Baroque architect
Marco Tullio (17th cent), Italian painter
Marzio di [Colantonio Ganassini](#) (1580-1623), Italian painter
Mino da [Fiesole](#), aka di Giovanni (c.1429-1484), Italian early Renaissance sculptor
Orazio Censore († 1622), sculptor, bronze founder
Paolo [Romano](#), aka di Tuccio Taccone (c.1415-1470), Italian early Renaissance sculptor
Paul [Bril](#) (1554-1626), Flemish Baroque painter
Pietro [Bernini](#) (1562-1629), Italian sculptor
Pietro Bracci (19th cent), Roman architect
Pietro [Cavallini](#) [aka Petrus Caballinus de Cerronibus] (1259-ca.1330), Italian painter
Salvatore Revelli (1816-1859), Italian sculptor
Sebastiano [Conca](#) (c. 1680-1764), Italian painter
Stefano [Maderno](#) (1576-1636), Italian late-Renaissance sculptor
Tarquinio [Ligustri](#) da Viterbo (17th cent), Italian painter
Tommaso [Righi](#) (1727-1802), Italian sculptor and stuccator
Vincenzo [Conti](#) († 1610), Italian painter

Relics:

St. Cecilia, and Sts. Valerian Tiburtius and Maximus

Burials:

P. Saint [Urban I](#) (222- 230)

P. Saint [Lucius I](#) (253- 254)

Adam Cardinal [EASTON](#) of Hertford, O.S.B., (?-1398) [also see [here](#)]

Buried in a splendid tomb at the back of the church, near the saint's shrine

Niccolò Cardinal [FORTIGUERRA](#), (1419-1473) [also see [here](#)]

His tomb was sculpted by Mino de Fiesole

Carlo Domenico Cardinal DEL [CARRETTO](#), (1454-1514) [also see [here](#)]

Paolo Emilio Cardinal [SFONDRATI](#), (1560-1618) [also see [here](#)]

Gaspare Cardinal [MATTEI](#), (1598-1650) [also see [here](#)]

Celestino Cardinal [SFONDRATI](#), O.S.B., (1644-1696) [also see [here](#)]

Francesco Cardinal [ACQUAVIVA](#) D'ARAGONA, (1665-1725) [also see [here](#)]

Buried in the sepulcher that he had built for himself

Cornelio Cardinal [BENTIVOGLIO](#), (1668-1732) [also see [here](#)]

Troiano Cardinal [ACQUAVIVA](#) D'ARAGONA, (1696-1747)

Giorgio Cardinal [DORIA](#), (1708-1759)

Cosimo Cardinal [IMPERIALI](#), (1685-1764)

<never consecrated a priest>

Giuseppe Maria Cardinal [FERONI](#), (1693-1767)

Ferdinando Maria Cardinal de [ROSSI](#), (1696-1775)

Girolamo Cardinal [SPINOLA](#), (1713-1784)

Pasquale Cardinal [ACQUAVIVA](#) D'ARAGONA, (1718-1788)

Giuseppe Maria Cardinal [Doria-Pamphili](#) (1751-1816) [also see [here](#)]

Giacomo Luigi Cardinal [BRIGNOLE](#), (1797-1853) [also see [here](#)]

His tomb was sculpted by Salvatore Ravelli

Mariano Cardinal [RAMPOLLA DEL TINDARO](#), (1843-1913)

Francesco Cardinal [MARMAGGI](#), (1870-1949) [also see [here](#)]

Gregorio Bishop [Magalotti](#) (1490-1537)

Governor of Rome from 1534 to 1537

Paul Paluzio de Ponzianis (d. 1480)

the son of S. Francesca Romana

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