

San Gregorio Magno al Celio

Ss. Andrea e Gregorio Magno a Celio



San Gregorio Magno al Celio is dedicated to Pope St Gregory the Great. The church is also dedicated to St Andrew the Apostle, and the full name is **Santi Andrea e Gregorio Magno a Celio**.

History

Pope [Gregory the Great](#) lived here as an abbot, in a monastery dedicated to St Andrew the Apostle that he established in 575 by modifying his father's house and a nearby theological school (*Bibliotheca Agapiti*) built by his relative St. Agapetus I who was pope in 535-36. The villa possessed by the family of Gregory, who had already provided one pope (Felix III), seems to have had a distinguished early history. Here, he trained English slave boys he had bought in the Roman market as monks. They were sent as missionaries to England in 596. His home is most likely partially preserved beneath the present church and monastery. They have not been excavated.

The church was rebuilt in the Middle Ages, possibly after being damaged by the Normans under Robert Guiscard at the end of the 12th century.

The monastery was for a long time assigned to the Benedictine order. In 1573 the church was granted by Pope Gregory XIII to the Camaldolese monks, a branch of that order named after the hermitage of Camaldoli near Arezzo, who still officiate today.

In 1607 Flaminio Ponzio designed a new portal on the site of the old entrance to the monastery (which was rebuilt to the right of the church); between this entrance and the three chapels one can see the ruins of the apse of a basilica, which is commonly known as Biblioteca di Agapito and is thought to be part of the complex built by that pope; the lower part of the wall belongs to an earlier building.

Scipione Cardinal Cafarelli Borghese, the nephew of Pope Paul V, had the church rebuilt 1629-1633, to a design by Giovanni Battista Soria.

The interior was renovated between 1725 and 1734 by Francesco Ferrari.

Exterior

The façade is by Giovanni Battista Soria, and was made in the 17th century renovation. It is considered his best work. The church lies on high ground, and Soria used this to good effect by constructing wide stairs with very low steps.

The façade itself is divided into three parts vertically, with a middle section flanked by double pilasters. In each section, there is a doorway with a rounded arch, crowned by the eagle of the Borghese family. The façade has two orders, divided by an entablature. The inscription on this commemorates Cardinal Borghese's work. Three windows with balustrades on the upper order correspond to the doors. The middle section has a triangular pediment.

The door in the wall to the left of the façade leads to the Oratories (see below).

The façade opens to a 16th century atrium, 96 feet long, by 69 feet 8 inches broad; and is adorned with Doric pillars and pilasters from a courtyard of the earlier church. The atrium is decorated with a cycle of frescoes showing events of the life of St. Gregory, including one where an exorcism is performed.

When the interior of the church was renovated in 18th century a series of Renaissance funerary monuments were relocated from the church to the atrium. Among the several sepulchral monuments the most remarkable are the two last. At the extremity of the right wing, erected to Andrea Gentili, from 1525. Gentili was from Genoa: he died at the age of 59. He was portrayed in his sleep in line with a traditional way of depicting the dead; in this case however the posture of Gentili is that of someone having a nap, rather than being immersed in his eternal sleep. During the Renaissance there was little room for the gruesome symbols which characterized in the following century.

Also there is the monument for the Bonsi brothers. Antonio Bonsi (d. 1498) and his younger brother, Michele Bonsi (*cortile, right side*), were members of a Florentine family, who had a palace in Rome, near the Trinita dei Monti, with other property in Rome. Antonio served Florence as Envoy and 'Orator.' Michele was a man of culture, who formed a fine collection of antiques. The tomb (undated) is generally accepted as the work of Luigi Capponi of Milan, and deserves careful study on that account.

Sir Edward Carne was a Welsh diplomat who was involved in missions to Emperor Charles V and to the pope. At the death of Queen Mary in 1558 he chose to remain in Rome: the design of his sarcophagus follows a pattern introduced by Michelangelo.

The two monuments in the left wing, erected one to Virgilio Crescenzo, in 1592, designed by Onorio Longhi. The other to the canon Guidiccioni. The monument to Canon Lelio Guidiccioni (d. 1643) is rather peculiar because while its lower part shows a typical iconography (hour-glass) of the 17th century, the reliefs in its upper part have a Renaissance grace. They are thought to have come from the tomb of Imperia, a famous courtesan from the time of Pope Leo X Medici. She lived in a palace in Via Giulia where she died at the age of 26 in 1511.

The church building has a nave with aisles, a short presbyterium of a much lower elevation and an attached three-sided apse. The roofs are pitched and tiled. There is a little detached campanile to the left of the church, just an elevated bellcote with a single bell.

Interior

The interior of the church is divided into a nave and two aisles by eight arcades, decorated with sixteen columns, twelve of Egyptian granite and four of cipollino, and measures 115 feet in length by 68 feet in breadth. Most of the interior of the church, including the intricate stucco decoration

of 1725 by Ferrari, is painted in a cream color. The 13th century Cosmatin floor was restored by order of Card. Quirini, in 1734, and is a handsome specimen of opus Alexandrinum.

There are two medieval statues of St Gregory and St Andrew - in Gregory's days, the monastery was dedicated to that Apostle.

The vault fresco was painted by Placido Costanzi in 1727. The motif is *The Glory of St Gregory*.

Left aisle

The first altar to the left of the entrance has an altarpiece of the *Saviour appearing to Bl. Michael Pini*, and blessing his beads, whence the painting, which is by Giovanni Battista Ponfreni, is called *la Corona del Salvatore*.

The second altar in the left aisle has *Our Lady with the Saints of the Family Gabrielli* of Gubbio by Pompeo Batoni of 1739.

The door to the left opens into the Salviati chapel, in which are three altars. The painting of *Saint Gregory at Prayer*, over the central altar, is a copy of the famous original of Annibal Carracci, carried off by the French, sold in Genoa, and now in England. Over the altar to the right is the *Eternal Father in Glory*, by an unknown 19th century painter. Opposite is a marble tabernacle, adorned with bas-reliefs of the Virgin and Child, and other figures, sculptured in 1469 by Andrea Bregno, as is recorded by an inscription on its lower frieze. The chapel was planned by Francesco da Volterra and Carlo Maderno; and its cupola is said to have been painted by Ricci of Novara.

Returning to the aisle, we find, over the first altar to our right, a painting of the Virgin, called of the Conception, by Francesco Mariani.

The chapel to the left of the great altar is that of the Holy Sacrament, over the altar of which is the *Saviour and Saint Joseph*

Across from the chapel of St Gregory, at the end of the left aisle, is another chapel with a modern painting of Our Lady.

Near this chapel is a door that leads to the Cappella Salviati, with a wall from the original church. On the wall is a very old fresco of the *Madonna with Child*. Tradition claims that St Gregory prayed before this picture, and that the Madonna spoke to him here. It seems to have been painted too late for that, but it may have been repainted. Over the altar is a painted panel, by the Sisto Badalocchi, showing *St Michael the Archangel and Saints*. The decoration of the chapel was designed by F. da Volterra and completed by Carlo Maderno in 1600. The Altar dossale was restored and regilt by Andrea Bregno.

Tribune and Apse

The tribune was designed by Ferrari, and is richly gilt. The painting over the high altar is of *Our Lady with SS Andrew and Gregory*, by Antonio Balestra of 1734. The church also has two medieval statues of St Gregory and St Andrew.

The medallion supported by angels, over the arch of the tribune, was designed by Ferrari, and executed in stucco by B. de Rossi.

Right aisle

The first altar, in the right aisle, has a painting, by John Parker, an Englishman, of Saint Sylvia and the young Gregory, to whom Saint Benedict, by anticipation, presents the tiara.

The *Saint Peter Damian*, over the second altar, resigning the Cardinalship into the hands of Greg. IX., who, instead, presents him with the discipline, is by F. Mancini.

Over the third is the *Death of Saint Romuald*, by F. Fernandi, called Imperiali.

There is a chapel of St Gregory at the end of the right aisle. A room off the chapel incorporates what is believed to be the remains of his cell. One of the items is an ancient Roman chair in which he sat, and the slab on which he took an occasional short nap. Over the altar is a painted panel, by the Sisto Badalocchi, showing *St Michael the Archangel and Saints*. The marble front of the altar has a relief depicting scenes from the life of St Gregory by Luigi Capponi, commissioned in 1485 by Michele Bonsi.

Monastery and Oratories

The monastery is inhabited by Camaldolese monks, dressed in white habit. Unlike others of their order, who are hermits, this monastery is organised on normal Benedictine lines. It's possible to see the gardens if you ask one of the monks. If you can't see any of them, ring the bell at the door in the atrium.

The garden to the left of the portal, up another flight of stairs, is the site of the burial ground of the old monastery. There were two chapels here in mediaeval times, set at an angle to each other, the left hand one being dedicated to St Barbara and the right hand one to St Andrew. Cardinal Cesare Baronio commissioned a restoration in 1603, and simply in order to create a symmetrical composition he had a third one built to the right, identical to St Barbara's and dedicated to St Sylvia. The architect was Flaminio Ponzio, and the work was completed about 1607. The façades of St Barbara's and St Sylvia's are false.

By a door to the right, in the portico, we reach Chapels of the three chapels of S. Sylvia, S. Andrew and S. Barbara, repaired by Card. Baronius, when commendatory abbot of S. Gregory's.

The grounds of the oratories also include some substructures of the Roman imperial period, that may merely have been *tabernae*, but one of which exhibits striking features that encourage some experts to think is an early Christian meeting place and baptismal pool.

In the grounds of the Camaldolese monastery of San Gregorio al Celio was discovered the *Aphrodite of Menophantos*, a Greco-Roman marble Venus of the Capitoline Venus type, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano.

1) Oratorio di S. Andrea

The central oratory is dedicated to Saint Andrew, and is of the 11th or 12th century. It has an open porch occupying the entire width of the façade, with a sloping tiled roof supported by four antique Corinthian columns in green marble. Above it, the windowless gabled frontage is topped by a triangular pediment with a broken cornice. In the pediment is a blank horizontal rectangular niche, decorated with a love-knot on top. There is a dedicatory inscription at the entrance.

Inside, there are several important frescoes. The chief attractions in this chapel are the rival performances of Guido and Domenichino on its side walls. On the wall to the right is the "*Flagellation of Saint Andrew*" by Domenichino, restored by Carlo Maratta. On the opposite wall Guido Reni has painted the *Saint Andrew brought to the temple* and *Saints Peter and Paul*, on either side of the altar.

The altarpiece is *Virgin with Saints Andrew and Gregory* by Cristoforo Roncalli, *il Pomarancio*; and finally *S. Silvia e S. Gregorio* by Giovanni Lanfranco. There is a coffered and carved flat wooden ceiling. During the restoration, mediaeval fresco fragments were discovered between ceiling and roof which are 12th century at the latest and show a Christ Pantocrator with two angels and two prophets.

2) Oratory of St. Silvia

The oratory to the right is dedicated to St. Silvia, St. Gregory's mother. The chapel is probably located over her tomb. The statue of the Saint was sculptured by Nicolò Cordieri, under the direction of Michelangelo. In the vaulted part of the tribune is an *Eternal Father, encompassed by a celestial glory*, executed in fresco by Guido Reni. Other notable frescoes are *San Damiano* by Francesco

3) Oratory of St. Barbara

This is a mediaeval building, dating from the 12th or 13th century but built on re-used ancient foundations. The oratory was rebuilt by Cardinal Baronius in 1602. The 16th century restoration left the façade with two corner pilasters with impostes but no capitals, supporting a segmental pediment on a broken cornice. The doorway has a triangular pediment, and over this is a window with a curved top. There is a blank elliptical tondo in the pediment. The inscription on the doorway lintel is "Triclinio di San Gregorio", referring to a legend that this was originally the famous *triclinium pauperum* where St. Gregory hosted dinner for the poor of Rome.

In the centre of the chapel is the massive marble table on which S. Gregory fed twelve poor persons daily, on whom he himself waited when Pope. John the Deacon tells that one day an angel joined the twelve poor men who gathered at the table to partake of Gregory's beneficence. He thereafter increased their number to thirteen, whence the present custom of having thirteen priests waited on at dinner, on Holy-Thursday, by the reigning Pontiff. A poem celebrating the original event is carved on the table. The table is 3rd century, resting on a fragment of granite column and with its end supports carved with griffins.

The large marble statue of St Gregory in its own shrine was sculptured by Nicolò Cordieri, and is a companion to the statue of St. Silvia.

The frescos on the walls are by Antonio Viviano of Urbino from 1602. The first fresco to the right, on entering, is *S. Gregory sending Augustine and the monks on their important mission, the Conversion of England*; and the two next portraits are *S. Flavia Domitilla*, and *S. Achilleus*. The two next, to the left of the statue, are *S. Nereus*, and *S. Barbara*, after which is *S. Gregory in the act of writing*. The next large painting represents the *Angel appearing as the thirteenth guest*, after which comes that of *S. Gregory imparting his benediction*. To the right of the door is *S. Gregory admitting some pilgrims to his presence*; to the left is the *Bl. Virgin appearing to the Pontiff in prayer*; and the remaining fresco represents the *reception of Augustine and the monks by king Ethelbert in Kent*.

Artists and Architects:

A. de Rohden, painter

Andrea [Bregno](#) (1418-1506), Italian sculptor and architect of the Early Renaissance

Annibale [Carracci](#) (1560-1609), Italian painter of the Baroque

Antonio [Balestra](#) (1666-1740), Italian painter of the Rococo period

Antonio [Viviani](#) called Il Sordo (1560–1620), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance and early-Baroque

Carlo [Maderno](#) (1556-1629), Swiss-Italian architect

Carlo [Maratta](#) (1625-1713), Italian Late Baroque Classical painter

Carlo Porziano, Sculptor

Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) aka *Il Pomarancio* (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter

Dalmazzoni, Sculptor

Domenico Zampieri, aka [Domenichino](#) (1581-1641), Italian Baroque painter of the Bolognese School, or Carracci School

Flaminio [Ponzio](#) (1560–1613), Italian architect of the Mannerist period

Francesco [Capriani](#) da Volterra (1535-1594), Italian architect

Francesco [Fernandi](#), aka *Imperiali* (1679-1740), Italian painter of the late-Baroque or Rococo period.

Francesco [Ferrari](#) (1634-1708), Italian painter and architect of the Baroque period

Francesco [Mancini](#) (1679-1758), Italian painter

Francesco Mariani, Italian painter

Giovan Antonio [de Rossi](#) (1616-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period

Giovanni Battista Ponfreni (17th cent), Italian painter

Giovanni Battista [Ricci](#) aka da Novara (1537-1627), Italian painter

Giovanni Battista [Soria](#) (1581-1651), Italian architect

Giovanni [Lanfranco](#) (1582-1647), Italian Baroque painter

Giuseppe de Fabris (1790-1860), Italian sculptor

Guido [Reni](#) (1575-1642), Italian painter of high-Baroque
John Parker (18th cent), English painter
Luigi di Pietro Capponi (15th cent), Italian sculptor
Niccolò [Cordieri](#) (1567-1612), Italian sculptor of late Mannerism
Onorio [Longhi](#) (1569-1619), Italian architect
Placido [Costanzi](#) (1702-1759), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period.
Pompeo Girolamo [Batoni](#) (1708 -1787), Italian painter of the Rococo/ Neoclassical period
Sisto [Badalocchi](#) (1585-1647), Italian painter and engraver of the Bolognese School

Burials:

Benedetto Cardinal [LOMELLINI](#), (1517-1579)
Giacinto Placido Cardinal [ZURLA](#), O.S.B.Cam., (1769-1834) [also see [here](#)]
Ambrogio Cardinal [BIANCHI](#), O.S.B.Cam., (1771-1856)

[Sir Edward Carne](#) of Glamorganshire (1496-1561)

<British diplomat, buried in the narthex>

Andrea Gentili from Genoa (d. 1525)

Emanuela Savelli Lomellini (d. 1592)

P. Del Drago Santacroce

Location:

Addr: Piazza San Gregorio 1, 00184 Roma

Coord: [41° 53' 7.7"N, 12° 29' 26.3"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 7008227

Fax: 0039 06 7009357

Open times:

9.00 am - 1.00 pm and 3.30 pm - 7.30 pm, daily

Mass Schedule:

Weekdays: 7.00 am and 7pm.

Schedules are subject to change. Please contact the church before visiting.

Links and References

[English Wikipedia page](#)

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[Rome Art Lover page](#)

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