

Santa Maria in Tempulo



Santa Maria in Tempulo is a deconsecrated 11th century convent church at Via Valle delle Camene 2, which street runs along the south-west flank of the Caelian Hill parallel to the Viale delle Terme di Caracalla. This is in the rione Celio (the historic rione Campitelli). The dedication was to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

History

The present edifice is thought to be a descendant of a church in the area dedicated to St Agatha, mentioned first in the 6th century, but this is a surmise.

A monasterium Tempuli hereabouts was recorded as destroyed in a Saracen (that is, North African Muslim) raid in 806. An oratory dedicated to St Agatha, which was attached to the monastery, might have been the ancestor of the extant building.

The alleged foundation legend of the later nunnery was written down by Martinelli in 1642, and concerns three exiled Greek brothers from Constantinople named (in Latin) Tempulus (Hieron in

Greek?), Servulus and Cervulus. They were meant to have brought a miraculous icon of Our Lady with them, which they installed in the oratory in the reign of "Pope Sergius" (which one?). Hence, the dedication of the oratory was changed.

The icon and monastery seem to be referred to in a bull of Pope Sergius III in 905. The icon was one of those referred to in Greek as *acheiropoeta*, which means "painted without hands" or miraculously.

However, the church with its present dedication and an attached monastery of Benedictine nuns are first mentioned unambiguously in 1155. The earliest parts of the fabric, remains of a campanile, date to this period.

The convent was shut down by Pope Honorius III in 1222 and some of the nuns transferred to San Sisto Vecchio, shortly after that church was given over to the Dominicans. The icon went with them. Benedictine monastic life in the city was in a period of gross degeneracy at the time, and the new mendicant orders took over most of their churches in the city -but not this one, which was simply deconsecrated. Other members of the community ended up at Santa Bibiana, which foundation didn't do so much better in the long run.

The icon is now in the church of Santa Maria del Rosario a Monte Mario.

Since the closure of the convent in the 13th century, the complex functioned as a farmstead and the survival of the church as a recognisable ecclesiastical edifice is a minor miracle. It was a private house until incorporated into the estate of the Villa Celimontana (then owned by the Mattei family) in the 17th century, allegedly by being incorporated into a nymphaeum. It quickly became a barn, however, and its ecclesial status was only recognised in the late 19th century.

In the early 20th century the building became a sculptor's studio, and was later occupied by the noted sculptors Francesco Sansone and Ugo Quaglieri.

In the 1980's it was bought and restored by the municipality of Rome, and is now (2010) used for civil marriages without religious content.

Exterior

This is now a brick edifice on a rectangular plan, which has been obviously knocked about and patched up several times. Note the provision of concrete buttresses.

There are two architectural elements to the plan, a transverse rectangular zone to the east which has a singly pitched roof and a longitudinally rectangular zone to the west with two roof pitches not meeting at a single ridge at the gable.

The streetside frontage shows three widely spaced Doric brick pilasters to the right of the large round-headed entrance, and a closely spaced pair of the same to the left. These support fragments of entablature, broken up by the insertion of large modern windows below the roofline. On the other side of the edifice, facing the main road, you can see four pairs of similar brick pilasters in a fragmentary condition, and a blocked entrance door. These pilasters seem to be a result of a 17th century restoration. The evidence for the Romanesque campanile are in the fabric on the right side of this frontage.

The side frontages show evidence of several blocked windows; there is interesting variations in the styles of blocking. The western side has a blocked round-headed entrance with the archivolt in brick; the eastern side has two entrances, one round-headed now used as a window and another rectangular one which is now a side entrance into the ancillary range.

Interior

The main interior space is aligned north to south, and occupies the western architectural zone. The gable of the roof is held up by a large rough brick arch, and there are blind arches of different sizes around the walls. Some of these still spring from low stucco Ionic pilasters, but most of the walling is rough brick also. There are no ceilings, and the floor is polished red brick laid in a herringbone pattern.

The eastern architectural zone is mostly occupied by an ancillary range which is walled off. Opposite the entrance is a headless ancient statue (of Diana?). The furnishings are otherwise confined to good quality moveable chairs of bentwood and magenta upholstery, a red carpet, a table to do the business on and some pot plants which look healthy. No symbolism, in other words.

Access

If you really want to get married here, contact

Ufficio Matrimoni Comune di Roma, Via Luigi Petroselli 50, 00186 Roma. Tel 06 67103066

The premises are advertised as open to visitors 09:00 to 12:00 and 16:00 to 18:00, but are closed on Tuesdays and Sunday afternoons.

Location

Coord: [41°52'55.8"N 12°29'37.4"E](#)

Address:

Via Valle di Carmine

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Medioevo.roma web-page](#)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

["Romasegreta" web-page](#)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)