

## San Biagio della Pagnotta degli Armeni



**San Biagio della Pagnotta** is the national church of Armenia, dedicated to the 4th century Armenian martyr [St Blaise](#). The appellation was first recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and refers to the tradition of a monastery giving blessed loaves of bread to local poor people on 3 February, St Blaise's feast day. (1)

### History:

The church was there long before the Via Giulia was created, and is of ancient but unknown origin. The original church was built on the ruins of a temple of Neptune. (1)

The first documentary reference is of 1072, during the papacy of Alexander II, when it was rebuilt as the church of a small Benedictine monastery. Back then its name was San Biagio Cantu Secuta, which has many documented variations and seems to refer to a sandbank accumulating on the inside of the bend of the Tiber. (1) (3)

In 1559, the church came under the care of the Vatican Chapter. They ran it as a public chapel, but there have always been many churches in the area and so it was rather redundant. (1)

In 1730 it was entirely rebuilt by Giovanni Antonio Perfetti.

In 1832 Pope Gregory XVI granted the church to the Armenians, which already owned the church of S. Mary of Egypt). In 1838 the interior was gutted and re-ordered, and the Romanesque bell-tower demolished.

Since then, it has been served by Armenian Catholic priests. The liturgy of the Armenian rite is used, which is one of the ancient rites of the Catholic church and which is officially of the same dignity as the Latin rite. Despite being one of the Eastern rites, it differs significantly from the Byzantine rites by, for example, having no iconostasis and using unleavened bread in the Eucharist. The Armenian Catholic Church is in full communion with the Holy Father, but is identical in its worship to the Armenian national church with its headquarters at Etchmiadzin in Armenia. (1)

### **Exterior:**

The 1730 façade was by Giovanni Antonio Perfetti, and features four gigantic derivative Composite pilasters on very high plinths and supporting an entablature which has a Latin dedicatory inscription on its frieze. The acanthus leaves on the capitals are stylized. The inner pair of pilasters is brought forward slightly, which means that the entablature and the ogee-curved pediment above it are both stepped vertically. The pediment is decorated with three flaming urn finials. (1)

The entrance has a rather geometrically elaborate Baroque doorcase supporting a raised false pediment formed from two volutes with small spirals facing each other, rather like fighting caterpillars. Above this is the main feature of the façade, a fresco of St Blaise performing the miracle of the fish-bone. This has an elaborately decorated frame, with an acanthus-and-palm-leaf device below and a scalloped tablet above which bears an inscription in the Armenian alphabet. Owing to the narrowness of the street this is not easy to view, and binoculars are useful. (1)

In between the pairs of pilasters to either side are two pairs of windows, the upper pair rectangular and the lower capsule-shaped. (1)

### **Interior:**

The church is a single nave which was renovated by Filippo Navone in 1832. (2)

The style is restrained neo-Baroque, with Corinthian nave pilasters in yellow stone supporting a deep vertically stepped entablature immediately below the flat ceiling. The latter is decorated in shallow stucco relief, with a sunburst motif around the dove of the Holy Spirit within a Baroque frame surrounded by panels showing sprays of vegetation. (1)

The triumphal arch of the apse is narrower than the apse itself, and is supported by a pair of white marble Ionic columns. Above the arch on either side is a pair of stucco putti, and on the ceiling immediately above is an Armenian inscription. (1)

The apse is at a higher level than the nave, and is approached by steps. Note the red curtains which can be drawn closed to isolate the apse; this is the equivalent of the iconostasis in the Armenian rite and is closed during the secret part of the Eucharist. Behind the high altar, which is identical in style to a Latin one and has a tabernacle, there is a painting showing *St Blaise and the fish-bone miracle* again. (1)

The painting to the right of the altar is *The Guardian Angel* by Pietro da Cortona, and to the left is *St. James of Armenia*. Also, an image of *Our Lady of Graces* (1671) on the left hand side of the nave, and *Adoration of the Sacrament*. (1) (2) (a)

In the church are the relics of the throat of San Biagio. (1) (2)

Inside the church is a Latin inscription dating back to 1072, which recalls the date of the reconstruction of the church. (a)

### Artists and Architects:

Filippo Navone (19<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian architect  
 Giovanni Antonio Perfetti (d. 1754), Italian architect  
 Pietro Berrettini [da Cortona](#) (1597-1669), Italian Baroque painter

### Location:

Addr: 64 Via Giulia, Roma  
 Coordinates: [41° 53' 53"N 12° 27' 57"E](#)

### Info:

**Telephone:** 0039 06 68804891 - 06 42458607 (amministratore)  
**Telephone:** 06 42458607 (amministratore)  
**Fax:** 0039 06 42458697  
**Email:** [rettore@pontificiocollegioarmeno.org](mailto:rettore@pontificiocollegioarmeno.org)

Open Mon-Sat 7.00am-8.00am 4.30pm-7.00pm  
 Sunday 4.30pm-6.30pm

### Masses:

Mon-Fri 6.00am 7.30am  
 Saturday 6.00am 7.30am 6.00pm(armenian catholic rite)  
 Sunday and Holidays 6.30pm

### Links and References:

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San\\_Biagio\\_della\\_Pagnotta](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San_Biagio_della_Pagnotta)
  2. [http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa\\_di\\_San\\_Biagio\\_degli\\_Armeni](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_San_Biagio_degli_Armeni)
  3. <http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/san-biagio-della-pagnotta-o-san-biagio-degli-armeni.html>
  4. <http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi71.htm#S.%20Biagio%20della%20Pagnotta>
  5. [http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=104](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=104)
- a. Donovan, Jeremiah; ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS; 1842, pg.220