

Santa Caterina della Rota



Santa Caterina della Rota is a 16th century confraternity church in the piazza named after it off the Via Giulia (Piazza di Santa Caterina della Rota), where there are two other churches. This is in the rione Regola.

The dedication is to St Catherine of Alexandria. Note that the name is Rota (Latin), not Ruota (Italian).

History

Sancta Maria in Caterina

This is thought to be one of the older parish churches in the area, which entered history as Santa Maria in Caterino (the name has many variations). The first reference with this name dates from about 1140, in the pilgrim guidebook known as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, but the church was built at least by the late 10th or early 11th century when there was a major building programme of small parish churches for the surviving built-up area.

It has the name Caterina in a papal bull of Pope Urban III, 1186, where it is listed as a parish church dependent on San Lorenzo in Damaso. However the filiation was disputed by the Chapter of St Peter's, and the dispute first surfaces in a bull of Pope Alexander III (1159-81). This is a hint that the church had an earlier foundation than about the year 1000, because the small churches built in the locality then were all aggregated to San Lorenzo as their mother church without argument. Subsequent bulls as regards the dispute also refer to Caterina. The Chapter won the case.

The name had variations Catenari or Catinera, which look as if they mean "chains", and a legend grew up that Christian captives who had been ransomed from Muslim pirates used to be accommodated in a hospice next door. They allegedly hung their chains in the church in thanksgiving. However, a plausible alternative

explanation is that the benefactor paying for the foundation of the church was called Catherine and this is supported by the earliest form of the name.

With time the name mutated, as a devotion to St Catherine the martyr of Alexandria in Egypt grew up here. The church was listed as Sante Maria e Caterina (Mary and Catherine) in late mediaeval catalogues, and finally simply Santa Caterina by 1490. The rota suffix refers to the spiked Catherine wheel on which she was tortured, according to her legend.

Rebuilding

At the end of the 16th century the church was rebuilt to a design by Ottaviano Mascherino, and formally rededicated to St Catherine. It continued as a parish church, serving about a hundred families in the next century. In 1730 the façade was added by Luigi Poletti.

Modern times

The parish was suppressed in a re-organization at the beginning of the 19th century. However, the Chapter of St Peter's remained responsible for the fabric. It paid for a restoration in 1857, and for another one after 1885 when the salvaged ceiling from San Francesco d'Assisi a Regola, demolished in that year, was inserted.

The church was looking for a reason for existence for over a hundred years, until 1929. In that year, it was handed over to the Confraternity of Sant'Anna dei Palafrenieri in exchange for their own church, which had been sequestered in order to become the parish church of Vatican City. The Confraternity has remained in charge since then.

The Confraternity used to have a website with a useful description of the church, but this is either "under repair" or actually defunct.

Exterior

Layout and fabric

This is a small church, with a single nave. The fabric is in brick, rendered in an ochre colour where it does not abut on neighbouring buildings, and there is a single pitched and tiled roof. The right hand side wall, on the street, is much thicker than the left hand one; this is because a range of sacristies and ancillary rooms abut the church on the left hand side, and are structurally part of it (although not under the roof mentioned).

The campanile is invisible from the street, and is a bellcote halfway along the left hand side wall with two arches side by side under a tiled gable.

Façade

The façade was designed by Luigi Poletti, and added in 1730. It has been described as neo-Classical, which it certainly is not; it is late Baroque. It is now an unusual example of a neglected and dirty church frontage in the Centro Storico, with the stonework of the architectural details flaking and the orange paint on the rendering peeling off.

There is a single storey, although the design derives from one of two storeys. Two pairs of pilasters, the inner pair doubletleted on their inside edges, flank the single doorway and reach about two-thirds of the height of the façade. Above their capitals, two pairs of inverted plinths support a pair of cornice fragments that run round the outer corners but not across the façade. The pilasters have interesting derivative capitals, with Ionic volutes reversed so that they curl inwards and which are connected by swags and ribbons.

On these cornices stand a pair of dumpy tripletted Doric pilasters which are slightly bellied; the inner two elements of the triplets support a crowning triangular pediment which is vertically stepped above them, but

the outer element supports a continuation of the pediment cornice at the outer corners. The triplets are bounded by a pair of curlicues embellished with sprays, the pediment tympanum is blank and on the pediment are three flaming urn finials.

The single entrance has a molded doorcase, and above its lintel there is a short inscription proclaiming the ownership of the Confraternity. Above this in turn is a segmental pediment with the top broken. Then comes a large rectangular window framed in narrow relief in the centre of the façade, with Baroque curls (not proper curlicues) to either side at the top. This is surmounted by a small oval carved coat-of-arms in a oddly-shaped frame (reminiscent of a draped sheepskin) below a floating cornice with an ogee curve.

Interior

Layout and fabric

The interior has a single nave. There are three shallow arched recesses on each side forming chapels, separated by engaged pillars without capitals. Over the entrance is a balustraded gallery. The presbyterium has a semi-circular apse, and a pair of slightly smaller apses on each side which are used as choirs. There is no triumphal arch. The right hand apse has a large window, and the second chapel on the right has a lunette window over the altar.

The glory of the church is its flat wooden ceiling dating from the 16th century, although as mentioned this was a salvaged item installed at the end of the 19th century. It is richly coffered in red, blue and gold and contains heraldic symbolism with rosettes, curlicues and scallops. It reaches into the presbyterium.

The main altarpiece shows The Apotheosis of St Catherine, by Giacomo Zucca of the school of Vasari.

The most interesting funerary monument is that to Giuseppe Vasi the engraver, who left many depictions of Roman churches in the 18th century.

Side chapels

The chapels are described anticlockwise, starting from the bottom right.

The first chapel on the right is the baptistry, and has a painting by Girolamo Muziano depicting the Flight into Egypt. He also executed the other decorations.

The second on the right is dedicated to St Charles Borromeo, and the scenes from his life are by Giacomo Coppi (a Mannerist painter from Peretola in Tuscany, also known as Jacopo del Meglio).

The third on the right is dedicated to St Anne, and is a special focus of devotion. The statue here of Our Lady with St Anne was originally used in processions invoking divine assistance for pregnant women (the so-called Processioni delle Panze). The sculpture is in a niche within a bowed aedicule with a pair of ribbed Corinthian columns flanked by a pair of wide Corinthian pilasters, and the number of ex-votos on display around it is impressive.

The last chapel on the left has an Annunciation of the Tuscan-Roman school of the 16th century.

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, and was also decorated by Coppi.

Address:

Via di San Girolamo della Carità 80

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to SS Martial and Valerius, and the altarpiece is by Giovanni Antonio Galli, nicknamed Lo Spadarino.

Access

The church is open for Mass on Sundays at 11:30 (2017). However, it has a long summer closure -in 2017, this was from 10 July to 14 September

Otherwise it is usually closed. However, it is part of the Centro Storico marriage circuit and so you may find a wedding going on there especially on a Saturday.

External links

Roman Churches Wiki

http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Caterina_della_Rota

Official diocesan web-page

http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page_id=188&ID=859

Italian Wikipedia page

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_Santa_Caterina_della_Rota

Nolli map (look for 702)

<http://nolli.uoregon.edu/map/index.html?xurl=85.998&yurl=53.019&surl=2000>

"De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157615517356803/>

Info.roma web-page

http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=776

"Romearthlover" web-page

<http://www.romearthlover.it/Vasi111.htm#S. Caterina alla Ruota>

Roma SPQR web-page

http://www.romaspqr.it/ROMA/CHIESE/Chiese_rinascimentali/s_caterina_della_rota.htm

Confraternity website

<http://www.parafrenieri.it/>

Plan in Accademia San Luca archives

Futuro Insieme blog with photos of interior

<https://futuroidinsieme.wordpress.com/2012/07/27/>

Some photos from Claudia Ruffo