

Santa Maria della Quercia



Santa Maria della Quercia (Our Lady of the Oak Tree) is the small Baroque church of the guild of butchers (*Confraternita dei Macellai di Roma*), and is dedicated to the blessed Virgin Mary. It is tucked away among the many streets and alleys in the rione Regola near the Palazzo Farnese.

The church is sometimes called **Santa Maria dei Macellari**.

History:

The first church on this site was dedicated to San Nicolò del Curte († c. 350), bishop of Myra in Lycia. The church dated back to the 13th century and was called *San Nicolò de Curte*, where *Curte* alludes to the *Court* of the ancient Roman noble family of the Orsini, who had their palace nearby. The church is mentioned for the first time in 1320 in a catalogue listing the churches of Rome as "Ecclesia Sancti Nicolai de Curte". The church of St. Nicholas is reported to have had other by-names, e.g. "S. Nicolai post Campum Florae", which roughly means St. Nicholas behind Campo dei Fiori, "S. Nicolai prope domum de Capiteferro", which translates into St. Nicholas near the house of Capo di Ferro, and "San Niccolò della Catena" ("catena" is the Italian word for chain or shackle).

In 1507 pope Julius II (1503-1513) entrusted the church of St. Nicholas to the people of Viterbo and the Maremma district to be their national church. Two years earlier the pope had visited the city of Viterbo and the sanctuary of Santa Maria della Quercia (Saint Mary of the Oak), where a miraculous image with the same name is venerated. Legend has it that the image got its name from the fact that a peasant had hung it upon the trunk of an oak tree (quercia). Julius II, who in fact had an oak tree as his heraldic symbol, wanted to bring the cult of this image in Rome.

In 1523 the community of Viterbo relinquished the church of St. Nicholas to the *Confraternita dei Macellai*, the Butchers' confraternity, which until then had had its liturgical gatherings in the church of Santi Sergio e Bacco at the Forum Romanum. In 1532 pope Clement VII (1523-1534) officially confirmed the confraternity and its proprietorship of the, by then dilapidated, church of St. Nicholas. In time the confraternity had the church restored and renamed it Santa Maria della Quercia, by which name it is still known today.

At the beginning of the 18th century the confraternity began to plan a reconstruction of the church *ab imis*, and in 1728 pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730) laid the foundation-stone. The pope had commissioned his fellow countryman from Benevento near Naples, Filippo Raguzzini to design the new church. Raguzzini is the architect of the Roman rococo, and the church of Santa Maria della Quercia is considered to be his masterpiece. In his work Raguzzini was assisted by Carlo de Dominicis, but when the pope died in 1730, they both were replaced by Domenico Gregorini. In 1731 the church was opened for worship, and a copy of the image of the Madonna della Quercia was placed above the high altar, but the church wasn't consecrated until 1738.

In 1864 the church was reconsecrated after a thorough-going restoration by Andrea Busiri-Vici.

In 1928 the church, having been abandoned for some time, was restored anew. Another renovation took place in 1960 by Marcello Caccia and Luigi Fabrizi, and the following year the church was reopened.

Exterior:

The façade was designed by Filippo Raguzzini and it is one of very few examples of [Roman sacral rococo architecture](#). The façade is characterized by a subtle interaction of convex and concave elements. The central axis of the façade is convex, while the lateral axes are concave. In the lower storey, which has a high socle, the architect has applied four slender pilasters with capitals inspired by the Corinthian order. The pilasters are pleated; the central ones more than the lateral ones. The middle axis has a quatrefoil window, which is reminiscent of Gothic architecture. The cornice projects strongly.

The second storey has matching pilasters, but without capitals and the roofline is marked only by an architrave. There is a large rectangular central window, and over this there is a segmental pediment without cornice which contains a volute-and-acanthus-leaf motif in relief.

The bellcote, with openings for two bells, is on the tall building to the right of the church and is just about visible from the ground.

The church has a garden on the roof.

Interior:

The little church is on the plan of a Greek cross having very short arms, with a central hemispherical dome in metal with a large oculus. The quite small interior of the church is bright and when fully lit flowing with light. There is not one single spot on the walls, that's not decorated with either paintings, frescoes, stucco or marble! However the present appearance of the interior isn't what Raguzzini once conceived; it dates back to the restoration by Busiri-Vici in 1864.

The marble and stucco decorations were executed by Paolo Croppi Lega, and Guido Molinari embellished the cupola, the pendentives and the lunettes above the chapels with frescoes. In the cupola Molinari painted *The Litanies of the Virgin with Angels*. The pendentives have four Prophets: *Isaiab, Moses, David and Ezekiel*. The lunette above the high altar chapel has *The Coronation of the Virgin*, while the lunettes above the right and left chapels have *The Marriage of the Virgin* and *The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple* respectively.

The high altar was designed in 1738 by Gregorini, but it was modified in 1864. The altarpiece, *Madonna della Quercia*, framed in foliage containing emblems of the butchers' guild, is a copy of the school of Agostino Caracci.

The painting of the right altar, *The Baptism of Christ*, is attributed to the 18th century painter Pietro Barbieri.

The left altar has a *Crucifixion*, attributed to Filippo Evangelisti (1684-1761), but more probably it is executed by Marco Benefial (1684-1764).

On the counterfaçade is the 18th century cantory with its plant ornaments and cherubs' heads. The oratory, on the left hand as you enter the church, has an inscription plate in the pavement, commemorating the visit by pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) in 1589.

In the sacristy, to the right of the entrance, there are several works of art. The vault has a painting depicting the *Virgin with the Child Jesus and Saints*. Other paintings show the *Annunciation*, *the Holy Family*, *the Mocking of Christ*, and the *Enthroned Madonna with St. Francis of Assisi*. There is also an 18th century statue of *St. Anthony of Padua* here.

Artists and Architects:

- Andrea [Busiris Vici](#) (1817-1911), Italian architect
- Carlo [De Dominicis](#) (1696-1758), Italian architect
- Domenico [Gregorini](#) (1692-1777), Italian architect
- Filippo [Raguzzini](#) (1690-1771), Italian architect
- Guido Molinari (19th cent), Italian painter
- Luigi Fabrizi (20th cent), Italian architect
- Marcello Caccia (20th cent), Italian architect
- Marco [Benefial](#) (1684-1764), Italian proto-Neoclassical painter
- Paolo Croppi Lega (19th cent), Italian sculptor from Forlì
- Pietro Barbieri (18th cent), Italian painter

Location:

Addr: Piazza della Quercia, 27

Coord: [41° 53' 41"N, 12° 28' 18 E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6865196

Fax: 0039 06 6865196

Open Sunday 10:00am-12:00pm

Mass Sunday 10:30

Links and References:

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

<http://web.comhem.se/~u13117202/smquercia.htm>

<http://web.comhem.se/~u13117202/smquercia2.htm>

http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=730

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/santa-maria-della-quercia.html>

<http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi131.htm#S.%20Maria%20de%27%20Macellari>

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Santa_Maria_della_Quercia_%28Roma%29?uselang=it

Lewine, Milton; THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580; 1963