

San Salvatore alle Coppelle



San Salvatore alle Coppelle is a church of Rome in rione Sant'Eustachio in the Piazza delle Coppelle.

History

An engraving in the inside wall of the church states it was consecrated by Pope Celestine III on November 26 in 1195 which may refer to the original construction, although that may have been a rebuilding of an even older church.

In a bull of Honorius III of 1222 the church was called *de Cupellis*, and in the catalogs of the 16th century, this name seems to derive from the fact that concentrated in the surrounding area the *cupellari*, manufacturers or *cupelle* *Capelle*, the typical Roman barrels with wooden staves capacity of about five gallons used for storing water, wine and vinegar.

An ancient inscription, now no longer exists, said that the church was built over the house of Santa Abbasi, noble woman who bequeathed her life to works of mercy, in his own home by creating a Monte di Pietà, hence the name of the medieval church of San Salvatore *de Pietà*. Others derive the name from the proximity to the so-called *Arco della Pietà*, from the time of Trajan, (whish still existed in the 14th century, though in ruins).

The epigraph also describes Pope Celestine III (1191-98) as having the church built or rebuilt. The original notice of consecration in 1196 is preserved on a wall in the church, together with a long list of relics provided. The

present Via delle Coppelle was part of a major pilgrim route in the Middle Ages, and many visitors to the church would have come to venerate these.

The present campanile dates from this project, as do the church's foundations. It is unclear how much of the original fabric survives in the walls, although the side apses at least seem to be part of it.

The name Coppelle first occurs in 1222, as Cupellis (a plural form). Its meaning is a small puzzle. A circumstantial theory is that the name is derived from the Latin word *cupa* meaning "cask" or "barrel" (it occurs only in the works of Cicero). *Cupella* would then be a small barrel, but the problem here is that this word is not in any Latin literature. It does occur in metallurgy, in the production of metal by smelting ore in a ceramic vessel, but only as a result of a neologism of the 17th century. The barrel etymology dates from the same century.

The church was parochial throughout the Middle Ages, and this was its primary function.

In 1663, it became the headquarters of the *Confraternity of Perseverance*. This confraternity had been established to aid foreigners who fell ill in Rome, and to bury those who died.

The church was rebuilt in a project beginning in 1739, and apparently completed in 1750. As mentioned, it is unclear how much of the old church was demolished for this but the continued existence of mediaeval frescoes in the side chapel apses indicates that demolition was not total. The architect was Carlo De Dominicis, who had been responsible for building Sant'Eligio for the saddlers so it is obvious that they had given him a reference. The sponsor of the work was Cardinal Giorgio Spinola, who fitted up one bay of the left hand side aisle for his funerary monument.

Between 1858 and 1860, the College of Parish Priests promoted a general restoration, which involved both the interior and the exterior of the church. Unfortunately, during this restoration many of the original decorations were destroyed, and defaced two paintings dating from the time the church was consecrated by Celestine III, representing the Virgin Mary and St. Giovanni Battista

The last interventions were carried out in the early 1900s and are the result of the assignment of the church to the Romanian clergy. The request was made in 1913 to Pius X by Bishop Basil Hossu. It was necessary to carry out the work for the liturgical adaptation transforming the presbytery to add the iconostasis. The work was completed by Bishop Valerio Trajan Frentiu and 29 February 1920 there was the re-consecration at the hands of Bishop Basil Lucaciu.

Exterior

The church has a rectangular basilical plan, having a nave with side aisles and a semi-circular apse. The brick fabric is mostly invisible from the street, except for the façade and campanile. The left hand side aisle external wall fronts the Piazza delle Coppelle, but a range of domestic accommodation is on top of the aisle and the actual church wall here is only as high as the string course. Other buildings abut the church on all other sides.

Campanile

The campanile dates from 1195, and is at the bottom of the right hand side aisle. It is in brick, of four storeys above the aisle roofline. The first storey had two separate arched openings presumably on each face away from the church (adjacent buildings obscure this), while the top three storeys had arcades of three arches each separated by little stone columns with impost. However, these have been mostly blocked up and only one column remains in its original state.. The storeys are separated by dentillated brick cornices, and the roofline has stone modillions as well. There is a low tiled pyramidal cap.

Façade

The very simple single-storey façade by De Dominicis is now attractively rendered in light blue, with details in white. Four gigantic Composite pilasters with festoons on their volutes support an entablature and triangular pediment. There are three entrances, with the central one larger. This has a molded doorcase, with a raised horizontal cornice above. The side entrances just have molded doorcases (these actually do not lead into the church;

the left hand one is for the sacristy, the right hand one for the campanile). Above the entrance is a large rectangular window in a simple molded frame, the lintel of which abuts the entablature. Above the side entrances are two tondi with raised and molded frames, topped by knots of ribbons. These tondi used to contain frescoes. The remnants hint that at least the right hand one had the coat-of-arms of a cardinal. The tympanum of the pediment also had a fresco in its centre, but this is now illegible.

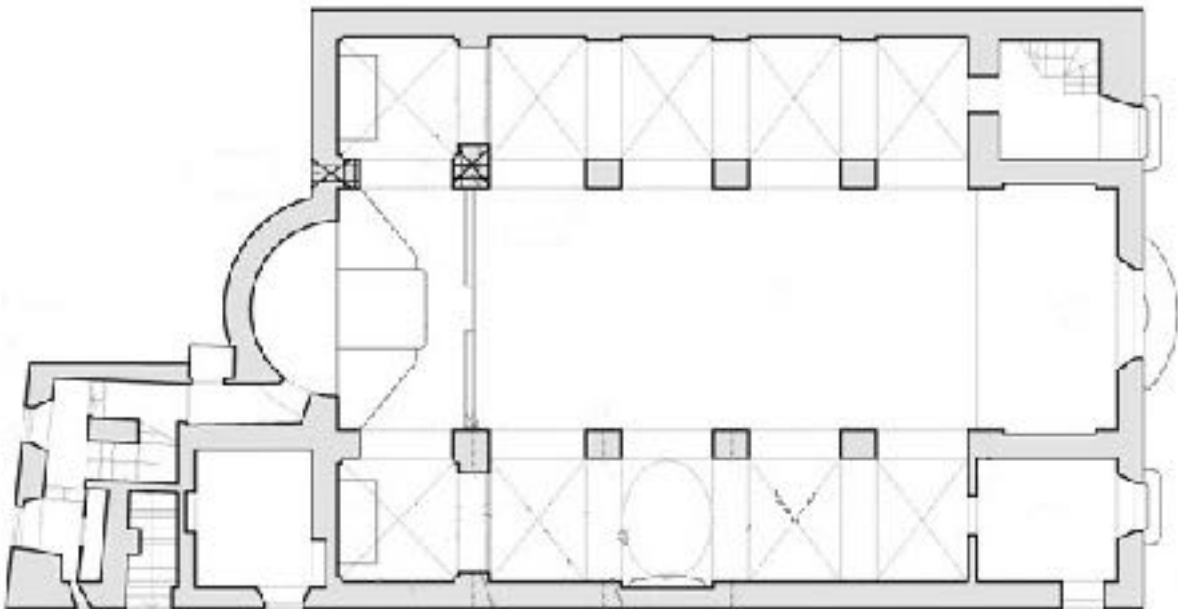
Epigraphs

There are two interesting epigraphs on the side wall of the church.

One reads Chi[es]a de S[an] Salvatore aler [sic] delle Cupelle 1195, and is an 18th century piece of antiquarianism.

The other one has been damaged by erosion, but bears the date 17 December 1749. It is a notification to local innkeepers by the Confraternity of Perseverance, requesting them to inform the latter of any sick guest needing assistance. This was put up for the Jubilee year 1750, when many pilgrims were expected at Rome.

Plan



Interior

The church has an entrance bay, which is flanked by two chambers. To the left is the sacristy, and to the right the first storey of the campanile.

Then follows a nave with side aisles of four bays, then the sanctuary of one bay with an external apse. This is flanked by a pair of side chapels, which are extensions of the side aisles. Similarly, the sanctuary bay is structurally part of the nave and shares its ceiling.

Nave

The nave has arcades on either side, which spring from square Doric piers. Above the archivolt on each side is a floating entablature (unsupported by pilasters), which has an extremely wide frieze. This has alternate rectangular and square panels, painted to resemble alabaster.

The piers and other wall surfaces in the nave are painted to resemble polychrome marble revetting, crude work but colourful.

The ceiling is a barrel vault with five shallow lunettes on each side. The near right hand four and the middle left hand one contain real windows, but the rest have fake painted ones because of abutting buildings. The apparent stucco decoration is painted on. The central panel contains an interesting fresco depicting Providence. This consists of the Eye of Providence (to be found on the back of a US dollar bill), which is an eye within the triangle of the Trinity emitting rays of glory. This is over the yellow disc of the sun, itself surrounded by a cloudy blue sky.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is now screened off by a traditional solid iconostasis installed by 1920. The icons on this are in the traditional disposition, but are an interesting late example of Byzantine-rite icon painting being influenced by Western academic artistry. The technique here is very accomplished, but in a realistic style not in the Byzantine iconographic tradition. The most striking example of this is the icon of Our Lady to the left of the Royal Doors. She has bare feet, which is prohibited in Byzantine iconography.

It might be supposed that the use of a Western style here was the result of undue influence from the Latins. This is incorrect, as Orthodox icon-painters in the 19th century espoused a realistic style especially in the Russian Empire. Only in the 20th century did devotion to the traditional manuals of icon-painting re-emerge.

Behind the iconostasis is the free-standing altar required by the Byzantine rite. The original altar seems to have been against the curve of the apse wall, where the original Baroque altarpiece survives. This depicts Christ the Saviour, and is in a dirty and neglected condition. Angeli writing in 1903 gives the name of the artist as G. B. Lelli, which seems to be a mistake.

The apse conch is coffered in octagons, with rosettes. The wall above the apse arch has a lunette fitted into the curve of the ceiling, which has fake stucco work showing the Dove of the Holy Spirit.

Chapel of St Joseph

Those familiar with the Byzantine-rite Eucharist will know that it entails the use of two side chambers flanking the sanctuary. These are the prothesis to the left, where the bread and wine to be consecrated are prepared, and the diaconicon to the right, where the sacred vessels and vestments are kept.

In this church, the chapel at the end of the left hand aisle has been converted into the prothesis.

The chapel was dedicated to St John the Baptist when the church was re-built in the 12th century. It was re-dedicated to St Joseph in the 18th century, but mediaeval frescoes survived until destroyed in the 19th century restoration.

The late 18th century (?) altarpiece survives, depicting The Trinity and St Joseph. It is not great art, but the composition is interesting and the work has some charm.

Chapel of the Dormition

The chapel at the end of the right hand aisle is dedicated to the Dormition or death of Our Lady. It is unsuitable for use as a diaconicon, so has been left alone.

There is a fragment of a 15th century fresco depiction of the Dormition. What is left shows Christ holding the soul of Our Lady; what is mostly lost is her corpse laid out and surrounded by the apostles. The depiction of her soul as a little girl has caused the ignorant description of this fragment as showing St Joachim with Our Lady -this is quite wrong.

Our Lady of Perseverance

On the right hand aisle wall is a framed fresco depiction of the Madonna and Child, which has been ascribed to the school of Antoniazio Romano. One view is that the work is by the master himself, which would make it the most important artwork in the church.

It is in serious need of cleaning and conservation. One advantage of its unrestored state is that it still has on it a silver crown, and two silver ex-votos in the form of hearts. Restored icons invariably have such additions removed, so these are interesting survivals.

Monument to Cardinal Giorgio Spinola

The third bay of the left hand side aisle has been converted into a little casula for the spectacular polychrome marble Baroque monument of Cardinal Giorgio Spinola. This is by Bernardino Ludovisi, 1744. An angel and a putto hold a cameo portrait of the cardinal, in an elliptical tondo at an angle facing the church entrance.

The angel is female, and has a bare breast. Female angels were still risqué at the time, and the sculptor was lucky to get away with it.

Other items

The savage 19th century restoration left a dearth of items of interest in the church.

On the wall to the right just inside the church entrance is a large slab bearing an inscription commemorating the consecration of the church by Pope Celestine III (1190-1198), and a list of the relics which he provided for it.

Since the church was parochial, it had the right of burial and so there are some monuments and tomb-slabs to be found. The one to Filippo Boschetto 1740 is the best, having a frame in yellow and green marbles with a skull and crossbones.

At the bottom of the left hand aisle is a memorial to Pope Leo XII, 1829. He was an extremely unpopular pope who tried very hard to re-introduce mediaeval social structures to the Papal States, and so his memorial here is noteworthy.

In the left hand aisle is a portrait of Pope Gregory the Great, with the dove of the Holy Spirit whispering in his ear.

Special notes

The church is of the Byzantine-Romanian Rite and the national church of Romania, and is in full communion with the Holy Father.

Access

The following information on access and the liturgy is from a notice recently pinned up at the church, and is perhaps subject to change.

The church is open:

Weekdays 14:00 to 20:00.

Sundays 8:00 to 12:00, 14:00 to 20:00.

Liturgy

The Eucharist in the Byzantine rite is celebrated daily at 18:00, and additionally on Sundays at 10:00. The Romanian language is used.

All Catholics may receive Communion. Orthodox Christians should obey the instructions and prohibitions of their own priests concerning this matter.

Artists and Architects:

Antoniazio [Romano](#) (1430-1510), Italian Early Renaissance painter

Bernardino [Ludovisi](#) (1693-1749), Italian sculptor

Carlo [De Dominicis](#) (1696-1758), Italian architect

Burials:

Giambattista Cardinal [SPINOLA](#), *seniore*, (1615-1704) [also see [here](#)]
Buried in front of the main altar
Giorgio Cardinal [SPINOLA](#), (1667-1739)

Location:

72/b Piazza delle Coppelle , 00186 Roma
Coordinates: [41°54'2"N 12°28'33"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6892929
Fax: 0039 06 6875796

References and Links:

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[060608.it](#)

[gcCatholic.org](#)

[Google search photos](#)

[Dino Ignani blog](#)

["Roman Dispatches" blog-page](#) with very good photo gallery

[Nolli map](#) (look for 825)

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

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