

## Santa Marta al Collegio Romano (deconsecrated)



The **church of Santa Marta al Collegio Romano**, was a church of Rome in Rione Pigna, located in Piazza del Collegio Romano. According to legend Saint Martha was the first woman after the Virgin Mary to vow virginity to God, and the first to found a convent.

### **History:**

The origins of S. Marta al Collegio Romano date from 1545. When Saint Ignatius Loyola was general of the Jesuits, he conceived the idea of establishing a refuge for penitent women who, though wishing to reform, had not been called by God to become nuns or who were already married. Failing to find a patron willing to finance the project, he resorted to selling some of the marbles discovered in the ancient ruins in front of the Gesu to raise the necessary money. However, the institution remained there only until 1561 when the former residence was transformed into a convent of Augustinian nuns, who in 1570 consecrated their church.

In 1668 the convent was enlarged by Giovanni Antonio De Rossi for the Card. Giberto Borromeo, although by April 1671 the name of Carlo Fontana appears as architect.

Due to the ruinous state of the vault, which threatened collapse, the nuns of Santa Marta took the opportunity to renovate their church totally in 1673, enlarging and decorating it in the Baroque style under the patronage of Sister Maria Eleanora Buoncompagni, abbess of the convent (1670-76), and Sister Maria Scolastica Colleoni, both members of noble Italian families. Fontana constructed six new lateral chapels. He was entrusted with the project of creating an overall interior design to the iconographic themes chosen by the nuns related to the titular of the church, St. Martha. The church was solemnly reconsecrated in 1696.

Between 1870 and 1873 the convent was suppressed and the church deconsecrated and most of its numerous works of art removed. The new Italian government confiscated the buildings for use as a barracks and a military warehouse.

During the Napoleonic occupation it was transformed into a Masonic Lodge. In the Risorgimento it was used as a military warehouse for the barracks housed in the former convent, and in the twentieth century it became the seat of the archives of the Police Central and later a storehouse for the Ministry of the Treasury. The convent is now home of the District Police of the city.

In consequence of this misuse and neglect, most of the elaborate stucco decorations and architectural elements were destroyed or severely damaged. Finally in 1965 the restorations begun in 1961 were completed. The vault frescoes were restored, and the stuccoes were cleaned and repaired, as was the cornice. Both the roof and floor were redone, and the sacristy or choir restored.

The present appearance of the former church is due to the restoration starting in 1984 by the Superintendence for the architectural and environmental assets of Lazio.

The former church, now known as "Sala di S. Marta", is now home to conferences, conventions, exhibitions and concerts, and is owned by the Ministry for the material and cultural activities for the promotion and conduct of cultural.

### **Exterior:**

The restrained façade has the entrance framed by a pair of Doric columns in the round, supporting a frieze of stylized fasces supporting a triangular pediment. There is a pair of Doric pilasters on either side, with a narrow rectangular window between each pair. These support a full entablature, with architrave, a frieze in the same style as that above the door and a projecting cornice. Above that, the upper storey of the façade has four pilasters without capitals running up to the gabled roofline. There are three rectangular windows, the middle one larger and with a stone frame fitting snugly between the inner pilasters, and which contains a 17<sup>th</sup> century fresco.

The reconstruction of the vault by Fontana in 1671 made necessary the elevation of the facade by means of a superstructure added above the old pediment.

### **Interior:**

The Church of Santa Marta presents a rare example of a truly unified decoration. Before it was stripped of much of its painting in later centuries, the church presented a rich collection of art

representative of varying artistic trends of Late Baroque Rome. All this was possible only because of the generosity of individual nuns.

The interior is small but very rich in stucco and gilding, with an apse and three chapels on each side. The ceiling is arched, coved in triangular panels around three, slightly elliptical tondi (ovals). The decoration of the vault was designed by Giovanni Battista Gaulli, (called Baciccio). As noted on the altar concerning the altarpiece, where "most likely had to be a painting by Girolamo Muziano representing the *Resurrection of Lazarus*." The canvas of Muziano was indeed replaced by a work by Guillaume Courtois, called Borgognone, which was later moved to the convent of SS. Quattro Coronati. Flanking the oval painting over the altar were two rectangular lateral paintings, the *Three Marys at the Tomb* by Luigi Garzi and the *Resurrection of Lazarus* by Fabio Cristofani, which are no longer *in situ*. Enclosing the three tribune paintings were marble frames supported by sculptured angels. Behind the central painting hangs a simulated gilded brocade curtain, which billows out at the bottom, over-lapping the arms of the angels. In the center of the vault of the tribune, elegantly embellished with gilded stuccoes and painted fictive stuccoes, is a medallion relief of two putti with a vase of holy water and a banner reading "ACQUA SANTA," an allusion to one of the attributes of Saint Martha.

A marble sculpture involving putti and an open scroll is on top of the apse arch, below this, and there is another tondo over the entrance door. The tribune now has an empty oval and picture frames.

The stucco work and frescoes on the vault were by Baciccio, who painted the ceiling of the Gesù and who received that commission as a result of his work here. The apse has four columns in red marble, the inner ones round and the outer square.

In the shallow chapels, altars with segmental pediments and oval picture frames alternated with those with triangular pediments and rectangular frames, a rhythm that was continued by the picture frames of the tribune. Above the chapel arches are graceful, elongated figures of youths with a affectation that prefigures the eighteenth century. Above the pediments of the altars were more stucco putti. The stuccoes were executed by Leonardo Retti, assisted by the otherwise unknown Antonio Roncati. The altar paintings formed a virtual museum of contemporary taste.

*Transfiguration* in the right altar painting is by Alessandro Grimaldi;

Paolo Albertoni, who also collaborated with Gaulli on the vault frescoes, executed *Christ Carrying the Cross Appearing to Saints Ignatius and Charles Borromeo* in the second right chapel;

Francesco Cozza did the *Preaching of Saint John the Baptist* in the third right chapel;

Francesco Rosa painted a *Guardian Angel* for the first left altar;

Giacomo del Po, *the Madonna and Child with Saints Augustine and Monica* above the second left altar;

and Ludovico Gimignani, a *Madonna* for the third left chapel.

All these paintings were removed from the church when it was suppressed and they were subsequently lost. Cozza's painting was rediscovered on the antiquarian market in Rome and purchased by the Italian government in 1966.

The surface of the vault is organized into compartments consisting of three tondi and twelve pendentives surrounding them. Two broad ribs covered with gilded stucco garlands and a gilded painted leaf motif cross the vault. This latter decorative painting also forms the outer surrounds of the tondi, while the inner frame is made of gilded stucco. The three roundels depict events in the life of Saint Martha, to whom the church is dedicated. In the central panel she is represented in glory, while the other two tondi show her preaching and subduing a dragon. Various allegorical figures of Virtues encircle the panels. Although the general design of the frescoes is due to Gaulli, considerable confusion has attended the attribution of specific frescoes to the three painters, Gaulli, Paolo Albertoni, and Girolamo Troppa, whose names are associated with the ceiling. Surrounding the tondi are allegorical representations of Virtues. Those depicted by Gaulli around the central tondo have been identified as *Chastity, Penitence, Innocence, and Glory*. The allegories surrounding the tondo nearest the high altar, representing *Saint Martha and the Dragon*, are the Cardinal Virtues: *Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice*. The allegorical figures around the other tondo of *Saint Martha Preaching*, located nearest the entrance of the church, represent the Virtues of *Faith, Religion, Charity, and Truth*.

Even now, though stripped of most of its altars and paintings, the church possesses a distinct charm. Its surfaces are covered with a rich and elegant decoration of gilded stuccoes and paintings.

### Artists and Architects:

Alessandro Grimaldi (1630-1663), Italian painter  
 Antonio Roncati, Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
 Carlo [Fontana](#) (d. 1714), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period  
 Fabio Cristofani (1610-1689), Italian artist  
 Francesco [Cozza](#) (1605–1682), Italian painter of the Baroque period.  
 Francesco [Rosa](#) (1638-1687), Italian painter  
 Giacomo [del Po](#) (1654–1726), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Giovanni Antonio [de Rossi](#) (1616-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period  
 Giovanni Battista [Gaulli](#), aka Baciccia (1639-1709), Italian painter of the High Baroque  
 Girolamo [Muziano](#) (1532-1592), Italian painter, active in a late-Renaissance or Mannerism style.  
 Girolamo [Troppa](#) (1637–1710), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Guillaume [Courtois](#) aka Borgognone (1628-1679), French painter and etcher  
 Leonardo Retti (1670-1709), Italian sculptor  
 Ludovico [Gimignani](#) (1643-1697), Italian painter during the Baroque period  
 Luigi [Garzi](#) (1638-1721), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Paolo [Albertoni](#) (d. ca. 1695), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period.

### Location:

Address: Piazza del Collegio Romano 5, 00186, Rome  
 Rione Pigna (Torre Argentina)  
 Coordinates: [41°53'50"N 12°28'47"E](#)

### Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6791051  
 Open times: Mon-Fri 10am-5pm

### Links:

[http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa\\_Marta\\_al\\_Collegio\\_Romano](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Marta_al_Collegio_Romano)

[http://209.85.165.132/translate\\_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa di Santa Marta al Collegio Romano](http://209.85.165.132/translate_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_Santa_Marta_al_Collegio_Romano)

<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.correrenelverde.it/arte/santamarta/volumesantamarta.htm>

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/santa-marta.html>

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**Refs:**

Dunn, Marilyn R.: "The Decoration of S. Marta al Collegio Romano". from *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Sep., 1988), pp. 451-477  
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