

Santa Maria del Carmine alle Tre Cannelle



The 18th century Carmelite church of **Santa Maria del Carmine alle Tre Cannelle** is well-hidden at a small piazza near Piazza Venezia. High buildings and palaces overlook the façade of the church. The church is dedicated to Our Lady of Carmel.

History

The original sanctuary on this site was erected as an oratory for the *Confraternita del Carmine*, founded in the church of San Crisogono in Trastevere. In 1515 the confraternity was transferred to the then remotely situated church of San Martino ai Monti. Cardinal Odoardo Farnese (1573-1626), protector of the confraternity, acquired some houses at the ancient "Tre Cannelle", and in 1605 the building of the oratory began. In 1606 Paul V (1605-1621) raised the confraternity to the rank of archconfraternity, and in 1621 Gregory XV (1621-1623) recognized it as "Madre e Capo" of all Carmelite confraternities. The building of the oratory was completed in 1625, but it remained a quite insignificant edifice. (1)

In time the oratory grew too modest for the archconfraternity, and the architect **Giacomo Ciolli** was commissioned to amplify the building. From 1724 to 1733 the presbytery, the high altar and the nave was constructed, while the façade was erected only in the Holy Year of 1750 after the designs of **Michelangelo Specchi**. Specchi's façade is an illustrative example of the tendency towards a formal severity, which was predominant in Rome in the middle of the 18th century. (1) (2)

In 1772 a disastrous fire almost destroyed the church, but in the very same year Clement XIV (1769-1774) commissioned the rebuilding of the church with the assistance of Cardinal Domenico Orsini d'Aragona (1719-1789), protector of the archconfraternity. In 1775 the church was reopened for worship, and it was given the name "Santa Maria del Carmine". The church was restored in 1862. The church is served by diocesan clergy. (1) (2)

The church was pillaged and closed down after the French occupied Rome in 1798, but it was re-opened in 1801. In 1862, the confraternity appointed Vincenzo Martinucci to restore and embellish the interior. It also revised its constitutions two years later in the light of modern charitable needs. The locality was affected by the building of the Via Quattro Novembre in 1875, but the church itself was not affected and the government did not expropriate the property. (2)

The confraternity revised its constitutions again in 1938. There was a restoration of the fabric of the church in 1962. (2)

Unfortunately, in the 1970's the confraternity fell into decay. The church was closed down, and was almost deconsecrated. Fortunately, a successful effort was made to re-vitalize on the part of a small number of members, and the church was re-opened in the following decade under the charge of Monsignor Gianfranco Bella. He has been the priest here from 1984 to the present day. (2)

It was found that arrears of maintenance had taken their toll, and that the edifice was not in a good state. Then a fire in 2007 destroyed the private oratory of the confraternity, adjacent to the church, and smoke-damaged the church's interior. This was the spur to a major restoration of the complex, under the architect Paolo Taffi, which should be completed about now (2014). (2)

Exterior

The façade by **Michelangelo Specchi** was completed in 1750. It's in the Late Baroque (tardobarocco) style, and has two storeys. After the recent restoration, the color scheme is white on pale yellow but it used to be white on orange ochre. (2)

The design is very simple for the period. The first storey has four pilasters with derivative Composite capitals (each having four volutes and a rosette), the outer pair being tripletted at the corners. These support an entablature separating the storeys, and on the frieze of this is a dedicatory inscription: (2)

B[eatae] Mariae Virgini de Monte Carmelo.

The single entrance has a doorcase flanked by a little pair of curlicues at the top sides. Above is an entablature with a segmental pediment, and a pair of side posts over the curlicues. This entrance is enclosed in an arch fitted into the inner pair of pilasters, with the archivolt springing from Doric imposts. The imposts are continued behind the pilasters to form a string course. (2)

The tympanum of this arch has a very interesting monochrome fresco of Our Lady of Mount Carmel with the Christ-Child, each presenting the Brown Scapular. They are flanked by a pair of putti. Before the restoration this tympanum had a rotting polychrome fresco of the same subject, of the early 19th century. The confraternity appointed Marina Furci to restore it, but instead she found

that it was an overpainting of the earlier work now visible. This presumably dates from after the fire in 1772. (2)

The second storey has a large rectangular window with a cornice incorporating two posts supported by strap corbels. On this is a broken ogival pediment with curlicues on the breaks, and a swag of flowers connecting the two parts. This is flanked by two pairs of blind pilasters without capitals, but connected at top and bottom to form two frames with recessed molded borders. Each of these contains a narrow blank vertical tablet, curved at its ends around a pair of scallop shells. (2)

At the top of the Façade is crowned by a triangular tympanum with sharply protruding frame that spans the entire width of the housing. Originally this was decorated with bas-reliefs in stucco depicting the *Virgin Mary with the Christ child* in her arms, surrounded by angels. They were executed by **Giovanni Battista Grossi** and is believed to have been lost in the fire in the 1772. (3)

Interior

The interior has a single nave with a decorated barrel-vault ceiling and high Corinthian pilasters. There are two side altars. The decorative theme of imitated stucco-work was executed by the architect of the archconfraternity, **Vincenzo Martinucci**. (1)

Sanctuary

The high altar, which is the work of **Giacomo Ciolli**, and has a pair of Corinthian columns in yellow Siena marble supporting the split-away and separated ends of a triangular pediment. These are slightly turned outwards, and support a pair of stucco angels venerating a Marian monogram in a gilded wood glory. The glory is echoed by another one on the tabernacle, except this has a crucifix. (1) (2)



The altarpiece is a large 18th century copy a statue of *Our Lady of Mount Carmel with the Child Jesus*, made of papier-maché., standing in a silk dress within an arched and glazed niche. The original is in Palestine. This work is obviously the subject of much devotion because the altar is flanked by wall cases containing ex-votos. (1) (2)

Earlier the high altar was adorned by a painting of *Our Lady of Mount Carmel*, executed in c. 1605 by the Roman painter **Gaspare Celio**. This painting is now preserved in the oratory of the archconfraternity. The painting of the small dome of the choir has an angel in the sky. (1)

Side Altars

The two side altars are not in chapels, but are simply attached to the nave side walls. They are matching aedicules with a pair of Corinthian pilasters supporting a triangular pediment. The altarpiece paintings are large. (2)

In the 18th century, the dedications of these altars were to the prophet Elijah to the right (the Carmelites were mendaciously claiming him as their founder), and St Michael the Archangel on the left. (2)

The right hand altarpiece is painted on both sides, and hence seems to have been intended as a processional standard. It is attributed to **Sebastiano Conca**; one side shows *Our Lady Granting the Scapular to Simon Stock for the Souls in Purgatory*, and the other shows *Our Lady Appearing to the Prophet Elijah*. (2)

The left hand altar used to have an altarpiece showing *St Teresa of Liseux*, executed by **Tito Ridolfi** in 1927. It replaced another depiction of *Our Lady granting the scapular to Simon Stock* (whom the Carmelites venerate as a saint, although he is only a beatus in the Roman Martyrology). This work, by **Giovanni Pirri** 1776, is now on the right hand wall of the sanctuary. (2)

During the restoration after the 2007 fire, the original altarpiece by **Francesco Cozza**, depicting *St Michael Subduing the Devil*, was discovered in situ and in fairly good condition. This was some recompense to the confraternity for its losses in that fire. (2)

On the counterfaçade, above the cantory, there is a fine organ from 1807, designed by the organ builder Aldobrando Fedeli commissioned by Count Rodolfo Brignole Sale. In the adjacent rooms of the church there are several art-works of interest. In the changing-room of the confrères a painting by **Corrado Giaquinto** representing *St. Filippo Neri* is preserved. In a small corridor we may behold an apparently anonymous 18th century painting depicting *St. Filippo Neri exhorting the children to pray for Our Lady*. In the sacristy there is a late 16th century painting of *The Flagellation* by an anonymous master. (1)

Liturgy:

The feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the patronal feast of the church, and is celebrated on 16 July. In 2013, there was Mass at 11:30 followed by a litany addressed to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, then Rosary and Benediction at 17:30 followed by Mass an hour later.

Artists and Architects:

Aldobrando [Fedeli](#) (19th cent), Italian Organ builder
 Corrado [Giaquinto](#) (1703-1765), Italian painter of the Rococo period (also see [here](#))
 Francesco [Cozza](#) (1605-1682), Italian painter of the Baroque period.
 Gaspare [Celio](#) (1571-1640), Italian painter of the late-Mannerist and early-Baroque period
 Giacomo Ciolli († 1736), Italian architect
 Giovanni Battista Grossi (18th cent), Italian sculptor
 Giovanni Pirri (18th cent), Italian painter
 Michelangelo Specchi (1684-1750), Italian Baroque architect
 Paolo Taffi (21st cent), Italian architect
 Tito [Ridolfi](#) (1886-1956), Italian painter
 Vincenzo Martinucci (19th cent), Italian architect

Location:

Address: 4 Via del Carmine, 00187 Roma
 Coordinates: [41°53'48"N 12°29'5"E](#)

Info:

The church is open on Sundays at 10:30 for Mass.
 However, it is closed from Christmas Eve to 7 January, and also from 17 July to 31 August.

Links:

1. <http://web.comhem.se/~u13117202/smcarm.htm>
2. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Maria_del_Carmine_alle_Tre_Cannelle
3. <http://www.annasromguide.dk/sevaerdigheder/viminalsev/santamariadelcarminealletrecannelle.html>
4. <http://www.chiesacarmine-roma.it/lachiesa.htm>
5. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=732
6. <http://www.news-art.it/news/tra-cielo-e-abisso--un-dipinto-inedito-di-francesco-cozza.htm>
