

## Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque Churches in Rome

Rome  
Pantheon  
Santa Maria ad Martyres

The Pantheon has Roman origins, having been built as a pagan temple between 117 and 138 under Emperor Hadrian. It was abandoned in the IVc. It is entered by a wide portico with 16 pink columns all of which are original except three. There is an inscription recording that it was built by Agrippa for the third time. The interior has a huge dome with an oculus at the crown. The walls are clad with polychrome marble and the floor is marble; most of this is original. Around the sides are bays with huge columns topped with Corinthian capitals.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 149-151

Rome  
Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura

This church, which is outside the city walls and adjacent to Santa Costanza, retains much of its original IVc form. Dedicated to a famous Roman martyr who was killed in about 304, it is a basilica with a rounded apse, and three aisles that are separated by re-used Roman columns with Corinthian capitals. The choir is decorated with a VIIc mosaic showing St Agnes as a Byzantine empress standing on a funeral pyre between the figures of two popes, Symmachus and Honorius I, the latter holding a model of the church. There is a long dedicatory inscription. The upper walls of the nave are decorated with paintings of popes and saints. A crypt houses the tomb of Saint Agnes.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 246-249 and 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 148-153

Rome  
San Clemente

This basilica is built over IVc basilica, a Mithraeum and a Ic BC Domus. All may be visited. The upper church is entered from an Atrium leading to the East door; at the East end of the Atrium and below it is a

wall behind which is the atrium of the earlier IVc church. The Atrium has columns with Ionic and Corinthian capitals. The interior of the church has a wide central nave and narrow side aisles with columns and Ionic capitals. The choir is decorated with a XIIc mosaic of the Tree of Life. Around the choir area and chancel are low sculptured screens. The lower church dates from the IVc according to an inscription by the entrance. The ceiling is somewhat lower than originally because of the construction of the Upper church. It had three aisles divided by XIXc pillars added to support the upper church. It is famed for its frescos which date from the V to the XIc and which include Christ's descent to hell, scenes of the life of St Clement and the story of St Alexis.

See 'St Clement's Rome' Leonard Boyle OP, 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 87-93, 'Gesta' Vol 20, No 2, 1961, 'Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes' Vol 45, 1982, 'Dumbarton Oaks Papers' No 30, 1976 and 'Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians', Vol 45, No 3, Sept 1966

Rome

Santa Costanza

This church is circular and was built as a mausoleum next to a funerary hall on the North side; the latter is now an overgrown ruin. The mausoleum was built in AD 350 on top of an earlier building. The interior comprises a barrel vaulted ambulatory round a high central dome. Both the dome and ambulatory were once decorated with mosaics. Only those in the ambulatory survive. They date from the IVc and illustrate grape harvesting, heads, birds, mythical figures, fruits and foliage. There are two small apses. These have mosaics from the V or VIIc and illustrate 'Traditio Legis' with Bethlehem in the background and 'Traditio clavium', Christ passing the Keys of Heaven to St Peter, with Jerusalem in the background. The ambulatory and the domed area are divided by pairs of Roman columns.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 249-252, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 61-65 and 'Dumbarton Oaks Papers', Vol. 12, 1958

Rome  
San Crisogono

The present church dates from the 1123; it is built above an earlier church that dates from the VIIIc; this, in turn was a development of a IVc church; below this are the remains of a Roman house. There is a XIIc bell tower on the South side. The entrance to the church and the interior were re-modelled in the 1623. It is in the form of a basilica with large antique granite columns and Ionic capitals. The floor has strikingly patterned Cosmatesque marble. Behind the XVIIc baldachin is a small mosaic panel depicting the Madonna and child; it is a late XIIIc work by Pietro Cavallini.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 263-265

Rome  
Santi Giovanni e Paolo

The early church was built in 398; it was restored twice in the Vc and again after 1048, when the bell tower by the South-west corner was added. The tower is built over the Temple of Claudius. The church plan is that of a basilica with three naves and a rounded apse. The apse has an open gallery with arches divided by slim columns and capitals. Below the apse, with access from the lane on the South side of the church, are a number of structures that date from the I & IIcs; these include a house with baths and shops and apartments. The West door has a marble lion each side of the base. The interior was remodelled in the XVIIIc. It retains the Cosmatesque marble floor. In the vestry to the left of the altar is a XIIIc fresco depicting Christ between some of the apostles.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 101-104

Rome

This church dates from the Vc; the evidence is a roof tile that now serves as a lectern; it has an Ostrogoth

San Giovanni a Porta Latina date stamp. The church was restored and remodelled in the XI & XIIc. The portico and the bell tower were added in the second restoration. In front of the portico is a IXc well head with the inscription: IN NOMINE PAT[RIS] ET FILII ET SPI[RITUS SANT]I and OMN[E]S SITIE[NTES VENITE AD AQUAS] followed by the carver's name: EGO STEFANUS. The church is roughly orientated West to East. The North-east corner of the nave and the polygonal apse and two side chapels are essentially Vc. Inside, the church is in the form of a basilica with a rounded choir. The aisles are divided by re-used Roman columns and capitals. The floor of the choir is of Cosmatesque style marble from the IXc. The altar is a re-used panel from VIIIc choir screen. Around the upper walls of the nave and the Triumphal arch are cycles of frescos with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, (the Creation & Fall of Man and Redemption & Renewal).

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 201 & 202 and 'American Journal of Archaeology' Vol 40, No 4, 1936

Rome

San Giovanni in Laterano

This large basilica, originally known as 'The Cathedral of Rome and of the World', was built in the late IVc as the seat of the bishop of Rome. It was built over the remains of a Roman house that belonged to the Laterani family; this is 5 metres below the apse; it later became a barracks for part of the Imperial Guard. retains fragments of its original IVc frescos. The Romanesque bell tower, to the right of the church, is built above the remains of the Temple of Claudius. The portico is Romanesque a fine central door guarded by two lions. The church was restored and remodelled several time from the VIIIc through to the XIVc. The interior was remodelled the early XVIIIc. The central bronze doors in the façade below the portico are the original Roman doors from the *Curia* in the *Forum*. The interior of the church retains the original floor plan. Parts of the original exterior walls were retained in the XVIIIc remodelling but they are not visible. The floor of the church is decorated with Cosmatesque marble. Only a few of the original columns remain; of these, two red granite shafts, originally from the IVc nave, support the triumphal arch. Four bronze columns beside the altar are also from the IVc church.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 41-44

Rome

San Giovanni in Fonte,  
Baptistery

The baptistery was first built in 432; it has undergone restoration several times since. It stands by the North-west corner of the basilica. It was to serve as the model for most early Christian baptisteries in Western Europe. It is octagonal with a cupola that is supported by eight columns with marble capitals that are on two levels.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 45-48

Rome

Santa Maria in Cosmedin

This VIIIc basilica was built over the Temple of Herculis Pompeiani. The central nave is divided from the side aisles by re-used Roman columns and capitals. There are three rounded chapels all built into the flat-ended apse. The floor is of fine Cosmatesque marble. The upper part of the nave and the Triumphal arch are decorated with XIIIc frescos. The choir has a mosaic showing the Madonna between two pairs of saints. On the triumphal arch are the remains of IXc frescos. There is a XIIc bell tower at the North-east corner and below the portico is an antique face on an ancient marble drain cover, the Bocca della Verita. Below the choir is a small crypt. It has three aisles and on the side walls are rows of shallow niches to house the many relics gathered from the catacombs and to make them accessible to pilgrims. The word 'Cosmedin' comes from the Greek meaning decoration.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 175-177

Rome

Santa Maria in Trastevere

This church is in the site of one of the first Christian places of worship in Rome. The present church which was built in the XIIc is orientated from East to West. The façade has a line of mosaics above the XVIIIc portico. They depict Mary feeding Jesus with ten women holding lamps; two lamps are out, perhaps to

indicate that the women are widows. On the right side of the portico is a Romanesque bell tower. Inside the portico and right doorway are numerous panels from a chancel screen. The interior is in the form of a basilica, with the aisles divided by large antique granite columns. The choir is decorated with mosaics that date from 1291 and which are the work of Pietro Cavallini. They illustrate the coronation of Mary who is surrounded by saints. To the right of the altar is Cosmatesque twisted column where legend records a well of oil springing up on the night of the Nativity.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 270-272, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 212 & 213 and 'Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes', Vol 33, 1970

Rome

Santa Maria Maggiore

This huge church is a remarkable blend of styles. The basic plan is that of a Vc church. The bell tower and the Cosmatesque marble floor are late XIIc. Much of the remainder is Baroque. However the triumphal arch is decorated with a superb mosaic that dates from the Vc. It illustrates biblical scenes. The mosaic in the choir dates from 1295 and illustrates Christ with Mary, his Mother. Below are scenes from Mary's life. Down each side of the nave there are panels with mosaics with Old Testament scenes; 25 survive, many in poor condition; others are lost. They also date from the Vc.

See 'Simiolus' Vol 4, No 3, 1972 'The Art Bulletin', Vol 64, No 4, 1979, 'The Harvard Theological Review', Vol 86, No. 2, 1993, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 73-89 and 'Gesta' Vol 16, No 1, 1977

Rome

Santi Nereo e Achilleo

This church was originally founded in the IVc and was dedicated to two 1<sup>st</sup>c martyrs. Their martyrdom is illustrated by XVIc frescos. The church is orientated from North-east to South-west. The church was rebuilt in the Carolingian period and restored in the XVIc but some IXc mosaics at the top of the cul-de-four choir vault were retained. They show Christ between saints

and angels. The church is in the form of a basilica. The pulpit, altar and choir screen are all finely decorated. There is a square tower at the South-corner.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 198-200 and 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 199 & 200

Rome

Santa Prasseda

This church was a IXc foundation. It was extensively altered over subsequent centuries but it retains the original plan of a basilica with the aisles divided by granite columns. The choir and triumphal arch are richly decorated with mosaics created by Byzantine artisans. They illustrate the elders and the elect looking down from a blue heaven. Below are lines of sheep, red flowers and palms. There is a small crypt below the choir. At the North-west corner is a bell tower that is scarcely visible from the street. On the East side of the nave is a side chapel, that of Sran Zeno. It is also beautifully decorated with IXc mosaics. The church is orientated from South to North. At the South end is the original doorway that led in from an atrium; the present door dates from the XVIc

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 68-71, 'Speculum' Vol 62, No 4, Oct 1987, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 207 to 212 and 'Papers of the British School at Rome', Vol. 57, 1989

Rome

Santa Pudenziana

This church has been developed over the centuries from a Roman secular building to an early Christian church before being converted to the present structure. The façade of this church dates from the XIXc but it retains a XIc frieze depicting both Prassede and Pudenziana, both 'saints' were declared invalid in 1969. The interior is in the form of a basilica. It was remodelled in the XVIc. The aisles are divided from the central nave by grey marble columns that are engaged within piers. The left aisle retains elements of the original mosaic pavement. The choir is decorated

with a IVc mosaic, but it has undergone restoration several times; as the result it is smaller than it was and much of it is not original. It illustrates Christ seated below a cross. To the sides are symbols of the evangelists and two female figures, who represent the Church of the Jews and the Church of the Gentiles. Christ is shown preaching to a crowd of people who are gathered around the sides of the choir vault.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 65-67, 'Vigiliae Christianae', Vol. 43, No 2, 1989, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 65-7 and 'Vigiliae Christianae', Vol. 46, No. 3, 1992

Rome

Santi Quattro Coronati

This church is named after four Roman soldiers who were martyred for failing to worship a pagan god. It is a huge church with a rounded apse that towers over the lane below. It is entered from below a IXc Carolingian tower and archway which leads to a XIc courtyard that is over part of the nave and aisles of the XIc church. To the right of the courtyard are four arches with columns from that church. The first IVc church was rebuilt in the early XIc. It has a wide porch and single plain door. The plan is that of a basilica. The aisles are divided by re-used Roman columns and capitals. The floor is decorated with Cosmatesque marble. There is a small crypt behind the altar. It is still a convent.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 93-95

Rome

Santa Rufina

This XIc church is part of a convent. The church was rebuilt in the XVIc and is now enclosed by the convent. Only the Romanesque bell tower is visible

Rome

This basilica dates from the Vc and is named after the original property owner prefixed by 'Santa'. It was

Santa Sabina

built over an earlier house or *domus*. It is entered from a long narrow porch. The central door, which is within a IIIc marble frame, has Vc carvings of biblical scenes. Inside, there is a very wide nave and narrow side aisles that are divided by large Proconnesian marble columns with Corinthian capitals; the columns are *spolia* from the IIc. Above these are arcades on each side of the nave. The floor is of polychrome marble set into geometric patterns. In the floor is the tomb of Santa Sabina. The choir is rounded and has a sculptured screen. On the rear wall of the nave is an inscription between two figures in mosaic that dates from the Vc. It records the foundation of the church in 442.

See 'Art Bulletin, Vol 26, No 4, dated Dec 1944, 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 169-174, 'Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft', 34, Bd. 2007, 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 89-90 and 'Gesta' Vol 34, No 2, 1995

Rome

San Sisto Vecchio

The first church was founded between 399 and 401 making it one of Rome's oldest churches. It was replaced by the present church before 440. The monastery was added in the XIIIc and was re-modelled again in the XVIIc, leaving only the apse and Romanesque bell tower of the original church. XIIIc frescos from the church have been conserved.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 203 & 204

Rome

Santo Stefano Rotondo

The church was built over a Roman barracks which were abandoned in the IVc and destroyed in the Vc. The church was consecrated before 483. It was redecorated in the VI and VIIcs. It has a circular plan with four side chapels. The entrance, on the North side, is through a small room or vestibule. The ambulatory is divided from the central area by columns, some of which are *spolia*, with Ionic capitals. The ambulatory is decorated with murals of the martyrdom of saints made by Nicholas Pomarancio. The central dome is supported by two huge columns

with Corinthian capitals. Fragments of the original mosaic flooring have been exposed in places. Left of the entrance is a chapel with a VIIc mosaic of two martyrs.

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 96-98 and 'The Mosaics of Rome from the third to the fourteenth centuries' pages 153 & 154

Rome

San Tomasso in Formis

The church is of no great interest. But the North gateway to the church has a fine XIIIc mosaic panel that is within a marble arch. The mosaic by Pietro Cosmati shows Christ seated between two freed slaves, one black and the other white.

Rome

San Venanzio

This small chapel is between the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano and the Baptistery. It was founded in the VIIc. It has a single nave and a short rounded choir. The choir is decorated with a mosaic that is dated to around 640. It shows Christ between two angels. Christ is holding his right hand in the Greek form of blessing. Below is a line of saints, martyrs and Mary. Below them is an inscription that commemorates the creation of a *martyiam* for Dalmatian martyrs. The triumphal arch has mosaic panels that show Jerusalem, Bethlehem and more martyred saints. The North wall has fresco fragments. In the North-east and South-east corners are two re-used Roman columns and capitals. Some steps on the left side of the nave lead to the remains of a IIIc bath house

See 'The Churches & Catacombs of Early Christian Rome' pages 47 & 48 and 'Canadian Art Review', Vol 23, No 1/2, 1996

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