

There are two further niches in the corner spans and four columns from different eras, of uncertain date but in any case originating from Roman monuments, which rise from the centre of the sacellum. Corresponding to these columns are four groups of three little columns bearing barrel vault arches. Seven little columns are made of brick, one, from the 300s, is made of granite and four date back from classical antiquity.

The octagonal tiburio added in renaissance times, is surmounted by the lantern. The sacellum also preserves some small sections of mural art from medieval Lombard times; frescoes by Bergognone, which decorated the lateral walls and were discovered in the 800s underneath subsequent re-paintings, were completely removed and can now be found in Brera. One of the niches features the figure of St. Dionigi, with a long pallium embellished with crosses, holding a book in the manner of an archbishop teaching the faithful. On the altar there is Agostino de Fondutis' Lamentation over the Dead Christ from 1483. It is precious group of 14 terracotta statues that form a choir intoning the hymn of pain with open mouths, surrounding the Anguished Virgin, kneeling down holding a waxen and rigid Dead Christ in the centre of the group.

The Lamentation is an expression of significant non-mannerist verism, with a variety of different behaviours vying to express the same feeling, depicted in a double arch, from the Virgin with the dead Child to the black mother with a live child.

The external decoration, in terracotta, consists of cornices of plant motifs and tondos with sculpted heads, and is typical of Milanese tradition.

BELL TOWER

The bell tower, built in the IX century in Romanesque style, has an axis parallel to that of the sacellum.

It is one of the oldest bell towers in Milan still visible in its original form: the structure is that of a simple square tower, with five meter sides divided into four orders.

The lower order opens up to the outside with narrow single lancet slit windows, the second from the bottom has wider lancet windows and two double lancet windows above.

The lower area houses a fragment of a Roman tombstone, a Roman, highly-corroded bas-relief and another bas-relief in Byzantine style, portraying two peacocks.

SANTA MARIA PRESSO SAN SATIRO

CHURCH

The Church of Santa Maria was built between 1476 and 1482 to safeguard a miraculous icon.

The celebrated miracle was the following: an image of the Virgin Mary, painted on the outside of the medieval chapel, was vandalised with a dagger and blood.

The fresco central to this miracle, which dates back to the XII century, can now be found at the high altar of the church. The initial work was commissioned by Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who is depicted together with his mother, Bona di Savoia, in the icon on the altar. However, work continued mainly thanks to the support of Ludovico il Moro and to donations from believers and various noble families.

The architect is believed to have been a young artist from Urbino named Donato Bramante, who had recently moved to Milan; Giovanni Battagio and Giovan Battista Amadeo also contributed to the work.

Despite having only a small space to

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work with, Bramante designed a large-scale monumental building: indeed the church comprises a longitudinal body with three naves of five spans each, and the central nave is double the width of the side naves.

The central nave and the arms of the transept, both covered by mighty barrel vaults with painted ceiling coffers, are identical in size, and at the intersection of the arms a hemispheric cupola rises, a typical Bramante motif.

The Evangelists are painted in the pentadentive circles, the work of a Lombard at the end of the 400s; De Fondutis was responsible for the decorative strip at the foot of the cupola, interspersed by terracotta tondos of the heads of Prophets.

To get round the inconvenience of the church not being allowed to have a real choir, due to the presence of Via Falcone, Bramante invented a pretend choir depicted in perspective and made of bricks, wood, terracotta and painted stucco, which simulates three bays identical to those in the central nave, in a space of only 97cm.

The solution, considered a predecessor of all subsequent *trompe l'oeil*, in its perfect perspective construction, shows the influence of the research previously carried out by Piero della Francesca and Donatello on illusionistic representations.

Work proceeded very quickly, so much so that the entire transept was already complete in 1483.

The church's minor naves and the vestry were designed during the same phase and built in the subsequent three years; the marble high altar is in neoclassic style.

VESTRY (now the BAPTISTRY)

An exceptional example of renaissance architecture is the octagonal Bramante vestry, inspired by late ancient buildings. The hall, entered from the right-hand nave of the church, was later transformed into a baptistry.

Its internal shape is traditionally Milanese, with alternating semi-circular and rectangular niches in the lower order, and a higher loggia with twin lancet windows, similar to those found in the chapel of St. Aquilino, in the church of St. Lorenzo. The balustrade in the loggia, made from metal and stucco, depicts various representations of vases and animals.

In the strip between the two ledges above the capitals and niche vaults there is a sequence of little musical angels and virile busts in terracotta created by Agostino De Fondutis.

In the centre of this harmonious environment is the baptismal font from the 500s. The shell that can be seen in the

niches in the vestry probably derives from Piero della Francesca's well-known Brera altar-piece, which Bramante studied carefully.

SACELLUM

This primitive cult building emerged from the wishes of Archbishop Ansperto da Biassono, probably in 879, on pre-existing Roman buildings, and was a sacellum dedicated to St. Satiro, brother of St. Ambrogio.

The building we see today stands on a plot of land surrounded by 4 roads: today's Via Torino, Via Speronari, Via dell'Unione and the medieval Via Falcone (probably already open in the year 1000).

This small part of the church was therefore created as a private chapel for Archbishop Anspoerto, inside his residence, together with a hospice for pilgrims and a community cell for monks from the St. Ambrogio monastery, who were called on to officiate.

The St. Satiro sacellum is unique from the perspective of architectural structure.

A square plan, it has a circular exterior from Bramante's time, but a Greek cross profile inside, placed within a square, pierced on three sides by semi-circular niches; the fourth side is the entry to the church.