

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND NEW DISCOVERY IN THE CHURCH OF S. ANTONIO DI PADOVA (NARDÒ, ITALY)

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Abstract

This contribution included research on the Church of S. Anthony of Padua in Nardò, located in Terra d'Otranto (now in Puglia, Italy), in a construction site that probably developed between the 14th and early 15th centuries, with other later additions. Between 2004 and 2016, through a series of state funding, the Church underwent a major restoration that revealed a number of previously unpublished and unknown aspects, with the help of a campaign of diagnostic investigations and georadar and laser scanner surveys. In addition, the search for documents on the pre-existence of an ancient Jewish synagogue on the site of the Church was facilitated by a number of investigations with digital instruments, which were reported in 3D reconstructions. The aim of this contribution is to confirm that the current digital tools used for diagnostic investigations are indispensable for research in the History of Architecture about Saint Anthony Padua's Church, especially when compared with bibliographic research and documents.

Keywords

Franciscan Church, Acquaviva D'Aragona, Digital surveying, Ground-penetrating radar, Jewish architecture, Renaissance.

1. Introduction

During the religious functions in the Church of S. Anthony of Padua in March 2002, some detachments appeared from the lateral pillars, a clear sign of a worrying collapse, which led to the first provisional works in the building and a project for its consolidation and its restoration. The first phase was based on knowledge of the building through in-depth bibliographic research and investigations with traditional but also digital technologies; strain gauges-deformometers were applied to some internal pillars, on the damaged vaults and on the external perimeter walls to monitor their micro-displacements; surveys on the flooring were carried out using ground-penetrating radar and diagnostic surveys were carried out with a videoendoscope in the pillars and in the elevated walls to analyse the materials' consistency.

A finite element modelling of the structure was also studied to allow the creation of a precise structural plan and in the final phase a laser scanning was carried out to have a precise graphic rendering of the Acquaviva Aragona Mausoleum, a unique work in the Salento Renaissance, to have a correct plan to

conservative recovery (Bianchini 2014). The subsequent restoration works – carried out in functional sections – from 2004 to 2016 has allowed an important monument to be returned to the community of Nardò and the whole of Puglia, but above all to analyse the different phases of the fifteenth- and seventeenth-century construction site of the Church, annexed to the convent complex, and to provide new and unpublished information on the synagogue and Jewish quarter, which evidently pre-existed the foundation of the Franciscan convent and church. (Da Lama 1714, Tafuri 1732, Coco 1928, Perrone 1980, Vetere 1984, Mazzarella 1999).

2. Historic informations: from Synagogue to Christian church.

The foundation of the monastery of S. Antonio di Padova in Nardò is closely linked to the events of the Jewish Giudecca, located in Nardò probably since the 12th century¹: the first mention of the Jews in Nardò dates back to the "Chronicon Neritinum", in which the emperor Henry VI in

¹ Jewish communities, in any case, had been present in the province for many centuries before.

1195 forced the Jewish Community of Nardò to submit to the dependencies of the abbey of "Sancta Maria de Nerito" (Falkenhausen 1906, Vernole 1933, De Pascalis 1999, Ghio-Lelli 2018). Even today in the surrounding area that connects Nardò with nearby Galatone, in the district called "Sant'Angelo", there is a rural road called "l'acqua degli Giudei". Their presence is however effectively proven by an Angevin document of 1376, which specifies that "li Giudei, confectieri, et corvisieri, non habbiano da buttare al pubblico, acque potride, et fedite, et altre bruttezze"². From these indications it's clear that the Jews of Nardò mainly worked as tanners and master craftsmen for the manufacture baskets, resident in the "Iudayca", located in the "San Paolo's Quarter", as confirmed by a parchment of 1427 preserved in the monastery of Santa Chiara in Nardò (Frascadore 1981; De Pascalis 1999). The Jewish colony further until it reached at least fifty dwellings between 1467 and 1469, when its members were asked to pay property taxes "come l'altri Cetadini" (Panareo 1942). Later, between 1480 and 1484, simultaneously with the depopulation of the city caused by Turkish incursions, the plague and the occupation by the Venetians, the number of Jews had now been reduced to a few families (Zuccaro 1901, Panareo 1942-43). In 1495, due to anti-Semitic disturbances that had broken out in Aragonese Spain and then throughout the Kingdom of Naples, the Neritine Jews were forced to flee to nearby Gallipoli, which was more hospitable to foreign communities, and - with royal privilege from Charles VIII of Valois - the abandoned Neritine Synagogue was donated to the conventual order of the PP. Franciscan Observants (Guerrieri 1900; Panareo 1942; De Pascalis 1999). The confirmation of this privilege was given by the papal bull of Alexander VI dated 16 March 1497 which permitted the construction of a monastery and a church (Guerrieri 1900).

2.1 The first Church: the celebratory temple of the *Acquaviva d'Aragona*, dukes of Nardò

Although Franciscan chronicles say that the church and convent were built "ex novo", (Da

Lama 1714, Perrone 1982), recent restorations have shown that - at least in some parts of the masonry - the current structures were built using materials from pre-existing buildings in the area.

There is really evidence from notarial transcripts that the presence of the Reformed Observant monks in Nardò was prompted by the presence in Naples of Charles VIII of Valois, who stipulated that "the Synagogue of the Jews should belong to the Monastery of Santo Antonio de Padoa", granting "six ounces of gold" annually to speed up its construction (Castrignanò 1930, Panareo 1942).

The model refers to the first Franciscan churches, following the typology of the "chiesafienile" or "chiesa ad aula" built in the Kingdom of Naples between the XIIIth and XIVth century, according to a wide declination dictated by the different local contexts, as the fourteenth century churches of San Francesco in Lucera and Gerace, and the church of S. Maria del Casale a Brindisi (Bozzoni 2014; Carannante 2023).

The layout of the church substantially reflects contemporary models of the "Regolare Osservanza" (S. Maria Casole in Copertino, S. Francesco in Castellaneta, S. Maria dell'Isola in Conversano, etc.), designed with a three-nave plan without a transept, of which the taller central nave is connected to the side naves by quadrangular pillars and round arches and high walls, surmounted by splayed single-lancet windows and wooden 'truss' roofs (Fig. 1). The presbytery and choir were totally excluded, which were evidently covered by a high cross vault, rebuilt in recent times.



Fig. 1: Nardò, the Church of St. Anthony Padua in XVII century (from Joan Blaeu, Nardò, ca. 1650)

² The word "confectiero" could refer to the art and technique of "packaging" skins, typical of the Jewish populations. The term "corvisiero" derives unequivocally from the Latin term "corbis", which means "basket". This etymology leads back to those who produced and sold baskets.

These works, conceived with the construction techniques and architectural typologies of the late 15th century, were first modified with 17th-century interventions and later incorporated with 18th-century stuccoes, as had happened with the works in the Cathedral, executed by architect Ferdinando Sanfelice during the episcopate of his brother Antonio bishop of Nardò from 1707 to 1736 (Gaballo et alii 2003, De Cupertinis 2014).

It is evident, however, that despite these artistic and stylistic changes, the church has substantially retained its original architectural and structural composition. This is confirmed by the fresco depicting St. Anthony of Padua, currently visible in the first chapel on the left, and the "sinopie" along the walls found in the same chapel, dating to the same period. The iconographic image of this fresco, similar to the polychrome stone statue by Stefano da Putignano, dates back to the first half of the 16th century, when the Paduan Saint was represented only with the book and the lily, without the presence of the Child Jesus. The roof of the religious temple also lacked the current coffered ceiling, which hides the wooden truss structure, in accordance with the custom of the time and other contemporary churches. It can also be assumed that the building was constructed in the late-Gothic style with the single-light arched and splayed windows at the top (later walled up), but still visible from the outside; the position of these windows still showed that the nave was covered by a lower roof than the one existing today.

Observing the current spatial and architectural organization of the apse and choir, also following recent restoration work, it was discovered that before the renovation works made in the 16th century with the arrival of the Reformed Monks, the apse was placed at the end of the nave, probably on the site where the pre-existing synagogue was located. The original project had planned here a rectangular space flanked on the sides by mouldings and at the back a large window to illuminate the room, then reduced by the Reformed to create the two choirs (lower and upper): it is very likely that originally this place was much higher than the present and that had once a cross vault with ribs, as it was in use in Franciscan churches of that period. The two polychrome stone statues of S. Antonio da Padova (1514) and S. Francesco d'Assisi, works by Stefano di Putignano, and the magnificent Mausoleum of the family Acquaviva (1545),

Dukes of Nardò and patrons of this building, are the only surviving works from the first period of the church.

2.2 *The Reformed Observant Church.*

The Church and Convent were modified again in 1599 with the arrival, again at the invitation of the Acquaviva family and the Universitas Neritina, of the new Franciscan order, the Observant Reformed Fathers (Perrone 1980). Initially, these monks were to move into the building of the erecting Incoronata monastery, donating their Convent to the Clarisse of Nardò (De Pascalis 2023); the nuns, however, renounced the move and the new monks decided not to move anymore, renovating the existing building. The first works did not substantially modify the ancient XVth century planning, except for the reconstruction of some altars according to late sixteenth-century models, during the great construction activity neritina workshops of Giovan Maria Tarantino, Spalletta and Pugliese (Maneri Elia 1989, De Pascalis 2001). In particular, we refer to the altars of St. Anthony of Padua (1637) and that dedicated to "Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio".

Substantial changes were still made during the priory of "Padre Serafino" da Nardò³, when - perhaps due to telluric events in Calabria in the mid-17th century - he demolished the old ceiling of the convent to make new cells and corridors, and he had the lunettes of the cloister frescoed, and gave a new organisation to the interior of the church, creating a dividing wall between the apse and the presbytery, in order to obtain two choirs, (lower and upper), and to be able to reconstruct a new 'altar display' in full Baroque style, erasing the backdrop created by the Acquaviva family Mausoleum (Perrone 1980, De Pascalis 1999). The work continued under the episcopate of Mons. Orazio Fortunato (1678-1707), when "Padre Serafino da Nardò" ordered the reconstruction of the ancient wooden trellis, and then placed the current lacunar coffered ceiling, which according to some was made for the Cathedral, but was then placed here due to a measurement error (Castrignanò 1930). At the same time, (1678-1680) the Prior had also had the perimeter walls of the main nave raised, and new windows were opened to close the existing

³ The prior's lay name was Scipione de Vito, who belonged to an ancient and very noble Neritina family.

15th-century ones, as can still be deduced from an analysis of the external wall structure, and from a reading of the 17th-century engraving by Joan Blaeu (c. 1650) that highlights the original openings (De Pascalis 1997).

All this general revision was completed during the episcopate of Monsignor Antonio Sanfelice (1708-1736), probably under the direction of Mauro Manieri⁴, brother-in-law of Commissary General of the Cismontani friars, “Padre Cherubino de' Pandi” of Nardò⁵ (Mazzarella 1999), and relative of Achille de Pandi, to whom the plaque in the first chapel on the right is dedicated, capitular vicar before the appointment of Monsignor Antonio Sanfelice as Bishop of Nardò (Mazzarella 1972). Sanfelice himself reconsecrated the building in 1710, as recorded in the epigraph currently located to the left of the side entrance door.

Also during the Baroque period, Padre Serafino da Sogliano, guardian in 1727, continued the work, completing the stucco decorations in the side chapels, definitively giving the monument its late Baroque character, before the new upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries.

With the suppression of the convents in 1866, other substantial changes occurred, transforming again the original configuration of the Church: in those years, the demolition of the altar of the “Nativity of Jesus with the Magi” is documented when the side door was opened (still visible today), whose the large canvas had been evidently moved on a wall in the Mausoleum Hall.

In addition, the documents preserved in the historical archives of the Municipality of Nardò show new subdivisions on the lower floor (bell tower and annexed rooms) and the upper floor (upper choir and terraces)⁶.

But the most radical changes occurred during the rectorate of Don Gregorio Gaballo, between the years 1932-37: although there is no reliable documentation, investigations have revealed approximate consolidations in the foundations (particularly on the corner area between Via S. Giovanni and Via Cairoli); considerable hollowing

out of pillars and the opening of new niches, as well as substantial painting renovations by the painters Gino Gabrieli, Gino Bove and Gino Buia, possibly under the direction of Michele Gaballo, according to the aesthetic and chromatic taste of the time, which significantly altered the original image.

In danger of being completely demolished together with the adjacent Convent in the 1960s, the Church remained without any intervention until 1984-1988 (except for the dismantling of the presbytery balustrade, reused for an altar mensa and the creation of a new marble floor around 1972-1975), when the first renovation work was carried out (work direction by Architect Nino Muci and Engineer Franco Guerrazzi), which led to the re-roofing of the pantile roof with the replacement of some original wooden beams and the insertion of new trusses. Foundation subsidence in 2002 and 2004, possibly caused by seepage during a flood, provided the impetus for the new phase of restoration.

3. *Survey of the masonry and 3D model of the Church: the study of structural forces.*

Before restoration work began, a campaign of preventive investigations was carried out. In particular, a number of soundings were carried out on the walls using a video-endoscope, thus analysing the constitution of the masonry ashlars made of limestone, characterised by high workability but also poor mechanical performance, due to the strong rising damp from the underlying ground (the geologists found through geological investigations that the water table was located just 3.00 ml from the church floor).

The mortar consisted of lime paste mixed with tuff sand: the load-bearing pillars and perimeter walls were built with normal boulders, and placed face to face. The transversal walls dividing the chapels, on the other hand, had sack masonry, with faces made of roughly squared elements and a filling layer of irregular elements of various sizes.

With the technical assistance of the company Aice Consulting of Ghezzano di Pisa, a three-dimensional model of the entire building was reproduced (Fig. 2), which made it possible - thanks to the equipment with 12112 nodes and 161 BEAM elements for the wooden trusses, and

⁴ The famous architect of Neritina origin seems to have participated in the rebuilding of the façade and, almost certainly, in the execution of the exhibition (Da Lama 1724) and the altar frontal on the presbytery of the church (Paone 1980).

⁵ His noble name was Mattia: he was born in 1654 to Giuseppe de Pandi and Antonia d'Orlando, and died in 1725.

⁶ Archivio Storico Comune di Nardò, *Division from Ospedale Sambiasi to Comune di Nardò*, Sez. LL.PP., XXX/66, s.c.

8035 BRICK elements with 8 nodes for the masonry - to analyse the mechanical resistance and constitutive relationships of the different materials for the various parts of the building. In particular, an orthotropic linear elastic material with an elastic modulus in the vertical direction (E_z) equal to twice that in the two transverse directions ($E_x = E_y$) was defined for the wall faces, for the cores of the pillars and for the vaults.

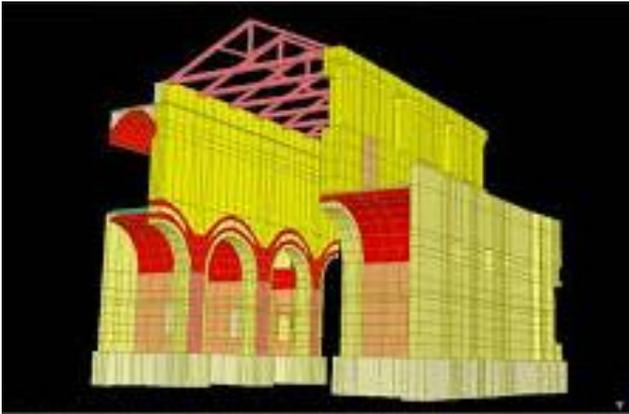


Fig. 2: 3D Model with finite elements about the Church of St. Anthony Padua (Aice Consulting – Ghezzano di Pisa)

The inner layer of the wall panels was schematized with a material of lower mechanical properties. Finally, other materials of low elastic modulus were defined to model the loose material of the vault filling, the foundation masonry and the timber of the trusses.

After conducting a static analysis under the action of its permanent and variable structural loads on the developed model, it was concluded that the failure was caused by the weakening of the limestone's mechanical strength due to rising damp, and by the crushing caused by the reinforced concrete curb built to replace the trusses in the 1980s. Moreover, the hollowing out of some pillars and walls to create new niches, the cavity created in a cross vault to fit a staircase providing access to the terraces, and especially the addition of two new windows on the façade along with the consequent closure of the only central large window, had caused serious issues with the structural conditions.

4. *The façade of the Church: the “new discovery”.*

Thanks to the GPR surveys, supported by researches on documents and postcards, it was

found that the façade analyzed by scholars and visitors was a distorted alteration of the original eighteenth-century configuration, when the large central window was tamponed, probably between 1866 and 1922, and on its sides two new large openings were created, erasing a part of the frescoes of the upper register (Fig. 3). Subsequently, the remaining parts of the original capitals, frames, friezes shell and lesenes were cut, including the frames that enclose the four frescoes set between the pairs of the same lesenas.

During the restoration, under the 18th century stucco of the central window, traces were also found of a pre-existing central “rose-window”, evidently cut and covered by the integration of the 18th century façade (Fig. 4).

Now, a meticulous and diligent philological restoration, which has taken into account the photographic documentation as well as the differentiation of materials and the regulations in force, has allowed to reconstruct the façade as it was conceived, under the supervision of the S.A.B.A.P. Puglia (2008-2010).

The current result has reconstituted the monumental but sober and austere façade, which fully reflects the principle of the conjunction between the Franciscan rule of poverty and the elaborate decoration of eighteenth-century Neapolitan taste.

The objective was clearly to rely exclusively on architectural elements for the compositional solution, echoing other local contemporary examples such as the facades of S. Trifone and S. Chiara, in the same city of Nardò, of S. Maria delle Grazie in Galatone. The façade is divided into two orders with a gable overhanging, in the center of which was framed a fresco depicting the patron saint. This is underlined by two protruding curbs near the risers, without further decoration. The two orders are tripartite and dotted with smooth pillars with Corinthian capitals, with the central ones doubled on both sides, giving more three-dimensional plasticity to the overall perspective.

At the centre of the upper order, a central rectangular window with a lowered arch in a serliana pattern, framed by mouldings and surmounted by a stucco bas-relief depicting a shell surrounded by small acanthus branches. Both orders symmetrically present, on each side of the central openings, two frescoes of Franciscan saints, now strongly degraded and unrecognizable.



Fig. 3: Nardò, project for the façade of Church of St. Anthony Padua. With red colour, the “new” windows in the years 1866-1922.

These frescoes were once framed by moldings, as can be seen in vintage postcards before they too were demolished, and have now been stylistically reconstructed but with different materials. Above each frescoed frame, there is now a shell similar to the original, with the same acanthus branches as the central window.



Fig. 4: Nardò, St. Anthony Padua's façade before the restoration (November 2004).

The main entrance is entered by a single portal without steps, which was once aligned with the street level but is now elevated to the churchyard level. It's framed by two side columns with Doric bases and Corinthian capitals similar to those of the pillars, crowned by an architrave with undecorated moldings. In the central part, there is a blank cartouche, while the central stucco trabeation reveals an interesting epigraph, slightly damaged by chisel marks, dating back to the original façade, bearing the inscription: "UNA EX SEPTEM ECCLESIIIS", indicating the inclusion of this building in the oldest Jubilee pilgrimage itineraries (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Nardò, St. Anthony Padua's façade then the restoration (March 2010)

5. *Ground Penetrating Radar application and archeological investigations in the Church.*

To support of the metrological investigations with laser scanners, it was also considered necessary to carry out explorations on the church flooring and on some side walls, where allowed due to the absence of frescoes, by means of GPR scanning: this methodology could have in fact allowed us to have additional informations to try to understand if remains of the ancient Synagogue were still visible in the walls of the current Church.

First, the GPR revealed that the Church had a larger number of tombs than that found in the existing archive documentation, published in XX century (Coco 1928): 30 tombs were found compared to the 12 tombs initially documented! Furthermore, following the removal of the modern floor and the discovery of new entrance

doors, it appeared necessary to carry out targeted archaeological investigations⁷.

The investigations were mainly aimed at creating a graphic and photographic documentation of the existing tombs, but also limited excavation operations aimed at recovering data useful to define the typology and chronology of the tombs as well as documenting residual traces of a settlement presence at the construction of the church. The use of the entire space below the nave, side chapels, and sacristy as burial rooms has been documented (Fig. 6)..

In total, 33 tombs were identified, of two different type of construction, for the construction of which a deep excavation was carried out until hitting the geological level, which has a clay matrix, with sand lenses, of yellow color. Some of the tombs were affected by modern waste material, the result of the work of remaking the various floor levels.

The first one, probably contemporary to the construction of the church, was made of slabs of "pietra leccese", whose strips were identified in different points along the nave, always at the same height. Subsequently, in a chronological phase between the 17th and 19th centuries, the second floor was made, in "cocciopesto".

This has a slight slope from north-east to south-west, with a colour that flows on shades of grey. In some parts, along the nave, traces of red colour have been preserved: it is difficult to say if it was initially chromatically homogeneous and then erased by wear, or if red was limited to certain specific areas. During the first half of the twentieth century, a floor was made of dark grey marble, some of which were recovered from the waste material found inside the investigated tombs and finally, in the 1970s, the fourth and last floor level was created, the one in marble, removed during the current restoration work.

The "cocciopesto" floor is crossed at its center, longitudinally, for the entire length of the nave, and transversally, from pillar to pillar, by a cut, cm 39 wide covered by slabs of "pietra Leccese", erroneously called "canaletta", whose function would seem to follow the initial orientation of the foundation of the Church.



Fig. 6: Nardò, Church of St. Anthony Padua, archeological investigation in a room-tomb

The excavation has allowed us to document in correspondence with the same, in the space below, the presence of a corridor for a length of 15.50 ml, but most likely will extend over the entire nave, divided by transverse walls to obtain individual tombs with a rectangular plan, measuring about ml 2.30 x 0.95. The same type of tombs was also found in the south-west corner of the nave, that to the left of the main entrance.

The elevation is made with a mixed construction technique: the upper half with regularly cut blocks, laid with little binder, while the lower half uses irregularly shaped stones bound with brown-greyish mortar, indicating the use of a strong component of 'bolus'. Only the two tombs located in the central part of the nave were built entirely with squared blocks. At mid height, three transverse blocks in "pietra Leccese" or limestone are inserted in all the tombs, crossing the space in its width. These have been preserved in some tombs, while in others are partially or completely broken, perhaps on purpose. The roof, made of squared blocks, is flat or inclined. Of the total number of documented tombs, most belong to the second type, which we could define as "chamber". They are burial rooms of various sizes which are accessed through a brick staircase. The roof is a barrel vault, always made with squared tuff blocks; however, as we have seen for the previous type, the elevation is in some cases very regular construction technique, in others instead it is made with irregular stones and mortar, with some fragments of ceramic glued.

⁷ These took place under the Scientific Direction of Dr. Arcangelo Alessio of the Archaeological Superintendency of Puglia.

Compared to the other tombs, numbers 7 and 10 differ, as they have platforms built in masonry on three sides. The coating of the entrance doors to the tombs is composed, in some cases, by a layer of *cocciopesto* that covers the actual coating made up of blocks of limestone or Lecce stone. It is absent in the tombs below the space of the side chapels. In cases where the *cocciopesto* is not present, the hatch is covered directly by plates of "pietra Leccese".

The most interesting news, to retrieve useful data on possible Jewish settlements, were found mainly in the tomb called 10. At the bottom of this tomb⁸, in fact, a part of a square or rectangular cut was brought to light, obtained in the geological layer, which developed under the wall structure of the tomb, particularly along the south-west side. Its filling has been influenced by numerous ceramic fragments, stone material, some metal and a few human and animal remains, as well as some fragments of plaster. The most accepted hypothesis is that a cistern was found before the church was built: considering its size, it is thought to be an ablutions basin, typical at the entrance of the Synagogues.

The ceramic material is chronologically heterogeneous: most of the fragments can be dated to an era between the 14th and 15th centuries: among these there are painted ceramic and polychrome glazed ceramics.

6. *Reconstructive hypothesis of the Synagogue: conclusions.*

The monastic complex of the Observant Franciscans was inserted into the urban fabric of the fifteenth century, fully reflecting the process of urban reorganization (De Pascalis 1999), probably started with the Angevins and completed at the end of the fifteenth century by the Aragonese and their faithful Belisario Acquaviva, first Duke of Nardò. The choice to settle on the area occupied by the presence of the "Synagogue", besides having a clear political and symbolic meaning, also had an indisputable social function in the radical and organizational renewal of the entire Giudecca. It was evident that - as in other cases of transformation of Jewish synagogues into Christian churches (Lecce, Trani, Cagliari, Messina, Syracuse, Cimitile, Naples, etc.) - even for Nardò initially it seemed to be nothing

left of the pre-existing Jewish remains remained, even considering that in medieval and Renaissance construction sites were also rarely used to waste building material.

The "damnatio memoriae", the cultural, social and political oblivion that struck the Jewish populations was the reason why the "signs" of their presence apparently had to be erased. However, even if the investigations have not recovered any evidence of inscriptions, epigraphs, or materials attributable to the Jewish presence, an careful metrological reading of the walls leads us to assume that the original arrangement of the ancient Synagogue has been preserved, especially in the Lower Choir, behind the high altar.

The perimeter walls are in fact very thick (about 1.70 m in the external wall on Via Cairoli and 1.20 m in the internal walls), which currently support a square vault where the Mausoleum of the Dukes Acquaviva is located; such an oversized consistency would justify the weight of a cross-vaulted roof (perhaps ribbed) that existed and was visible from the Choir, then demolished in the 1970s, whose remains were found during the restoration at the roof level (Perrone 1980).

This meant that the Choir was originally at a much higher height than it is today and that the Acquaviva Mausoleum was dimensionally taller than it is today: but the most unusual aspect is given by the fact that the orientation of the quadrilateral space⁹ on which the perimeter walls are set (some of which are "a sacco", mixed with stone and bole) have an evident rotation of about 27° to the north-east, compared to the axial layout of the entire building, which would be an incomprehensible irregularity for a Christian church built at the end of the 15th century with the appropriate criteria of accurate symmetry

The entire nave of the building, in fact, evidently designed from scratch in respect of the pre-existing medieval structures, developed from the current presbytery towards the main façade along 30° orientation axis to the North-East, evidently incorporating and hiding part of the ancient synagogue structures: this has led to a slight and evident rotation in the connecting walls, as can be deduced also from reading the current floor (Fig. 7).

⁸ This tomb is located in the central part of the nave, in front of the chapel of "SS. Cosma and Damiano".

⁹ The exact measurements of this large chamber are as follows: approx. 6.50 x 6.67 m.

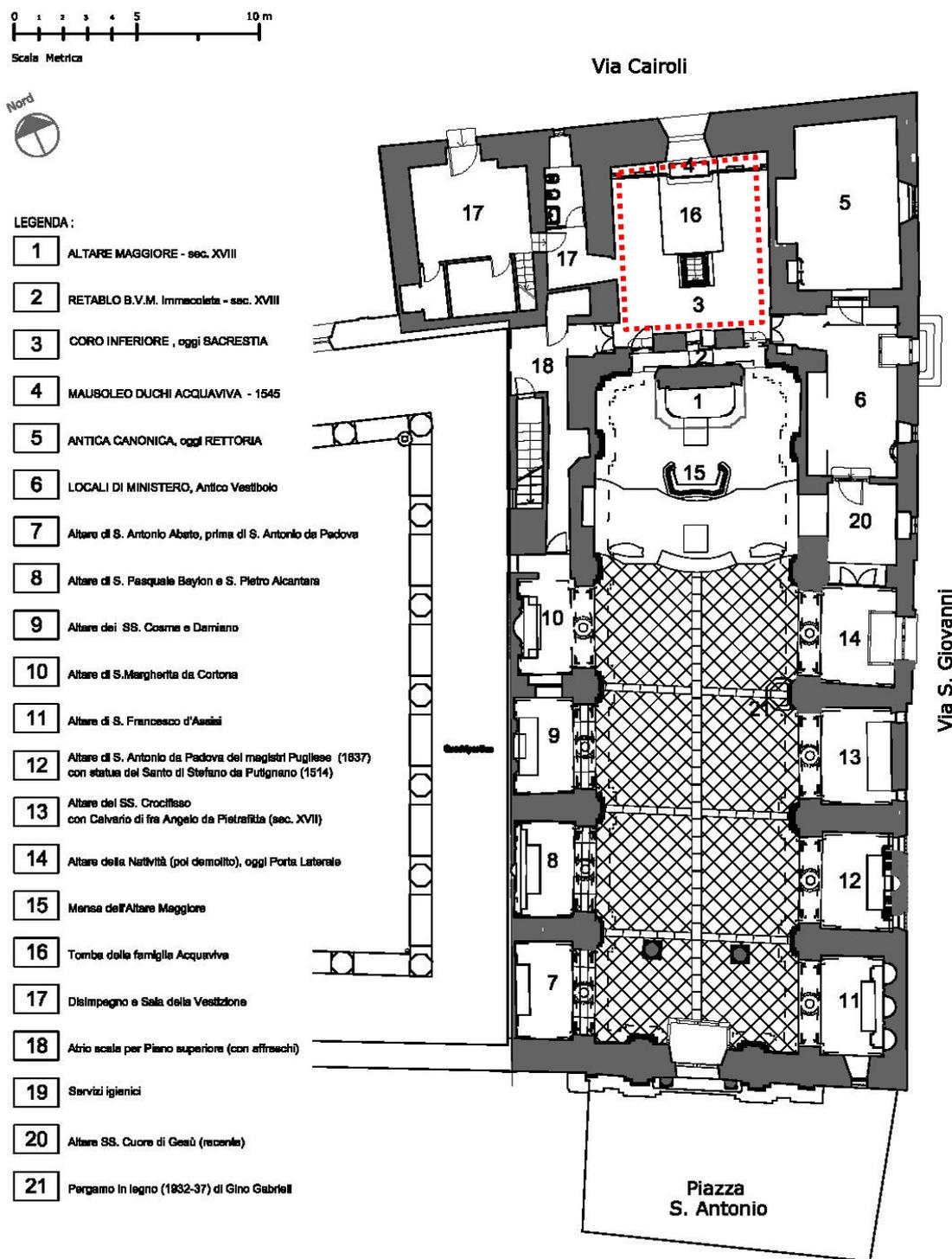


Fig. 7: Nardò, restauration planning about Church of St. Anthony Padua. With red colour, hypothetical area of the ancient Synagogue.

Moreover, medieval synagogues usually respected a well-defined spatial distribution: the niche for storing the Torah scrolls was oriented in

the direction of Jerusalem, and exactly 27° to the north-east; the main entrance was mirrored to the niche to avoid turning one's back to "the Ark

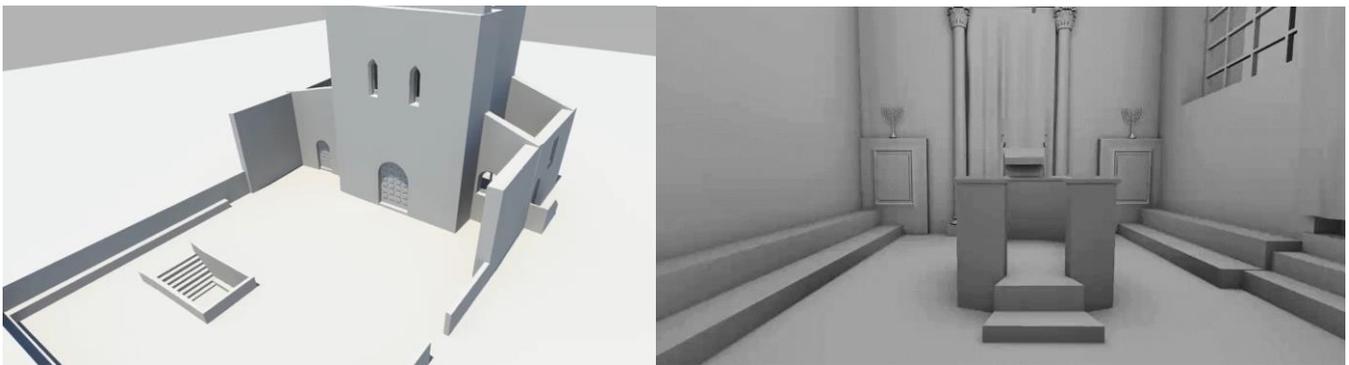
of the Aron”; there was a second, separate side entrance for women; a vestibule to avoid direct contact with the street, usually connected to a well or cistern for ablutions; often also a large portico (Scandaliato-Mulè 2002).

It is also known that in the mediaeval diaspora, the Jews could not respect with the Talmud's rule, according to which the Synagogue had to exceed in height all the other buildings in the surrounding area: this fundamental feature has been overcome by creating a height difference of about 6-7 steps below street level in order to maintain an internal height that respected the Talmud.

Now, the entire area behind St. Anthony's Church along Cairoli Street is raised by 1 meter, and during the preventive tests carried out in both the Rectory and Mausoleum, fill material was found. This would indicate that the

could be financed at a later date, then it would mean that the complex of the rooms behind it (currently Vestibule-Sacristy-Rectory) are nothing more than the pre-existence of the structures of the Nardò Synagogue complex.

The reconstruction of the 3D model (Valzano 2017), curated by Duilio Madaro and myself, has allowed us to hypothesise that the two large sarcophagi of the Acquaviva Mausoleum were placed in the sacred niche to preserve the Ark (Figg. 8-9). Moreover, the decision to place in that sacred place for the Jews the same monument which symbolised feudal power in Nardò would have demonstrated, with an architectural metaphor, the supremacy of the religious-political power of the Aragonese feudal lords on the economic power of the Jewish communities, transforming the new Franciscan building into its own ducal church, entrusting the friars of the



Figs. 8 -9: Reconstruction in 3D model about medieval Synagogue of Nardò
(design by Duilio Madaro and Giancarlo De Pascalis)

Acquaviva tomb chamber (later reconsecrated in the 19th century to the priors of the monastery) was also inserted starting from a sub-maintain a considerable height of the Jewish building that would not violate the prohibition of the Christian authorities to exceed a certain height above street level.

The archaeologists' reports have, moreover, recorded an important burial phenomenon in the basement of this Chorus - in addition to the already known central burial of the Acquaviva family - with five other tombs; not only in the tomb opposite the current chapel of the SS. Medici was a “basin” found, which corresponds longitudinally to a well found under the road surface during consolidation work, in the outer part of the Chapel of the Crucifix, along Via S. Giovanni. If the dates of the finds confirm this chronology, and if further in-depth excavations

convent with the care of their burial tombs.

In any case, the entrusting of the synagogue area to the monastery of the Observants ended - after the addition in the 16th century of the Dominican monastery, in the area adjacent to the ‘platea publica’ and the construction to the south-west of the Clarisse convent in the early 14th century, with the relocation of the new fortress complex to the south-eastern part of the city - a precise ideological project that assigned each convent complex a predominant role in the city's structure (cultural, social, economic-commercial, but also religious, symbolic and spatial), thus holding control over the entire Jewish Giudecca in the ideal triangle composed of the convents of S. Domenico-S. Antonio-S. Chiara, according to the typical canons of medieval urban planning (Guidoni 1982).

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