

The Icon

Why Madia?

The word "Madia" may derive from the Spanish "Almadia" that means "raft" or wood that is tied and carried along a river.

Historical information on the site where the Cathedral was built.

This Cathedral was built from 1742 to 1772 on a site which had been previously used by man for at least 4000 years. In fact, in the Bronze Age, some huts were built in this same place.

Then, 2500 years ago, the first tombs of the Necropolis of a Messapian* town were built. From that time this place became sacred and stayed sacred even when the main religion changed, from Paganism to Christianity.

Originally, a Pagan temple was located on the site; in 256 A.D. a Christian church was built instead.

In 1107, Bishop Romualdo started the construction of a Romanesque church. According to local tradition, the church could not come to completion because there was not enough wood to build the roof. In 1117 the wooden beams arrived at the seaport in the form of a raft which carried the Byzantine Icon of Our Lady with Child.

In 1742 the Romanesque church was demolished because it was unsafe and too small for the increasing population. Therefore, the new Baroque church was built

*Messapii: Ancient tribe, probably of Illyrian origin, who lived in the southern part of Apulia.

A pictorial series, made in 1742 by Michelangelo Signorile from Bari, shows the story of the arrival of the Byzantine Icon:

1st painting: In the middle of the night of the 16th of December 1117, an Angel (according to local tradition it was the Virgin Mary instead) appears in a dream to a pious townsman whose name is Mercurio. He is ordered to tell the bishop that the long-awaited wooden beams needed to complete the Cathedral will arrive soon at the seaport.

2nd painting: Twice the bishop does not believe him, so Mercurio goes to the seaport where he sees the raft. He goes back to the bishop to finally convince him. Crowds of people gather at the seaport to welcome the raft and the Icon.

3rd painting: The wooden beams and the Icon are carried to the Cathedral in procession.

4th painting: The wooden beams are used to complete the roof of the Romanesque Cathedral.

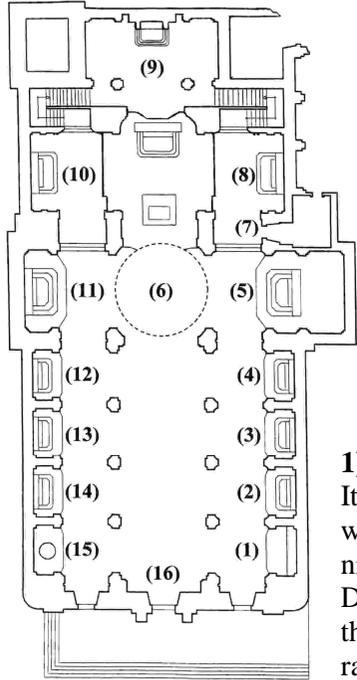


These paintings are very important because they show how the old cathedral was built; they are the only drawings showing the outside and the inside of the Romanesque cathedral. In the fourth painting you can see the "retablo," a sort of triumphal arch with 16 statues, built in 1501 behind the major altar. Ten of those statues are now placed on the Baroque wall outside the Cathedral, two others are placed on the façade of St. Francis of Paola's Church and other four statues were destroyed by a thunderbolt in the night of the 25th of December 1519.

Welcome to the Basilica dedicated to the "Madonna della Madia" - the Icon that came from the sea



Inside the Cathedral



1) Chapel of the Beams: It preserves some of the wooden beams that, on the night of the 16th of December 1117, arrived at the seaport in the form of a raft.

2) Chapel of St. Michael: Jacopo Palma, a famous Venetian painter also known as “the Young”, made the painting in 1625. You can see the Archangel Michael that chases away the devil.

3) Chapel of the Immaculate Conception: Bishop Macedonio (bust on the left) wanted the marble statue of the Immaculate Conception in 1623. The altar was made at the same time as the new Cathedral; the original one is in the sacristy.

4) Chapel of St. James: The Neapolitan Carlo Rosa made the painting in 1640-1645. You can see St. James who rides a white horse and changes the fate of the Battle of Clavijo in Spain (844 A.D.).

5) Chapel of the Holy Sacrament: This chapel is property of the Holy Sacrament’s Confraternity. This Confraternity was formed in 1513 and in 1612 the King of Spain, Philip III, gave it the name of Royal Archconfraternity. In the chapel you can see three paintings, made in 1755 by the Neapolitan Francesco de Mura: “The Sacrifice of Isaac” (oval on the right); “The Last Supper” (in the middle); and “The Supper of Emmaus” (oval on the left).

6) The Dome: Its height is 31 metres and the four Evangelists are frescoed on the sides of the base. They are recognizable from their symbols: a winged Man for St. Matthew, a Lion for St. Mark, an Ox for St. Luke and an Eagle for St. John.

7) Sacristy Entrance: On the top of the entrance there is a painting made in the 16th Century by an unknown painter. It came from St. Francis of Paola’s Church after it was closed (with the attached Convent) by a Napoleonic Decree in 1807. It shows St. Francis of Paola on his deathbed. Opposite this painting, there is another one, made in 1626 by Andrea Cunavi from Mesagne, and shows St. Charles Borromeo.

8) Chapel of the Martyrs: The chapel was commissioned at the beginning of the 19th century by Bishop Villani (bust on the right). He had some relics and put them in 58 drawers around the altar. The large painting was made by Jacopo Palma (the Young) called “Our Lady in Glory with St. Rocco and St. Sebastian” and came from St. Francis of Paola’s Church. Marco Pino da Siena made the painting at the top in 1570; it is called “The Circumcision”. The two paintings representing St. Mercury and St. Lorenz were made by the Neapolitan Giuseppe Cammarano ordered by Bishop Villani. For the description of the four paintings on the easels, see the back of this brochure.

9) Chapel of Our Lady of the Madia: It preserves the Byzantine Icon that arrived to the seaport, in 1117, on a raft. The altar was built with precious marbles that came from different quarries. The Neapolitan Andrea de Blasio made the silver frame and the silver imperial crown in 1720 and 1724. Around the chapel you can see six paintings made by Michele del Pezzo in 1798. The pictorial series called “The Virgin’s Stories” includes “The Purifying of the Virgin,” “The Annunciation,” “The Visitation,” “The Introduction to the Temple,” and the ovals “The Nativity of the Virgin” and “The Nativity of Jesus.” On the sides of the chapel there are two other paintings made by the Neapolitan Pietro Bardellino in 1788: “The Iconoclast campaign” on the right (*) and “The Arrival at the Seaport” on the left. The two statues on the sides of the altar represent the Archangel Michael and St. Joseph; they were made in 1752 by Giuseppe Sammartino,

better known for his “Veiled Christ” (Sansevero Chapel, Naples). The little organ was built in 1762 by Pietro De Simone (junior).

10) Chapel of St. Anne: The painting in the centre (by an unknown painter) shows St. Anne on her deathbed with relatives and St. Michael around her. On the sides there are two oval paintings: St. Zachariah and St. Elizabeth (St. John the Baptist’s parents) made by Pietro Bardellino.

11) Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary: In 1748, the Neapolitan Nicola Cacciapuoti painted “The Our Lady of the Rosary” showing Our Lady with some saints and purgatory souls. He also painted the smaller paintings around it that represent the Mysteries of the Rosary: the five Joyful Mysteries on the left, the five Sorrowful Mysteries on the right, and the five Glorious Mysteries on the top.

12) Chapel of The Redeemer: In this chapel there is a painting called “Jesus and Zebedee’s Sons” by Giovanni Bernardo Lama and Silvestro Buono made in the second half of the 16th Century. In the painting, the mother of the Apostles James and John asks Jesus to put her sons on the left and right of His throne; the other Apostles become angry at the two.

13) Chapel of the Crucifix: The crucifix was made in the 16th Century. It was probably created by Filippo Mitricchio from Monopoli (or possibly by a Sicilian artist). The body of Jesus is made of plaster reinforced by paper and cloth in some parts; the veins are made of string while the head and the fingers are made of wood.

14) Chapel of St. Francis of Paola: The marble altar was built with the new church and then, after the Napoleonic Decree in 1807, the painting (17th Century) and the wood decorations (1705) arrived from the church of St. Francis of Paola.

15) The Font: It was built in 1769 and the painting of St. John the Baptist, placed on the wall, was made at the end of the 16th Century by an unknown painter.

16) Pipe Organ: The existing organ replaced the original one in 1922.

(*) **Iconoclast campaign:** To defeat idolatry, in the Byzantine Empire people were ordered to burn paintings representing Saints.