

In the Chapel of Confessions between the two windows there is the painting of *The Holy Family and Saints Francis Romana and Eurosia*, which has also been arranged above the main altar. This painting is by Giandomenico Tiepolo and dates from 1777. The artist compromised between the Rococo style, which he had inherited from his father Gaimbattista and had always followed (father and son had worked together in Spain shortly before) and the new rules of Neoclassicism. The angel in the foreground was added by G.B. Mengardi, a supporter of academic Classicism.

On the right of the painting there is a bronze gate of exquisite workmanship, which can also be found on the main altar. This work was signed: IACOB(US) GABAN (US) FECIT - 1747. In front on the left, there is a painting of the *Martyrs of Saint Stephen*, which is considered to be the work of Stephen dall'Arzere, one of the most important Paduan painters of the 6th century.

On the right we can see the first of four wood panels in the church of Saint Nicolò. These are the only examples of this kind of art in Padua. They have been attributed to G.B. Vian, also known as Vianino, from Cremona who was born in 1564; however, there is also evidence of the work of an artist from northern Europe in the panels. They represent *Saint John in the desert*, *Saint Francis with signs of the stigmata*, *the Bilocation of Saint Anthony* and *Saint Bernardine healing a king*.

The remains of a 5th century Annunciation are to be found in the arch that leads into the apse on the right. The author of this painting is unknown. Also to be admired in the apse is a *Madonna with Child* in polychrome terracotta and although Bellinati has some doubts, it is believed to be the work of Giovanni da Pisa in the 5th century. This work combines an unusual elaboration of styles, mixing Gothic and Renaissance elements. On the right in the wall there is a bas-relief of the same period by an unidentified artist.

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In the central apse the main altar is set in the foreground. It was recovered by the restoration work from the previous Baroque altar; as were the Tabernacle and the base of the Madonna in terracotta. In the background there are the pulpit chair, marble seats and the Crucifix from the 1970's. The two decorated wood panels date from the 17th century. The fresco on the

roof of the apse depicts *The Eternal Father* with the *Madonna and Christ*; due to its poor condition, it is difficult to identify the author.

Turning our back to the altar, we can see from here a large painting above the main entrance of the *Madonna with Child and several Saints*, including Saint Anthony and Saint Nicolò. It was completed between 1680-82. As the paint has deteriorated with time, it is not possible at present to identify the author, although it was obviously the work of a talented painter. In the apse on the left there are the remains of an 8th century fresco.

On the way back towards the entrance there is a valuable table with Saint Liberal painted on it. It is believed to be the work of Jacob da Montagnana and dates from 1458-1651.

Above the side door there is a 6th century *Madonna with Child*. The head of an angel above the holy water stoup seems to be the work, as are many others in the church, of Giovanni Bonazza, one of the most interesting Veneto artists of the 8th century.

Before you leave, you may be struck by the fresco remains high on the right. The lower one represents the *Crucifixion*, while the upper one is the *History of Saint John the Baptist*. As Bellinati has pointed out, the works were requested by Marco Forzaté in his will in 1372. Until 1963, they remained covered by a Baroque altar and it was only then that it was possible to make out the damaged writing of the following sentence: HOC OPUS PINXIT GERARDVCIVS DE REGIO, indicating that the work was carried out by an artist who was in Padua between 1353 and 1379 in the nearby district of Saint Andrea.

A fine example of contemporary art is the stations of the Cross, completed by the Paduan artist Paolo de Poli on enamelled bronze in 1968.

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J. da Montagnana: Saint Liberal

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PADUA

The Church of S. Nicolò

A brief account of its History and Art

HISTORY

The Church of Saint Nicolò may certainly be considered one of the oldest in Padua and one of the first dedicated to Saint Mira. Although the first documentary evidence of the Church dates from 1088 – the year in which the Bishop of Padua, Milone, gave the church to the monks of Saint Peter – recent restoration work has revealed the presence of foundations from a much earlier period. These foundations, which are in the same place as a chapel dedicated to Saint Nicolò – the patron saint of sailors of whom there were many at the time in Padua – are probably even older than 1087, the year in which the remains of Saint Nicola were transferred from Bari.

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In the following centuries, the Church of Saint Nicolò is frequently mentioned in documents. As early as 1178, based on the new boundaries drawn up by Bishop Gerardo, it was counted as one of the parishes in the city. From that moment on, we know of the presence of a cemetery on the site of the present church courtyard and that many noble families, who had linked their names to the church for centuries and who had donated many works of art, were buried inside the church. Some of these families still live in Padua and among those linked to the church are: Forzaté; de Roberti; Livello; Cavalli; Borromeo; Sala; Dondi dall'Orologio.

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Documentary evidence from 1305 reports the first of many restorations that Saint Nicolò underwent over the centuries. A Pastoral Visit in 1546 talks about the existence of 11 different altars which each of the above-mentioned families wanted for the church. These altars were divided between the three naves that existed at that time and which were separated longitudinally into two sections, one for men and one for women, by a low wall that crossed the central nave. On the orders of Bishop Ormaneto, the wall was demolished in 1571 and the pillars that divided up the naves were replaced with the present Tuscan columns.

The Baroque details were added between 1660 and 1680; a period, in which radical alterations were made

to the medieval structure, including the knocking down of the apses – they have now been rebuilt – so that new altars could be installed and the church could be separated from the building behind. Finally, the baluster was placed in front of the main altar.

ART

Even the external part of the Church of Saint Nicolò shows the signs of the vicissitudes that the building went through over the course of the centuries. The prevalent and original Roman structure reveals many additions and modifications that were carried out. Examples of Gothic art can be found on the facade (and also inside) with a series of small acute arches that decorate the walls above the central rose window and the bell tower with its acutely arched double lancet windows.

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The forecourt was only added after 1367 to provide space for the Forzaté's family chapel as can be seen by the small paving stones set in the wall outside, which depict the family stem: a galloping deer and a flower. Evidence that it was built after the original church can be found two metres from the corner on the left where there is the corner consecration stone – now hidden – set in the stonework, which documents the date of this



Anonymous: Madonna with Child with Saint James and Saint Leonard on either side.

event. The addition of a fourth nave, originally destined for use by the noble families, is also evident on the right of the facade. Today, only slight traces remain of the frescoes that run along all the small arches of the facade and that depicted the stems of the city's noble families. There are, however, no traces left of the niches with their arches and columns that lined the front wall of the bell tower in the 15th century and were removed in the 19th.

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At the main entrance you pass through the portal, which was built on at the end of the 15th century. Designed in the Lombardesque style stone from Nanto, it was restored in 1988 and on the inside of the arched gable you can see a depiction of *Saint Nicolò*; above this there are paintings of the *Eternal Father* and on either side the *Annunciation*. What can be seen inside is the result of a long and careful restoration that lasted from 1966 to 1971, which aimed to return the internal part of the church to its original Roman design, while retaining all the additions and modifications up until the Baroque era. The high vault, in the shape of a cross with its terracotta ribwork that was set on the buttress, is from the 4th century and replaced the original wooden roof cover.

In the first chapel on the right, there is a painting of *Saint Agnes in Glory*. It came from a church nearby dedicated to the Saint, which has since been pulled down. The author has never been identified, but it has been attributed to a Paduan artist of the 7th century.

The next chapel, the Chapel of the Baptistry, used to be the Chapel of the Catechumens and therefore had its own entrance. In the foreground there is a valuable baptismal font from the 6th century, while in the background there is a 4th century triptych hanging over a sarcophagus. At the end of the 14th century the bodies of Giordano and Marco Forzaté were buried in this late Gothic sarcophagus made from red broccatello marble and during the 1933 restoration their bones were recovered. Their family stem, which we have already pointed out in the forecourt, is depicted in the centre of this work of art. The triptych above shows the *Madonna with Child with Saint James and Saint Leonard* on either side; it is a rare work of art for both the quality of the painting and its use of light.

This work of art over the years has been attributed to many different authors; at the moment Lucco argues



G.D. Tiepolo: The Holy Family and Saints Francis Romana and Eurosia.

that it is the work of an unknown artist, several of whose work have been identified in the Paduan area. The author was trained in the Bellini school, but was also connected to Jacob of Montagnana.

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Moving on towards the back of the church, we enter the first of two chapels that were once reserved for the nobility. They were added to the original structure and separated from it by a series of small arches, similar to the kind that can be found in the Chapel of the Organ.