

SPRING FAI DAYS 23- 24 March 2019

Rediscovering the Virgin Mary : a journey through the Virgin's holy icons in Aversa



A tour itinerary led by the students of Aversa schools

- *Santa Maria a Piazza*
- *Santa Maria del Popolo*
- *Santa Maria of Cappuccinelle*
- *Saints Filippo and Giacomo*
- *Church of the Purgatory Souls*
- *Santa Maria degli Angeli*
- *'La Maddalena' Park*
- *Religious tradition : Edicole Votive*





PORTA NAPOLI- ARCO DELL'ANNUNZIATA-AVERSA

AVERSA :

THE STORY OF A HUNDRED CHURCHES

THE OLDEST CHURCH IN AVERSA : SANTA MARIA A PIAZZA



Santa Maria a Piazza's Church was built in 1339. The Church represents **Aversa's heart**, in fact it was the main center where the social, economic, political and religious life developed in the past. The Church is characterised by many styles: **Norman, Gothic, Romanesque, Byzantine, Arabic and Longobard prevalence**. The Church has a tuff facade with three portals. On the right, incorporated into the structure, there is a bell tower that has remained unfinished. Inside we can admire "Nicola Simonello's tomb plate", an eighteen-century altar with the "Madonna with Baby

Jesus" and some frescoes as "Saint Lucia", "Madonna enthroned with Baby Jesus", "Crucifixion" and "Shepherd's adoration". The Church is characterised by unusual symbols: a cross "camata", an overlap of two crosses, a star inscribed in a circle, a lorenge ad a simple cross. By these symbols they wanted to represent what it is said in the swntence: "Jesus, Father's son, created the Earth and the sky".

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DEL POPOLO

The Church Santa Maria del Popolo is located next to the Monastery of San Domenico. Here the Attorney decided to build a church called Chiesa del Monte di Pietà. Later the icon of the Virgin Mary was moved into this building that was started and never accomplished. In 1599 the Chapel was completed and took the name of Santa Maria del Popolo.

In 1740 the surrounding lands were bought and the church was amplified and decorated with highly refined stuccos probably realized by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro together with the facade. Inside we can see the remarkable polychrome floor realized by the Neapolitan Giustiniani





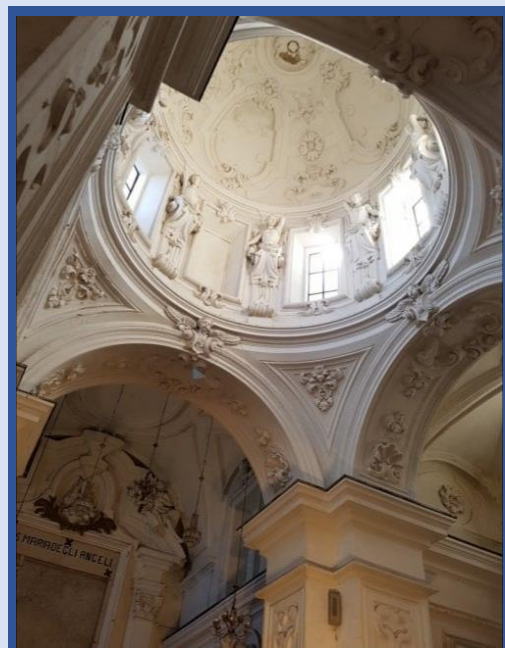
SANTA MARIA DELLE CAPPUCCINELLE

The origins of the **monastery** are not certain, it is known, that at the beginning, it was a small conservatory, a monastic house where women retired to lead a life of penitence and contemplation but without seclusion. Most likely, the foundation of the conservatory dates back to XV century. The amplification works of the monastery and the church were realized by an Aversan citizen ,Vincenzo Dragonetti , and favoured by the Bishop Bernardino Morra with the consent of Pope Clement VIII. As for **the Convent** it remained a conservatory until 1680 when Pope Innocenzo XI transformed it into a cloistered monastery. Later, a further amplification was realized thanks to the Prioress, Serva di Dio Suor Maria Gabriele dè Martini. The works started in 1746 with the restoration of the church and

the amplification of the Monastery also thanks to the intervention of Carlo di Borbone and of Queen Maria Amalia and other noble benefactors. Nowadays the convent includes an entrance with a small square in front of it. The access to the vestibule is possible thanks to five stone steps; on the left we can find the access to the parlatory. From this, an access takes to the double portico between three tiers of pillars. On the left of the portico there is a small courtyard that is the original heart of the convent. From the courtyard we can go up to the bell tower of the church. The convent is composed of a central rectangular garden and it is surrounded by a portico with round arches . From the portico it is possible to access to refectory with the kitchen; in the north of the garden there is a rustic garden. From the garden you can access to the nuns' accomodation with windows surrounded by Baroque stucco frames. In the corridor there are the nuns' cells.

SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI

The Church Santa Maria degli Angeli, probably founded by S. Bonaventura, is located next to the Aragonese castle and is a splendid example of Baroque and



dates back to the XIII century due to the presence of Romanic elements. In the past it hosted the Congregation of S. Maria del Gonfalone. The facade presents some elements of Borrominian inspiration ; above the stone portal there is a relief of Madonna del Gonfalone. Next to the facade there is the bell gable tower . Inside you can see side chapels with polychrome altars. The transformation of the church involved the participation of Francesco Solimena into the Baroque style. Solimena is also the author of the extraordinary canvas La Madonna consegna a S. Bonaventura il gonfalone del Santo Sepolcro.



CHURCH OF THE SAINTS FILIPPO AND GIACOMO



The Church of the Saints Filippo and Giacomo is a complex including two churches : “**La Parrocchiella**” and **Madonna di Casaluce**. They are located one opposite the other at the end of Via Roma

LA PARROCCHIELLA

The origins of the church are uncertain but most likely it is the result of the transformation of the ancient Sedile di S. Andrea. It is also called “ **La Parrocchiella**” for its small size. The facade is in XVIII style and includes some

elements of Baroque and late Baroque with side columns. On the right side you can see a moon-shaped window and the bas-relief representing the *Madonna del Suffragio*. The church has a unique nave with side chapels and altars. In the under- arch apse there are traces of a fresco and a stucco frieze with angels and the symbol of Eucharist. The majolica floor is decorated with black and blue motifs and was probably originated from one of the most famous Neapolitan manufacturing. On the left side of the main entrance there is the **Chapel of Congrega delle Anime del Purgatorio** with a central and two side altars. This chapel represents the devotion of people from Aversa to the Purgatory souls also called “ *anime pezzentelle*”. Some poor people were allowed to bury their dead here and share the tomb with other unknown dead people. A polychrome marble balustrade separates the chapel from the church with a small brass gate dating to 1776 . On the altar of the left wall there is a representation of the *Annunciazione* (XVII). On the central altar a canvas with *Madonna Addolorata* (XVIII). It is an example of Baroque and it is completely covered with white stuccos dating to the half of the XVIII century.



MADONNA DI CASALUCE

The original nucleus of the church was a chapel of the castle built by Carlo II d'Angiò in the XIV century. Pope Celestino V was entrusted the care of the Church and the Fathers Celestini were hosted in the castle. On that occasion the chapel was amplified and restored. The denomination Madonna di Casaluce is due to a very ancient Byzantine icon of the Virgin with Baby painted probably by S. Luca. The legend says that it was found abandoned in a small rural house and suddenly became so bright that all around was illuminated. According to the tradition some refugees found shelter in the town of Casaluce and they brought the icon with them and left it there. Nowadays the icon is exhibited alternatively in Casaluce (Santa Maria della Neve)

and in Aversa (S. Filippo e Giacomo). Realized originally in gothic style , the church is now in baroque style. The change was also due to the earthquake of 1694 and the damages of the World War II in the roof and the ceiling. The facade is divided in two orders : the superior, where you can see two round windows , shell-shaped stuccos or representing the emblem of Celestino's Pontificate and Fathers Celestini ; on the inferior order there are two recesses with two stucco statues representing S. Benedetto and Celestino V and finally above the entrance portal there is a bas-relief of the Virgin with Baby. Originally, the bell tower had three floors and recalled the Arabian style for the presence of a dome on the top where a lamp was kept lit during the four months of the presence of the Virgin in the church. After the earthquake in 1980 the most remarkable part of the



church was damaged. Inside the church there is a unique nave. On the side walls there are two huge recesses including pictures ,altars and frescos . The ceiling has a ruff truss made after the earthquake but originally there was an oval image of the Virgin and the Saints Filippo and Giacomo. On the right of the altar there is a canvas representing S. Benedetto and his disciples probably dating back to the XVIII century. On the inside facade, located on the mezzanine there is a precious carved golden organ dating to the XVIII century and produced by De Martino . The marble floor, instead, dates back to the XX century.

LA MADDALENA

In the past Aversa was the seat of seven psychiatric hospitals that hosted people suffering from mental illness. The most famous is La Maddalena that is still surviving today. It was founded in 1813 by Gioacchino



Murat who decided to apply the French Revolution reforms. That's why the first psychiatric reform was introduced and Murat decided to establish the first reformist asylum in Europe. Maddalena Asylum was firstly a leper hospital, then became a convent guided by Franciscan friars. In the cloister built in 1400 there are some frescoes representing S. Francesco da Paola's life. One of the most representative elements is the surrounding wall that constituted the material separation between the real world and mad people's world. In 1978 **Basaglia Law** was issued: it stated the closure of asylums which were abandoned. The

mental patients that had been chased away, didn't find their freedom because they were persecuted or closed in house families, who worked as asylums as well. Nowadays the building is unused but there's a project called "**La Maddalena che vorrei**" (the Maddalena I would like to have) meant to regenerate the huge building rich in treasures of artistic interest and the wonderful gardens surrounding it. Mr Fortunato Allegro, promoter of lots of important initiatives to preserve the historical and artistic beauties of Aversa, in our interview declared: "It's a 17 hectares area that should become a public park with the historical archive in order to remember all those people suffering from mental illness".



RELIGIOUS TRADITION IN AVERSA : EDICOLE VOTIVE

Aversa is famous for its religious tradition and its one hundred churches, for its convents and monasteries but during the Middle Ages a new form of devotion was introduced, the so called **Edicole Votive**. They are a sort of recess in the wall located along the streets where icons of the Virgin

Mary or other Saints were painted and visible to everybody. It was a way to keep the faithful in direct contact with God or the Saint Patron; the 'dialogue' took place outside the church and in total meditation and freedom from priest and congregation. It was a place where the protective force was accessible in any moment of the day and the night for those who wanted to pray or just meditate, confide pains and ask for clemency. They were located on the corner of the streets, on the crossroads of dusty country roads in holes created on the house facades with candles lit to pay homage to the Saint or the Virgin. In the past there were lots of Edicole Votive in Aversa and many can be seen also today. Some of them have been reworked and restored, the historical image has been sometimes replaced by framed pictures of saints. Some of them are armoured to avoid the attacks of the vandals. Unfortunately, this historical- cultural heritage is almost going to disappear under negligence and indifference of people.





Breaking Views

Reading, writing, expressing ideas, reflecting on issues... all this inspired our magazine in English. An eye on reality, another on our minds and hearts.

“If a story is in you, it has to come out”

~ William Faulkner