

a cura di
STEFANO BERTOCCI
FEDERICO CIOLI

Franciscan Landscapes

*Conservation, Protection and Use
of Religious Cultural Heritage
in the Digital Era*

vol. 2



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This volume collects the papers presented at the concluding conference of the European project 'F-ATLAS: Franciscan Landscapes: The Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain' that took place in Assisi, May 11-13, 2023.

The publication underwent a peer-review-based acceptance and qualitative evaluation procedure entrusted to the conference's Scientific Committee using the double peer-blind review system.

F-ATLAS CONFERENCE – Franciscan Observance Landscapes, Assisi, May 11-13, 2023.

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'F-ATLAS – Franciscan Landscapes: the Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain' project was funded in 2020 by the JPICH 2019 Conservation, Protection and Use Call.

Project Leader: Università degli Studi di Firenze.

Principal Investigators: ISCTE Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Universitat de Barcelona, Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

Associate Partners: ICOMOS Portugal, Sisma srl, Regione Umbria, Direção Regional de Cultura do Centro, Provença Serafica di San Francesco d'Assisi dei Frati Minori.

in copertina

Façade of the Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi (Italy). Drawing by Stefano Bertocci.

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Dipartimento di Architettura
Università degli Studi di Firenze
via della Mattonaia, 8 Firenze 50121

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ISBN 978-88-3338-222-7

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THE 'BATTENDIERO' CONVENT IN TARANTO.

A CHARACTERISTIC SITE OF THE CAPPUCCINI FRIARS

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Abstract

The Order of Cappuccini Friars was founded in 1525 by Friars from the Franciscan Osservanti and spread throughout Europe in about fifty years. The first Cappuccini site in Taranto dates to 1536, followed by the construction of the large convent in 1556. In addition to preaching, the Cappuccini Friars in the Ionian capital were dedicated to preparing wool and fabric to make their clothes. A '*gualchiera*' was founded in 1597, not far from the central convent, on the Mar Piccolo at the source of the Cervaro River. The '*gualchiera*' was a building where the cloth was washed, and wool was degreased, beaten, and firmed; it is precisely from the operations of winning wool and material that the Italian name '*Battendiero*' derives. The convent is on two levels: on the ground floor, there are rooms for communal activities (kitchen, refectory), storerooms and a small church, and, on the upper floor, there are 12 cells. This contribution aims to describe a singular Capuchin site (the fulling mills managed by the Order are very rare in fact) especially in the current state with the structure managed by private individuals and difficult for public use. This article, therefore, has only the claim to provide the scientific community with the knowledge of an O.F.M. Cap site. outside the more well-known Franciscan circuits.

Keywords: Cappuccini Order, Battendiero Convent, wool beating.

opposite page

Fig. 1
Detail of the map of G. Ottone di Berger, from: T.M. D'Aquino, *Delle Delizie Tarentine*, Naples 1771.

Fig. 2
Plan from: G.B. Gagliardo, *Descrizione Topografica di Taranto*, Napoli 1811. In below: detail of the area with the Convent of Battendiero.

1. The Franciscan First Order

The *Cappuccini* movement (Order of 'Fratelli Minori Cappuccini', in Latin *Ordo fratrum minorum capuccinorum*, O.F.M. Cap.), together with the Friars Minor *Conventuali* and the Friars Minor *Osservanti*, constitutes the so-called Franciscan or Minorite First Order. The *Cappuccini* were born at a time of incredible transformations of the monastic Orders that sprang from Franciscanism and – more generally – at a time of religious upheaval due to the appearance of the Lutheran Reformation.

The first contrasts between the two Franciscan souls of the *Conventuali* and the *Osservanti*, originating from the question of the poverty of Christ and the apostles, had already emerged by the end of the 13th century and continued into the following century. These disputes escalated in the first decades of the 15th century and were not healed despite repeated interventions by the popes. This led to the definitive separation of the Orders sanctioned by Pope Leone X on May 29, 1517, with the bolla *Ite vos*, perfected on June, 12 of the same year by a further bull called '*di concordia*' issued to prevent new disputes and claims. However, the period of relative calm resulting from the separation between *Osservanti* and *Conventuali* lasted very little: the more relaxed climate led to the abandonment of the original rigour. Thus, within the Observance, the ferment of renewal resumed, which soon led to the emergence of new demands and the birth of the Order of Friars Minor *Cappuccini* in 1525.

2. The birth of the Cappuccini Order

The *Cappuccini* movement was born in 1525, when Fra' Matteo da Bascio, of the *Osservanti* of the Marca di Ancona, began to call for a return to the Franciscanism of the origins, even after the breakaway of 1517.

By the Order historians, Matteo da Bascio is now regarded as an ardent ascetic, now an intolerant fanatic; he, wishing to return to the purest principles dictated by Francesco, took to wearing a crude habit and practising very strict poverty. This model made, with unusual rapidity, numerous proselytes eager to relive primitive spirituality, poverty, and asceticism. However, there was no lack of fierce opposition and persecution from the other two Franciscan families, concerned that many *Osservanti* and even *Conventuali* were leaving their communities to join the *Cappuccini* movement.

His superiors tried to suppress these innovations, so much so that Fra' Matteo and his first companions were forced into hiding by the Church authorities, who intended to arrest them for abandoning their religious obligations. These were, after all, the years following the Lutheran Reformation and any attempt at renewal was viewed by the church leadership with suspicion and distrust.





Fig. 3
Shows the convent from the southwest (Photo Laura Pentassuglia). In the foreground, on the left, the large tanks for washing clothes and wool.

opposite page
Fig. 4
View of the convent from the south (photo Laura Pentassuglia). The tubs are in the foreground.



Fra' Matteo and his confreres found refuge with the Camaldolese monks in Le Marche; later, as a sign of gratitude, they adopted the long hood worn by that Order and the custom of wearing beards. The popular name of their movement originates precisely from this characteristic element of their habit.

Within three years, numerous brethren gathered around Matteo da Bascio, so much so that Pope Clemente VII, with the Bolla *Religionis Zelus*, on July 3, 1528, deemed it appropriate to approve the foundation of the new Order.

The first Order was held on the first general chapter of the Order in 1529, when the *Constituzioni di Albacina* were drawn up, probably by Fra' Lodovico da Fossombrone, in which the hermitic roots of the movement, the connections with the older Franciscan tradition and the need for poverty are codified. These were then reaffirmed in 1535 by the new *Constituzioni*, drawn up by Bernardino d'Asti, also considering the significant growth of the Order. Faced with the growth of the Cappuccini family, the other Franciscan Orders succeeded, with continuous pressure, in obtaining that Clemente VII, with a *Breve* of 1534, forbade the Cappuccini to open new convents, a restriction reiterated shortly afterwards by Paolo III with the addition that they should no longer accept religious coming from other Orders.



Pope Gregorio XIII in 1574 allowed the Cappuccini to establish themselves in “*Francia e in tutte le altre parti del mondo e di erigervi case, luoghi, custodie e province*”, effectively authorising their spread outside Italy. From the end of the 16th century, the Order expanded rapidly throughout the world, growing until the middle of the 18th century. To understand the importance of the Order’s role in this century and a half, we need only think of Alessandro Manzoni, who chose one of the *Cappuccini*, Fra’ Cristoforo, to oppose Don Rodrigo in his *Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed).

3. The Cappuccini in Taranto

The first Cappuccini settlement in Apulia is documented in 1533, when the Bishop of Lecce, Alfonso Sangro, ceded to Fra’ Tullio da Potenza a church dedicated to Nostra Signora in Ruggie, about a mile and a half from the city. A small friary (Valenzano, 1926, p. 96) was later built there by the instructions in the ‘*Constituzioni of Albacina*’¹, where it was recommended

² *Le Constitutione...*, Napoli 1537, f. 21): “*Le celle in longhezza et larghezza non passino nove palmi, in altezza diece; le porte alte sette palmi, larghe duoi et mezzo; ma l’andito del dormitorio largo sei palmi. Et così le altre officine siano piccole, humili, povere abiette et basse, acciocché ogni cosa predichi humiltà, povertà et di sprezzo del mondo: le chiese nostre etiam siano piccole, povere et honeste [...]*”.

opposite page
 Fig. 5
 Plan of the
 ground floor
 of the convent
 (Survey Carmela
 Crescenzi and
 Marcello Scalzo;
 Marcello Scalzo
 returns).

Fig. 6
 Plan of the
 ground floor
 of the Convent
 (Survey Carmela
 Crescenzi and
 Marcello Scalzo;
 restitutions
 Marcello Scalzo).

that each friary should not exceed seven or eight friars, with the possibility of exceptions only for large cities. Soon after, Fra' Tullio moved to Taranto and then to Potenza², managing in 1534 to lay the foundations for constructing two convents, thanks to offerings and donations (Coco, 1940, p.397; Da Roccagloriosa, anno, p. 393).

The first Cappuccini site in the Ionian city dates to 1536 when historians and chronicles speak of the foundation of a convent near the Galeso river³. We are sure of this because the indication remains on the topographical map published in D'Aquino's *'Deliciae Tarentinae'*⁴. This Cappuccini complex likely developed around a pre-existing rural church, with the construction of a few cells needed to house the first friars; the first Provincial Chapter was held here in 1536. Unfortunately, due to the swamping of the Galeso river, the place became unhealthy, so much so that, barely twenty years after the friars had settled there, the small convent was abandoned (D'Aquino, 1771, p.393). As a result, nothing remains of the site, not even in ruins.

The site for building the new complex was identified in 1556, less than a mile west of Taranto⁵, not far from the coast of the Mar Grande, near the port and on the road leading to the city gate. The convent and church were dedicated to Saint Mary of Consolation. The Cappuccini community in Taranto was conspicuous: there were thirty cells on the first floor and at least another four (for tertiaries) on the ground floor. Unfortunately, the architectural appearance and the current characteristics of the complex do not allow us to highlight the construction phases of the convent, which, from 1556 onwards, continued over the following centuries⁶, especially after the two suppressions of the 19th century⁷, when the friars abandoned the convent for good.

² From: Francavilla, ms. in Curia Prov. O.F.M. Cap. by Bari, c. 9. The ms. was edited under the title *"Istoria cronologica dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori Cappuccini di S. Francesco della Provincia d'Otranto, descritta e posta in ordine da P. F. Emanuele Martina da Francavilla, Predicatore e Precettore dell'istesso Ordine e della stessa Provincia"*, edited by P. Antonio Da Stigliano, Bari 1941.

³ Coco, p. 297 reports of a donation to the Capuchins by Francescantonio Troccoli that *«con licenza dell'Arcivescovo D. Antonio Sanseverino, cede la chiesetta della sua masseria, sita nelle vicinanze del Galeso»*.

⁴ D'Aquino T.N., *Delle Delizie Tarentine*, Book IV, commented and republished by Carducci C.A., Naples 1771, p. 393.

⁵ Let us remember that, in accordance with the Costituzione, the Cappuccini convents, unlike the Franciscan sites, were built extra moenia, outside the city-walls.

⁶ We refer not so much to the building interventions of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, as to the changes in function, when the convent was used as a lazaret, military hospital, nosocomial hospital, infirmary for the prophylaxis of contagious diseases, until the final abandonment of the site around 1960. The complex, owned by the municipality, was restored with Jubilee 2000 funds to a project by the writer.

⁷ Murat's decree of 1809 suppressed the religious orders. The work of dismantling resumed with the unification of Italy: the decrees of 1866 and the following year established the drastic downsizing of the properties of all religious orders, abbeys and collegiate churches. The entire patrimony they had accumulated over the centuries was claimed by the State and passed into the public domain.

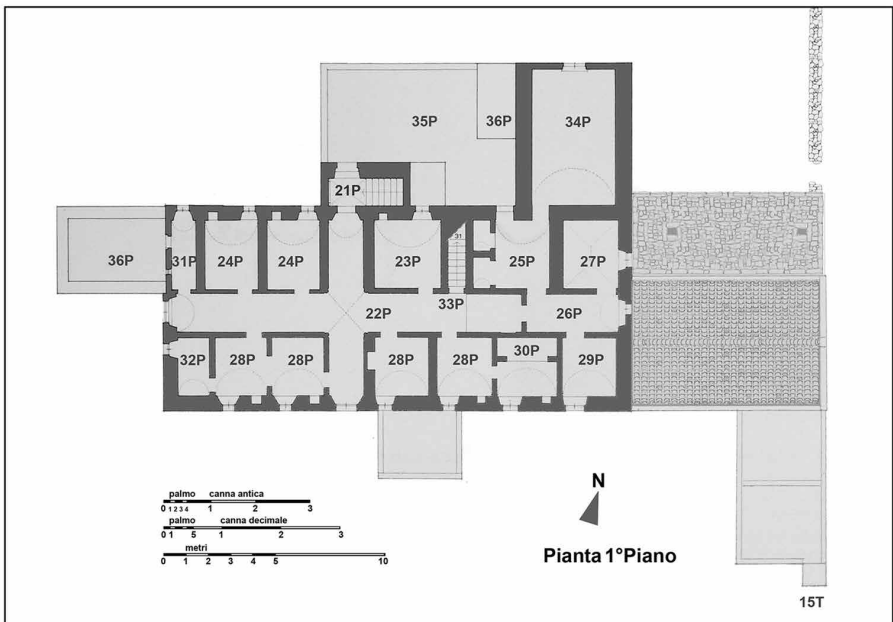
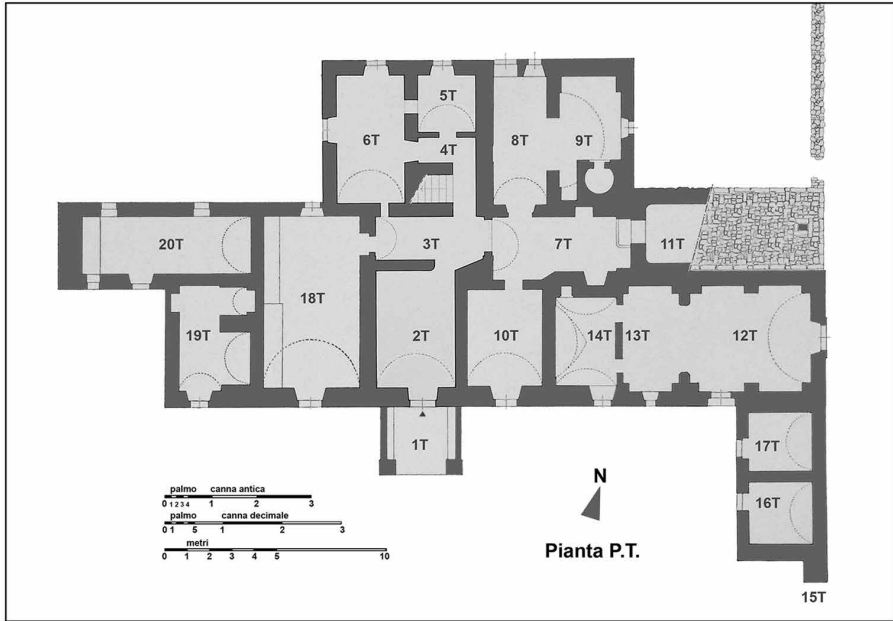




Fig. 7
View of the
convent from
the southwest
(Photo Laura
Pentassuglia). At
the top left the
circular well.

4. The founding of the Battendiero Convent

One of the extra-spiritual occupations of the Cappuccini of Taranto was fulling cloth with wool woven from nearby monasteries. Soon the friars felt the need for a gualchiera, which they built, in 1597, not far from their first complex on the Mar Piccolo, but no longer on the mouth of the Galeso, but close to the Cervaro river⁸. Moreover, the convent's popular name of 'Battendiero' or 'Battendieri' derives from the fulling of wool and cloth. Due to its location next to the springs of the watercourse, the complex was well suited for fulling the wool and cloth that arrived here from the various convents in the province. After being degreased, beaten, and firmed, the fabrics were washed, and the thread was sent to the Provincial Minister, who redistributed it among the convents⁹.

The building was conceived as a unitary structure, although over the centuries during which it housed the Cappuccini community, it underwent minor alterations and

opposite page
Fig. 8
Front of the
convent from
the south
(Photo Laura
Pentassuglia).

⁸ Coco, p. 348: "il suolo fu donato dal nobile signore Francesco Marrese, confermato dal figlio Scipione, con atto legale del 1597 e col diritto di retrocessione, in caso di abbandono dei detti padri. Questi vi fabbricarono una piccola chiesetta, tuttora visibile, con accanto le stanze per sacrestia, refettorio, cucina, e le officine per la pulizia e la lavorazione della lana necessaria per confezionare gli abiti dei religiosi della provincia, con nel piano superiore otto celle e altre piccole comodità per i religiosi".

⁹ From Valenzano, p. 100: "verano di residenza due sacerdoti, tre laici e due terziari, che ricevevano i panni da Conventi, destinati a tesserli, e, dopo averli fatti passare dalla gualchiera e asciugati, li rendevano al Provinciale che pensava a distribuirli ai frati".



additions; others in the periods following the Murat and post-unification suppressions up to the present day¹⁰. A dry-stone wall of considerable thickness initially enclosed the entire complex, about 80 cm, interrupted only on the east side by the very simple, gabled façade of the church and the low-arched (Figg. 5-6) gateway to the site. The enclosed area included, on the northwest corner, a circular construction built over a spring water¹¹ well where operations related to washing and fulling cloth and wool took place. To the south, along the course of the Cervaro river, the friars-built canals, sluices, and basins to regiment and channel the water. In surveying the structures, we found the use of three different measurement systems: for the earliest phase, the 8-palm barrel, corresponding to 2.12 metres; for the intermediate stage, the 10-palm barrel, reaching 2.65 metres; and for the post-unification step, the metric system. The central nucleus of the monastery is a quadrilateral block on two storeys, with a total height of 33 palms (8.73 metres); we believe that it was designed in close connection with the church, as can be seen from the overall dimensions: the length of the block, plus that of the church, is precisely ten canes, corresponding to 21.16 metres.

¹⁰ At the time of our survey campaigns, 1979 and 1985, the complex was privately owned.

¹¹ Both the well and the small Cervaro river are fed by 'citrì' these are sources of fresh water that flow from the underwater crust, typical of the Taranto area, found in the Golfo of Taranto, the Mar Grande and the two sinuses of the Mar Piccolo.



Fig. 9
View of the
convent from the
east (Photo Laura
Pentassuglia). At
the top right the
circular well.



opposite page
Fig. 10
View of the
convent from
the north
(Photo Laura
Pentassuglia).

5. Description of the Convent

From the small square-plan¹² portico [1T], one enters the barrel-vaulted entrance [2T], like all the rooms on the ground floor, which leads to a corridor [3T] and disengages the rooms on the north side, which are reached by crossing a passageway [4T] with the staircase to the first floor on the left, followed by the kitchen [5T] and the refectory [6T]. Through the central hallway [7T], one arrives at the rooms on the north-east side of the floor, perhaps intended initially as canova [8T] and storeroom [9T]; here, one finds a large masonry oven, built based on the metric system, thus datable to the mid-19th century. The corridor [7T] disengages: to the south to a room that leads back to the outside [10T], possibly for a tertiary with the function of a guardian; to the east to the large rectangular cistern [11T] adjacent to the north side of the church, which was accessed through an arched fornix preceded by a stone basin/sink; following this to the south was a door, now walled up, that allowed the friars access to the choir of the church [14T]. This, dedicated to Santi Lorenzo and Giorgio, has a single nave [12T] in the best Cappuccini tradition, conceived as a unit with the choir loft behind the altar. The hall has a slightly lowered barrel-vaulted ceiling, divided into two bays by round-headed niches set on square pillars with rounded corners. On the other hand, the hierarchy has a cross-ribbed roof and is separated from the hall by an arch set on capitals and pillars like those in the gallery.

¹² The base of the loggia, measuring 3.70×3 metres, and its height of approximately 4 metres, testify to its construction according to the metric system, which dates the artefact to a period after the Capuchins abandoned the site.



Initially, on the back wall at the sides of the altar [13T], of which no trace remains, two passages connected the hierarchy with the choir behind [14T]. The church's interior space is 8.47 x 4.77 metres or 32 x 18 palms; nothing remains of the old floor or the original decorations, probably consisting of canvases. The façade, made of carparo stone¹³, has a maximum height of 6 metres; in the centre is the architraved entrance door surmounted by a small arched lunette and, higher up, a small square window through which the rising sun could illuminate the altar. Outside, the church is covered up to the presbytery with tiles protecting the vaults below. On the other hand, the choir loft is incorporated into the first floor occupied by the cells. On this four-sided block, flush with the east wall, decorated with 14 simple corbels, a small bell gable about 12 palms (2.65 metres) high rises at the wall dividing the presbytery from the choir.

On the south side, a round-headed portal [15T] allowed access to the church inside the enclosed area. Next to the entrance door, we find two simple four-sided rooms, datable to the 18th century, with a barrel-vaulted roof [16T-17T], used as storage or community guest quarters. On the west side of the primitive building, we find three rooms, the outermost of which [20T] has been enlarged and limited to the ground floor; in these three rooms were indeed located the workshops and storerooms for the storage of fabrics awaiting fulling and those already fullered [18T-19T]. The large cistern adjacent to the church [11T] measures 15 x 5.30 metres and originally had a depth of about 4 metres, i.e., a capacity of

¹³ Carparo is a calcarenitic stone, derived from the cementation of calcareous rock sediments, generally in a marine environment; common throughout Apulia, it is generically referred to as tuff.



Fig. 11
left. Interior of the church towards the altar (Photo Laura Pentassuglia), right. Interior of the church towards the exterior (Photo Laura Pentassuglia).



about 300 cubic metres, a considerable volume of water for the needs of a small community. As a hypothesis, one might think that the cistern reached its current size later when the complex was mainly used for livestock breeding¹⁴. One arrives at the first floor using a flight of stairs [21P] which starts from the small passageway [21P] on the ground floor and reaches a balcony from which one can access a terrace on the right and, on the left, one of the short arms of the orthogonal corridors [22P] onto which the cells face. At the intersection of the corridors, four decorated columns indicate the dependence of ‘*Battendiero*’s project on that of the Convent of the Consolation, built forty years earlier. However, everything is more straightforward at Battendiero since the original cells were only eight, as the 1670 document states, and perhaps not even built in one piece. To a phase carried out between the mid-17th century and the beginning of the following century, we owe the construction of the eastern part: the extension of the corridor [26P], the pavilion-vaulted cell [27P], the barrel-vaulted cell in the south-east corner [29P] and the modification of the room possibly used for the ‘communal fire’ [25P].

Further phases include the ample space of uncertain use [34P], the terrace to the north [35P] and, much more recently, a room used for services [36P]. On the west

opposite page

Fig. 12
left. Interior of the ground floor of the convent; rooms 7T and 3T (Photo Laura Pentassuglia), right. Interior of the first floor of the convent; corridor 22P (Photo Laura Pentassuglia).

¹⁴ In 1979, at the time of our first surveys of the monastery, we found the presence of mangers on the ground floor rooms [18T-19T] and even in the church.



terrace [36P], a small square window opens, one palm by one palm, surrounded by a moulded cornice of fine artistry. The cells were designed only partially following the requirements of the Constitutions, which stipulated 9 palm sides. At Battendiero, the cells towards the south are slightly wider by 9 palms (from 2.60 metres to 2.68 metres wide). At the same time, those towards the north are decidedly wider (from 3.08 metres to 3.17 metres, thus from 10 to 12 palms [23P]), perhaps because they were intended for the Father Guardian of the small community. Usually, the more giant cells consisting of two rooms [28P-32P], a smaller one where the bed was housed, the other larger as a study, were intended for activities related to the Father Guardian or Provincial. We do not believe that, due to its size, cell [30P], characterised by the presence of a large fireplace, could have housed the ‘common fire’ room. In the central corridor, a narrow staircase [33P] led to the roofs of the convent.

6. Some final considerations

When we surveyed the convent more than thirty years ago, the structure was already in disuse and no longer inhabited. Abandoned by the Capuchin friars, the monument in the early twentieth century was sold to private individuals who used the building for agricultural purposes, overturning, above all, the singular and elaborate system of locks, tanks and canals present on the Cervaro river intended for the fulling of wool and cloths.

**Fig. 13**

View of the convent from the northwest (photo Laura Pentassuglia). In the foreground, bottom left, the circular well with its annexes.



opposite page

Fig. 14

(left) Fra' Cristoforo e Don Rodrigo. Illustration for the 'Promessi Sposi' by Francesco Gonin, 1840.

(right) A Capuchin friar (18th century engraving).

This article is a small contribution to the knowledge and dissemination of some basic information on a minor and peripheral Capuchin site, albeit extremely unique, for scholars of Franciscan architecture

Today the convent of Battendiero continues to be privately owned; in recent years some rearrangement interventions in the area have made the spaces around the convent usable, although the complex system of basins and canals that characterized the place has been irretrievably lost. Other works especially involved the exterior of the convent, such as the facades and roofs. We can only hope that in the future this characteristic example of Apulian Capuchin architecture will be preserved and protected, respecting the original structure.



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Finito di stampare da
Rubbettino print | Soveria Mannelli (CZ)
per conto di **didapress**
Dipartimento di Architettura
Università degli Studi di Firenze
2024

The volumes present contributions from the International F-ATLAS Conference, promoted within the European project “F-ATLAS – Franciscan Landscapes: The Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain”, funded in 2020 by the JPICH 2019 Conservation, Protection and Use Call. The Conference brought together experts from various disciplines, including history, architecture, geography, digital humanities, and computer science, creating a rich and comprehensive interdisciplinary dialogue. Participants from renowned international universities offered unique insights into the Franciscan Observance and its impact on European Cultural Heritage. The contributions examined the past and sparked discussions on the future of documenting and safeguarding religious heritage.

Integrating historical research with technological progress opens exciting possibilities to create comprehensive digital archives, virtual reconstructions, and immersive experiences that can bridge the gap between the past and the present.

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ISBN 978-88-3338-222-7



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