

MONASTERY OF SAINTS MARCELLINO & FESTO

Church. High Altar



From Via Paladino, one of the *cardines* of Ancient *Neapolis* it is possible to reach Vico S. Marcellino which leads to the ex-Monastic Complex of Saints Marcellino and Festo; opposite the entrance is the neoclassical façade of the Carafa d'Andria Palace and that of The Church of Saints Severino e Sossio. The Entrance Hall, once the Monastery's atrium and *parlour* for visitors, leads to the great Cloister, which covers a large area obtained from the fusion of two previously separate religious communities, those of Saints Marcellino and Pietro and of Festo and Desiderio, the former of Basilian foundation which later passed to the Benedictines, the latter of older Benedictine origin, and both dating back to the 8th century. Work was begun in 1567 on the new Cloister by Giovan Vincenzo Della Monica, which is indeed similar to the

Cloister of St. Gregorio Armeno, later designed by the same architect. It has fifteen arches on the long side, and eight on the other; while along the side facing the sea (South-East), the Cloister has an arcade of only six arches; the remaining nine having never been realised. The first storey, once housing the nuns' cells, gives onto a roof terrace whose width corresponds to the span of the arcade walkway below. The cell door frames are made of *piperno*, variously sculpted, further enhancing the architecture. The second storey has lower ceilings and is sustained by a series of reduced arches with *piperno* supports: the open-work parapets of the first and second-storey balconies are also made of *piperno* and have small columns with alternating floral and geometrical decorations.

The Church, view of the Entrance Hall

The Cloister arcades have *piperno* arches and fluted pillars in square section, the design of which continues into the decoration of the arches; seats of *piperno* flank the pillars on each side.

The shorter wing of the arcade leads into the area now housing the Museum of Palaeontology. This wide rectangular hall crowned by an ample vault once functioned as the nuns' Choir and Chapter room. The Convent was completed by the first decades of the 17th century, but the nuns had further aspirations: they began to have a new church built, as by that time, the original one was in extremely bad repair and did not conform to the desire for the baroque splendour and elegance which was increasing within the monastic communities.



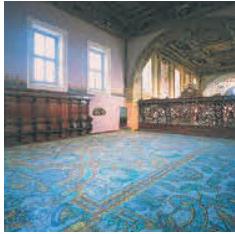
The new works began in probably Giovan Giacomo

di Conforto, who was helped in his work by Pietro D'Apuzzo, wrongly once considered the principal author. The Church plan has a single nave and three chapels on each side. From the four original portals, of mixed marble with lateral *puttos* and festoons, it was possible to enter the confessionals on one side and have access to the sacristy and the organ on another. These were later relocated to the shorter side of the Cloister by the architect Luigi Vanvitelli.

One of the portals constitutes the entrance of the present Museum of Palaeontology. The

View of the Saints Marcellino and Festo building complex

Church is surmounted by a dome standing on a low tambour; the lower transept is raised by one step and has two side chapels, in one of which is the so-called *comunichino*, where the nuns used to receive Communion through a fine brass and iron grating inserted in a thick frame of polychrome marble. The dome was frescoed by Belisario Corenzio; the flooring is of marble and slate, in a beautiful design of grey and white rhomboids; the magnificent ceiling, with its ornate gilded wood marquetry on a light blue background, houses seven canvases, one of which



by Massimo Stanzione. The majolica-tiled dome restored in 1762 by Ignazio famous family of "riggiolari". dome is salient above the a time when Neapolitan prominence thanks to these

by Corenzio, the other six Of special interest is designed by Conforto and Chiaiese, member of a The great polychrome cityscape; it is evidence of architecture was gaining characteristic majolica clad

exteriors. In 1759, the nuns turned to Luigi Vanvitelli, who created a homogeneous and unitary work of art in the wall covering of "open vein" marbles for the first order of the entire length of the Church. The chromatic effect of the precious marbles is truly magnificent. The beautiful wooden screens and decorations of the Great Choir and Small Choirs are also due to Vanvitelli, and were carved and gilded with floral and arboreal patterns by the

carvers Giuseppe D'Ambrosio and Francesco di Fiore.

Particularly noteworthy is also the small, delightful corner of the complex's lower courtyard occupied by the "Oratorio della Scala Santa" (Holy Staircase Oratory), containing a 'penitential' path ascending through a narrow barrel vaulted space, Vanvitelli's last opus, constructed in 1772 by the engineer Pasquale Manzo, where characteristic Vanvitellian floral decorative patterns and crossed star stuccoes can be seen.

Since 1907, the a seat of the University of at present some teaching of the Departments of Sciences and of Political University's Museum of In recent years, the important works to restore



external areas (the façades, courtyards and gardens) as well as its inner spaces. After having been abandoned for a long period of time, the Church's interior is now also open to the general public for cultural initiatives.

monumental complex is Naples, Federico II. It houses and research facilities Mathematics, of Earth Science, as well as the Palaeontology. University has carried out the ancient splendour of its

*Eighteenth century majolica-floors in the Great Choir*

*View of the Church's majolica-tiled dome*