

Barletta

*The Greek Church  
of St. Mary  
of the Angels*



CITTÀ  
DI BARLETTA

This publication is financed by PIC INTERREG III A GREECE - ITALY 2000-2006, project *“Development, enhancement and promotion of Roman and early Christian monuments in the areas of Preveza and Thesprotia and of Greek monuments in the area of Lecce”* (cod. I3201061).



Unione Europea



INTERREG III A  
Greece-Italy 2000-2006



Regione Puglia



Città di Barletta

---



The projects financed by EU programs of international cooperation, such as the PIC INTERREG GREECE – ITALY, represent an important occasion for strengthening the cultural identities of both countries, Greece and Italy, and for knowing each other's artistic and cultural heritage.

It is a great challenge: to build economic networks and cultural interactions with people and cultures of the Mediterranean within new boundaries.

Indeed, the Program of Cross-border Cooperation Greece–Italy, even in its new planning cycle 2007-2013, is aimed at strengthening the competitiveness and territorial cohesion between those countries, through the sustainable development and enhancement of the potentials of both sides of the maritime frontier.

A challenge “accepted” and widely supported by our Town Government, insofar as the aforementioned project, of which the town of Barletta is a partner, aims to achieve goals in line with the strategic goals of our local government.

The local cultural identity

and unique artistic heritage become the starting point for enhancing competitiveness and local development, new social and cultural relationships and the creation of a “new territorial value”. We wish our territory can become part of important national and international tourist networks, providing a cultural offer, capable of attracting more and more tourists to our town.

The promotion and marketing initiatives, carried out by the Town Government within this project, allow to promote our highly valuable artistic, historical and cultural heritage, hoping they can have positive effects on the culture, tourism and economy of our town.

We have thus traced a route, while looking at a future, which talks about the need of mutual cooperation to enhance the development of our town, our region and of the Countries of the Mediterranean area, which we are linked to by age-old history and culture.

The mayor  
**Nicola Maffei**

---

This brochure about the Greek Church of St. Mary of the Angels is now published again within a project financed by the program PIC INTERREG GREECE – ITALY 2000-2006, Meas. 3.2, entitled “*Development, enhancement and promotion of Roman and early Christian monuments in the areas of Preveza and Thesprotia and of Greek monuments in the area of Lecce*”, which is supported by Barletta’s town council through the **Cultural Heritage and Services office** and the **Europe Office**. The project is aimed at enhancing, recovering and developing the historical and cultural heritage of mutual interest in the involved geographical areas and is characterized by a collaboration between Greek and Italian partners: Preveza’s prefecture (leader), Thesprotia’s prefecture, the town of Filipiada, Thesprotia’s Local Development Agency

and the town of Nardò. This reprint fulfills the strategic goal of providing more in-depth information for tourists, scholars and art and culture lovers. The brochure is an important tool to know the main features of the monumental heritage of this church, located in Barletta, which is now open to the public again after a long and hard restoration work, carried out under the aegis of the Superintendency and which involved iconostasis, furnishings and handmade textiles. This up-to-date edition of the brochure is inspired by a previous version, published in 2004, and is now enriched with a final page, containing tourist information about the most important monuments and cultural sites in the town of Barletta and its surroundings.

The Manager  
Cultural Heritage  
and Services Office  
**Santa Scommegna**

# *The Greek Church of St. Mary of the Angels*

---

*The Greek community in Barletta*

---

The strong relationship between Apulia and the Byzantine East was due to several reasons, most of which regarded not only obvious diplomatic relations, but also frequent trade exchanges and pilgrimages towards the Holy Land. After the Ottoman invasion and the fall of the Byzantine Empire, such relationship was far more strengthened, since a lot of people were forced to

choose the Apulian shores as their refuge. The oldest evidence of the presence of people from Greece in Barletta dates back to the first half of the XVI century, when a large group of people from Corone (modern Koroni, a town situated in the southern Peloponnese) settled in our town, as a consequence of the diaspora, caused by the Turkish invasion of their town. Once permanently

settled, the colony used at first the church of St. George and then the church of St. Mary of the Angels as their worship places. The first reference to this last church can be found in a document of



*The Baptism of Christ*



*The Presentation at the Temple*



*Christ of Deesis*

“Barletta’s diplomatic code”, dating back to February 1398, in which a certain Angelillo Trapperius of Berteraymo applies to the archbishop of Trani for building a church “sub vocabulo Sante Marie de Angelis”, endowed with a poorhouse.

The colony used the church as a worship place from its foundation to 1656, from 1789 to 1842 and from 1861 to the early XX century, while it functioned as a Roman-Catholic church, under the authority of St. Mary Cathedral, from 1660 to 1789. The name of the

church refers to the Greek Orthodox people's well-known devotion to the Virgin Mary.

In 1656 a terrible plague killed both a large part of Barletta's inhabitants and a huge number of Greek Orthodox people, which caused the colony to disappear for over a century. During such a long period, the church was used by the secular clergy and was put under the authority of St. Mary Cathedral. It was only in 1789, after the Greek community was reformed, that the church hosted the Orthodox rite

again until 1842, when the Greek Catholics took possession of it again with the help of local authorities. From then on, the Greeks were forced to celebrate their rites secretly, because of a widespread intolerance among local Catholics, and they could recover the church, after paying six hundred ducats, only twenty years later. Since then, Barletta's inhabitants have always showed their solidarity with the Greek community and their rites, which they would remember for a long time.

---

## *The Church*

---

The church rises at 2,10mt. above street level. Two opposing flights of steps, ending with a landing, lead to the main entrance. The simple

and architecturally uninteresting façade develops along the longer side of the plan. The front door is surmounted by two small half arches





*Madonna of Deesis*

and a centrally placed oval, on which a painted lamb was still visible until a few years ago. Inside, there is an east-west oriented rectangular hall, characterized by a floor, made of a green and

ochre colored majolica from Naples.

Against the long sides of the building are two rows of stalls (stassidia), dating back to the XVIII century, which are made of poplar wood and were used by

male worshippers only, who leant on them during liturgies. Against the west wall is another group of stalls, whose three central seats, surmounted by a baldachin, present a better wood finishing. Such seats were reserved for religious authorities. On the left, above the stalls, is the pulpit, dating back to the period between the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century; it is made of poplar wood and its dorsal painting represents Christ blessing in the Greek manner. At

the end of the church, right in front of the iconostasis, there is the matroneum, dating back to the same period as that of both stassidia and pulpit. The matroneum is characterized by a grating and a balustrade and is decorated by a gilded silver molding. On the left, in the Santuarium area, inside a niche surmounted by a half dome, there is the Prothesis altar, decorated by a small fresco of excellent manufacture, representing the “Christ on the Cross”.

---

## *The Iconostasis*

---

In Orthodox churches the iconostasis is a screen, which separates the area of the Santuarium from the area attended by the worshippers, while representing a bridge between the earthly

world and the spiritual dimension of religion. Such a separation plays an important role in the Orthodox rite, since the celebrant’s area is considered as sacred and inviolable.



*St. John the Baptist of Deesis*

The core of the iconostasis is represented by the “DEESIS”, which hints at intercession between the believers and God, through its portrayals of Christ, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist.

The same function of separation between the sacred area and the area attended by the worshippers is fulfilled by the royal doors, which were reserved for the clergy only, who passed







through them after wearing liturgical vestments. On both sides of the iconostasis are two minor doors, called “North Door” and “South Door”, usually placed next to the despotic icons, which often represent the “Christ Pantocrator” and the “Madonna”. Equally fundamental are, in an iconostasis, the icons representing the twelve feasts of the Orthodox liturgy, always placed just



*St. Thomas*



*St. Matthew*

above the doors. Thanks to its monumentality, the iconostasis of the

church of the Greeks in Barletta is one of the most excellent and interesting

in southern Italy. The imposing wooden structure, hosting the icons, is 10mt high and 6mt large and is placed on 4 steps, that widen out at the centre, just in front of the royal doors; the structure



*St. John the Baptist*

is made of four tiers and is surmounted by an anchor-shaped cross, crowning the iconostasis. At the bottom are the royal doors, bearing portrayals of St. Peter and St. Paul; on both sides of the royal doors are the despotic icons, painted by Thomàs Bathàs, (1554-1559), which represent the “Christ Pantocrator” and the “Madonna Hodighitria”, both dominating two icons, which reproduce

the evangelic scenes of the “Adoration of the Magi” and of “The encounter between Jesus and the centurion in Capernaum”. On the side doors, known as north door and south door, St. Basil and St. Spyridon are respectively portrayed. Immediately above are the icons of the twelve liturgical feasts, which, starting from the left, represent Annunciation, Nativity, Circumcision, Presentation at the



*The door of St. Spyridon*



Temple, Christ's  
 B a p t i s m ,  
 Transfiguration  
 o n M o u n t  
 Tabor, Lazarus'  
 Resurrection,  
 Arrival at  
 Jerusalem,  
 Crucifixion,  
 Resurrection,  
 A s c e n s i o n  
 and Pentecost.  
 Just above the  
 twelve feasts,  
 are the icons  
 representing  
 apostles and evangelists on  
 their thrones; respectively  
 St. Thomas, St. James,  
 St. Andrew, St. Luke, St.  
 Simon, St. Peter, St. Paul,  
 St. John, St. Bartholomew,  
 St. Matthew, St. Mark  
 and St. Philip. The last  
 tier hosts the "Deesis",  
 characterized by the  
 "Christ on the Throne" at  
 the centre, the Virgin Mary  
 on the left and St. John the  
 Baptist on the right; the  
 whole structure ends with  
 the anchor cross, bearing  
 paintings inside the shank:



*St. Nicolas*

Jesus Christ at the centre,  
 the four evangelists at  
 the extreme ends and the  
 portrayals of the Virgin  
 Mary and St. John the  
 Baptist on the bills. The  
 work was maybe realized  
 in different periods,  
 starting from the end of  
 the XVI century with  
 paintings by Bathàs and  
 ending in the XIX century  
 with the royal doors and  
 the icons representing the  
 adoration of the Magi and  
 the encounter between  
 Jesus and the centurion in  
 Capernaum.

---

## *Thomàs Bathàs*

---

He was born in Crete in 1554 and settled in Corfu before 1586, where he stayed until 1588. In 1581 he became a member of the confraternity of “St. George of the Greeks” in Venice and was called Tomio from Corfu Batta. Once settled in Venice, he became vicar of the confraternity in 1592, ’95, ’98, while teaching Greek painting at the same time. In 1589 he provided the drawing for the mosaic, representing Christ Pantocrator, which was inside the apse of the church of St. George of the Greeks. Some documents report, that the painter was paid for having worked on the painting of the Madonna Nicopeia in St. Mark’s Basilica in 1594. Recently, a lot of works have been attributed to Bathàs, among which is a huge

signed board, representing the Apocalypse, now kept in Patmos monastery in the homonymous island. Moreover, the scholar Chatzidakis attributes to Bathàs other icons, representing St. Christodoulos, the Burial of St. John the Theologian, St. John the Theologian and Prochorus, the Madonna on the throne, the Christ on the throne and the Madonna Hodighitria. Shortly later, the scholar attributes to Bathàs also the “Christ on the throne” of the church of St. George of the Greeks in Venice and states, for the first time, that both the “Pantocrator” and the “Madonna Hodighitria” of the church of St. Mary of the Angels in Barletta are surely works by Bathàs.

---

## *Madonna Hodigitria*

---

Along with the icon of Christ Pantocrator, this board is the most important piece in the whole iconostasis. It represents a half-length Madonna, wrapped in a red maphorion, bearing the Child on her left arm;

the Child, in a frontal position, grips a scroll in his left hand, while using the right hand to bless in the Greek manner. On the upper angles of the board, the two archangels Michael and Gabriel are portrayed while unfolding



**Thomàs Bathàs - *Madonna Hodigitria***

phylacteries, containing verses from the psalm XLIV, which celebrate the bride. The work, signed by Bathàs, is a true copy of the work realized by Damaskinos for the church of St. George of the Greeks in 1574. As the original work

– in its turn inspired by the Kripti in Venice – the copy too is characterized by a rhythmic composition and by the solemnity of figures, whereas its painting style appears more shaded and softer than the style used by Damaskinos.

## *Christ Pantocrator*



**Thomàs Bathàs - *Christ Pantocrator***

The half-length image of Christ is represented with both head and shoulders bending towards left, wearing a dark red tunic and a blue himation, crossed by a close net of chrysographies. The right hand, resting on the breast, is in blessing pose, while the left hand shows a book, containing a passage from St. John's gospel. The outer edges of the painting are characterized by relief portrayals of saints, accompanied by inscriptions. This work is a copy of the Christ Pantocrator of the

iconostasis of the church of St. George of the Greeks in Venice, which, in its turn, is inspired by the image of Christ the Benefactor in Constantinople, dating back to 1259.

Such a circumstance emphasizes how important were the models chosen by Bathàs in both ancient and contemporary painting. Like the "Madonna Hodigitria", this board too differs from Damaskinos' works for the strong psychological connotation given by Bathàs to Christ's image.

---

## *Tourist Information*

---

Prestigious monuments can be visited in Barletta's historical town centre, such as:

### **The Castle**

Originally built as a defensive fortress by the Normans in the middle of the XI century, it became a real castle under Frederick II, Charles of Anjou and Charles V, when it was turned into a square-planned fortress, endowed with four pointed angular ramparts, used as casemates.

### **The Cathedral of St. Mary Major**

A beautiful example of architecture, mixing the Apulian Romanesque (façade) and the Gothic style (apse). The modern church rises on the site of a preexisting early Christian basilica, dating back to the VI century a.C. Here, Ferdinand of Aragon was crowned king in 1459.

### **The Della Marra Palace**

This magnificent Baroque building was the aristocratic residence of the Orsini family in the XVI century, then it passed to the Della Marra family in the XVII century and to the Fraggianni family in the XVIII century. The three-level building opens onto an inner courtyard, dominated

by an elegant arcade. The two upper levels develop along the perimeter of the entrance hall and the first floor is characterized by decorated wooden ceilings, which evoke the ancient rich interiors. Today, the Della Marra Palace is home to the "**G. De Nittis**" **Picture Gallery**, which hosts the largest and most prestigious collection of works by the famous painter Giuseppe De Nittis, who was born in Barletta in 1846, became famous in Paris and London and died in France, when he was only 38. Recently, the Palace has also hosted international temporary exhibitions.

### **The Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre**

Thanks to its strategic position between the Adriatic route and the way to Rome, the Sepulchre, dating back to the first half of the XII century, became an important place of encounter and worship for pilgrims and crusaders going to the Holy Land. Its architectural structure is characterized by a XII-XIII century Apulian Romanesque style, enriched with Burgundian and oriental influences.

### **The Challenge Tavern**

This medieval tavern was the theatre – according to

tradition – of the famous French insult to the honour of Italian knights, which caused the “Disfida di Barletta” on February 13, 1503.

### **The Colossus “Eraclio”**

An imposing bronze statue, maybe representing the emperor Theodosius in military garments, bearing the signs of royalty: a crown

and a cross in the right hand and a sphere in the left hand.

Just a few miles away from Barletta there are Castel del Monte and the famous site of Cannae.

**The Church of the Greeks** is located in Barletta’s town centre at Via Madonna degli Angeli.

Visits available with prior booking

For further information:

### **Town of Barletta Castle**

tel. +39 0883 578620

fax +39 0883 578644

### **Castle bookshop**

tel. +39 0883 578621

E-mail: [polomuseale.segreteria@comune.barletta.ba.it](mailto:polomuseale.segreteria@comune.barletta.ba.it)

### **Information and Tourist Reception Office**

Corso Garibaldi, 208

70051 Barletta - Italy

tel. +39 0883 331331

fax +39 0883 337304

E-mail: [iat@comune.barletta.ba.it](mailto:iat@comune.barletta.ba.it)

### **Town of Barletta**

[www.comune.barletta.ba.it](http://www.comune.barletta.ba.it)

For general information:

**Barletta’s town website,**

**Town and Territory section, The historical places:**

[www.comune.barletta.ba.it/retecivica/citta/luoghi.htm](http://www.comune.barletta.ba.it/retecivica/citta/luoghi.htm)

*Contents by Cinzia Dicorato*

*Pictures by Ruggiero Dicorato (FotoRudy)*

*Reprint layout project by Chiara Tupputi*

*Translated by Luciana Cortellino*