

Urban Trekking “*Civitas Constantissima*”

Historical-cultural-sport itinerary through the neighborhoods (rrughë), alleys (vaneddë), and underpasses (baddadörë) of the city of Nicosia.



Overview of the city of Nicosia, photo by Santino Barbera

Nicosia (Necöscia) is an ancient state city in the Sicilian hinterland awarded by Frederick II of Swabia with the title of "Civitas Constantissima", is the seat of the diocese since 1817 and the Gallo-Italic dialect is spoken here. Patron saint of the city is Saint Nicholas of Bari and patron saint San Felice of Nicosia.

Surrounded by the mountain ranges of Erei, Madonie and Nebrodi, is located at an altitude of 724 meters s.l.m. (Piazza Garibaldi). Over the centuries the city has developed taking advantage of the various rocky heights: Castle and Möntettö, SS. Salvatore and Rocca Palta, Cappuccini and Rocca San Cono, which make it very characteristic from a scenic and urban point of view.

The origin of the town is uncertain; Engio, Erbita and Imachara are the three ancient cities with which historians have tried to identify it. The current name suggests Byzantine origins that according to some it may mean “city of St. Nicholas, whereas some think the meaning is “city of victory”.

What is certain, though, is its development happened in the byzantine age by the erection of an equipped castle on a high cliff, furthermore by the erection of the small village of Santa Nicoella. Subsequently, under the Arabs, it took the name of “*oppidum Sarracenorum*”.

Between XII-XIII Nicosia was repopulated by lombard settlements from Northern Italy. Their permanence signed the local dialect. Over the years, the coexistence between the lombards and the natives wasn't simple. As a result of their conflicts, the city was divided in two parts: the upper part belonged to the marians (*santamariotë*) the inhabitants of santa Maria Maggiore, while the lower part of the city was managed by the natives (*santanicölarë*), inhabitants of St. Nicholas district. The edge that marked the two districts was known as *piliere* (pelierö), even nowadays located in street *Francesco Salomone*.



The ancient border of the “Piliere”

Over the centuries, the city was object to several visits from notorious Royals, such as Charles V of Asburg in 1535.

The heart of the city is the main square “piazza Garibaldi”, once known as “piano di san Nicola”, where the wonderful “palazzo della città”; the basiliscs cathedral of St. Nicholas” and other noble palaces of the city stand. Among the small and big streets of the city, it is possible to see the medieval town planning, in which some ancient buildings containing portals finely worked own a certain relevance. Nicosia was also known as “the city of the 24 Barons”, given that the palaces belonged to numerous important aristocratic families: *Alessi, Ansaldi, Basilotta, Beritelli, Cirino, Caprini, Di Falco, Gentile, La Motta, La Via, La Valle, Nicosia, Miritello, Pontorno, Salomone, Speciale, Valguarnera*. If you were to explore curiously the characteristic districts of the city, you’ll come across cave houses and notice notorious several artistic and historical annexed convents, among which the small church of Santa Nicolella and San Nicolò petit, built on the slopes of the castle in the IX century. Furthermore, you can: come across the ancient churches of SS. Salvatore and San Michele arcangel, admire the beauty of basilicas of santa Maria Maggiore and St.Nicholas, admire the beauty of Guglielmo Borremans’s Frescoes in the church of san Vincenzo Ferreri, come across the sixteenth century of sant’Eligio vescovo (Saint Eligius the bishop), Sant’Agata, or san Simone and Guida Taddeo. Moreover, you can visit San Benedetto and San Francesco d’Assisi’s fourteenth century portals belonging to his former churches, the seventeenth century churches of San Giuseppe, san Calogero, san Francesco di Paola, and San Biagio’s church, made of wonderful rococo stuccoes and canvases by Giuseppe Velasco, nowadays the seat of the Diocesan museum of sacred art. It gathers numerous citizens work of art, among which two wood ceiling boards coming from the cathedral (XV century), and a canvas of the notorious spanish painter Jusepe De Ribera “Martirio di san Bartolomeo”. In addition, we must include in the list the church of san Antonio abate, surmounted by the rock belonging to ss. Salvatore and eventually, the modern romantic rosette of the church del Carmine.

Visit° 1 Departure/ arrival

The circular path begins at the small side street of Via Casale no.57, in Piazza San Francesco di Paola.

After a brief and concise historical introduction, we will be ready for this fascinating path that will dive us in history and reveal true beauties. Starting from Via Casale n. 57, after the first steps, we come across the first historical building, *Palazzo Valguarnera*, dating back to the 18th century and restored in the 19th century, belonging to the ancient family descended from Catalonia, which arrived in Sicily in the 13th century and settled in Nicosia in the 17th century.

Over the centuries, in the city, they were patrons of the arts, funding several works of art to decorate some churches in Nicosia.

The itinerary continues towards a rocky ridge called "Rocca Palta" which is part of the city's heights, perforated by ancient caves that have been used over the centuries as houses.

Continuing, we arrive at the suggestive *Church of the Holy Saviors* (Chiesa del ss. Salvatore), which, thanks to its strategic position, provides a splendid and breathtaking panoramic view.



Overview seen from the ss. Salvatore and twin portico of the church, photo by Santino Barbera

The church was built on top of a rock. It was already constructed in 1204, as highlighted by an ancient parchment kept at the Santa Maria Latina Abbey (Abbazia di Santa Maria Latina) in Agira (EN). The church collapsed in 1607 and was immediately built again. What remains of the old construction was the two-hundred-year-old tower crowned with protruding corbels, and in the 1600s, the bell tower was added. The two portals and the elegant double portico, which some historians place in the 14th century, are particularly significant. The presence of some "meridians" on its external walls to control the city's clocks makes this church characteristic, whereas the "calendars" that marked the arrival of swallows in the city are noteworthy as well.

The interior houses various works of art, including Francesco Quattrocchi's "Ascension of Jesus to Heaven" (19th century), a beautiful local stone baptismal font, finely carved in 1617, a canvas with "The Swoon of Sicily" (Lo Spasimo di Sicilia) by Nicosian Nicola Mirabella made in 1608, the canvas "Madonna della Consolazione" by Nicosian Antonino Cardella (17th century).

Particularly important is the canvas illustrating "St. John the Baptist in the Desert" (**San Giovanni Battista nel deserto**), (first half of the 17th century) by the Florentine painter Giovanni Bilivert. Moreover, there are a beautiful "St. Andrew the Apostle" and a wonderful "Pietà," wooden sculptural works by Nicosian Giovan Battista Li Volsi (17th century).

Nearby is the ancient **Basilotta Palace**, baron of Sant'Andrea (17th century). The Basilotta family was already present in Nicosia in the 17th century. Today, the ancient palace is reduced to a ruin. Proceeding, there is the Salomone Palace (18th century), an ancient Sicilian family already present in Nicosia. This building is one of the largest in the city: inside, besides the atrium, there is a characteristic hanging garden, an ancient library with rare pieces, and a collection of old carriages.

Visit n° 2 Starting from this building, we will begin to cross the characteristic baddadörë (underpasses) and, by walking through the historic vaneddë (alleys) of the ancient urban context, we will reach the magnificent Garibaldi Square, the heart of the city, once known as "piano di san Nicola", where the wonderful Palace of the City and the Cathedral Basilica with its superb bell tower and several palaces of the nobility capture attention. The center of the square is made scenic by a magnificent 19th century fountain.



Palazzo di Città and the artistic fountain, photo by Santino Barbera

The **City Palace (palazzo di città)** was built in the 18th century according to Salvatore Attinelli, the design architect (1736-1802). Besides the impressive council chamber, there is a beautiful atrium with a special wrought iron chandelier situated in the center, and a marble bust of the celebre nicosian poet Carmelo La Giglia, a work created by local sculptor Francesco Curcio. The stunning square is adorned by the **Nicosia-Radice Palace**, which belongs to the ancient family originating from Catania, which settled in Nicosia in the 15th century and was renovated at the end of the 19th century; the **Di Falco Palace (palazzo Di Falco)**, of an ancient family already existent in the 16th century and for a

period the seat of the Nicosia Tribunal, which was restored in the 19th century, and in 1900, the philanthropist Baron Bernardo Di Falco abandoned it with all his goods to the poor; the La Via Palace belonging to an ancient family originally from France that settled in Nicosia in the 15th century, who owned other residences in the city. This palace was also renovated in the 19th century and its antique portico was broken down. Inside this palace you can find the oratory of St. Philip. Opposite to the main portal of the cathedral is *the Gentile di Marocco Palace*, an ancient family of Genoese origin received the investiture of Nicosia in the 19th century. The Palace was renovated in the early 20th century and inside it hosts an atrium with a beautiful scenographic staircase and magnificent paintings in the salons.

Built in all its splendor is the magnificent *Basilica Cathedral of Saint Nicholas*, the place of worship for the Nicoleti, constructed in the 14th century as a small chapel renowned as "San Nicolò del piano," to distinguish it from the existing church of Santa Nicoletta, located at the foot of the Castle. It was extended in 1340 and its original forms were Gothic/Norman, whose beautiful traces remain in the bell tower.

It was elevated to the Cathedral of the new Diocese (Cattedrale della nuova Diocesi) by Pope Pius VII on March 17, 1817, and to the Minor Basilica by Pope Paul VI on June 19, 1967.



Cathedral Basilica of San Nicolò, photo by Santino Barbera

Over the centuries, it was object of many transformations and renovations, but the most relevant ones were made in the early 19th century (before becoming a Cathedral): the splendid painted wooden ceiling, dating back to the 15th century (nowadays existing), and the interior of the church was transformed from Baroque to Neoclassical style, with paintings made in 1810 by the brothers Antonio and Vincenzo Manno from Palermo, who paint scenes from the Old Testament in the central vault and in the transept, while scenes from the New Testament were painted in the side naves and minor prophets on the walls of the Dome. The exterior maintains the 15th century main portal, finely crafted in the Chiaramonte style, and the monumental bell tower, which was erected over the centuries (11th-17th centuries). The portico was built between 1489/1490, while the finely carved ancient arches of 1656 were placed outside in the 19th century (originally they were inside the church).

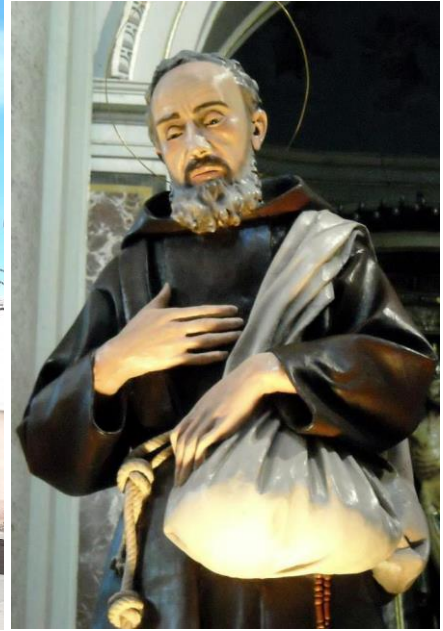


Detail of the wooden ceiling, "Coronation of the Virgin" (mid-15th century), at the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art in the former monastery of San Biagio in Nicosia (EN).

Inside, there are many works of precious craftsmanship and important artists, including the "Baptismal Font" (Fonte battesimale) (early 16th century) and the "Resurrected Christ between the Madonna and the Baptist" (Il Cristo Risorto tra la Madonna e il Battista) (1510), by Antonello Gagini; the marble "Pulpit" of 1565 by Gian Domenico Gagini; the canvas in the main altar by Giuseppe Velasco, showing the "Resurrection" (18th-19th century); a wooden "Choir" (1622) and some wooden statues of "St. John the Baptist," (San Giovanni Battista) "St. Bartholomew the Apostle," (San Bartolomeo l'apostolo) and the big wooden statue of "St. Nicholas" (San Nicola) standing in the dome were created by the Nicosian artists Giovan Battista and Stefano Li Volsi; in the dome, 12 buildings that crown St. Nicholas portraying the "Apostles" are the work of a nicosian painter Antonio Filingeri (17th century), the beautiful wooden crucifix admired by the Nicosians such as the "Father of Providence" (padre della Provvidenza) was created by the Palermitan Gaspare De Miceli in 1630; a painting by Giuseppe Patania with the martyrdom of "St. Placid and his companions" (San Placido e compagni) and eighteenth-century paintings assigned to the Nicosian painter Filippo Randazzo, called the "monocle of Nicosia" (monocolo di Nicosia), the "Holy Family" (Sacra famiglia) and the "Immaculate" (l'Immacolata); in the transept, a wooden statue of "St. Nicholas of Myra" (San Nicola di Myra) by Filippo Quattrocchi (19th century) and the "Madonna della Vittoria" (Madonna della Vittoria) (1571) of Gagini school. The chapel of the Holy Sacrament is decorated with polychrome marbles created in the early years of 1704.

On a dedicated altar, there are some relics of San Felice di Nicosia, once Filippo Giacomo Amoroso, who was baptized at the font of this church on November 5th, 1715, and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Visit n° 3 After admiring the beauty of the magnificent square, another fundamental stop is the birthplace (casa natia) of Saint Felice from Nicosia. This simple and humble building situated at Via Porta d'Aquila was the birthplace of Filippo Giacomo Amoroso, the second-born son of Filippo and Arcangela La Nocera, on November 5, 1715. He lived here with his family until the age of 27. Since he was young, he worked as shoemaker.



Birthplace and wooden statue of San Felice da Nicosia, photo by Santino Barbera

His vocation of wanting to be part of the Order of Capuchin Friars Minor matured over time. He was admitted to the novitiate in 1743 and as a friar took the name Felix, in memory of St. Felix of Cantalice, the first Capuchin saint. He was assigned to the friary in Nicosia with various duties, including that of questing friar, and remained there until his death on May 31, 1787. He was a simple, humble friar of blind obedience, ready to help his neighbor in any need, blessing everyone with a humble "let it be for God's sake." He was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 23, 2005. Over time the house in which the humble friar lived passed from one owner to another. Through the interest of Brother Gregorio Centamore from Troina, it was purchased by the Capuchin Province of Messina in 1953. The dwelling was left with the original internal structure, while the exterior has undergone transformations over time. Today it serves as a small shrine and the Eucharist is celebrated there on the 5th of each month.

Visit n° 4 After appreciating the humble house of Friar Felix of Nicosia, from here we head to the uphill stage, crossing some vaneddë (alleys), and arrive in the rruga (rione) of St. Catherine, part of the ancient Marian quarter, skirting the ancient walls of the garden that belonged to the ancient ***Nicosia palace*** Baron of Sangiaime, now owned by the Canossian Sisters. After a short walk, we suddenly find ourselves before the facade of the Basilica of ***St. Mary Major***, a place of worship of the santamariotë (Marian) people.

The basilica was built to replace the ancient church of Santa Maria Maggiore, already dating back to the 13th century and consecrated in 1267 by Cardinal Rodolfo, Bishop of Albano. The ancient church stood adjacent to the present-day Spiazzo dell'Orologio (Clock Square), now King Frederick Square. It collapsed, along with part of the neighborhood, in 1757, due to a 14-month subsidence. During this time much of the artwork that we can now admire inside the new church was recovered. Work began in 1767, designed by Catanian Carmelo Battaglia, and continued slowly to the point that it was not until 1904 that the new basilica was inaugurated.



Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, photo by Santino Barbera

The exterior features an incomplete facade with protruding stones and a beautiful Baroque portal donated by Baron La Via of St. Agrippina for the reconstruction of the new church. Great allegorical vases stand out in the portal, and the ancient deities of Bacchus, Venus with Cupid, Ceres and Aeolus beautifully frame the portal of masks. The basilica has three naves, and an octagonal dome rises in the center of the transept. The interior is decorated with fine stucco work executed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Carmelo Guglielmino of Giarre (CT); octagonal medallions in the center of the nave show some scenes from the life of the Madonna, and in the aisles scenes from the life of Christ. The interior holds many works of art of great prominence and artistic value, including Antonello Gagini's monumental marble "Cona" or "Ancona," commissioned from the artist in 1499, but mounted in the ancient church only in 1512, which features, in the center, scenes on the life of the Madonna and, on the sides, scenes of apostles and saints. Because of its grandeur and importance it was declared a unique work in Sicily by art historian Gioacchino Di Marzo. In the apse basin stands out the wall painting made in 1903 by Ettore Ximenes depicting "The Coronation of the Virgin." Some side altars are adorned with 17th-century wooden statues made by Nicosian sculptors Giovanbattista and Stefano Li Volsi: the Guardian Angel, St. Onofrio the hermit, St. Lawrence the martyr and an altar frontal; the crucifix venerated by Nicosians with the appellation "Father of Mercy," which is carried in procession for the third Friday in November in memory of the miracle of the deliverance from the plague that occurred in 1626, a 17th-century papier-mâché work by Nicosian Vincenzo Calamaro; a beautiful marble statue of the "Madonna and Child" (second half of the sec. XV), a work attributed to Dalmatian sculptor Francesco Laurana; and a beautiful wooden statue of the Assumption of the Virgin (year 1797) by sculptor Filippo Quattrocchi of Gangi (PA).



Detail "Cona" by Antonello Gagini, photo by Adriano La Blunda



"Chair of Charles V"

Another work of considerable interest is the "Chair of Charles V," made in 1518 and made famous in 1535 when Emperor Charles V sat on it during his visit to Nicosia. Also preserved is an 1830 canvas depicting the Holy Family, a neoclassical work by Natale Carta of Messina. The Basilica also houses some 19th-century reproductions of famous canvases, the "Crucifixion of St. Peter," formerly by Caravaggio (1600/1601), and the "Communion of St. Jerome," formerly by Domenichino (1614). The church in 1819 was elevated by Pope Pius VII to the dignity of Basilica Minor and was later made official on August 11, 1825.

A few steps from the Basilica stands *the church of St. Vincent Ferreri*. Built in the mid-16th century, it was part of the monastery of cloistered nuns of the order of St. Dominic. Under the law of 1866, the monastery and church became state property. To make way for the current elementary schools, it was decided in the 1970s to demolish the entire monastery.

The church was enlarged in the early 1700s. The facade of the church consists of a beautiful carved portal and a scenic staircase; above the portal is a beautiful balcony with panciute gratings, which was used by cloistered nuns to look out during processions; the balcony is overlaid by a bell tower.



"Glory of Saint Vincent Ferreri" by Guglielmo Borremans, year 1717, photo by Santi D'Alessandro

Upon entering the interior of the church, the eye immediately catches the beauty of the frescoes executed in 1717 by Flemish artist William Borremans, with a polychrome technique that skillfully blends all colors; the vault features scenes of floral vases and foliage; in the center of it, artistically composed, stands "the Glory of St. Vincent Ferreri, supported by angels, between the Madonna and the Holy Trinity; at the feet of the saint we find in mystical contemplation saints belonging to the Dominican order." Embellishing and intriguing the fresco is a "trumpeter angel" placed in the center of the vault made with the tromp-l'oeil technique. Indeed, as one walks through the church, the angel seems to follow toward the viewer. The two medallions placed at the ends of the vault depict "Saint Dominic of Guzman with the four evangelists" and "Saint Thomas Aquinas with the doctors of the church."

Next to the church stands *the Alessi Palace of the barons of Sisto*. Ancient family originally from Rome settled in Messina and eventually in Nicosia and obtained the investiture of the fief of Nissoria. The construction of the palace, located between Count Roger Street and King Frederick Square, dates back to the 15th century. It underwent various remodeling, especially in the 18th century and finally towards the second half of the 20th century.

The spiazzo re Federico offers a beautiful panorama of the Nicosian countryside, and on the horizon we can see the volcano Etna and the ancient city of Agira. This clearing in Nicosian slang takes the name dell'Orologio, due to the presence of an ancient 19th-century clock tower, which is still functioning and was built on the remains of the ancient church of Santa Maria Maggiore, which collapsed along with about 400 houses, due to the landslide (ddavanca) of 1757.

Visit n° 5 After admiring the beautiful panorama, we slowly begin the pleasant descent of steps. We thus come across the smallest little church in Nicosia, dedicated to "Our Lady of Graces" (18th cent.) and continue towards Arena Street, thus arriving in the vicinity of the ancient neighborhood of St. Mechelë (St. Michael), the place where, according to tradition, Arabs seem to have settled there. Crossing the baddadörö (underpass) of Porta Coniglio and some vaneddë (alleys), we reach the church of *St. Michael the Archangel*.

The church is among the oldest in Nicosia. According to some scholars, it already existed at the arrival of the Normans, probably as a Benedictine priory and donated by Count Roger to the abbot of the monastery of Patti. There is mention of this church as early as 1134, as reported by Pirro, a donation

reconfirmed by Roger II. In 1388 it became the first parish of Nicosia and its parish priest was part of the chapter of the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Maggiore.



Church of San Michele arcangelo and wooden statue of San Luca Casale, photo by Santino Barbera



Apses of the church of San Michele arcangelo, photo by Santino Barbera

On the outside, the church retains little of the old building: two severe apses relieved by a beautiful cornice and the 15th-century tower remain. The basilica-shaped interior had already undergone several renovations by 1574. It features pointed arches and a wonderful wooden truss ceiling. The dome stands square and the apse is finely decorated with a large Gothic arch. In the apse basin was a Christ Pantocrator, which was destroyed during restoration in the 1970s. The interior holds important works of art: a marble Saint Michael the Archangel (16th cent.) attributed to Antonello Gagini, the 17th-century wooden statues of Saint Luke Casale from Nicosia and St. Michael the Archangel, sculptures made by Nicosians Giovan Battista and Stefano Li Volsi, a striking 17th-century wooden crucifix attributed to Friar Umile of Petralia, and an 18th-century wooden statue of St. Isidore the Agriculturalist. This church holds a relic of St. Luca Casale da Nicosia, the first Nicosian saint who

was born and spent his childhood in this district, wore the monk's habit at the abbey of Santa Maria Latina in Agira (EN) and later became its abbot; his body rests in an urn in Agira (EN).



Palazzo La Via di Sant'Agrippina, photo by Santino Barbera

After admiring the beauty of this ancient church and its apses we continue to other mansions. Gradually we come to the Viale Regina Elena, an area where the historic "ddavanca" (landslide) occurred that took away part of the city in 1757. As we walk, we arrive in front of the **beautiful façade of La Via di sant'Agrippina Palace**, rebuilt from scratch on this site after the landslide of 1757 that swept away the old mansion. The family, during the reconstruction of the new Basilica of St. Mary Major, wanted to donate their patrician portal, which officially became its main portal to the church.

Visit n° 6 Continuing on, we arrive at the ancient church of St. Joseph and, next to it, the remains of the former Convent and church of St. Sunday.

The church of St. Joseph was built in the 16th century and adorned with a fine 18th-century portal. Inside it houses a valuable painted wooden ceiling and works by Nicosian artists, including a large painting of the "Transit of St. Joseph" by Nicola Mirabella (1612), a 1780 painting of an "Our Lady of Sorrows" by Nicolò Sauro, and other canvases by painters Giovanni Garigliano and Antonio Filingeri. The beautiful wooden triptych of the "Holy Family" (18th century) deserves attention.



Church of San Giuseppe and ruins of the former monastery of Santa Domenica, photo by Santino Barbera

Adjacent to the church stood the former monastery and church of St. Sunday, of the Benedictine order. It was built about the 15th century. The church was adorned with a beautiful Baroque facade and tiled floor; it held many works of art. With the laws of 1866 it was suppressed and the former convent became a school. During the 1967 earthquake, the church and the old convent, formerly a school, suffered several damages. During reconstruction in the 1970s, the church's fine Baroque facade was dismantled. Since then, only a few architectural emergencies remain of this ancient complex, including the characteristic arches of the ancient cloister.

In its vicinity we cross another baddadörö (underpass) formerly called the middle gate and find ourselves in the ancient Giudecca that was the old Jewish quarter and the characteristic little church of St. Eligius Bishop (16th cent.), which was formerly used by the Speciale noble family.

Continuing on we come to the Cathedral Basilica of St. Nicholas. In its immediate vicinity is the ancient border called pelierö (piliere). Continuing the itinerary, we come across several palaces, including the Bishop's Palace, which bears engraved on its facade the date 1713. It was last owned by members of the Nicosia family. It was purchased by the City of Nicosia and then ceded to the Diocese in 1933. The facade of the palace has been declared a national monument.

Next to it stands the **Palazzo La Motta di san Silvestro**, a family that settled in Nicosia in the 18th century with the purchase of the feud of san Silvestro. The interior of the palace has a magnificent atrium and frescoes from 1937 by Salvatore Gregoriotti. Luigi Capuana, during his stay in Nicosia as a juror, wrote a novel "Un eccentrico" in Nuove Paesane (published in 1898). In this novella he talks about the bizarre life of Baron Saccaro (La Motta) and the poet pharmacist Carmelo La Giglia.



Palazzo Cirino, photo by Santino Barbera

Moving on, the monumentality of the **Palazzo Cirino**, built between the 17th-19th centuries, of an ancient Spanish family that came to Sicily in the 13th century and settled in Nicosia in the 18th century, is striking.

The interior of the palace holds a marble bust of Bishop Giovanni Cirino and 1893 frescoes by Natale Attanasio depicting the "Judgement of Paris." In the same palace was the apothecary store of Carmelo La Giglia, a well-known poet who wrote his works in Gallo-Italic dialect. Nearby stands the **Palazzetto la Via**, a palace that belonged to Gian Filippo, Regio Milite, who in 1535 hosted Emperor Charles V of Asbrurgo during his visit to the city of Nicosia.

Opposite this little palace stands the church of **St. Calogero**, with a marvelous 17th-century wooden coffered ceiling inside. It is adorned with a cycle of frescoes by the Nicosian Filippo Randazzo (18th cent.), including a marvelous painting of "The Adoration of the Magi"; in a side altar is a wooden statue of the saint of the same name by the well-known Nicosian sculptor Stefano Li Volsi. A few meters from the building stands the church of **St. Anthony Abbot**. Built about 1480, it was totally renovated in the 18th century. Inside it holds works of considerable interest, including the "Circumcision of Jesus," a canvas by Nicola Mirabella, a "Saint Sebastian," a wooden statue attributed to Stefano Li Volsi, and a terracotta statue of "Saint Anthony Abbot" from 1530 by Antonio Riccio. Looking up a bit, we are amazed by the stunning church of ss. Savior anchored on the rock.



Church of the SS. Salvatore anchored on the cliff, photo by Santino Barbera

Continuing is ***Palazzo Speciale of Mallia***, which belonged to another ancient Speciale family and was remodeled in the 19th century. Inside it holds valuable frescoes. Arriving in the rise, we encounter the ***Pontorno Palace***, which belonged to an ancient Nicosian noble family. The 18th-century palace was modified in the mid-20th century.

Opposite the palace is the ***Church of Carmine***, which over the centuries was attached to a very old convent that was already flourishing in the 13th century. It has undergone many transformations, especially with the subversive laws of 1866 and in 1929 with the demolition of the old Baroque facade and the construction in front of the school, while during the 1960s it was transformed into a Diocesan Shrine with the construction of a facade and a tall bell tower in Romanesque style. Arriving to the top of the slope is the ***Palazzo Speciale La Nova***, an ancient family originally from Pisa that settled in Nicosia in 1492 with Matteo Speciale, brother of the Viceroy of Sicily.

The palace was Regio Secreto, a place where taxes were collected. That is why that whole area is still called cöddëtta (collection) in dialect. In 1903, this palace was home to Ettore Ximenes, one of the greatest sculptors of the twentieth century of international fame, who, at that time, painted the apse basin of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. The palace during the 20th century was given to the Capuchin nuns.

Visit n° 7 Having arrived at the colletta, we go to the convent of the Capuchin Friars Minor and, after a nice climb, there remains the last visit to the starting place: it is the ***church of St. Mary of the Angels and convent of the Capuchin Friars Minor***.

The Capuchin fathers arrived in Nicosia in 1542 and in 1604 began construction of the convent on top of the hill for which it is named. Over the centuries it would become one of the most important convents in Sicily. In the 18th century, in fact, Saint Felix of Nicosia (1715-1787) would live in this convent. The church and convent in 1866 would suffer the eversive laws and were turned into a prison, which would remain so until its suppression in 2013. But the Capuchin fathers, soon after the 1866 suppression, thanks to the collection of many faithful, bought back the forest, the various works of art and rebuilt next to the prison walls the new convent (year 1879) and finally inaugurated the new church in 1892.



Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, photo by Santino Barbera

The interior holds works of considerable interest, including some relics and mortal remains of St. Felix of Nicosia. The high altar is adorned with a rich wooden case, made in the middle of the 18th century by Friar Francesco Fedele da Poirmillen and embellished with valuable sculptures by Pietro Bencivinni, and a large canvas made in 1615 by Giuseppe Vazzano known as "Lo zoppo di Gangi," depicting the "Madonna of the Angels among Saints Francis, Dominic, Clare and Catherine of Alexandria." on the side walls an 1897 wooden statue of St. Felix of Nicosia by Mistrethian artist Noè Marullo; two canvases by Nicosian Nicola Mirabella, "The Deposition of Jesus from the Cross" (year 1600) and the "Transit of St. Francis" (year 1614), and other paintings by Nicosian friar Bonaventura da Nicosia (Francesco Sigismundo Culò (1772 - 1843)).

Once concluded this last visit, we continue to the ancient "St. Cone Rock," pierced by ancient caves that were part of an ancient Byzantine monastery. It remains for us to cross the last and characteristic baddadörö with its San Gaetano district and we arrive at the end point of our journey, in **Piazza San Francesco di Paola**, which takes its name from the **church and convent** of the same name founded in 1630 by the **Frati Minimi or Paolotti** Friars belonging to the order founded by the Calabrian saint. The church has a fine, finely carved seventeenth-century portal, the church's single-nave interior preserves the seventeenth-century wooden statue of "St. Francis of Paola" a sculptural work attributed to the Nicosian Stefano Li Volsi, and in the altars the eighteenth-century canvases depicting: the "Madonna of the Rosary between Saints Thomas, St. Nicholas of Bari and St. Francis of Paola," "St. Isidore the Farmer," the "Madonna between Saints Barbara and Lucy," "St. Francis of Paola handing over his cord to St. Francis de Sales," works that are attributed to Nicosian painter Filippo Randazzo. Another considerable canvas was made in 1791 by the Neapolitan painter Elia Interguglielmi, which depicts "the Trinity and saints belonging to the order of the Minims." The convent became the civic hospital "Carlo Basilotta" after the suppressive laws of 1866, which in July 1943 during World War II was hit by an Anglo-American aerial machine-gun fire in which the two Nicosian crocerossine *Costanza Bruno* and *Maria Cirino* lost their lives while voluntarily serving the wounded.

After crossing the length and breadth of the city strolling through time, we came to the end of our "historical-cultural-sports itinerary"; an itinerary that helped us learn and enhance the historical beauties hidden among our alleys.

*Historical part edited by Santino Barbera
Translation by Massimo Testa*