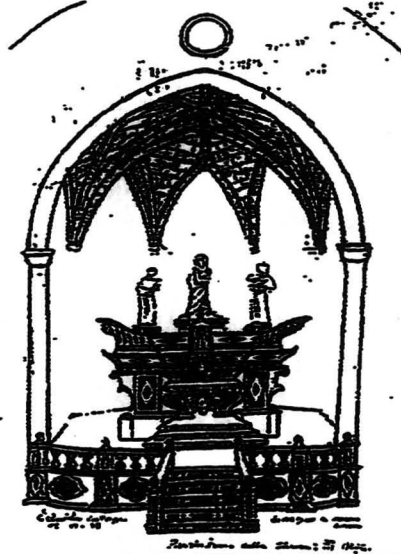


A 15th century cloister can be accessed through the vestry. The cloister consists of two floors: The first floor hosts 22 sandstone columns with decorated capitals over a polyhedral base. The columns have two differently shaped shafts, circular and polyhedral and stand in alternate sequence. The colonnade on the upper floor was built in the 18th century. The cloister's open space is dominated by the hexagonal bell tower, with its toothed spires, dating 1632.

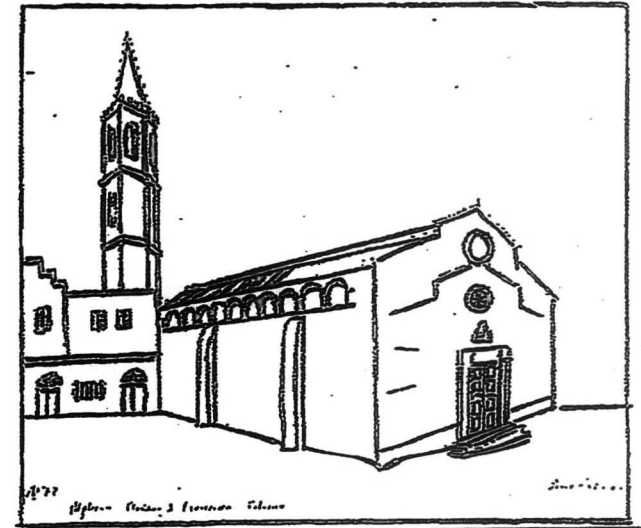
Of great interest are the capitals over the columns in the chapels adjacent to the apse, for these show, sculpted in relief, the plants the Franciscan friars used to grow in the gardens surrounding the convent (chicory leaves, hartichokes, grape vines).

On the left nave are three stunning Baroque altars made of multicolored and gold leafed wood, dating respectively 1729, 1730 and 1734 and made by craftsmen directed by Michele and Agostino Masala.

Of exquisite quality is the inlaid wooden cabinet in the vestry, used to date to stow the religious vestment used during services. The craftsman of this piece is an unknown Sardinian who lived in the first half of the 18th century. The cabinet is made of two overlaid parts, with four twisted small columns in the lower half highlighting three distinctive sections each hosting 4 drawers. On the top half are 9 doors inlaid with flowers, fruit and parrots, bearing in the centre, the Franciscan order's escutcheon.



Church of Saint Francis



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*Short artistic historical guide
of the monumental complex
of Saint Francis*



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Complesso Monumentale
San Francesco Alghero

Saint Francis Church with its adjoining convent, cloister and bell tower, sits in the heart of Alghero's old quarter. This architectural complex is a unique example of its kind. The actual church was built around the second half of the 15th century on top of an older church and was once surrounded by gardens which were thought to have reached the towers of "Porta Terra" and "San Giovanni" in Largo San Francesco which still stand today.

The arrival of the Franciscan friars in Alghero in the first half of the 14th century is clearly documented in a Papal bull dated 1324 issued by Pope John the XXII, where he instructs the then Minister for Order, Michele da Cesena, to establish two convents in Sardinia, one in the town of Alghero and one in the town of Iglesias, in the south-west of the island.

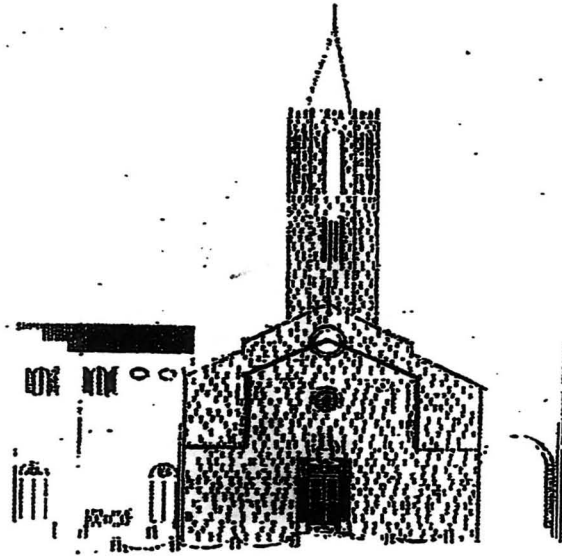
In the second half of the 15th century the "Fratelli minori conventuali", part of the Franciscan order, with the help of the local population and authorities, start building the original Saint Francis church, of which the frontal aspect, with its rose window, is still visible today.

In 1593 the church partly collapsed probably due to water logging of the land over which the building sat.

Today the front of Saint Francis church is an example of architectural simplicity, with a single architrave shaped portal which once hosted, in its top centre half, the Franciscan escutcheon (no longer visible today) with angels at its side carrying the torture instruments of Christ's Passion (flagellation column, step ladder, spear and sponge, nails),

objects often present in Franciscan symbolism.

Over the portal's architrave, we can admire Saint Francis's statue by the modern day artist Mario Nieddu. This sculpture sits inside the niche that once hosted the original wooden statue; currently being preserved and visible inside the vestry of this Franciscan complex.



Features of the original gothic-catalan 14th century building still visible today, are the two small chapels at the front-side of the church, the large presbytery with its four adjoining chapels and the chapel of the Holy Sacrament, with its distinctive loral shaped reliefs over the lower arch and its star shaped vault, which mirrors in shape, the vault in the above mentioned presbytery.

Following the subsidence episode of 1593, the church as it is today is the result of

a series of restorative interventions which started in 1940 bringing to light its original structure and the exquisite craftsmanship of the columns' capitals. The removal of the 18th century plastered ceiling in 1947, uncovered the original star shaped vault of the presbytery.

The church consists of three naves, divided by round arches over eight cross shaped sandstone columns, forming entrances to ten side chapels. The sandstone ceiling of the central nave is barrel vaulted and divided into lunettes. Over the arches and the false mezzanine, are eight rectangular windows.

Over the console, originally meant as a support for the ambo (standing platform for the preacher), today stands a 17th century wooden statue of the Flagellated Christ known as Lo Rosegat.

Inside the third bay from the left, similar expressive traits can be seen in the statue of the Placed Christ. Both statues are a representation of the 'Passion of Christ' and were used as part of the religious procession of 'The Mysteries' on Holy Tuesday.

The polychrome marbled main altar, surmounted by the statue of the Virgin Mary with Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Antony of Padua at her side, was made in Genoa in 1773. Of Rococo style, it is the work of sculptor Gianbattista Franco.

The most interesting aspect of the gothic architectural remains brought to light between 1947 and 1949, is the four pointed star shaped vault of the presbytery, with its elegant semidomes and ribs in hard white stone, bearing geometrical motifs of conch and daisy.