



United Nations
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Episcopal Complex of the Euphrasian
Basilica in the Historic Centre of Poreč
inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997



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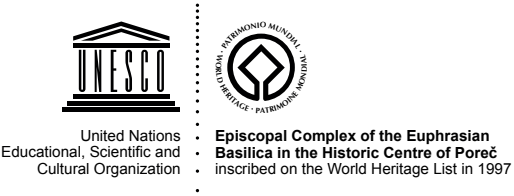


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EUPHRASIANA – CATHEDRAL IN POREČ



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This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Region of Istria and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Authorities.





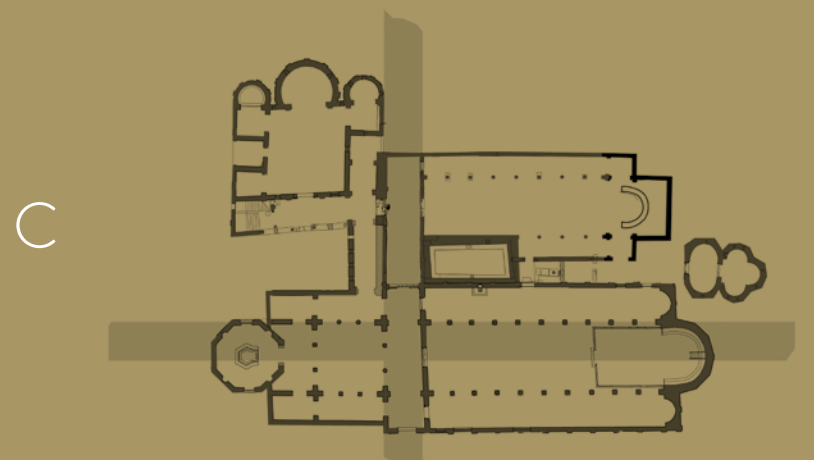
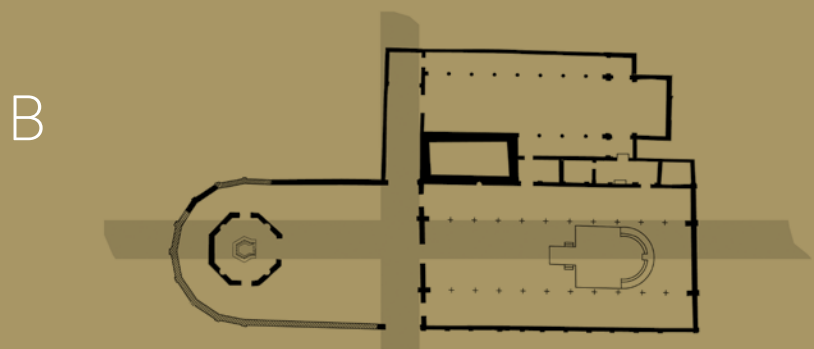
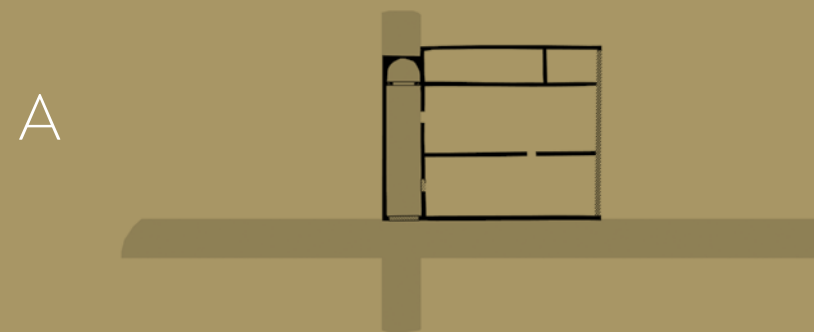
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L P S







- A) The oldest church – the first basilica, 4th century
B) The large complex of dual basilica, 5th century
C) Bishop Euphrasius' cathedral, mid-6th century

The locations of the Roman streets are marked in grey.

The cathedral complex of Poreč is one of the best preserved complexes of early Christian architecture in the world. Today, the triple-nave Euphrasian Basilica, the atrium with a quadriporticus, the memorial chapel, and the bishop's palace – all of them buildings from the mid-6th century – are preserved virtually in their entirety, partially in their original function. The baptistery, along with numerous archaeological remains and various structures integrated into Euphrasius' construction, are a testimony to the earlier building phases. This layer of the Cathedral is referred to as the Pre-Euphrasiana and is dated back to the 5th century. There are also preserved structural remains of an even older church, mainly the floor mosaics, as well as parts of a wall elevation, which are dated back to the late 4th century. All these church buildings were constructed in an area which was completely built up before that. The remains of Roman architecture have been discovered under the floor of the oldest church and on the location of a former street, which was turned into an enclosed lobby (narthex) in front of the façade during the construction of the church complex.

Naturally, it is impossible to fully reconstruct the appearance of each individual phase of architectural development in this area and the cathedral complex on the basis of the preserved remains. Many sections were destroyed during various renovations and expansions, while some were incorporated into newer structures in such a way that they can no longer be discerned.

After more than hundred and fifty years of research and archaeological excavation, the following building layers can be distinguished: a) pre-church buildings, b) the oldest church – the first basilica, c) the large twin-basilica complex – the Pre-Euphrasiana, and d) the cathedral of Bishop Euphrasius. One should also add the architectural remains and liturgical equipment which testify of the radical transformation of the northern pre-Euphrasian basilica in the early Middle Ages. During the late Middle Ages and the Modern Period, the cathedral complex experienced surprisingly little change. This is due to the general economic and demographic decline of the city and the bishopric in those times. The cathedral was barely maintained and there were simply no possibility of more radical undertakings.



CATHEDRAL WITHIN THE CITY'S ROMAN URBAN GRID

The complex archaeological story about the cathedral's construction and development begins with the very shape of the city in which it is located. The spatial context of all building phases of the Poreč cathedral is determined by the urban planning of ancient Poreč (Parentium). Research on the location of ancient archaeological remains, especially those of the forum on Marafor Square, has made it possible to reconstruct with considerable precision the Roman parcelling system on which the city's urban structure is based, with the regular orthogonal system of the *cardo* and *decumanus* streets. During this research, remains of an ancient street were found on the site of the cathedral complex: a tiled *cardo* which led towards the city's northern rampart, which has remained the backbone of the Poreč cathedral complex's architectural composition until the present day. Partially covered and partitioned, the *cardo* was transformed into a narthex that extended in front of the church buildings throughout their existence. The remnants of the street and the pre-church buildings

were discovered only recently, while the existence of different walls under the floor of the first church has been known from older literature. If these findings are combined with the assumed layout of the buildings as determined by the ancient parcelling rules, a pattern of small rectangular rooms lined up along the east side of the *cardo* can be discerned. The foundations and the lower part of the walls, as well as the doorstep of one of these rooms, are fully preserved. The proposed reconstruction of a series of small halls along the street indicates the existence of economy buildings rather than a residential one (*domus* or *villa urbana*). This conclusion is not in line with the traditional interpretation, namely that this location housed the earliest oratory in one of the more presentable halls of a residential house. The remains of the best-preserved room provide yet another important piece of information. Its southern wall was used to construct the first sacral structures. The wall was extended towards the east in order to become the northern wall of the first basilica's narrow northern hall. Such



continuity in the use of older structures when building new rooms and whole churches can be observed during the entire development and transformation of the cathedral complex. Each new phase of construction also involved reusing certain older structures, which were included into the new architecture. Hence, the development of the Poreč cathedral is seen more as a series of reconstructions, adaptations, and expansions than as a history of new constructions, although the differences in the architectural form and dimensions of the buildings from one phase to another are very significant. The traditional historiography noticed this continuity, but drew a wrong conclusion, which would

be often repeated, about the existence of a so-called “house church” (*domus ecclesiae*) within a Roman residential house. According to this interpretation, the floor mosaics of the first basilica would have been the original floor of one of the halls in that Roman house. The change of function would have been confirmed by inserting a fish symbol in the original mosaic composition. However, there is no archaeological or other precise evidence for the proposed hypothesis. It can only be concluded that the first church building really was erected on the location of earlier secular buildings, their parts being used in the construction.



CONTOURS OF THE EARLIEST CHURCH

The appearance of the first basilica can be reconstructed due to the preservation of large portions of floor mosaics and substantial segments of its walls. Its western, southern, and northern perimeters have been fully determined, while the length of the basilica's eastern side has remained unknown. The building consisted of three parallel, rectangular halls of different sizes. The central one was the largest and its floor bears the following inscription in mosaic: *basilicae taselaverunt*, meaning that the mosaic was made especially for the basilica. In other words, the church already had the status of a cathedral at the time. The southern hall is somewhat narrower and has a mosaic floor of similar characteristics as the central hall. The northernmost space is divided lengthwise into a shorter room, which probably contained the baptismal font, and a somewhat larger room of an unknown function to the west. Recent archaeological research has brought new insights regarding the architecture of the first basilica, establishing the existence of a peculiarly shaped narthex in front of the façade, i.e. on the site of the *cardo*. The narthex extended across the whole length of the church, while to the north it ended in a semicircular apse, which probably had a triumphal arch with a pair

of columns in the front. The floor of the apse was made of ceramic tiles (*tesserae*), identical to those found in the northern hall. Based on the current knowledge, it cannot be established whether the three halls and the narthex are all from the same period. Hence, it is possible that the narthex and the northern hall were built some time later. Numismatic evidence found under the mosaic floor dates the construction to the end of the 4th century, although its typology is fairly archaic for that period. Due to this circumstance, the dating based on the numismatic finds can be considered as referring to the mosaic floor alone. In terms of architecture, a typological analogy can be found in the Aquileian cathedral complex of Theodorian and even post-Theodorian period – if one takes into consideration the shape of the narthex, which has not been established for the first Aquileian basilica. Identification of a part of the narthex wall containing a single window and a side pilaster from the apse's triumphal arch, incorporated into the wall of the 6th-century church, is an important piece of data concerning the reconstruction of the first basilica. It is the unique evidence on the erection of the first church building of the cathedral complex where its existence has been firmly established.



ΕΝ ΤΗ
ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ
ΤΗ ΚΑΘΗΜΕΝΗ
ΕΝ ΤΗ
ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ
ΤΗ ΚΑΘΗΜΕΝΗ

THE PRE-EUPHRASIANA, A TWIN CHURCH

During the 5th century, the small church – probably already a cathedral – was significantly enlarged by constructing two parallel triple-nave basilicas, of which the northern one was built precisely above the location of the first basilica. The southern perimetral wall of the first basilica was used as a foundation for the northern colonnade of the southern, larger basilica. The large pre-Euphrasian basilica is now completely buried underneath the Euphrasiana, with which it shares the same perimeter on three sides. The eastern edge, i.e. the positioning of the eastern perimetral wall, partially coincides with the edge of a mosaic portion on the floor of the Pre-Euphrasiana. That basilica had a free-standing *subsellium* (gk. *synthronos*) – a clergy bench set off from the eastern wall. Other details about the construction of the larger, pre-Euphrasian basilica, such as the precise intercolumniation of the colonnade or the shape of the triumphal arch, have not been established. The northern basilica had a similar shape. Its perimetral walls have been preserved, and so has the colonnade's foundation with several stone

blocks from the lower part of the arcature's columns. This circumstance makes it possible to reconstruct its interior appearance, mainly due to the preservation of two arched passages on the eastern side, which were connecting the sanctuary with the side naves. This basilica contained a *subsellium* of the same shape and positioning as the main basilica. Other well preserved segments include parts of the narthex, which extended along the front of both churches. Same as the one from the preceding period, it was as wide as the *cardo*, but ended with a straight wall on the northern side. The narthex had a mosaic floor made of ceramic and stone tiles, arranged in the fishbone pattern.

An octagonal baptistery located in the axis of the larger basilica also belongs to the pre-Euphrasian complex. The baptistery remained in function during the later periods, as a logical and integral segment of the Euphrasian cathedral's architectural composition. Therefore, dating it back to the pre-Euphrasian period leaves several questions open. Also, the question of the polygonal ambulatory – its remains found to the



north-west of the baptistery – has not been completely solved. These were probably lower halls or porches, which encircled either the whole baptistery or only its western half. Analogies of such typology can be found in the baptisteries of Canossa, Riva San Vitale, Miletus, St. John in Ephesus, and the Aquileian cathedral. Yet another unclarified question is that of the annex or apse to the north-east of the baptistery. It has been identified by means of traces on the walls and drawings from the 18th century. Unlike the first basilica, the Pre-Euphrasiana occupied three Parentine *insulae*. It stretched southwards beyond and across the assumed

location of the *decumanus*, while the atrium and the baptistery were built to the west of the *cardo*. It is not clear whether the pre-Euphrasian cathedral complex also extended north of the atrium and the baptistery, towards the present location of the Episcopal Palace. Its composition in terms of both architecture and urban planning, as well as the shape of its liturgical furnishing (*synthronos*), are analogous to those found in Aquileia's post-Theodorian cathedral. Apart from the tentative, stratigraphic dating, no other clues exist, but the stylistic analogies point to the mid-5th century.



MODERNISATION OF THE CATHEDRAL IN THE TIMES OF BISHOP EUPHRASIUS

Euphrasius was the bishop of Parentium at the time when Justinian extended his rule to the western part of the Empire, which is manifest in the cathedral complex's artistic features and decorative system, preserved to this day. Bishop Euphrasius eternalized his construction undertaking by means of an inscription in the main apse and a series of monograms on capitals, doors, and decorative plaques. All of these facts indicate the mid-6th century as the approximate date of its construction. Euphrasius' adaptations encompassed, first and foremost, the large basilica. Its basic shape followed that of the older basilica, using its foundations and parts of the wall on three sides of the building. New architectural segments included the large, central polygonal apse and the semi-circular, niche-type apses of the side naves. Naturally, the church's interior was completely changed, including the addition of a colonnade with capitals made of

Proconnesian marble, an altar rail, and a pulpit. The apses were coated with figural and decorative mosaics and ornaments, using the art technique of polychrome stone inlay (*opus sectile*). The high level of preservation and the quality of architectural and decorative details in Euphrasius' basilica are comparable to the most famous examples of Justinian architecture in Ravenna and even Constantinople. Another Euphrasius' addition was the quadriporticus of the atrium, built in the space between the baptistery and the basilica, which was most likely also the location of the previous atrium. The northern pre-Euphrasian basilica remained unchanged and was functional in Euphrasius' time. Since it remained on a lower level, it was connected to the new church by four steps, of which only those that connected the old and new parts of the narthex have been recovered.



THE EPISCOPAL PALACE OF THE POREČ CATHEDRAL COMPLEX

THE ONLY ONE IN THE WORLD
PRESERVED FROM FLOOR
TO CEILING

North of the atrium and the baptistery, Euphrasius built another structure – the Episcopal Palace. It is a two-storey building of a pseudo-basilica type. The ground floor consists of a large square hall with smaller side rooms and a porch in front, from which three column bases have been preserved. The main room and the side rooms ended in semi-circular apses to the north. On this level no traces of decorative architectural finish have been discovered, and it is assumed that these halls had a simple utilitarian purpose. Only the porch contains chrismon reliefs (monograms of Christ), which indicates that it probably served the bishop to access the narthex from the representative hall on the upper floor in order to enter the basilicas. On the upper floor, the large central hall, fully preserved, is positioned higher than the side rooms and lighted through a series of eleven windows. A wide apse with large windows is located

to the north. The apse's front area is shaped as a triple arched pathway with a pair of marble columns with Corinthian capitals, which sustain a massive central arch and the smaller side ones. Symbolic reliefs depicting birds by a cross are engraved on the marble imposts. The inner surface of the triumphal arch is decorated with relief stuccowork featuring a vine motif. The decoration of the central hall clearly indicates that it was the throne room of the Parentine bishop, i.e. his space for protocol receptions (*episcopalis audientiae*).

The memorial chapel, a smaller building in the eastern part of the complex, is adjacent to the main apse of Euphrasius' basilica. Its complex architecture consists of a trefoil part and an ellipsoid entrance hall, an architectural form typical of the Justinian era. It may have served as a reliquary, but it is also possible that it was built as a mausoleum.



MODIFICATIONS IN THE MODERN PERIOD

The main parts of the cathedral complex from the time of Bishop Euphrasius (the basilica, the atrium, the baptistery, the Episcopal Palace, and the memorial chapel) remain preserved until today. The northern cathedral was abandoned and demolished during the Middle Ages, and its location served as a cemetery for centuries. Only archaeological remains speak of the existence of churches in that locality. The cathedral sacristy was archeologically explored between the two World Wars. At that time, the presbytery of the pre-Euphrasian northern basilica was discovered, with the evidence of its transformation in the early Middle Ages, when a large stone sarcophagus with pre-Romanesque reliefs on its front side was placed in the space behind the *synthronos*. Three identical,

semi-circular niche-type apses were built to the east, and that part of the northern cathedral was converted to a single-nave pre-Romanesque chapel. These interventions can be dated to the 8th and 9th centuries.

In the 18th century, two spacious chapels were built by the southern side of the basilica. The western one, the Chapel of the Holy Cross, was built on the location which had previously been occupied by two small Romanesque churches. Larger construction projects were undertaken in the mid-19th century. Carried by the spirit of historicism, Bishop Peteani expanded the basilica by building a spacious chapel on each side, so that they formed a transept. At the junction with the side apses, neo-style tribelons were added and an oversized choir area was built to the west.



CONSERVATIONIST RESEARCH AND INTERVENTIONS

During the first half of the 20th century, a large restoration programme was conducted, in which the Euphrasian basilica received its present-day appearance. The northern, Peteani's chapel was dismantled, the southern one was separated from the church, and the choir stalls were removed. The original windows in the basilica's northern wall were opened and the restoration of the baptistery was completed. The basilica's interior was completely excavated and archaeologically researched. A new church floor was laid down on concrete slabs, containing openings through which the old mosaic floor could be viewed. The room containing the sacristy was also archaeologically researched, but a floor was placed over the findings.

Towards the end of the 20th century, a new conservation/restoration programme was launched, involving the Episcopal Palace, the archaeological site, and the sacristy. On this occasion, a new residence for the bishop was built on the site of an abandoned, partially derelict building in the bishop's garden, which was to comprise the ordinariate and the bishop's apartment. This made it possible to restore the original Episcopal

Palace, which had served the Parentine bishop since Euphrasius' times, and to open it for the public. The more recent constructions in the Episcopal Palace were partially dismantled, so that the main rooms regained their original appearance to a large extent. The works were completed in 2001, with a *lapidarium* and a collection of sacral art arranged in the building. After that, the work on the archaeological site started, establishing a connection with the location of the former sacristy, which in turn created a circular route for the visitors: from the museum across the archaeological site, through the former sacristy and the trefoil chapel to the basilica. The sacristy's function was taken over by the chapel to the south, and the emptied space was used for presenting the remains of the northern pre-Euphrasian basilica's apse, with its medieval transformations. The vaulted hall was decorated, the mosaics in the trefoil chapel were restored, and the sarcophagus of St. Maurus and St. Eleutherius was repaired. These undertakings made it possible to open almost all the monumentally important parts of the Euphrasiana for the general public, an opportunity used by thousands of visitors every year.



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EX·VOTO·PERFECIT·EP̄S·OTO·.



ATRIUM
AND THE
BAPTISTERY



ATRIUM



1



2

At the very entrance to the cathedral complex, the visitor is greeted by a picturesque and intriguing portal built in 1902 (Picture 2). The truth is, unfortunately, that this is the only notable unauthentic part of the Euphrasiana. The entrance to the atrium is located down the passage which extends in the direction of one of the perpendicular streets (*cardo*). All the other parts of the cathedral are accessible through the atrium (Picture 1). It has the shape of a four-sided portico, its porches formed by the corner pilasters and

a pair of columns supporting three uneven arches each. This is an excellently proportioned, partially covered space, characterized by an interchange between shaded and lighted spots. The current appearance of the atrium is a result of repairs carried out in 1866, when the collapsed northern porch was re-erected and a new pair of columns with capitals was installed. All the other parts are authentic, including the particularly fascinating marble columns, richly decorated with hollowed capitals (Pictures 3, 4).



3

The ones to the west are best preserved, while those on the northern side have the most unusual appearance. These capitals are smaller than others and have wide, vertical ribbons engraved on the sides (Picture 5). Their shape indicates that they were originally planned for a multi-part window. Also, it indicates that the material from a warehouse – originally

engraved for other purposes – was used for the construction of the Euphrasian Basilica. The diversity of the capitals is balanced by the uniformity of the massive, cubic imposts on which the arches rest.

When looking towards the east from the atrium, one can see the upper part of the Euphrasian Basilica's façade (Picture 6). Traces of a wall mosaic, which used



4



5

to cover the church's exterior, are preserved there. In its upper part, scattered tiles and prints in plaster – parts of a large composition with Christ in the centre – are barely discernible, while in the lower part, where the mosaic is better preserved, it was radically and clumsily restored in the 19th century. The depictions of the Four Apostles and the seven candles of the Apocalypse

between them certainly represent the remnants of the original mosaic, but executed in an overly simplified, almost naïve manner. Therefore, they can only serve as a distant echo of the exceptional luxurious decoration which once covered the façade.





8



9



10

The atrium walls contain multiple stone monuments, creating a sort of lapidarium. All the fragmentary marble columns that were once located in the basilica's altar rail are now to be found in the south-western corner (Pictures 7-9). Each of them consists of a square base, the column proper, and the capital. The base contains vertical slots for inserting the panels of the altar rail. The neck of one of the capitals bears

an engraved pious inscription, while on other columns small Greek letters can be discerned – these are signs of stonemasons who produced them in the quarries of Constantinople (Picture 10). Some of these pilasters/columns are carefully polished, their profiles altered on one side. These are the ones which were converted into supports for the pulpit made by Bishop Peteani in the mid-19th century.



12



13



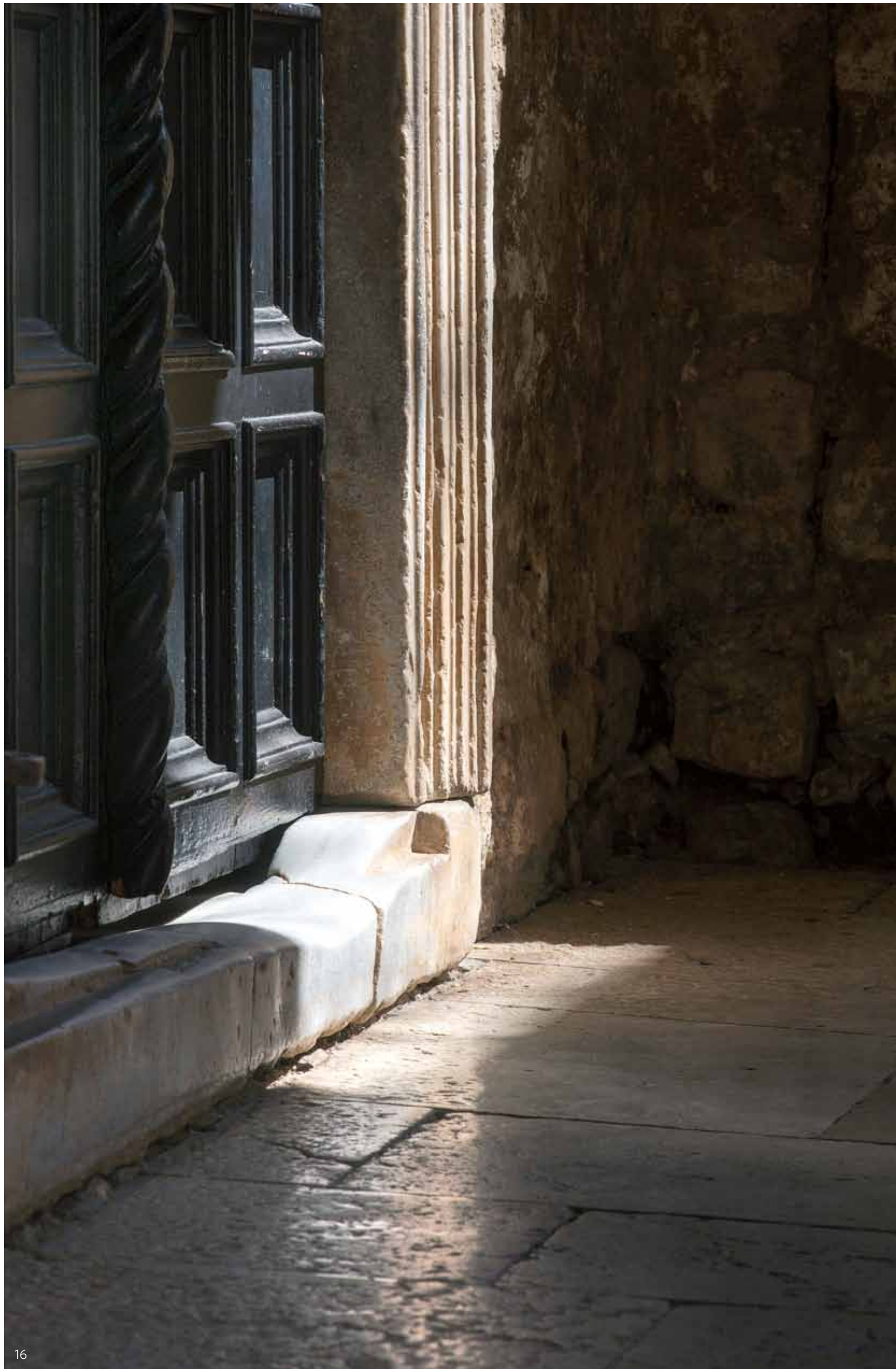
14



15

The floor of the pulpit, located at the southern wall, is polygonal in shape and bears a relief of a deceased bishop (Picture 11). It was originally the grave-stone of Bishop Quirini from 1475, which his successor used for the pulpit. Equally noteworthy are various valuable reliefs from the early Middle Ages, inserted into the baptistery walls. These are fragments of beams with characteristically pre-Romanesque braids. At the southern wall, beginning from the east, fragments of a front-side relief from a sarcophagus are visible (Picture 12), with depicted crosses and peacocks – the symbol of immortality – standing on both sides of each, as

well as a pair of doves, the symbol of peace, next to the cross. A large tabernacle with numerous figures, St Mark's lion, and the coat of arms of the Grimani family has been dated to the 14th century (Picture 13). Two plaques with a vibrant, centripetal composition in bas-relief are examples of early medieval sculpture from the 8th century (Picture 14). On another plaque, the Lamb of God, a symbol of Christ, is depicted with the Flag of Resurrection (Picture 15). A damaged plaque made of white marble contains a rudimentary portrait of Christ as a good shepherd, with lambs facing the cross.

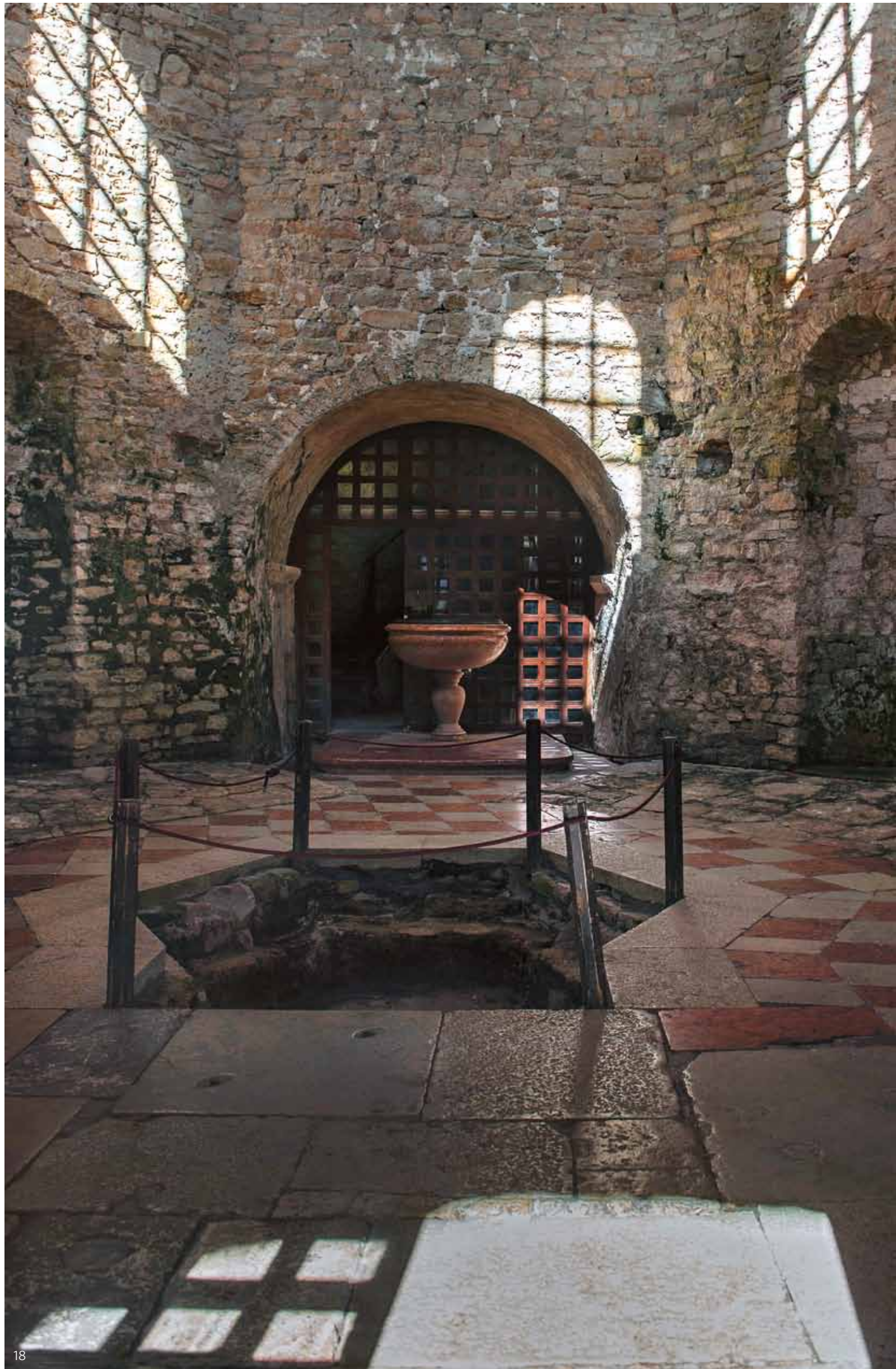


The visitor enters the Euphrasian Basilica through one of the three symmetrically positioned doors. In line with the size of the rooms they lead to, the central one is twice as large as the side doors. All of the doors have preserved their original profiled frames made of Proconnesian marble, known to be the work of stone-masons associated with the quarries in the outskirts of Constantinople (Picture 16). A round medallion with

Bishop Euphrasius' monogram is engraved on the transom of the main door, revealing his church-building initiative at the very entrance (Picture 17). It is noticeable that the door frames were built into pre-made openings with a discharging arch. Above the main door, one can still see the filling made of hollow bricks which were used to strengthen the opening in order to create less pressure for the decorated transom.



BAPTISTERY



19

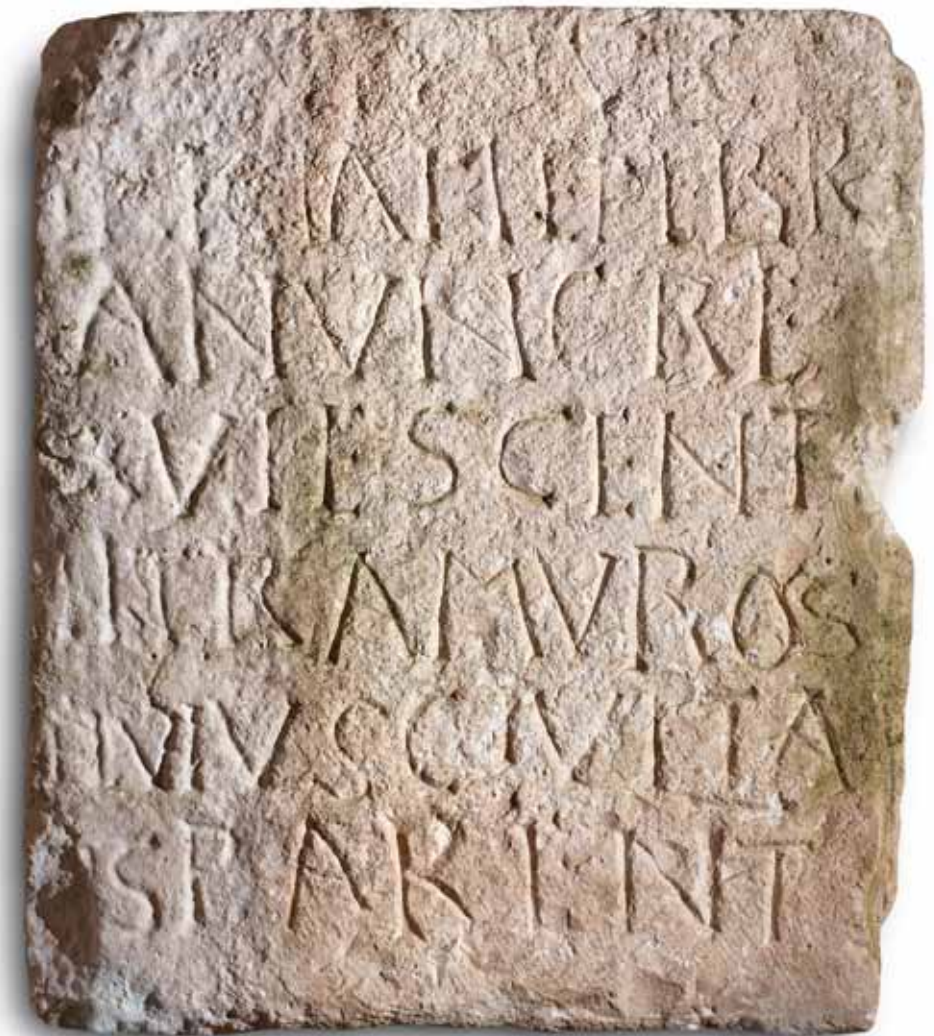


20

The baptistery, one of the best preserved examples from the early Christian era, is octagonal in shape, with a window positioned near the top of each wall. The upper part with the windows is a 19th-century reconstruction, but old drawings confirm that it represents the original rather well. The room is enlivened by small semi-circular or square niches in the axis of each side. In the middle, there is a hexagonal pool buried into the ground (Picture 18). The baptistery vividly evokes the atmosphere of the im-

portant ceremony of baptism, as the newly baptized Christian could enter the church for the first time through a large door. Several marble and stone relief fragments were placed on the walls. One of them is known to be the upper part of a 6th-century altar front (Picture 19). Another marble fragment depicts an elegant peacock (Picture 20). The triangular shape of the slab indicates that it was an integral part of the ambo in the Euphrasiana.





The opposite wall bears a fragment with an inscription mentioning the relocation of certain relics from the Parentine cemetery. It is assumed that the text refers to the transfer of St. Maurus' earthly remains to the cathedral (Picture 23).

A massive square-shaped belfry leans against the baptistery's western side (Picture 21). Its construction

began in the 11th century and the oldest part reached only several meters in height. The construction was completed in the 16th century, in simplified shapes. It is worth the effort to climb the tower and take a look from the top of it at the roofs of the cathedral and the town of Poreč, as well as the surrounding coastline (Picture 22).



THE
EPISCOPAL
PALACE



GROUND
FLOOR AND THE
LAPIDARIUM



Next, the route takes us northwards, to the garden of the Episcopal Palace (Picture 24). This area received its current appearance at the end of the 17th century, during the episcopacy of Alessandro Adelasio, who built an elegant staircase and renovated the porch on the first floor. This is confirmed by his coat of arms and a text engraved on the

transom (Picture 25). Upon entering the ground floor of the palace, one has stepped into a room surrounded by 6th-century walls on all sides. It is an exceptional experience to stand in a room that is fourteen centuries old. A porch as wide as the building extends at the southern side which was used for approaching the narthex from the west.



27



28

The doorstep is original and gives an indication about the original ground level in this area. A massive stone arch stretches across the porch, bearing an engraved cross with extended arms on one side and the monogram of Christ on the other. Next to the letters 'X' and 'P' (Rho), an abbreviation of *Hristos*, there is an engraved 'omega' as the last letter of the alphabet, and the whole is encircled by a stylized wreath. This small 'rebus'

can be interpreted as saying: "We celebrate (the wreath) Christ (monogram), who was crucified on a cross and who will pass judgement at the end of the world (omega)" (Picture 28). The monogram of Christ is also engraved on the transom of the entrance to the main halls of the palace's ground floor (Pictures 26, 27). To the west of the porch, there are remnants of a stairway which connected the ground floor with the first floor.



Upon entering the main hall on the ground floor, the visitor can observe an area partitioned by four large brick pilasters painted in white (Picture 29). These props were built into the room during the 19th century. All the other walls are from the original, 6th-century building.

The palace's ground floor is divided into several rooms: a large, square room in the middle and smaller rooms on the sides. In the north-western room, remains of a semi-circular apse can be seen, while on an even deeper level there are archaeological remnants from older buildings, which stood there before the Episcopal Palace was constructed. All the rooms on the northern side ended with semi-circular apses. The wall of the large, central apse is fully preserved, and the narrow windows are visible on its façade.



30

In the main apse, separated by a wooden lattice, Parentium's most valuable Christian artefacts are displayed. The most important amongst them is definitely the original fragment of the 4th-century floor mosaic depicting a fish (Picture 30). The letters of the word 'fish' in Greek (*ikhthys*) were recognized by the first Christians as representing the phrase *Iesous Christos Theou Hyos Soter*, which means 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Saviour'. Members of the then illegal church

used the fish symbol as a secret sign of identification. This particular floor mosaic with a fish drawing, placed in a city's residential house (*domus ecclesiae*), has also been interpreted as a symbol of Parentium's persecuted community of Christians who gathered there. This is not necessarily correct, since the fish was also used as a symbol of Christ in the later centuries, when it was completely free to practise Christianity.



31

Next to the mosaic, there is a marble plate from the front side of Euphrasius' altar base (Picture 31). It contains engravings of symbolic animals, dolphins, and doves. There are miniature doors in its lower part, through which one could see the chamber where the relics were kept. The semi-circular ribbon contains an engraved inscription stating that Euphrasius had the altar built eleven years after becoming a bishop. It is a magnificently carved piece of art – the bas-relief is

perfectly drawn, with connected outlines and curved edges that create mild shadows. The way in which the natural, darker vein in the marble was used to emphasize the centre of the composition shows the master's skill.



33



34

In the eastern apse, and the room next to it, items dated to the early Middle Ages are exhibited. The centre of the apse contains the monolithic Episcopal throne (Picture 32). Its sides are decorated

with braided and bas-relief ornaments (Pictures 33, 34). The forms of decorations indicate that it dates from the 8th century. It is a unique example of a monolithic throne from that period.



35



36

Fragments of a relief with pre-Romanesque motifs are displayed on the wall, while the one on the beams contains an inscription mentioning presbyter Leopardus, who erected a church in Parentium in honour of St. Pelagius (Picture 35). The fragment of the floor mosaic displayed on the wall dates from the 8th or 9th century, but its church of provenance has not been identified (Picture 36).



38



39



40



41

The entire ground floor of the palace contains approximately ten fragments of the original floor mosaics from the older, 4th and 5th-century church complex (Pictures 37–41). They are creatively rhythmicised by means of a system of ornaments in only three colours. The most interesting among them are, naturally, those

containing inscriptions revealing the identity of various pious donors, who wanted to indicate which parts of the mosaics they had paid for. Another inscription related to a donation, namely for a part of the sumptuous floor, is a real rarity – the donor wished to remain anonymous and stated that the Lord knew his name (Picture 42).



IOHANNIS
ROMEVSQV
SVIS PROVO
TO SVOTECTT
PEDE SXX

CVIVS NVN
ENDS NVVET
PROVOTOS
VO EC PD XII



44



45



46



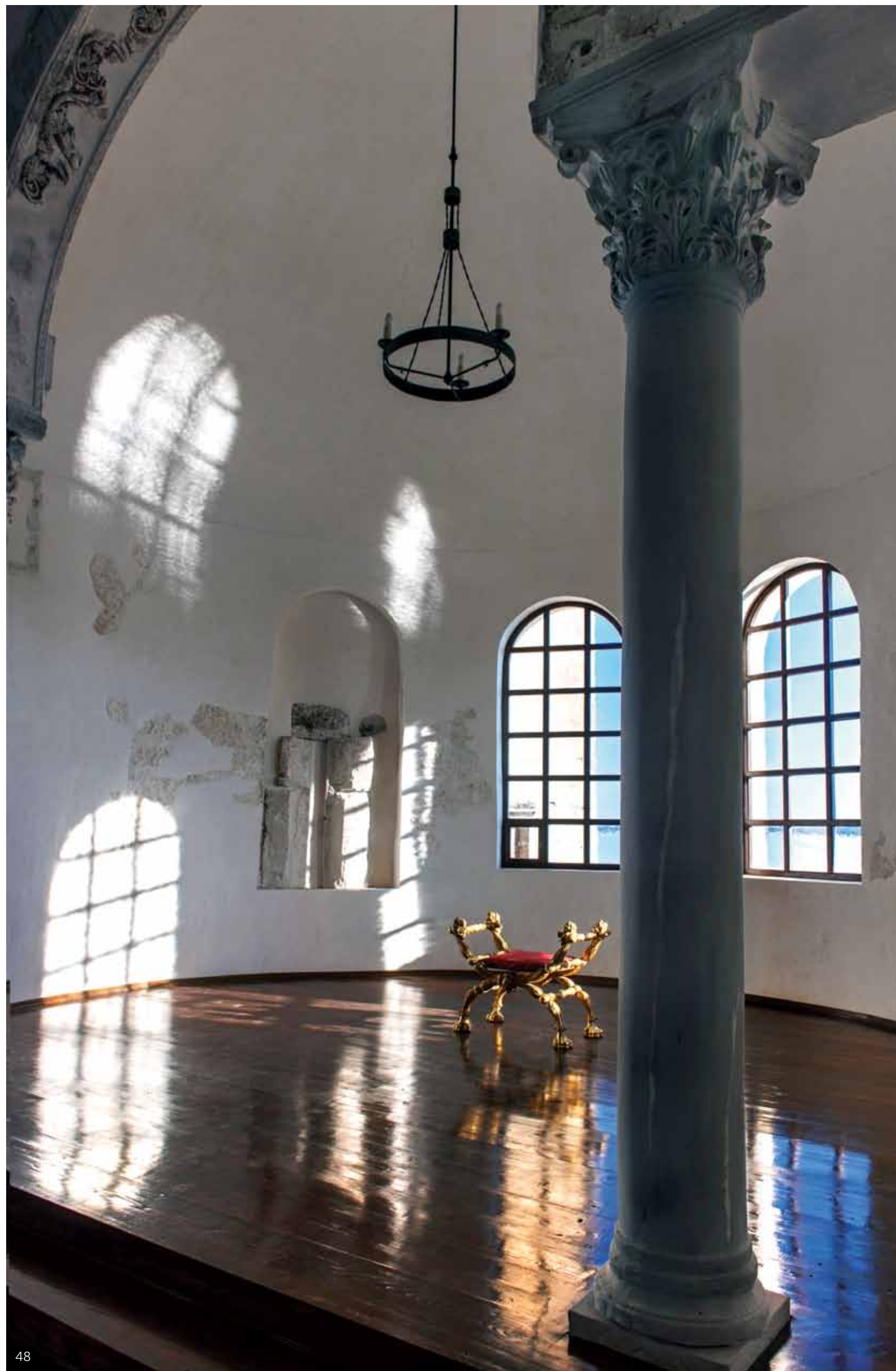
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The staircase leading to the first floor also leads to the porch which in this part, however, was significantly changed during the Baroque era. It is now used for displaying numerous stone artefacts that mostly come from the luxurious marble collection of Euphrasius' time (Picture 43). Remains of the original plaster which used to cover the northern porch wall in the 6th century can still be seen and those of medieval wall paintings (13th and 14th century) are visible in several places (Picture 44). Part of the displayed material

is situated in a smaller room to the north-east (segments of a *pluteus* and an *ambo*) (Pictures 45–47). Fragments which were found during the restoration works in the palace in the 1990s are exhibited in a small showcase. Another notable item is a well preserved *tegula* with a seal which, along with several other, similar ones was found on the palace's roof. It probably ended up there during the reconstruction works in the middle of the 6th century.

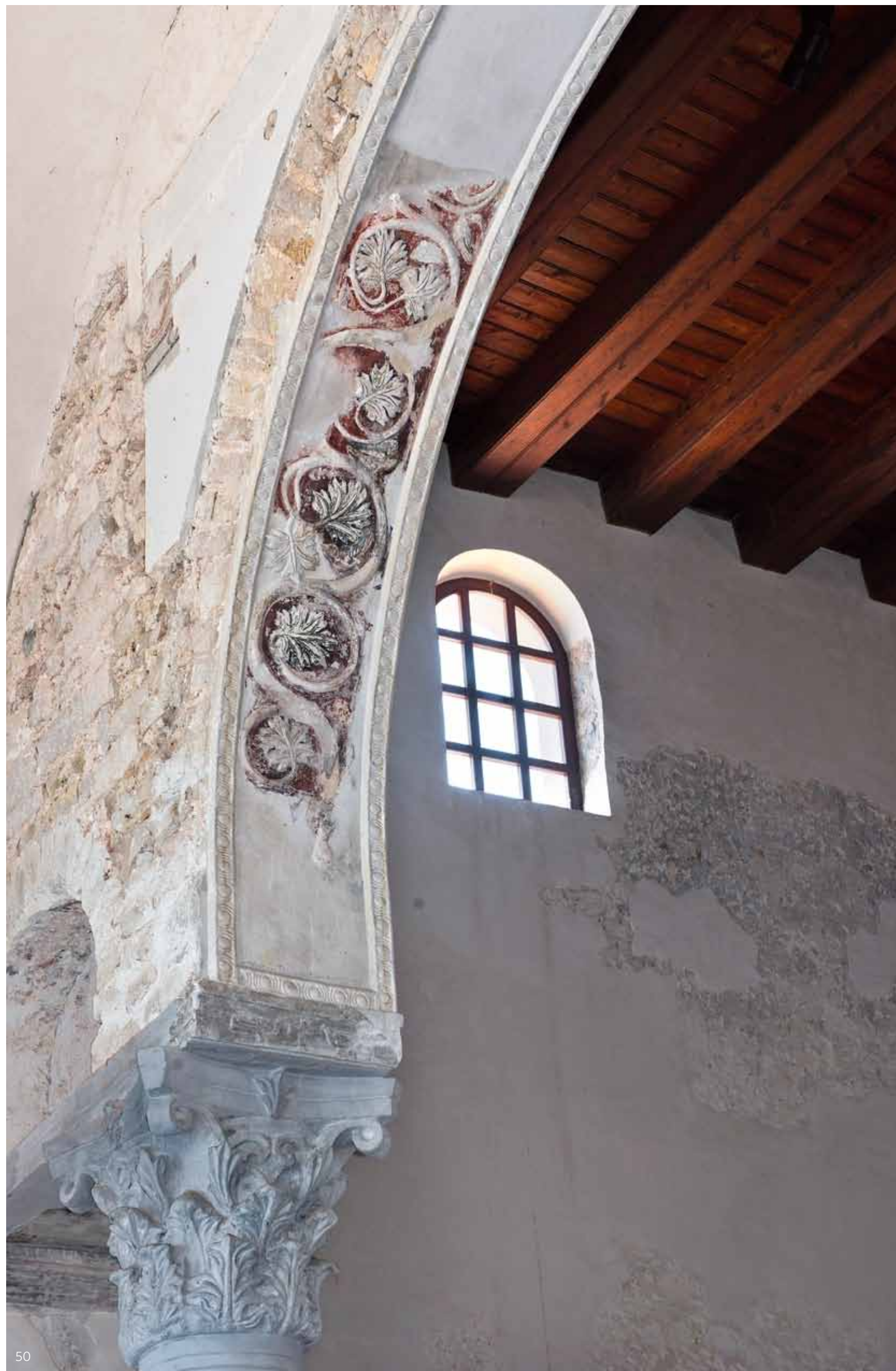


MAIN HALL
OF THE
EPISCOPAL
PALACE



A large marble door leads to the central, main hall of the Episcopal Palace (Picture 49). The entire building was constructed for the sake of this room. It is the ceremonial room, throne room, and reception room at the same time, the place from which Bishop Euphrasius governed both the diocese and the city. The space has preserved its original architectural characteristics and the details of its furnishing surprisingly well. It is an almost perfect cube, complemented by a spacious semi-circular apse to the north (Picture 48). The main area is lighted through windows installed to the very top of its walls. One of

them contains a stone *transenna*, preserved *in situ*. The windows open only to the east and north, as the western wing of the building was elevated in the 15th century and thus its windows were blocked. The windows in the apse are especially wide, allowing for intense light to flow in, which corresponds to the hierarchical place of the room in which the main personage presents himself to the public. The importance of the apse is also emphasized by a small elevation, while the triumphal arch gives it a special significance. It consists of two columns supporting three arches, the middle one being the largest by far.



50



51



52

In the area under the middle arch, large fragments of the original stucco have been preserved, depicting vines with leaves and birds pecking at grapes between them, evoking the Jesus parable: "I am the true vine, you are the branches" (Pictures 50, 51). The left column with its capital contains an impost plaque with a relief of the cross between two doves (Picture 52). It has been preserved in the original, whereas the other column is a replica. One of the windows in the apse has a different shape. It is obvious that it was converted into an arrow slit in the Middle Ages, when the apse was separated from the main hall and turned into a defence tower at the city's northern wall. The

audience hall of the Episcopal Palace in Poreč is, on a global level, a unique example of a preserved ceremonial hall from the period of Late Antiquity.

Poreč's bishops have lived and worked in the Episcopal Palace since Euphrasius' times, that is, for 1400 years, and it has experienced numerous alterations. Fortunately, the main building structures, as well as parts of the decoration, have remained preserved, and the thorough reconstruction works completed in 2001 restored almost completely its original appearance, especially that of the central hall.



MUSEUM OF
SACRAL ART



54



55

The ceremonial hall leads to several rooms in which valuable ecclesiastical artefacts are exhibited. The exhibition halls are located in the building adjacent to the apse of the Episcopal Palace, erected in the late 18th century by Bishop Polesini. The first hall houses the collection of liturgical vestments from the 17th and 18th centuries (Pictures 54, 55) and a group of wooden Baroque sculptures originating from Sveti Petar u Šumi, made by the Pauline monk and sculptor Paulus Riedl at the end of the 18th century (Picture 53). On the wall, there is a portrait of Gaspar Negri, the most important bishop of Poreč in the 18th century. The next room exhibits paintings and sculptures from the 15th and 16th centuries, including a polyptych by Antonio Vivarini de-

picting the Virgin with saints, made in Venice in 1440 (Pictures 57–59). This is an excellent work of art that, besides its dominant Gothic features in the figure of the Virgin, reveals more modern, Renaissance tendencies. Opposite to this opulent polyptych, one can see a triptych of Anthony of Padua from 1529 – a simple, almost rustic work of the renowned Istrian painter of frescoes from the hamlet of Kašćerge (Villa Padova) in Pazin's vicinity (Picture 60). Information about the painter, the commissioning client, and even some news from the then town of Hum (which the triptych came from) can be gained from a Glagolitic text placed amidst the *predella* – the triptych base (Pictures 61, 62).



56



57



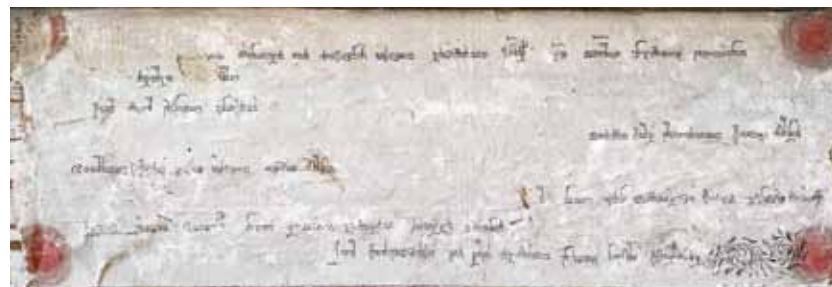
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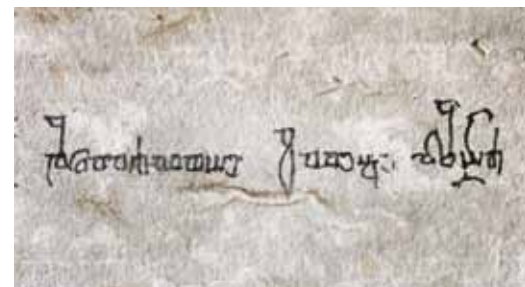
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60



61



62



63



The large painting on the wooden panel was made in 1519 by the Venetian painter Francesco Cevola, a follower of Bellini and Carpaccio (Picture 63). Although the painting originally depicted the Virgin sitting on the throne with the Child in her lap and two saints on the side, only its lower half remains. The painting's upper part, with the depiction of the Virgin, was repainted in the early 19th century, and a different Virgin

– the Immaculate – was created. The latter was again repainted towards the end of the 19th century by the Istrian painter Valentin Lucas. The polychrome layers that speak of these transformations and the probable relocations of the painting to various other altars were discovered during the restoration works undertaken at the beginning of this century; due to their historical value, now all the painting's layers are presented.

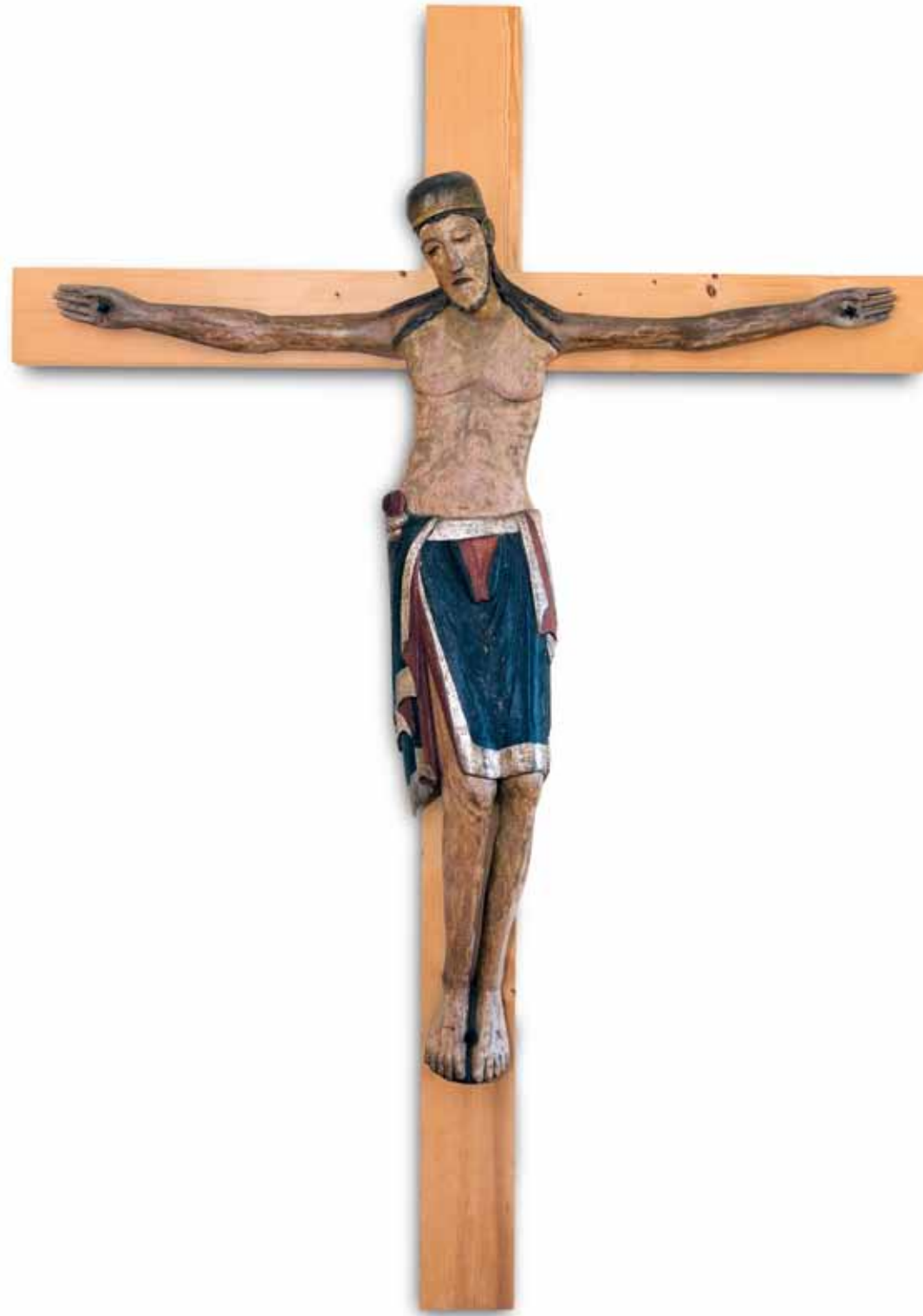


Small wooden sculptures of the Virgin and various saints originate from a church in the village of Kostanjica near Pula (Pictures 64, 68), while the larger sculpture of the Virgin with the Child was originally located in a church in Labin (Picture 65). These works are examples of Venetian Gothic/Renaissance sculpture from the second half of the 15th century. A small wooden sculpture of the standing Virgin with Jesus is an example of late Gothic sculpture in the Central

European region, produced around 1420. The sculpture originates from a church in the town of Boljun (Picture 66).

The wooden sculpture of a seated saint demonstrates the Gothic features of 15th-century art (Picture 67). The gilded sculpture of the Virgin with the Child and the colourful relief of St. Martin and the beggar (Picture 69) originate from the 16th century.





71

In the last hall, there are three monumental Romanesque crucifixes, the most beautiful being the one found in Motovun, dating from the 13th century (Picture 71). Probably only a little older example is the crucifix from Galizana, which has unfortunately lost its paint completely, leaving only its wooden core visible

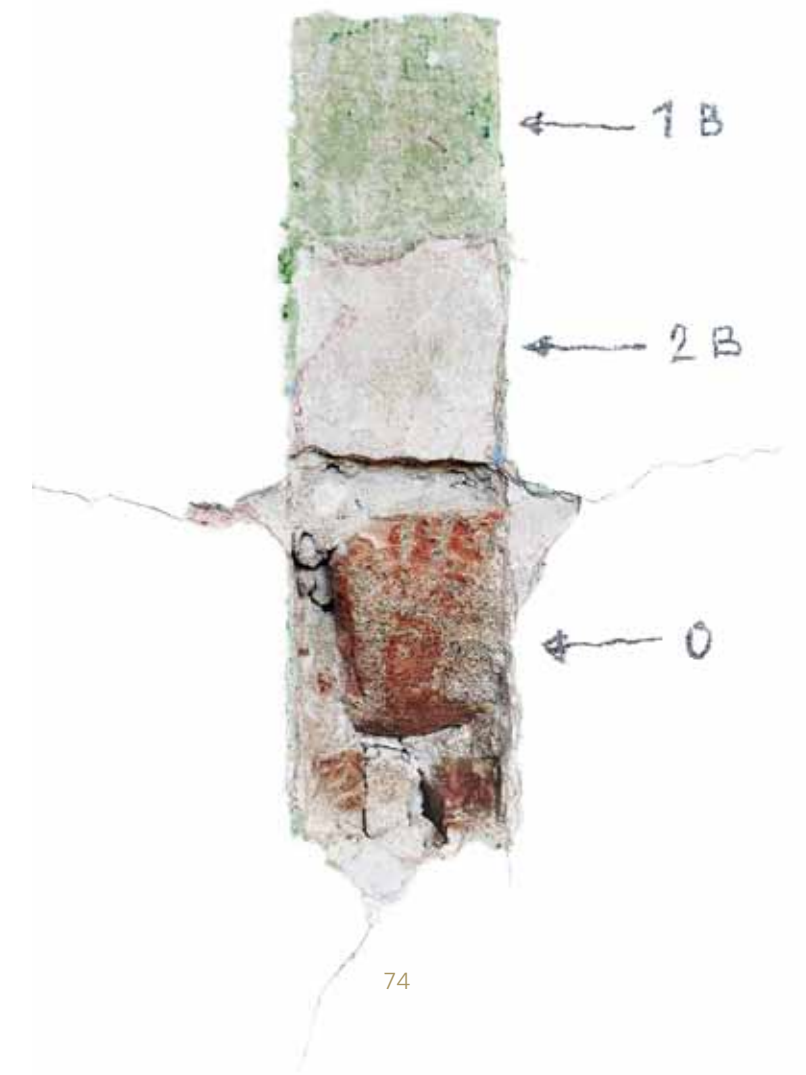
(Picture 72). The third crucifix is from the Poreč cathedral and it was also made in the 13th century. At a later date, however, probably in the 14th or 15th century, it was transformed in order to adapt to the new, Gothic iconographic fashion (Picture 70). The triumphant Christ – his posture upright, with his head raised



72

and eyes open – was modified by bending the neck so as to place the head in an angled position, while the once parallel and upright legs were broken and laid one over the other. During the restoration works that took place some twenty years ago, those layers of alterations were clearly identified. It was, however, decided

that the artwork should be presented in the form it had acquired during the transformation process. A reconstruction of the original appearance and the restoration data are presented on the panels next to the crucifix.



On the way back, the visitor passes through a small salon filled from floor to ceiling with playful Baroque decoration (Picture 73). Its green interior is complemented by furniture of the same hue and originating from the same period. This was the salon of Bishop Negri and then of Bishop Polesini, who had his predecessor's coat of arms, placed in the central medallion on the ceiling, painted over to show his own. In the Baroque period, there was another salon on the

opposite side of the large hall, similarly embellished and of the same size. This can be seen from the remnants of bas-relief stucco on the ceiling. The Baroque decoration of this room has not been restored. Instead, the walls are now presented in the state they assumed after the completion of the conservation works, which gives us an opportunity to observe various layers of intervention (Picture 74).



THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AREA OF
THE EARLIEST
CHURCH



PER VECES SAP
SCV SVIST C

IN TANTIS
ET IN QUINTA
EX SUDPAMEN
BASILICAE
PLESSE LAV

THE AREA
OF THE
PRE-EUPHRASIANA



From the ground floor of the Episcopal Palace, a steel grid platform, built over the archaeological remains, takes the visitor westwards. Having crossed the area of the former street – *cardo* – one sees, to the left, the remnants of a large city gate built in the Roman period, which led to the northern port of ancient Parentium (Picture 75). Several phases of reconstruction can be observed, but the gate went out of use in the Middle Ages, when the area on its inner side was filled up and turned into a cemetery. At the end of the iron walk, there are several stairs leading to the remnants of the city's ancient northern walls. After climbing a few more stairs, the visitor reaches the platform of a defensive structure built in the Modern Period for the purpose of reinforcing the walls. Here a beautiful and informative view opens into two directions. Outside the walls, one can see the spacious Peškera Bay and the green coast-

line to the north, where a string of Poreč's hotels starts. In the other direction, one sees the entire archaeological area with the remains of the oldest churches (Picture 76). Large areas of floor mosaic that are visible are not original, but copies made in the first half of the 20th century to replace the original mosaic floors of the oldest church, while the original fragments are those exhibited on the ground floor of the Episcopal Palace. But even though these mosaics are not original, they represent very well the atmosphere of the 4th-century basilica. The reason why they had to be replaced is that they are located at the level which was meanwhile, 1600 years after their creation, reached by the sea. The sea level on the northern Adriatic coast rises unstoppably at a rate of approximately 1 mm per year. Therefore, when the tide is at its highest, these mosaics are more than 20 cm below the sea level.



Passing through a large semi-circular opening, the visitor enters a building that some ten years ago served as the Cathedral's sacristy. This is the place where the great complexity of the ancient building and the decorative structures contained in this architectural monument are best seen. The rectangular room is a remnant of the apse of the smaller, pre-Euphrasian basilica from the 5th century. The two opposite large arches leading to the lateral naves were also part of the same apse – as the Pre-Euphrasiana was a three-nave basilica. The polychrome floor mosaic that once belonged to it is best preserved in the western part of the area, where it follows the semi-circular shape of the structure located in the middle of the room (Picture 77). The semi-circular wall is the remnant of the *synthronon* – the semi-circular stone bench

for the clergy. Here, the presbyters sat in half-circle like in a small arena, while in the middle a cathedra was raised for the bishop. However, it is precisely this central part that is missing – having been demolished in the 18th century, when a large, barrel-vaulted tomb was installed in the area. Standing right on the top of the tomb, on its cover, one can obtain the best view of the entire space. The transformations that it has undergone over time can also be well tracked.

In the early Middle Ages, probably in the 8th century, a stone sarcophagus was placed in its southwest corner (Picture 78), with an *arcosolium* – a vaulted tomb in a wall recess – erected above it, and an altar block was built at the centre of the western wall.



80



81

The *synthronon* and the elements that were brought to the sanctuary during the Middle Ages ended up underground in the 9th or 10th century, when the floor level of the entire area was raised and the room was turned into a small chapel by adding three semi-circular apses. Today, only their excavated foundations are visible, since they were dismantled in the 14th century, when the room, once again receiving its original rectangular layout, was turned into a sacristy with fresco-decorated walls. Parts of the murals have been poorly preserved on three of the walls (Picture 79). On the southern wall, one can discern two episodes from the Passion in the upper section: Christ's arrest and

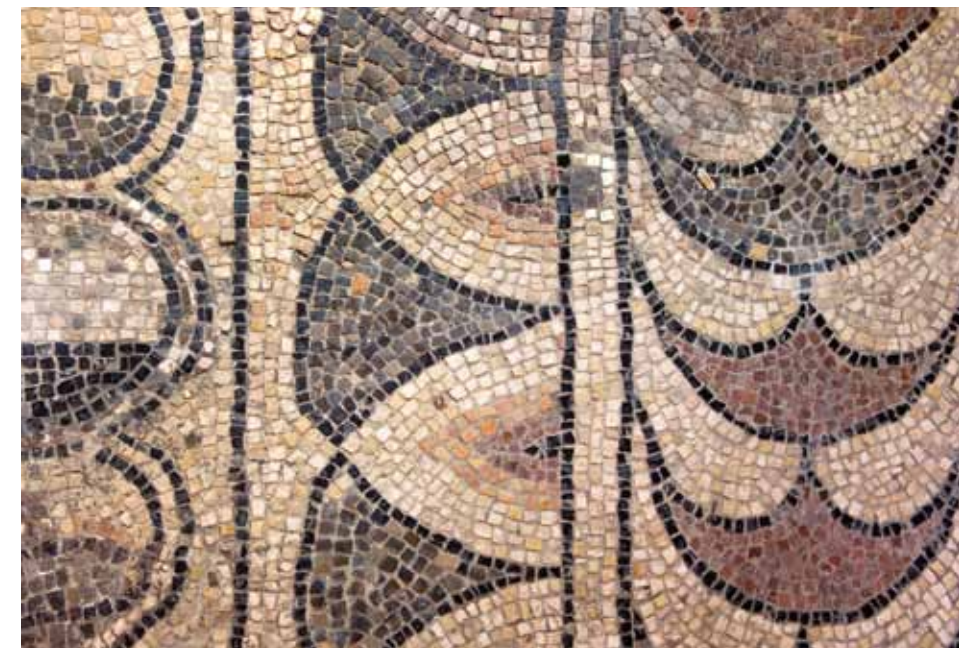
Christ before Pilates. A somewhat better preserved scene on the northern wall shows quite clearly two executioners flogging a person fallen to his knees (Picture 80). So far, the saint whose torturing is shown has not been identified with certainty. On the same wall, another interesting detail has been preserved. By looking a few dozen centimetres to the left of the semi-circular window, the only one in that wall, one can notice a small fragment of a fresco that is older than the above-mentioned ones from the 14th century. It is clear that this fresco lies in the layer beneath the Gothic paintings. This is a remnant of the oldest wall paintings, dating from the time before the 9th century (Picture 81).



THE TREFOIL
CHAPEL



83



84

More complex archaeological layers await the visitor in the next room (Picture 82). This is a two-nave, vaulted hall that was built between the apses of two basilicas – the Euphrasiana and the smaller, 5th-century church. That rooms between the two basilicas existed even before is indicated by the floor mosaics that were excavated in the midst of this area (Picture 83). At the end of the vaulted hall, there is a door with a marble-moulded frame, leading to the

memorial chapel. This building is also known as the *cella trichora*, because its central area is trefoil-shaped, with an elliptical vestibule in the front. It used to be a free-standing building, separate from the church. While it probably served as a memorial building for venerating a saint's relics, it may also have been built as a mausoleum for some privileged person. In its impressive vaulted room, important remains of the original floor mosaic from the 6th century have been preserved (Picture 84).



85



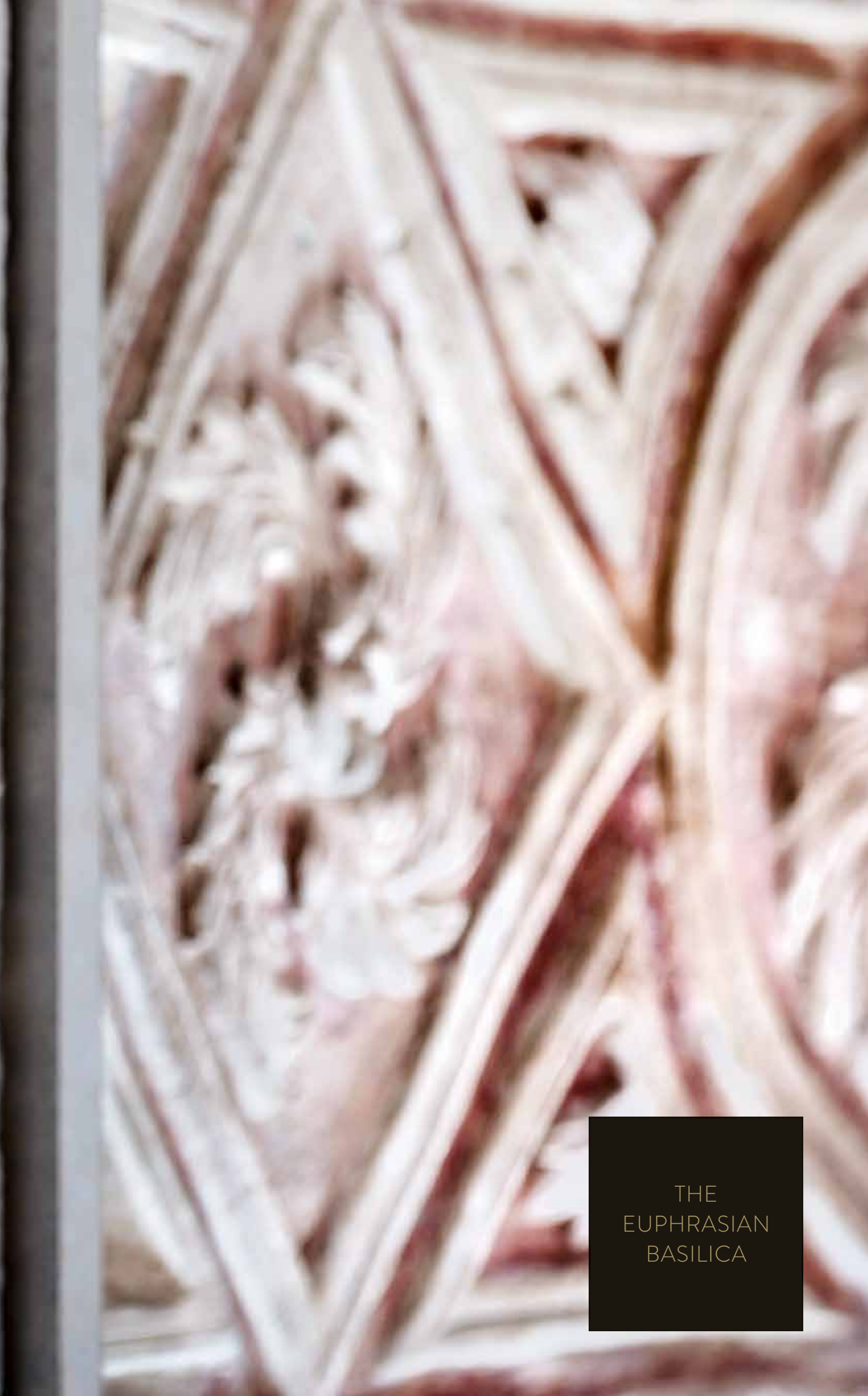
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87

In the centre, there is the marble sarcophagus of St. Maurus and St. Eleutherius, built at the time of Bishop Paganus, in 1247, and its inscription contains a reference to the stone carvers who created it: Nicola from Ancona and Nicola Bonoscagno (Pictures 85–87). The sarcophagus hosted the relics of St. Maurus and St. Eleutherius until 1354 when, during the

war between Venice and Genoa, the church was looted and the bodies of the Parentine saints were taken to Genoa, whence they returned only in 1934. At the side bottom of the sarcophagus, an attentive observer will notice two pairs of five small holes. Those were the openings that enabled the circulation of “power” that emanated from the relics.



THE
EUPHRASIAN
BASILICA



THE
LUXURIOUS
ORNAMENTATION
OF THE
COLONNADE



After touring the chapel, one finally reaches the Euphrasian Basilica. It is a real treasury of various building and decorating techniques used by the 6th-century artists. However, one should first notice its logical and meaningful architecture. The architectural idea of a basilica-style building was here implemented consistently, providing for a

well lit and accurately gradated and oriented space. In the side naves, our attention is drawn to the high and bright central area, while the rhythm of the columns connected by semi-circular arches (Pictures 88, 89) guides the eye toward the glittering curve of the central apse. Almost all parts of this building are original, dating from the time when it was constructed.



90



91



92



93

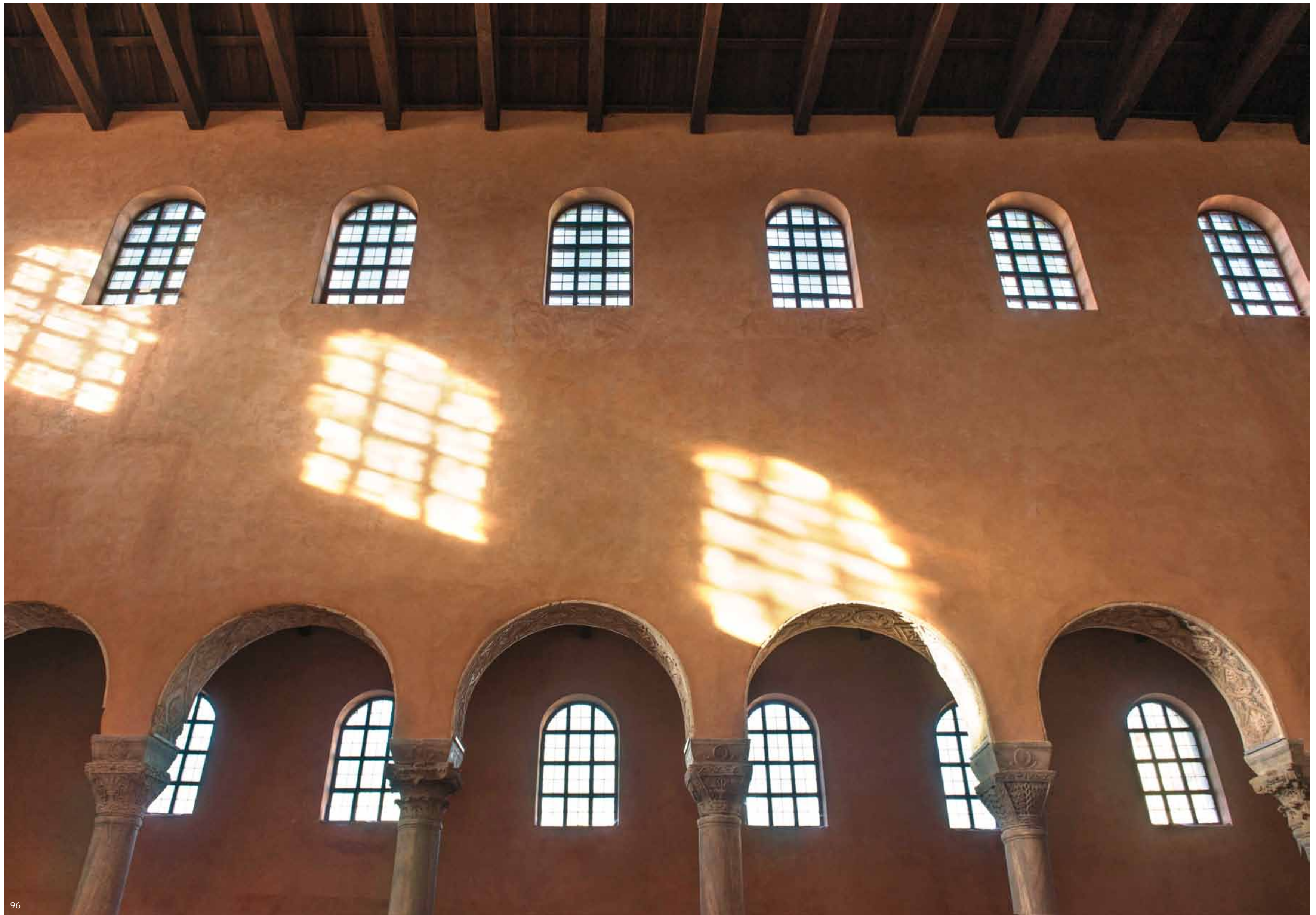
Two rows of nine marble columns bear capitals that are masterpieces of stone masonry. They are placed in pairs different from one another (Picture 90). Three main types of capitals can be discerned: first, the classical Corinthian capital, here enriched with a pattern of jagged-edged Acanthus leaves (Picture 91). The second type is a capital of simple volume, but with a specific and surprising finish. Its surface is wrapped in a sort of stone mesh that was carved separately from its stone core (Picture 92). It is the so called “à jour” technique of

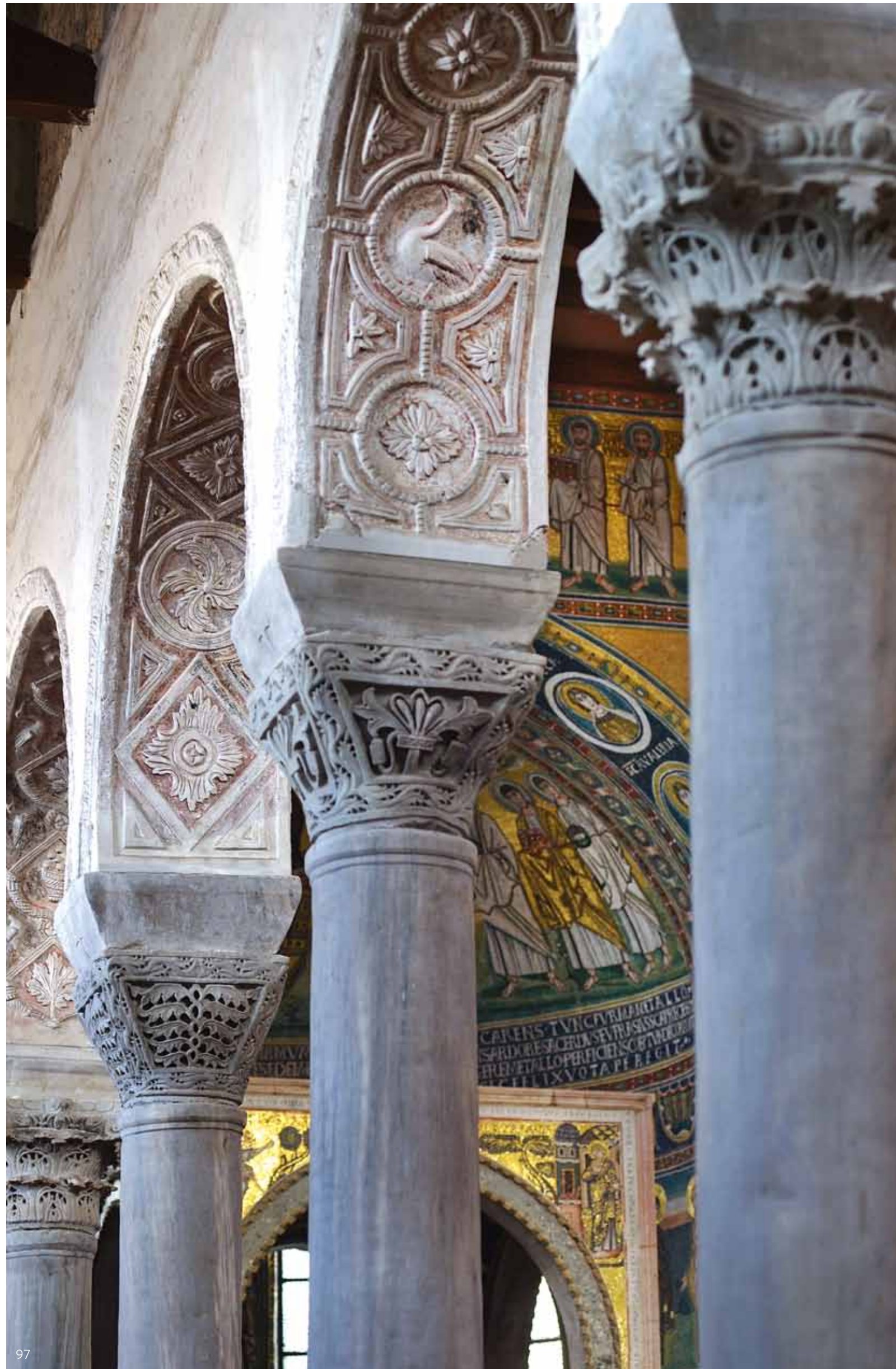
sculpting; it makes the capitals look like luxurious baskets, and therefore the common name for this type of capital is the “basket capital”. Another version of the same type is the prismatic capital, with symmetrical decorations in the shape of a pair of lotus leaves on each side. The third type is represented by two pairs of capitals that are particularly imaginatively composed. The lower part contains a perforated crown made of vegetal ornamentation, while the corners of the upper part contain various imaginary animals (Picture 93).



Such luxurious, deeply ornamented and versatile capitals would, in terms of aesthetics and physical strength, provide a rather fragile support for the arches, which is why additional, “real” capitals – imposts in the form of simple marble blocks – were placed

above them (Picture 95). They are all of the same size and shape, and are brightened up only by round discs carved on the side towards the middle of the church – where the monogram of Bishop Euphrasius was inscribed eighteen times (Pictures 94, 96).





98



99

In the northern arcade, the original stucco decoration has been preserved. Each of the arches is decorated with different motifs, and traces of the original colours are visible on the reliefs (Pictures 97–103). In the southern arcature, the stucco has not been preserved, because this wall was rebuilt in the 15th century. This is why one sees here pointed, Gothic-style windows, as

opposed to the square ones with round arches, such as found in all the other walls of the church. The rest of the church interior was likewise embellished with stucco decoration, but visually the richest in decoration were the apses, which was in line with their function as the spatial frames of the Eucharistic celebration.



101



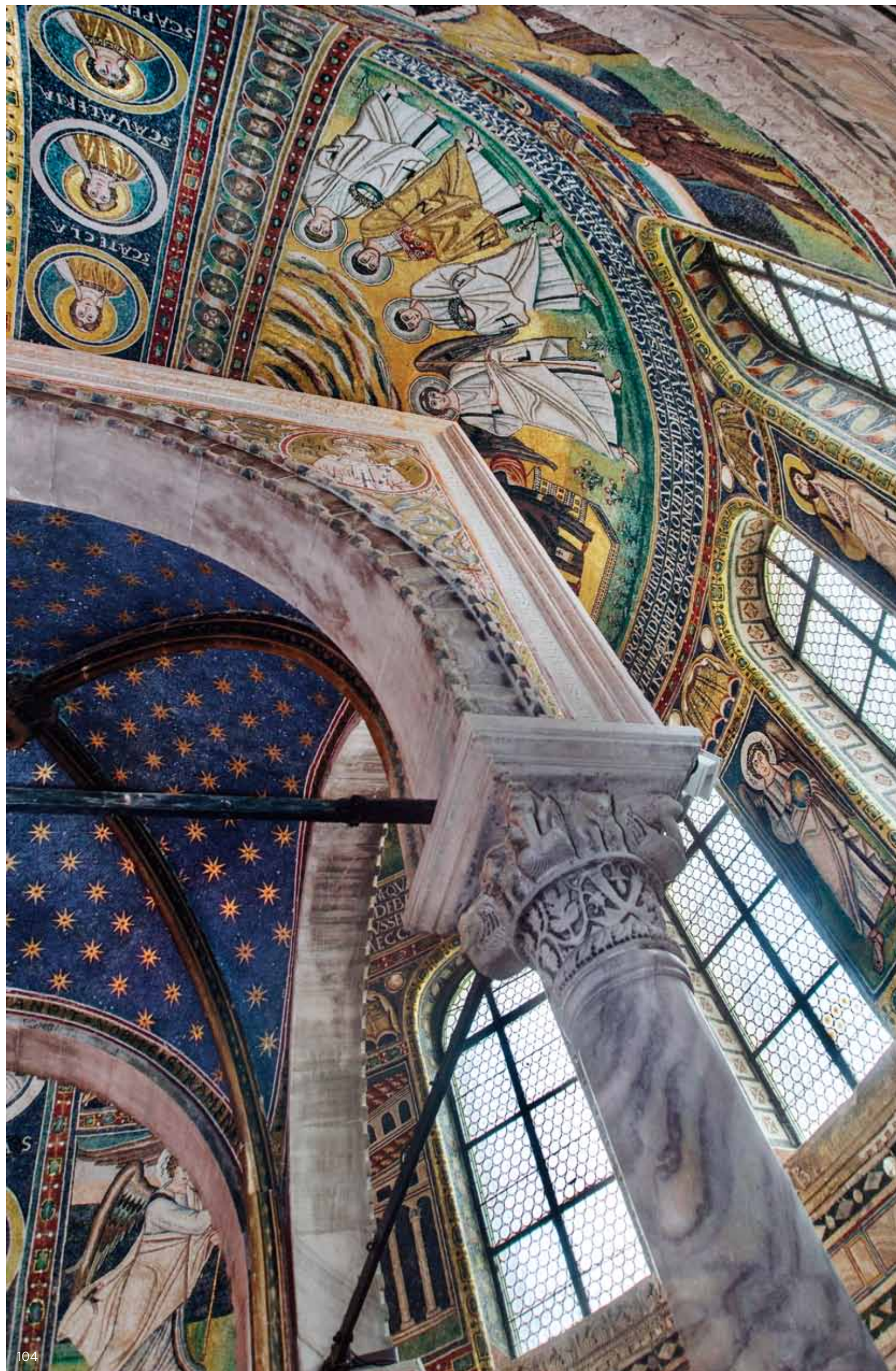
102



103



MOSAICS,
PICTURES THAT
DO NOT FADE



104



105

The apses' walls were covered to the last centimetre with the eternal material: mosaic cubes and marble tiles arranged in a "picture that does not fade" (Picture 104). In the main apse, mosaic was used to paint a complex theological and symbolic image. At the very top, above the triumphal arch and in the centre of the wide composition, Christ is depicted with an open book in his hand, seated on a blue sphere. To each of his sides there are six apostles

holding books, *rotuli*, or martyr's crowns in their hands. This mosaic was discovered below the ceiling of the church towards the end of the 19th century. Only the upper parts of all figures were preserved and therefore all the bodies were reconstructed from the waist down. The apse calotte contains a complex scene with an axial composition, depicting the Virgin sitting on the throne with Christ on her lap (Picture 105).



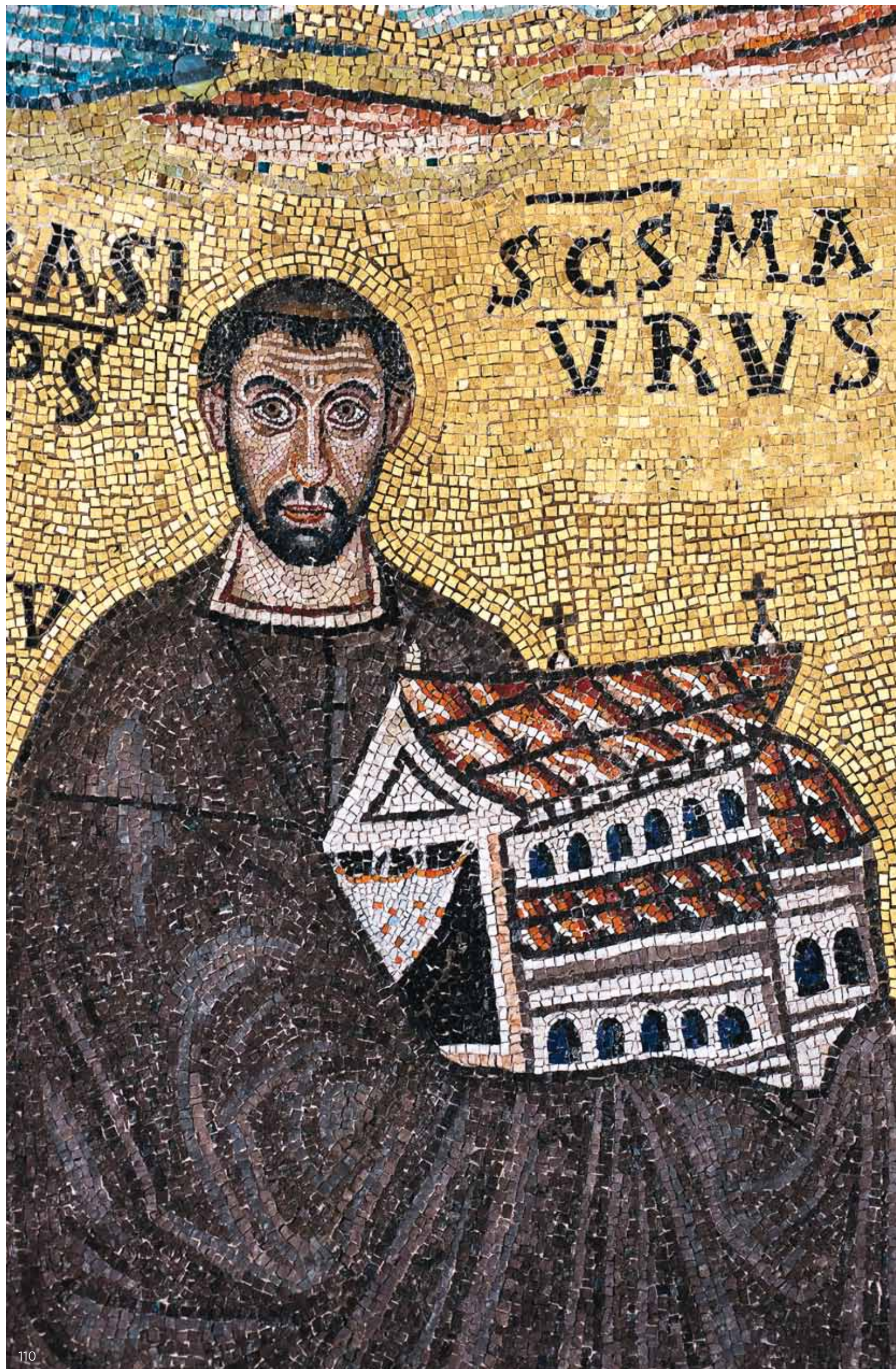
Her honour guards are two large angels dressed in white, and the ceremonial entourage on either side of her consists of personages worthy of the position. To the right, there are three anonymous saints, holding books or martyr's crowns in their hands, with halos around their heads (Picture 106). They are similar in

appearance and represent the multitudinous world of the saints and the blessed in Heaven, which is shown as an endless and timeless golden area with idyllic, colourful clouds (Picture 107). Flowers arranged on the green meadow show that it is the place and space of eternal bliss – the Garden of Eden.

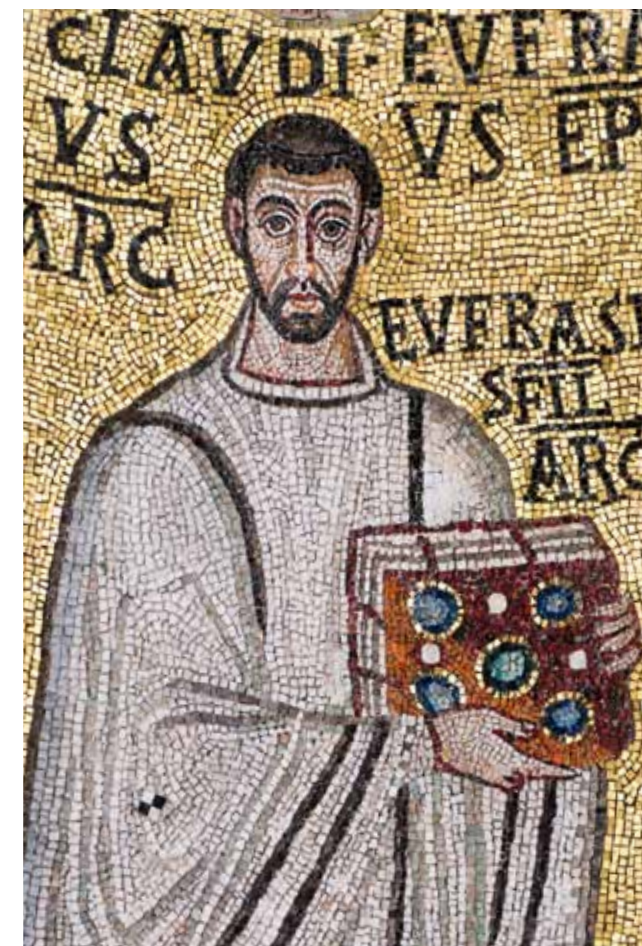


On the opposite side, there are three persons placed within the same ambiance, but only one of them has a halo around his head (Picture 109). Those are representatives of the Parentine church. They are the only ones identified by inscriptions and therefore easy to recognise. The figure with the crown and the halo is St. Maurus (Picture 108), the Parentine patron saint who acts here as an intercessor of the earthly Church of Parentium before the divine Christ and Mary

- which is the main task of those who have reached the honour of holiness. The last in the row are renowned citizens of Parentium who took part in the building of the church. Considered to be the most deserving is the person with an imposing face, short bearded, and dressed in a purple robe. This is Bishop Euphrasius. He is holding a model of his basilica, extending it toward the Virgin; he is offering the church built on Earth to the one in Heaven.



110



111



112

The model of the church painted in the mosaic depicts the newly built basilica faithfully. We can see that it is a three-nave building (Picture 110) – the large, rounded apse is discernible, the roofs are covered with *tegulae*, and a decorated curtain hangs over the main entrance door. That such a curtain indeed existed is confirmed by the bronze hooks that have been preserved until today – modelled in the shape of a finger with a nail, they still stand above the main door that was once covered by the curtain. Beside Euphrasius, there stands Archdeacon Claudius (Picture 111), physiognomically similar, the person in rank next to

the bishop who, given his position, was probably in charge of the technical part of the activities related to the building and furnishing of the church. Between Claudius and Euphrasius, a small figure is painted, described as Euphrasius, the son of Archdeacon Claudius (Picture 112). He is not a child; his size was rather, in accordance with the principles of iconographic perspective, determined by his lesser importance. Holding a couple of candles in his hands, he offers them to the Virgin and Christ, another symbolic gift that expresses the devotion of the Church of Parentium, its parishioners and clergy.



113



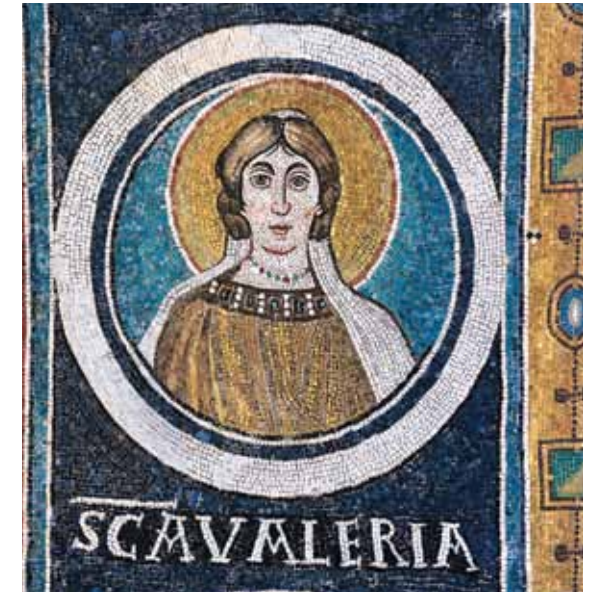
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115



116



117

Along the edge of the inner side of the triumphal arch, there is an interesting series of round medallions. The top one depicts Christ as the "Lamb of God" (Picture 113). Although the image looks quite convincing, it should be noted that it was a free interpretation of the 19th-century restorers, who did not have the full understanding of what the mosaic, damaged at that

spot, once depicted. The other medallions present the portraits of saints. There is an inscription beneath each of them, which indicates that some of them were very popular and venerated in Istria (Pictures 114–117). Their faces are uniform; they are all similar, with no individual characteristics. In the artist's imagination, they are timeless beings who have risen above the everyday.





119

Bishop Euphrasius recorded his endeavour of building and furnishing the church in a long inscription that extends along the entire width of the apse (Pictures 118, 119). The four-line text on a blue background has been excellently preserved and makes an interesting historical document. Translated, it reads:

“This at first was a shaky and dilapidated temple

In danger of falling down, it was not supported by firm strength,

Confined and without golden embellishments,

And its ruinous roof held together only by the grace of God.

When the caring and faithful priest Euphrasius

Saw that his seat was in danger of collapsing under its own weight,

With sacred inspiration he forestalled the collapse

And to make the ruinous building firmer, he destroyed it.

Having laid the foundations, he built the roof of the temple.

What in recent days you see shining in gold

(He) embellished, finishing what had been started,
and bestowed it with great gifts.

Calling upon Christ’s name, he marked the church,

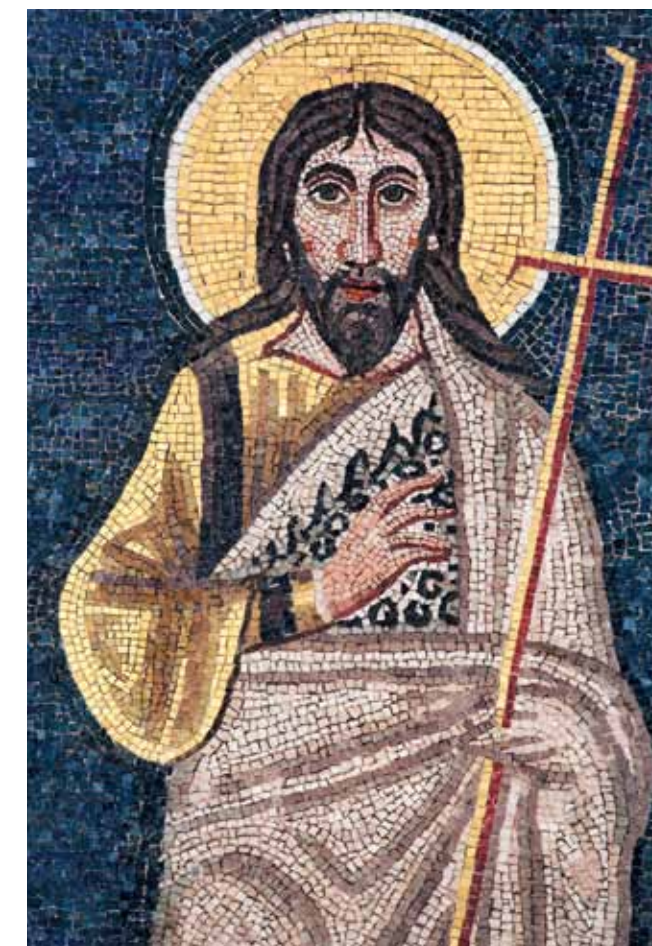
Rejoicing in the work, and thus pleased he fulfilled his vow.”



120



121



122

In this rather lengthy text, versified according to the metrical rules, Bishop Euphrasius says that the old church was in poor condition and of unsightly appearance and that he built a new one from ground up in the same place. The pious bishop slightly exaggerated here, because archaeological investigations have shown that the lower parts of the older church's walls were used as foundations almost along the entire perimeter of the building. Below the inscription – between

the windows and on the sides of the apse – there are five more mosaic pictures. In the middle, in the narrow field between the windows, there is a tall figure of an archangel with a celestial sphere and a glaring golden cross in it (Picture 120). Between the windows on the left side, there is St. Zachary holding a golden chest with a miniature three-figure scene on it (Picture 121), and an image of St. John the Baptist to the right (Picture 122).



123



124



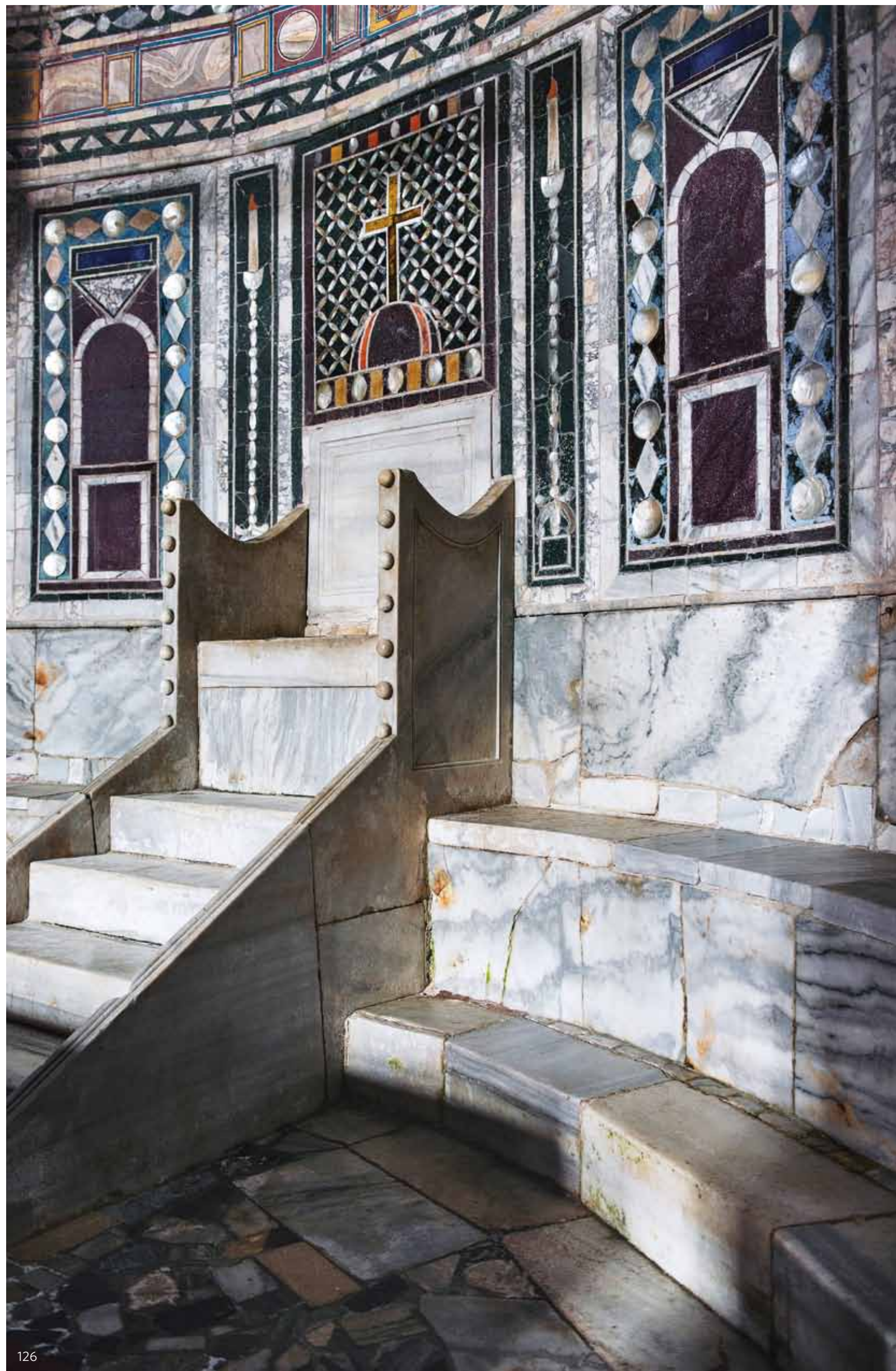
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The apse's sides are covered by two large scenes: the Annunciation (Picture 123) to the north and the Visitation (Picture 124) to the south. Below this part of the pictures, and in level with the bottom of the windows, there is a plaster garland with the Acanthus ornament, made in stucco (Picture 125). It divides the apse height-wise into two conceptually clearly distinct

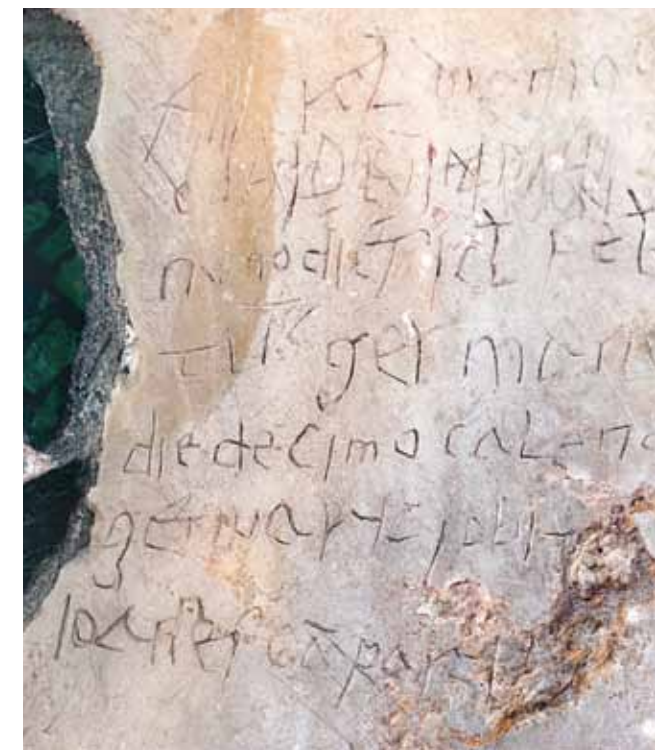
parts. The upper part features events related to the Biblical, heavenly Church. Below the garland, the figural and symbolical language is reduced to a minimum and ornamentation is deliberately geometrically abstract. It provides a visual frame for the area in which, through liturgical celebrations, the divine dogmas are evoked on Earth.



THE
FURNISHING AND
ORNAMENTATION
OF THE
SANCTUARY



127



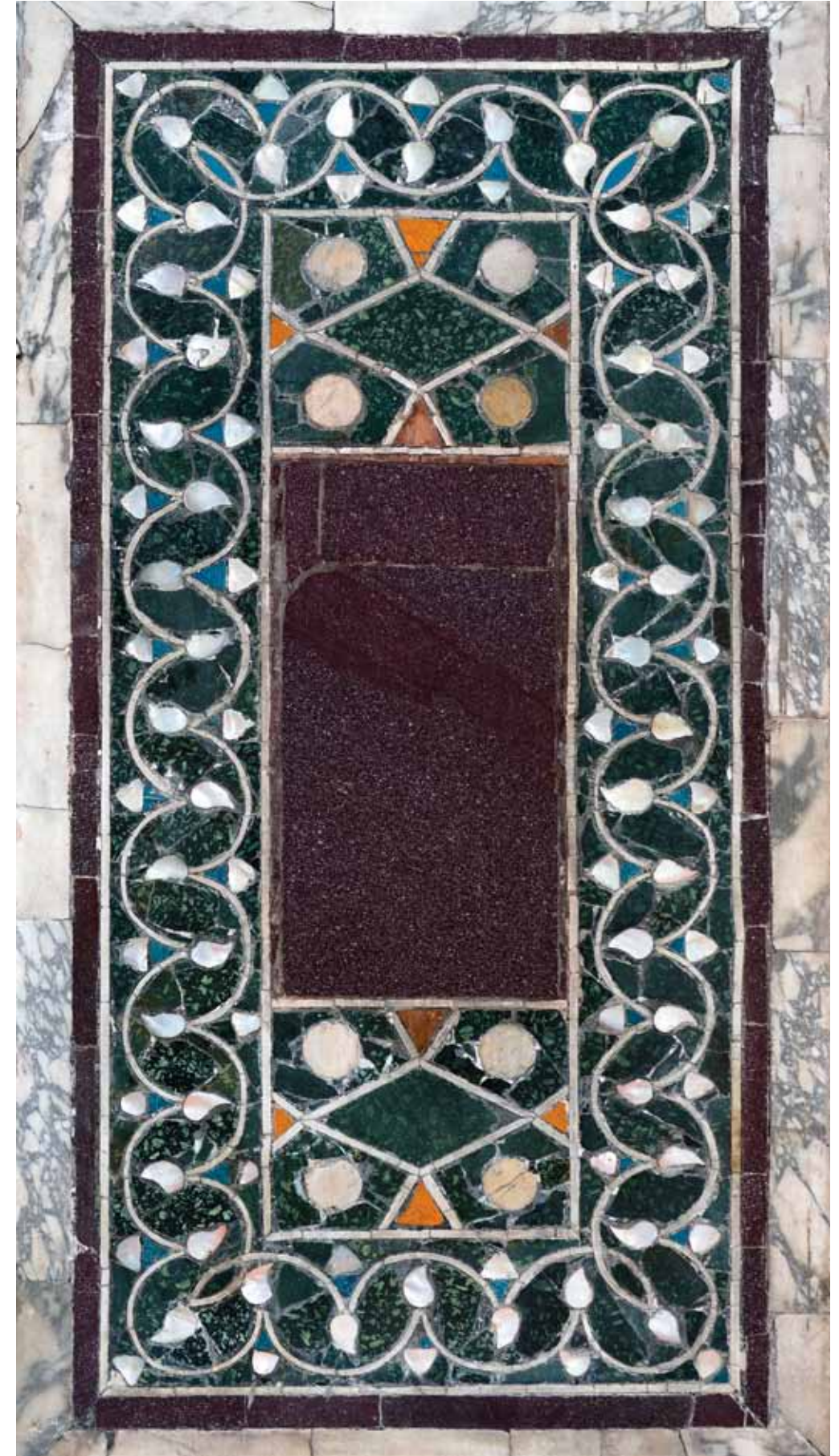
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The apse's semicircle is furnished with a marble bench for the clergy attending the liturgical service. In the middle, there is the bishop's throne (Picture 126). The bench and the throne are made of Greek marble and simple in shape, without excessive ornamentation. The only trace of symbolism can be seen in the dolphins carved at the end of the bench: they symbolise resurrection, in accordance with the legend that the dolphin can save a drowning man (Picture 127). This symbolism perfectly fits the meaning of the Eucharist service, taking place daily on the altar located in the middle of the apse, by means

of which the Christian truth of resurrection and eternal life is confirmed. Above the bench and the throne, there is a symmetrical array of rectangular panels executed in the precious *opus sectile* technique of decoration (Pictures 129–132). It is an inlay composed of polished marble tiles in many different hues, tiles made of glass paste and mother-of-pearl, and occasionally of ivory. Looking closely and under special lighting, one can also discern graffiti, letters, or texts that many centuries ago were inscribed into stone on numerous occasions, usually to record the date of death of a member of the Cathedral community (Picture 128).



129



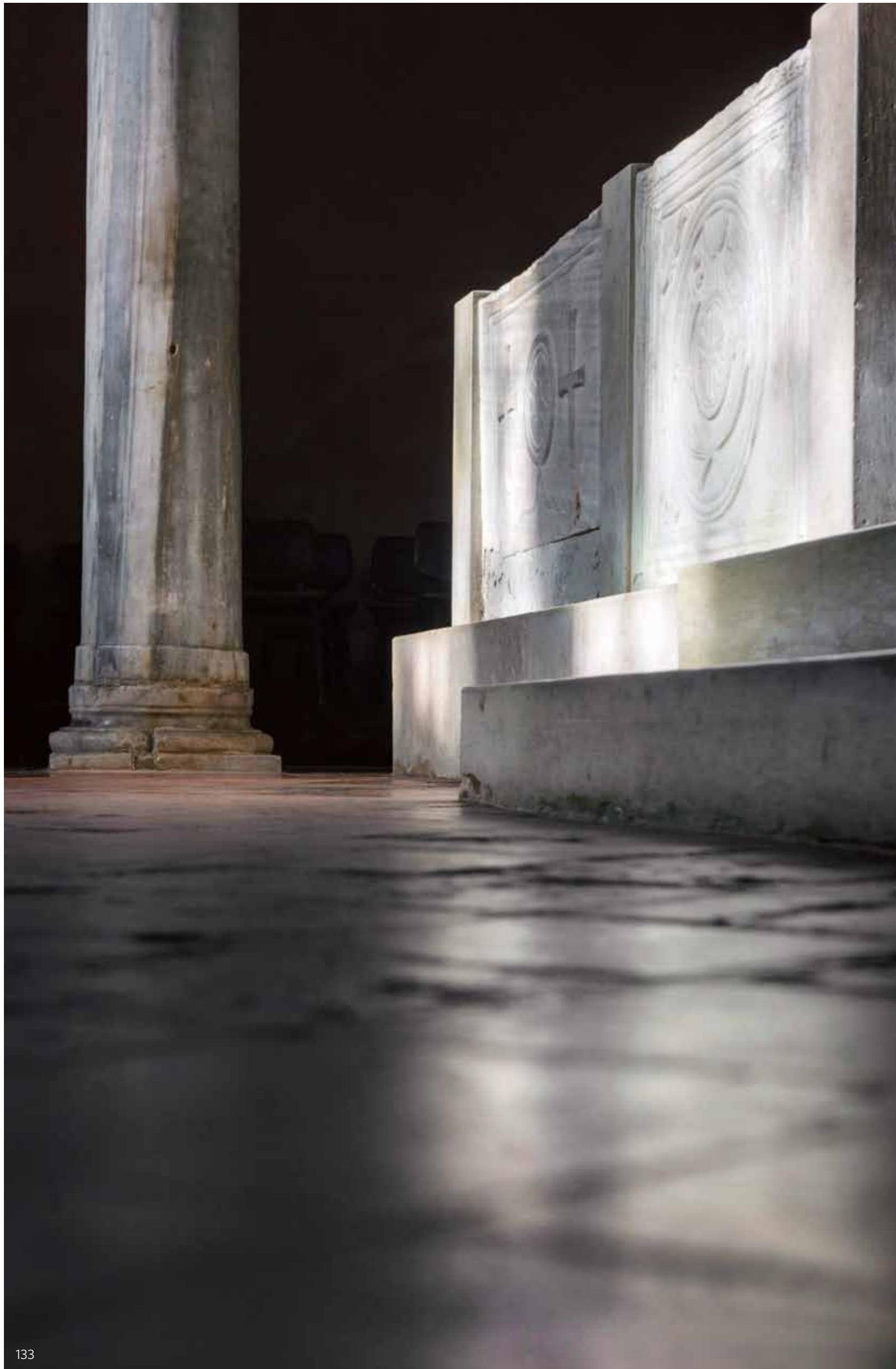
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131



132



134



135



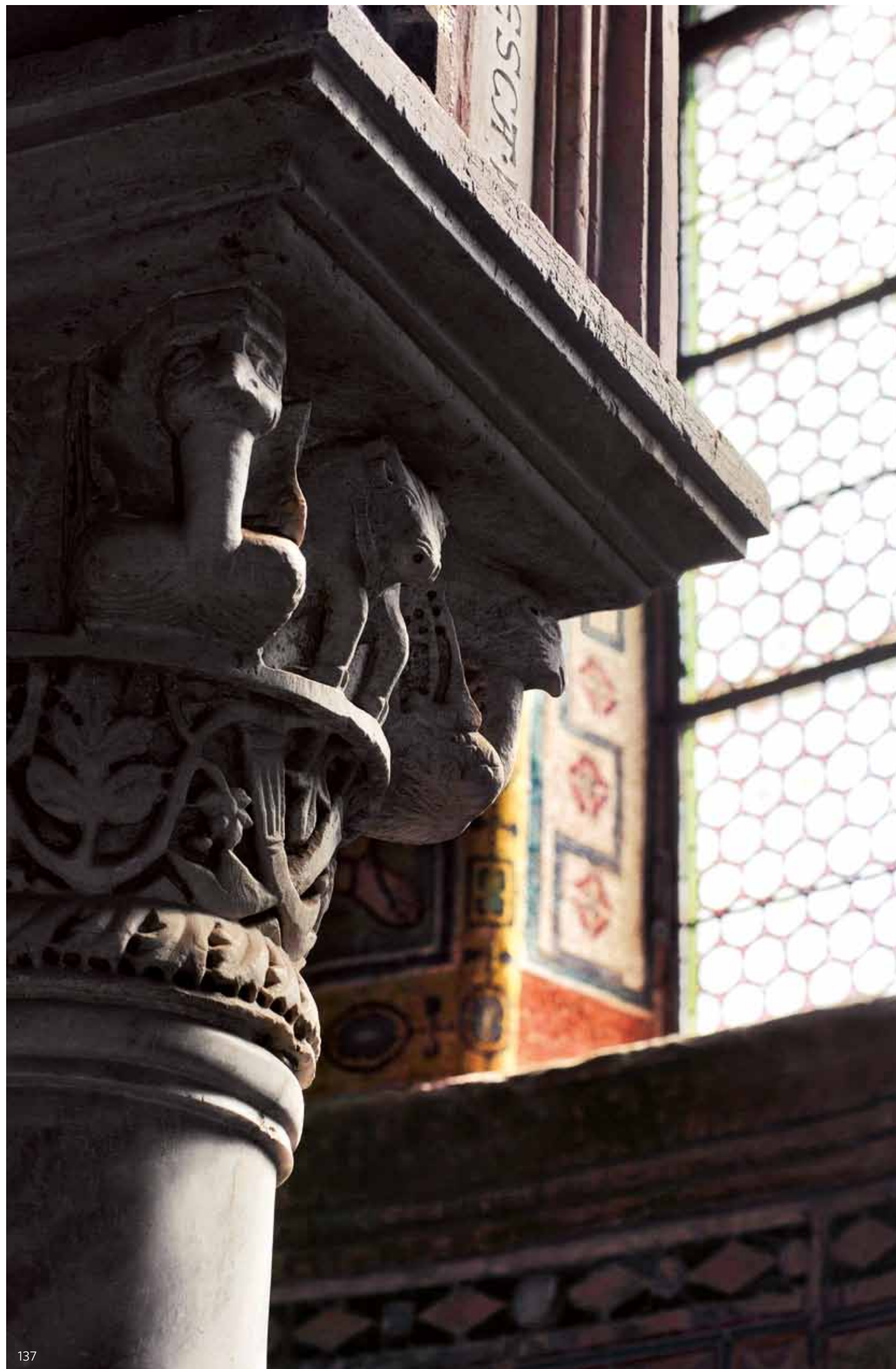
136

As is generally the case with early Christian churches, the entire area of the sanctuary – the part of the church where the ceremony takes place – was walled off (Picture 133). The railing was made of marble and consisted of pillars and stone panels between them, the *plutei*. Numerous fragments, a number of whole pillars, and a few stone panels of this railing have been preserved (Pictures 134–136). Based on archaeological remains, its original layout was reconstructed, and in 1932 it was restored to its approximate original shape. Therefore, the Euphrasian basilica provides an excellent opportunity to

see how space was organised in an early Christian church according to the liturgical rules. The railing is, of course, adorned with symbolical reliefs. Most often, a crucifix or chrismon was carved in the panel's centre, but there are also more complex compositions. The chrismon within a medallion, with a pair of crosses on its sides, is reminiscent of the "three crosses of Calvary." A couple of deer facing a drinking vessel – *kantharos* – illustrate the psalm in which the thirsty animal is compared with man longing for the source of faith. The image of a chrismon surrounded by large cornucopias and playful birds is most unique.



A SPATIAL
ICON



137



138



139

The entire visual design, architecture, decoration, and figural presentations in the church should be viewed as a unique symbolic image. This is a true “spatial icon” in which different visual elements are interconnected in a complex display of faith in resurrection and eternal life. Of course, the altar with its décor was also part of the “scene” and the symbolic unity would obtain its full meaning during the Mass, when the priest would offer the Eucharist at the altar in reflection of the sacrifice of Christ as the basis of faith in eternal life. The large ciborium in the centre of the sanctuary visually fits perfectly into this space, although it does not date from the 6th century as the rest of the furnishing and decoration,

but was “inserted” there in 1277. Undoubtedly, the church must have had a ciborium before that time and the present one is perhaps the copy of the older one; this assumption is supported by the four capitals that date from the 6th century and were probably part of the previous ciborium (Picture 137). The capitals were carved in a very similar way to those in the basilica’s arcature. They are of a two-zone type and the front pair has eagles with outspread wings carved into the corners. Between them is a chrismon, carved à jour, separated from the capital’s core. The rear pair contains imaginary animals in the corners – gryphons with lions’ heads and oxen between them (Pictures 138, 139).





142

The upper part of the ciborium, which consists of four slightly pointed arcades, was created by the Venetian masters, who were at that time also furnishing the interior of St. Mark's basilica in Venice with polychrome marble, in a rather similar manner. The ciborium's mosaics were also made by the Venetian artists (Picture 140). Stylistically, they are comparable to the mosaics in some of the domes in the narthex of St. Mark's basilica. The front side shows the Annunciation in repetition of the scene created several hundred years before in the apse, and in a symbolical relationship with the function of the altar below the ciborium, where the Eucharist takes place. It evokes the redemptive sacrifice at the end of Christ's earthly life, which began with the announcement to the Virgin Mary. On the remaining sides of the ciborium, saints that were at that time particularly venerated in Parentium are shown in round medallions. The series is headed by St. Maurus as the first from the south (Picture 142).

The present altar dates from the 17th or 18th century and contains an interesting artwork in its front (Picture 141). It is a silver, gilded altar frontal - antependium - ordered in 1449-1454 by Bishop Johann. Unfortunately, it was found in a rather damaged state, because its main parts were stolen twice. The first time, in 1699, the reliefs presenting the saints were torn out and had to be replaced by new ones, which were made in the then fashionable Baroque style. Those Baroque reliefs were stolen in 1973 and have not been found to date. All that we are left with is the original decorated frame, which in itself is an interesting work of art. It can be seen that the pilasters that divide the niches in which the saints are presented, as well as capitals and garlands, are made in the early Renaissance style, with the consistent application of a geometric perspective that began to be used in fine arts at that time.



143



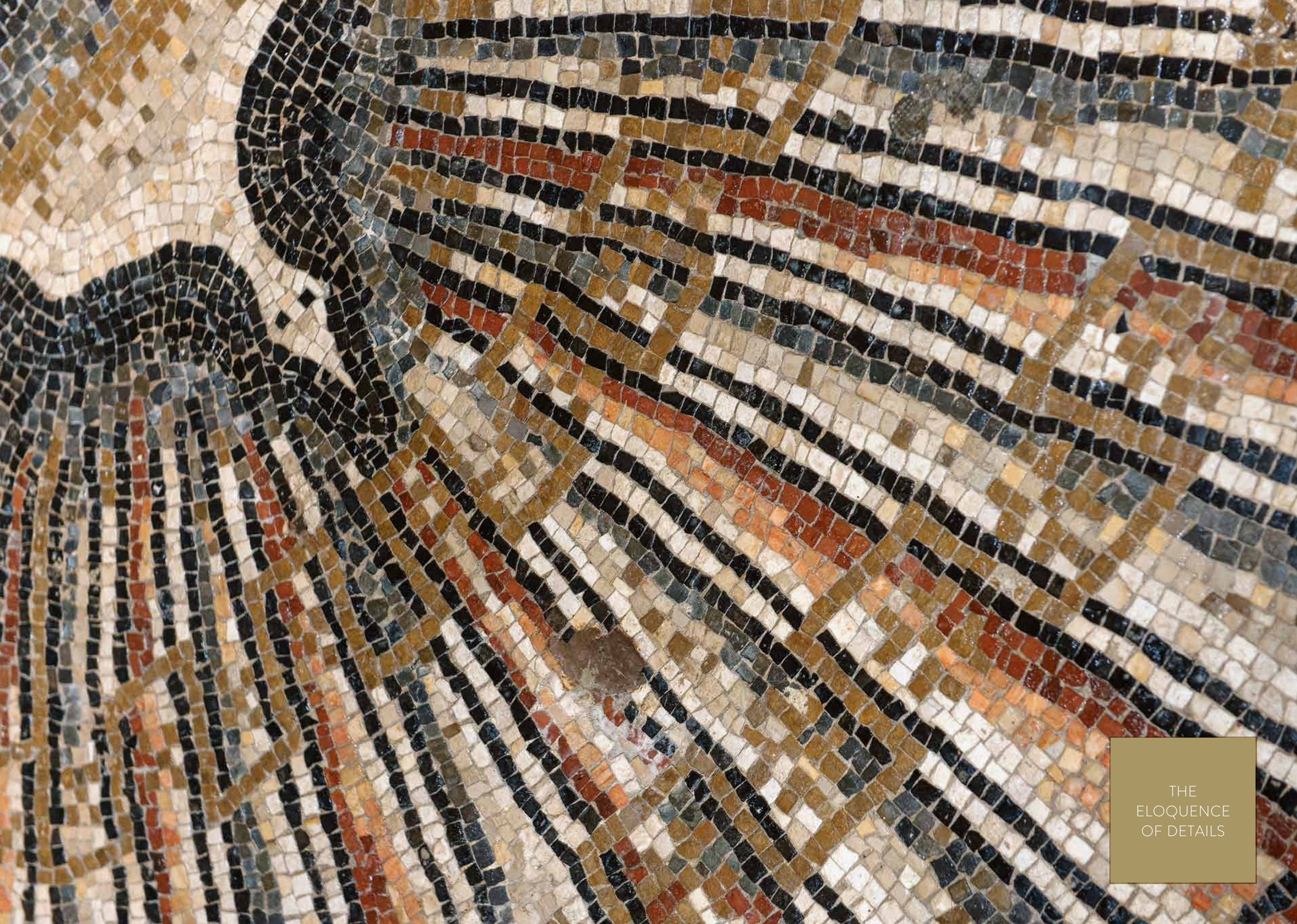
144



145

The side apses were also furnished with mosaics, but what remains of them are only minor segments near the top of the apse calotte (Pictures 144, 145). Both mosaics depict Christ with outstretched arms, placing martyr's crowns on the heads of a couple of saints. Although in terms of splendour they are not comparable to the compositions in the main apse, they should be carefully looked at, since they are the most authentic parts of the mosaics in the Euphrasiana. Until the 20th century, they were hidden behind the altar and therefore avoided the restoration undertaken in the 19th century, when the main apse's mosaic was extensively refurbished (Picture 143). Some of the mosaic tiles had fallen off, while some of the gilded ones were tarnished.

This is how the mosaics in the main apse must have also looked like before the restoration, when many of the ruined tiles, and particularly those with tarnished gilding, were replaced with new ones. For this reason, one may perhaps find the large mosaic looking unconvincingly well preserved and glittering. However, careful scientific research, during which the entire surface was analysed tile by tile, has shown that even in the case of the main mosaic, more than 80% of its surface is authentic. This means that, except for the gilded surfaces, all of the presented figures and most of the decorations and images have retained their structure, i.e. that some of the tiles occupy the same position as in the time when they were placed – in the mid-6th century.



THE
ELOQUENCE
OF DETAILS



147

Before leaving the basilica, one should pay homage to an object, perhaps rather plain at first sight, which is displayed in the middle of the church's northern wall. It is a thick, corroded stone panel with a lengthy inscription carved on it (Picture 147). It mentions Bishop Maurus, whose venerable body was transferred to the place where he had been an intercessor of faith and served as a bishop. This is the first written mention of the Parentine patron saint St. Maurus, and this panel was probably a part of the sarcophagus in which his body – a relic – was kept when it was placed in the church, probably one of the churches built in the 4th or 5th century.

These churches have been preserved not only as a memento, but also in substantial vestiges that the archaeologists have been studying for many years. Particularly well preserved are the mosaic floors, which are partly visible here, in the church's northern nave, through the openings made in the floor (Pictures 146, 148). The first visible mosaic, placed at a depth of about one meter, is the floor of the pre-Euphrasian basilica from the 5th century. This floor extends under the entire area of the present church. Sixty centimetres deeper, the floor of the 4th-century church can be seen, stretching until the line of the current northern arcature of the basilica.



148

The fact that the old floor mosaics have been preserved in a good state until the present day is actually due to the fact that all of them had been in use for only a hundred years or so before being filled in because another basilica was built over them. Surely, the Euphrasiana itself had a luxurious polychrome floor, but during the course of 1400 years it has become almost completely ruined. In the 15th century, it was still possible to read the inscriptions on the floor, and in the 19th century a drawing was made of what remained of it in the southern nave (Picture 151). We can still see a small portion of it if we head toward the southern side apse. This fragment, preserved because an

altar dismantled only in the 20th century was built over it, can help us imagine how the ornamented and colourful floor contributed to the overall artistic impression of the luxurious church. Art-historical enthusiasts should not miss “The Last Supper”, a large painting by the Venetian painter Palma the Younger from the early 17th century, placed in the sacristy in the southern part of the church. In the room in front of the sacristy, there are carved choir pews made around 1450 (Picture 150). The main altar of the Chapel of the Holy Cross contains a painted wooden crucifix that is a masterful example of the Venetian carving from the second half of the 15th century (Picture 149).



149



150



151



IMPRESSUM

Head of Project Activity

Vladimir Torbica

Coordinators of Project Activity

Sandra Ilić

Bojana Puljko

Publisher

Region of Istria

For the Publisher

Studio Sonda Ltd. – Jelena Šimunović, Sean Poropat

Author of Text

Ivan Matejčić

Text Editor

Robert Matijašić

Graphic Design

**Studio Sonda Ltd. – Tina Erman, Sean Poropat, Jelena Šimunović,
Aleksandar Živanov**

Photography

Hassan Abdelghani, Dušan Dorđević, TZ Istra/I. Zirojević (page 20),
Ivo Puniš (pages 91, 195)

Translation

Karmela Cindrić

Proofreading

Marina Miladinov

Realisation

Studio Sonda Ltd.

Printed by

Intergrafika, Zagreb

Edition

200 copies

This project activity is implemented by

the Region of Istria



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Contact:

Region of Istria

Administrative Department for Culture

Vladimir Torbica

Novigrad, Mlinska ulica 4b

Phone: +385 52 351 470

Fax: +385 52 351 691

e-mail: kultura@istra-istria.hr

www.istra-istria.hr

CIP - Katalogizacija u publikaciji

Sveučilišna knjižnica u Puli

UDK 726.6(497.5 Poreč)=111

MATEJČIĆ, Ivan

Euphrasiana - cathedral in Poreč /

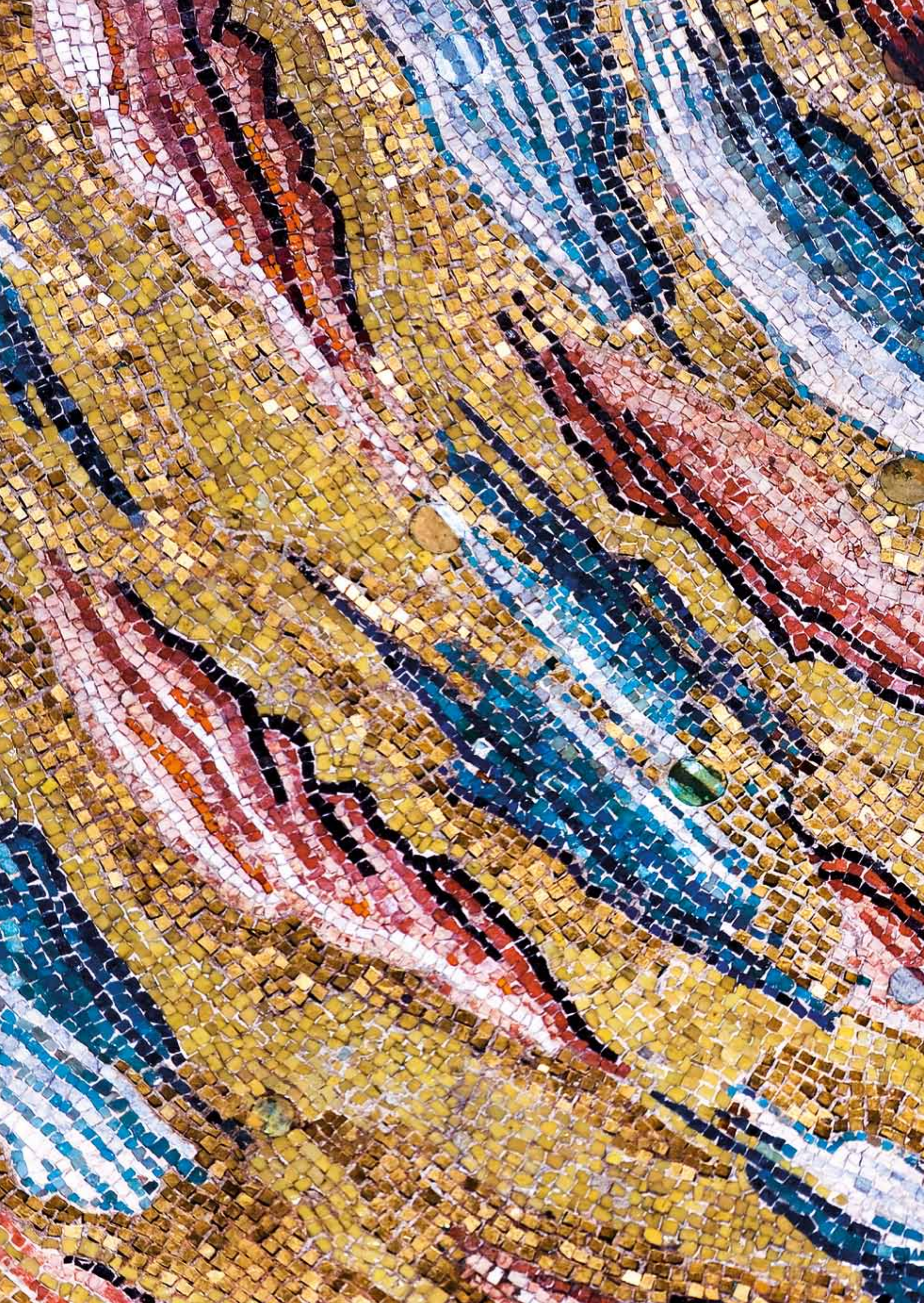
author of text Ivan Matejčić ; photography

Hassan Abdelghani... <et al.> ; translation

Karmela Cinrić>. - Pula : Region of Istria, 2014.

Prijevod djela: Eufrazijana - katedrala u Poreču.

ISBN 978-953-8009-00-6





www.expoaus.org



The project is co-funded
by the European Union,
Instrument for
Pre-Accession Assistance



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KONZERVACIJU I
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