

THE RESTORATION WORKS



The works within the church were preceded by a major fact-finding exercise, taking in **multidisciplinary scientific research**, historical/artistic/archaeological/archival analysis and in-depth **diagnostic surveys**, which enabled the drafting of an effective plan. The conservative solutions chosen ensured the interpretation of the property in its complexity, taking account of the various historical phases and the different uses to which it was subject.

The **restoration** encompassed the roof, the load-bearing structures, the frames, the leaves of the facades and the significant sculptural cycle of the entrance portal and the portico (columns and capitals). The detailed preliminary **scanner survey** of the church made it possible for the

first time to map out exhaustively the structural features, the irregularities and the deformations, and to glean an understanding of the phases of construction and the modifications made over the centuries, facilitating the scheduling of targeted conservation and protection interventions. To deal with the rising damp affecting the walls, a new mesh for the capture and re-use of rainwater was installed, channelling the water to the cistern in the citrus grove.

The building was fitted with **new lighting**, audio and CCTV systems, as well as burglar alarms. The technical lighting solution implemented (using LED equipment to save energy) is intended to make the most of the decorations, appearance and atmosphere of the complex.

THE RESTORATION OF THE FRESCOES

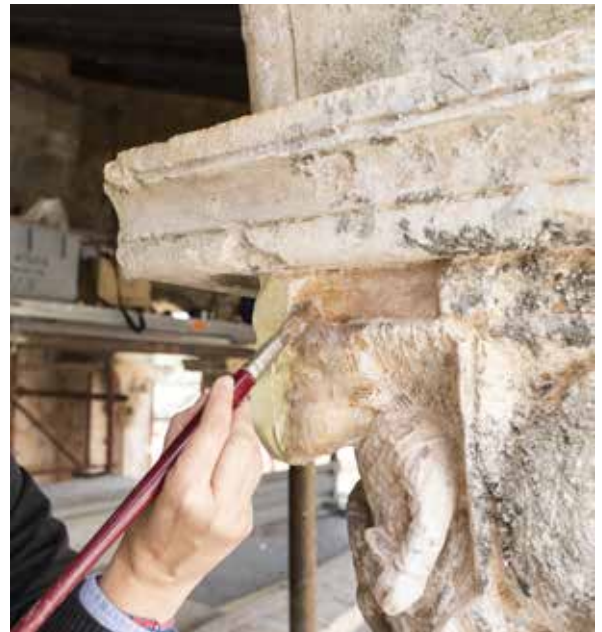
The wall paintings were deeply affected by the architectural changes made to the building over the centuries, as well as by traumatic events such as collapses and reconstructions, the series of decorative schemes, the microclimatic conditions and, last but not least, the restoration works carried out in the 1960s and '70s; it was in those years that a number of 14th- and 15th-century **frescoes were lifted off**, along with the **layers of plaster** that were obscuring the Byzantine paintings. Having conducted studies, diagnostic analyses and sampling, the restoration plan envisaged the phases of cleaning (with the use of laser technologies for the most stubborn dirt), the **removal of the remnants of old restorations** and, last but not least, **reintegration**. The operation reinstated the wall paintings' transparency and the brilliance of their ancient colours, and salvaged numerous important details, such as the inscriptions in Greek, which complete their narrative impact.



THE RESTORATION OF THE SCULPTURAL DECORATION

The sculptural decorations of the portal and the capitals were in a poor state of repair. Alongside the evident biological attacks under way, multiple **layers of lime-based plaster** had been repeatedly applied with a view to protecting and cleaning the surface, but which had in fact resulted in a flattening that altered the interpretation of the sculptures.

The restoration work involved the disinfection and **mechanical removal of the layers of plaster** in order to restore the original chiaroscuro and plastic-figurative effects. During the works, under the plaster an ochre-coloured patina was rediscovered, which is a feature of other monuments in Lecce dating from the same period. This was an old, natural form of protection, with the colour being perhaps chosen deliberately. After appropriate analyses, the decision was taken to retain this colouration.



FRANCO MINISSI

Before FAI's intervention, the complex was subject to a **restoration carried out between 1965 and 1975**: the architect and director of works was Franco Minissi, one of the most renowned and respected architects and museographers of that period. He had been responsible, amongst many other projects, for the restoration and protection of the mosaic flooring in Piazza Armerina (Enna) and the layout of the Sigismondo Castromediano Museum in Lecce. His input can still be appreciated in terms of the technical expertise he deployed, which has ensured the stability of the structure and the differentiability of the parts added later. Only a limited number of his interventions, such as the **removal of the Abbey's brick enclosure** and the **lowering of the farmhouse building**, have been questioned over time due to the consolidation of a concept of restoration that is more respectful towards all of the existing historical elements. The Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome (to this day, still working alongside FAI here) dealt with the frescoes, removing the plaster from the parts inside the church and **detaching** large portions of the wall **paintings**, today housed in the southern building. This operation makes it possible now to see the oldest underlying layer.

