

Madonna del Latte

Located on the north wall of the Church, the Madonna del Latte belongs to a pictorial phase of the late Gothic style, between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. The Virgin is painted in the maternal gesture of breastfeeding her Child, symbolic expression of the sacred humanity of Mary, woman and mother of Jesus.

Outlined by a double red and yellow frame, the image stands out from a deep blue background covered, in the upper part, by a white curtain dotted with small red crosses, as a starry sky, whereas, in the lower part you can glimpse the structure of a seat on which the Madonna is seated.

Mother and Child

The Virgin wears a red robe embellished with small pearls in the cuffs and a mantel covering her from head to foot. This mantle is entirely blue outside, whereas inside the lower part is ochre and the stretch, that wraps her head reclined towards Jesus, is red.

Madonna's face, depicted in three quarters, turns a tender gaze towards those who are looking at her.

From her robe appears part of her breast, to which the right hand of the Holy Child is humanly clung, with his head leaning forward to suckle, meanwhile with his left hand he grabs his Mother's red robe. Jesus wears a green tunic with little pearls.

Location and Shape

Location

Since prehistoric times, many caves, between Lentini and Carlentini, had been used as homes or worship places, the Rupestrian Church of the Crucifix is the most famous of these churches. It is located in the area of the ancient Greek town of Leontinoi which was replaced by a medieval town, to which the *Castrum Vetus* dates back.

Shape

Artificially excavated and shaped, the Church has suffered many changes over time. Through the portal dated 1764, you get into the Oratorium Populi, decorated with several layers of fresco often overlaid, dating between the 12th and 17th century. The altar is located in a little apse with an ogival arch.

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The Rupestrian Church of the Crucifix



Nuccio Costa

The Frescoes of the Oratorium Populi and Saint Cristoforo.

The giant Saint who carried Jesus on his shoulders with the whole wide world.



Santa Elisabetta

S(AN)C(T)A HELISABET, in a prayerful position with both hands open wide.

Madonna Odigidria

MAT(ER) ODI/GHIDRIA, "the one who indicates the way", the Byzantine name of the Madonna and Child painted in the saved space on a fully blue backdrop.

San Leonardo

S(ANCTUS) LEONARDU[S], with the chain that reminds us his protective role of the innocent prisoners.

San Giovanni Battista

S(ANCTUS) IOH(ANNES)S BATISTA, that holds a scroll with the traditional wording "ECCE/ AGNUS / DEI ECC(E) / QUI TOL/LIT PEC/CATA MU/N[D]I"



Christ Pantocrator

The oratorium populi is decorated with frescoes depicting images of Saints which, overlapping, create an historical-artistic palimpsest of great interest. The oldest figures (12th -13th century) observe the Byzantine iconography.

Christ Pantocrator is seated on an imperial throne typically oriental style, with his stern look, shows his omnipotence encircled by four cherubs. The similarities with artistic works of the same iconographic subject of the 12th century, help us to date this work to the Norman period.



The Theory of the Saints

On the wall you can see a sequence of five holy figures depicted as Byzantine icons, facing the devoted people dating back to the 13th century. As a kind of polyptych, each single figure is enclosed in a double red and white frame and divided into three chromatic fields, according to the blue /ocher/blue scheme.

The figures are characterized by the aureole, a gesture and the abbreviated onomastic inscriptions, in the Greek alphabet, which allow their identification.