

Parish Church of San Nicola di Bari

of Stefano Vannozzi

The parish church of San Nicola di Bari is located in the highest part of the historical center, where the original castrum of Brufa is situated. It is in fact the primitive castle church directed by a provost and eight Canons. It has early Medieval origins, although nothing can attest today its origins because of several reconstructions and changes. The first documents date back to 1310. Formerly it depends directly from the Collegiate Church of St. Gregorio Maggiore of Spoleto, whose right is to appoint the parish priest. Three fragments of the portal, depicting ancient branches of intertwined lives, are the traces of the oldest Romanesque phase (comparable with the similar ones of St. Augustine portal Cascia) today reused in a nearby block of Via Pago, while a fourth fragment is preserved at a private house. Other architectural elements again from the original building, including some fragments of sculptures with racemes and plant motifs, a tombstone and a head of St. Nicholas (dated between the XV-XVI century) are preserved in the cloister of the St. Francis church as well as the original baptismal font. With the earthquake of January 14th, 1703 the church of St. Nicola is almost completely destroyed and the parish is temporarily transferred to the church of Madonna del Carmine. The community and the inhabitants decide to restore it but, for the lack of resources, the works start only in 1707 and last until the beginning of the next century. Its present structure is still rich of works of sacred and devotional art. Its plan is arranged on one nave, equipped with ten side chapels with their altars (today there are only two) with a tiled floor made in recent years, and covered by an artistic coffered wooden ceiling covered with canvas painted with tempera floreal patterns. The main altar has an Eucharistic table donated by Mons. Raffaele Forconi and consecrated on July 3rd, 1941 by Settimio Peroni, Bishop of Norcia. Above there is the eighteenth-century painting of St. Nicola while he is raising the children, while at the sides there are niches respectively from left to right with the statues of St. Leonardo and St. Barbara. On the lintel of the main door is the coat of arms of De Rubeis family depicting a prancing horse with a dark brown head with turban and with the inscription "DIVO NICOLAO PATRIAE ET PAUPERUM PATRON / 1761 " (To St. Nicola patron of the fatherland and the poor). A minor access still in use is opened at the first right side chapel for practical reasons in the seventeenth century. In Via Pago there is also another access provided with a beautiful Renaissance portal of XVI century, bearing aloft the effigy of the saint patron. Both the ceiling, and the organ above the main entrance are the works of radical restoration operated in the first half of the nineteenth century, under the Pope Pio IX. Traces of this restoration are the heraldic insignia on the doors painted in tempera depicting, from left, the state, the reigning Pope and the bishop of Spoleto, Giovanni Sabbioni (Fermo, May 26th, 1779 - Spoleto, September 1852), who holds the diocese from 12th February 1838. In most points of the side walls, under the nineteenth-century repainting tempera, emerge traces of the oldest decorations. Among the various works, two particular paintings are to be noticed, which are works of important artists of the Roman school of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Among the paintings of the altars, there are two remarkable works coming from the Roman school, attesting the strict connection of the territory with the capital. The first one, placed in the second chapel on the left, under the designation of "Agricolarum" or chapel of St. Isidoro, patron of the farmers, depicting the beheading of John the Baptist between St. Antonio di Padua, St. Isidoro and Magdalene are attributed to the painter

Giuseppe Ghezzi (Comunanza AP, 1634 - Rome, 1721). The second one, depicting the Annunciation, it is probably the work of the Roman artist Agostino Masucci (Rome, approximately 1691 – 19th October 1758) made in 1723 and now kept in St. Francis. There is also another canvas, a residual part of a work originally wider, depicting St. Girolamo (in cardinal's robe) among the Saints Cristina, Antonio, Barbara and Biagio. In correspondence of the latter Saint, a gap of the pictorial support testifies the ancient custom of tearing small strips of the painting, considered useful to cure all diseases of the throat. This church is linked indissolubly to the ritual of "The Spelt of St. Nicola" that takes place since ages on 5th December every year, in the eve of the festivity of the Saint, the patron Saint of the country. In such circumstance, the priest prepares in the rectory of a church of St. Nicholas a spelt soup topped with low-fat sauce, cooked in a large cauldron hanging over the fireplace and distributed at noon to the inhabitants of Monteleone, starting with the children, privileged recipients, who, in this occasion, anticipate the exit from the school. This ritual commemorates the miracle that tradition attributes to Saint Nicola who, walking through the streets of Monteleone, is impressed by the poverty of its inhabitants and for this reason he decides to give spelt to feed the poor.