Santa Maria della Corte

Category: Sacred Sites
business description: The church of Santa Maria della Corte, which now houses the parish of Castellazzo, is traditionally recognized as the church "in curte regia Gamundii" (hence the suffix "della Corte") cited in a document from 1005, which records its foundation by Mary, daughter of the Lombard king Adalbert.
From 1443 to 1807, the church was governed by the Servite Fathers, along with the convent, built in the early 15th century, remodeled several times, and almost rebuilt in 1676. Covering a much larger area than the current one, it included a refectory, dormitory, cloister, vegetable garden, and workshops, as reported in a document preserved in the parish archives.
The document also details the stages of the church's evolution up to the current construction. The first church likely had a single nave; "crumbling due to its antiquity... as well as being incapable," the expansion was decided upon: and at the end of the Holy Spirit Mass in 1494, demolition solemnly began.
The bell tower remains. It was rebuilt with three naves, presumably in late Gothic style: the consecration took place on February 2, 1534. Flooded by the Bormida River in 1647 and burned by French troops in 1651, it was replaced by the current church, built between 1665 and 1717, "to the same design as the other, having used the same foundations and the dome that was still standing." The architect responsible for the reconstruction of the 17th- and 18th-century church, Guglielmo Trotti from Alessandria, further modified the interior appearance, "eliminating the slender arches and the beautiful walled capitals throughout."
In 1802, the Napoleonic Mayor of Castellazzo declared the community of Santa Maria dissolved, and in 1807 the church and convent were definitively abandoned by the Servite Fathers. Having returned to the possession of the secular clergy (1817), the convent was gradually divided between the parish and the municipality.
In 1894, work began on the restoration of the flooring and the decoration of the interior walls and rooms of the rectory, works by the painter Rodolfo Gambini of Milan, who would later also decorate the church of San Francesco ai Cappuccini and perhaps the convent of San Martino.
Inside Santa Maria, noteworthy features include the wooden crucifix that miraculously survived the fire of 1651, a majestic lion of San Marco of mysterious provenance, and—in the municipally-owned part of the convent—the small late-14th-century fresco depicting Saint Roch and Saint Sebastian.

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Alexala - Agenzia di Accoglienza e Promozione Turistica Locale della provincia di Alessandria
Piazza Santa Maria di Castello, 14 - 15121 Alessandria - Italy - Tel. +39 0131 227454 - e-mail: info@alexala.it