

# **THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF SAINT ADRIANO**

The Church of Saint Adriano is one of the most prestigious monuments in Calabria. In its solemn and millennial history, it encompasses the transformations and events of the south of Italy and Calabria, starting with its always idyllic relationship between the abbey and the Albanian populations, from the didactic and training activity of the Greek college to the events in the clashes between the Jacobins and Sanfedists and the years of decline.

The first sensation for those who enter the church is of simplicity, of an architectural structure without pomp and at the same time sober and of undoubted beauty. A popular legend tells of the almost miraculous function of the bell, which with its tolls, warned the brothers who remained in Albania of the dangers that had occurred to the arbereshe of San Demetrio. The creator of the legend imagined creating an ideal bridge to reunite with the land of origin. The church therefore has preserved its beauty and offers itself with its Byzantine architecture adorned with chromatic elements obtained from the wise use of poor material. The mosaics, placed on the floor, which are among the most valuable elements of the temple, were made with the installation of small colored stones that form images of snakes and lions, recurring in the oriental symbolism. The frescoes, among the most precious of Byzantine Calabrian painting, are in the representation of the saints and in the use of colors, a splendid example of how the chromatic balance can be enough to make a place for meditation and a search for transcendence pleasant and bright.

The material used for the construction was found in the various adjacent quarries and some elements almost certainly come from nearby Sibari.

The centuries-old Temple is located 1 km from the city center and is one of the rarest and most perfect examples of Norman Basilian abbeys in Calabria of the 11th and 12th centuries.

Built around 955 by the work of San Nilo di Rossano. Monk Basilian, hermit and abbot. The temple is dedicated to Saints Adrian and Natalia, martyrs who lived in the second half of the third century in Nicomedia (Asia Minor), where Adrian, a pagan officer, served in Roman armies under the emperor Diocletian Maximilian. Impressed by the sufferings suffered by the Christians, he converted to their faith, which was also that of Natalia, his wife. Tradition has it that Adrian knew martyrdom with the amputation of both arms, as can be seen in the large picture on canvas overlooking the high altar. It was Natalia, present according to the legend at the execution, to keep an arm in memory of the groom. The horrendous torture inflicted on Hadrian is believed to have contributed to the spread of many conversions within the Roman army in the 4th century. Venerated as patron of soldiers and blacksmiths.

During its millenary history the church has undergone several renovations and structural transformations that have completely changed its original face, to the point that the temple, since 1794, was literally embraced by the homonymous college, and by the Byzantine apsidal part, replaced by a junta Baroque walls, both from the main portal, covered around 1856 by the boarding school economist.

The building was extended and the Baroque dome was built, along with the three Latin altars.

The altar frontals, another preciousness of the church, are made with the same material, not in marble as it may seem, but with plaster stucco. In the altar on the left and on the right, decorative elements such as birds and plants are represented. On the wall surface, behind the high altar, a tombstone stands out in which the name of an important citizen, Demetrius Lopez, whose remains have been resting since 1731, is carved.

The temple has three naves, divided by 2 columns and 6 pillars supporting the arches. Entering from the door below the bell tower, the first two arches are round, the remaining six are pointed arches. The three naves have wooden roofs restored in the mid-1900s.

Above the central altar there are four niches. The three altars are surmounted by paintings. The central one depicts, in evident Renaissance style, the martyrdom of Saint Adriano. In the picture above the altar on the left, the Madonna, San Nilo and San Vito are depicted. In the canvas on the right is depicted San Basilio Magno.

In the arch above the central altar, a four-leaf clover rose window was found which gave light to the church on the side of the apse, before the construction of the dome.

The light in the temple penetrates from three windows of the facade of the main portal and from small single-lancet windows arranged along the side walls. The temple has the apse facing east according to the rules of the Greek church. Due to the closure of the main portal in 1856, access to the church is given by two lateral entrances. The main one is under the large stone and brick bell tower on which three bells are fixed. The central bell is the "bell emadhe" and has impressed the image of Sant'Adriano is Santa Natalia. The other is the "Mezzana" dating back to 1894. The third, the smallest, bears the effigy of San Demetrio on horseback. The other entrance is called Porta dei Monaci, which allowed the access of the monks to the church, from the adjacent Italian-Albanian college. This door has marble jambs made up of two decorated pieces. Curious is the ornament of the right jamb: two stone masks. One depicts a human face, mustachioed from whose mouth leaves foliage, the other has the appearance of a lion monster, from whose mouth a plant gathered above the head develops.

