



basilica di

Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari



Umbria in the early XIII century witnessed the birth of a religious movement that was destined to leave its mark not only on the history of Italy, but also on the culture and the art of many people to this day.

Francis of Assisi chose to live according to the Gospel in simplicity and poverty, and countless hosts of men and women came to join him.

Soon the "Friars Minor" (as the followers of the Poor Man of Assisi called themselves) spread throughout Italy and all of Europe, desiring to bring their message of *pace e bene* ("peace and all good") to one and all.

Around 1225 the first Franciscan friars arrived in Venice where, a few years later, in 1231, they received from Doge Jacopo Tiepolo "a certain empty terrain behind San Stino, in which place they built from alms a Church and Monastery in honour of Santa Maria dei Frati Minori" (Sivos).

The people immediately called it "Santa Maria dei Frari" or, more simply, the Frari Church (the term "Frari" is probably a dialectal deformation of the word *frati*, friars). On 28 April 1250 they laid the first stone of a second, larger church, perhaps designed by Nicolò Pisano.

Around 1330 the friars began building the basilica we see today, one of the most illustrious monuments in Venice thanks to its artistic masterpieces and historic memories.

The new construction set out from the apses, in such a way that it was possible to continue to use the previous church. Work progressed slowly due to lack of funds, and in fact it was not completed until nearly 1440. In the meantime, in 1420 Federico Corner's heirs added, next to the apsidal chapels on the left, the Chapel of St. Mark. In 1432, the bishop of Vicenza, Pietro Emiliani, had the Chapel of St. Peter built. The carved-wood choir was built in 1468, girdled in 1475 by a marble Rood screen. In 1469, on 13 February, the High Altar was consecrated in the presence of Emperor Frederick III. Finally on 27 May 1492 the church was consecrated by the conventual bishop Pietro Pollegani of Trani, and dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption: Santa Maria Gloriosa.

Century by century it has been enriched and embellished with monuments, sculptures, paintings. Worn down by time, it was returned to its ancient splendour with a radical and opportune restoration done between 1902 and 1912.

The Basilica, with the form of a Latin cross, is a classical example of the Gothic style, called "meek" or Franciscan, because in avoiding the pomp of spires, pinnacles and flying-buttresses it emphasizes the harmony, beauty and simplicity of the lines.

The warm color of the parts in brick, lightly marked on the external façade by a few white lines of Istrian stone, increases its simplicity and evocative power. The bell tower, built between 1361 and 1396, is in Romanesque-Byzantine style and is 70 metres high.

The external length of the basilica is 102 metres, the width 32 m., the length of the transept 48 m., the width 16 m.; the height both of the transept and of the central nave is 28 metres.

chorus

Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari

Tourists who enter Campo dei Frari are forced to raise their eyes to the sky to observe the imposing basilica and bell tower that pose in sober and refined elegance.

Once they have recovered from the enchantment of this spectacle and entered the church, they have the impression that everything has been composed as an ornament to the great painting of the Assumption that appears in the background. Released from the constraints of a guided tour, visitors are attracted towards the luminous apse of the chancel, showing all its elegance and beauty, when they find themselves before the XV-century wood-carved choir placed in the midst of the basilica in front of the altar. Here everyone stops to contemplate Titian's masterpiece in the harmonic surge of the vaults and stained-glass windows.

Attention, now, turns to the other illustrious works of art present in the Basilica: the XIII-century Crucifix at the corner of the chancel; the Madonna of Ca' Pesaro, another masterpiece of Titian's, on the left-hand altar just before the choir; the wood-carved statue of St. John the Baptist by Donatello in the first chapel to the right of the chancel; Giovanni Bellini's triptych in the apse of the sacristy, and many other works, perhaps not as well known, but certainly not without value and worthy of attention.

1. Internal façade
2. Chapel of the Crucifix
3. Monument to Canova
4. Monument to Doge Pesaro
5. Madonna of Ca' Pesaro
6. Chapel of St. Peter
7. Chapel of St. Mark
8. Chapel of the Milanese
9. Chapel of St. Michael
10. Chapel of the Franciscan Saints
11. Chancel
12. Titian's The Assumption
13. XIII century Crucifix
14. Monument to Doge Tron
15. Monument to Doge Foscari
16. Chapel of St John the Baptist
17. The Dead Christ
18. Chapel of father Kolbe
19. The Bernardo Chapel
20. Wall of right-hand transept
21. Sacristy
22. Bellini Triptych
23. Altar of the Relics
24. Chapter Hall– Convent of the Frari
25. Monument to Jacopo Marcello
26. Choir
27. Altar of St. Catherine
28. Altar of St. Joseph of Copertino
29. Altar of the Presentation
30. Monument to Titian
31. Altar of St. Anthony

