

LICIA MARI

THE MUSIC OF CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI IN THE BASILICA OF SANT'ANDREA IN MANTUA: NEW RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

La basilica di Sant'Andrea rappresenta, con la basilica palatina di S. Barbara e la Cattedrale di S. Pietro, una delle chiese di Mantova nelle quali i duchi Gonzaga celebravano molti eventi importanti ed esercitavano la loro influenza. Il saggio analizza e confronta alcuni documenti tra i pochi giunti fino a noi – riguardanti i musicisti, la costruzione di un nuovo organo, le cerimonie negli anni tra la fine del XVI secolo e l'inizio del successivo – e un nuovo schizzo della basilica che mostra la posizione dei cantori e delle autorità durante una cerimonia funebre per il duca Vincenzo I Gonzaga nel 1612. Sono emersi ulteriori dettagli che ci permettono di capire meglio la vita musicale nella basilica e il coinvolgimento di Claudio Monteverdi, probabilmente più frequente di quanto i documenti rimasti ci lascia intendere (ad esempio la sua musica per il Vespro nella festa dell'Ascensione del 1611).

PAROLE CHIAVE Basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantua, funeral mass, sketch, organ, maestro di cappella

SUMMARY

The Basilica of Sant'Andrea, along with the palatine basilica of S. Barbara and the Cathedral of S. Pietro, is one of the churches built by the Gonzaga dukes in Mantua to exert their influence and boast of their wealth, especially through sumptuous celebrations. The article analyzes and compares some documents among the few still preserved – about the musicians, the building of a new organ, the ceremonies in the years between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the following – and a newly discovered sketch of the basilica, showing the position of the singers and of the authorities during one of the funeral rites for Vincenzo I Gonzaga in 1612. More details have come out that allow us to understand better the musical life of the basilica and the involvement of Claudio Monteverdi, probably more frequent than surviving documents explicitly tell (e.g. his music for the Vespers for the Ascension Feast in 1611).

KEYWORDS Basilica of Sant'Andrea in Mantua, funeral mass, sketch, organ, maestro di cappella



The Basilica of Sant'Andrea, along with the palatine basilica of S. Barbara and the Cathedral of S. Pietro, is one of the churches built by the Gonzaga dukes in Mantua to exert their influence and boast of their wealth, especially through sumptuous celebrations. Sant'Andrea was a collegiate church and the *primicerio* was often a Gonzaga.¹ During his government (1587-1612) Duke Vincenzo I Gonzaga financed several works in the basilica of Sant'Andrea in the crypt and in the apse (we know that they were well under way from his testament of 1612). The plans of Mantua by Gabriele Bertazzolo (1596 and 1628) show the progression of these works, which continued even after the death of the duke. In the first of his maps, the church is represented without a proper apse, while in the second one a bigger, well-defined apse is clearly drawn (figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Gabriele Bertazzolo, *Mantuae descriptio*, 1596 (private collection), part.



Figure 2. Gabriele Bertazzolo, *Mantuae descriptio*, 1628 (Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana), part.

Unfortunately, due to the looting and destruction suffered through time, especially in the mid-19th century, the documents of this period in the archive of Sant'Andrea are too incomplete to grant us a complete understanding of the execution of these works, though some useful information does survive. In the fifteenth century, in order to work on the transept, the nave was closed down by building a temporary wall and in front of it was positioned a balcony that allowed the exposition of the relic of the Holy Blood of Christ on the Feast of the Ascension, giving a better view from the nave. The Blood of Christ is

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Abbreviations: I-MAad: Mantova, Archivio Storico Diocesano; I-MAa: Mantova, Archivio di Stato; I-Mag: Mantova, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Gonzaga; V-CVbav: Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

¹ Ludovico Gonzaga, born from a cadet branch of the family, was elected *primicerio* in 1610: see DONESMONDI, *Dell'istoria ecclesiastica*, p. 452, quoted in KURTZMAN – MARI, *A Monteverdi Vespers in 1611*, p. 550.

the city's most treasured relic: it is «the drop of blood of the wounded Christ, mixed with a small amount of the earth of Golgotha, which was kept under lock and key in a special crypt in the Church of Sant'Andrea».² The works of restoration and renovation of this part of the church continued for several decades: Pompeo Pedemonte, in ca 1580, left a sketch in which he drew a balcony with entrances to the crypt, to allow priests to collect and relocate the relic.³ A similar situation is reported in 1598 by a chronicler who wrote that, on the eve of the Feast of the Ascension, the Blood was shown during the ceremony on a little balcony and then was kept «nel camerello d'asse ordinario».⁴

Recently, some new evidence has provided further details about the musical activity in Sant'Andrea and about the management of space for the rites, such as the expected positions of priests, nobles and musicians. First of all, the musicians: one of the few registers still preserved, shows that in 1597 and 1598 Benedetto Pallavicino was paid as *maestro di cappella*. Thus, he was not only the master of music at the court, but he also had a stable position in Sant'Andrea. He was paid L. 30 every two months,⁵ the same received by Giaches de Wert as *maestro di cappella* in court in 1589-1590.⁶

This finding coincides with the dedication by Pallavicino in his *Liber primus missarum* (posthumous, R. Amadino, Venezia 1603) to Tullio Petrozzani, *primicerio* between 1591 and 1608,⁷ and suggests that in his first extant letter of 28 November, 1601, Monteverdi was probably seeking that position. Yet, in a later register (1605), we find Pietro Antonio Mazzucchi as the *maestro di cappella*.⁸ And, in 1606, Giulio Cesare Antonelli signed a manuscript as

² KURTZMAN – MARI, *A Monteverdi Vespers in 1611*, p. 547. The article contains the main information and bibliography about this relic and the feast during which it was exposed. It seems appropriate to quote here the most important scholar of the relic and the Mantuan feast of the Ascension as well as two of his studies: CAPUZZO, *La festa dell'Ascensione* and *Sanguis Domini Mantuae*.

³ Among the large number of studies regarding the basilica of Sant'Andrea, we can recall JOHNSON, *Sant'Andrea in Mantua*; regarding the work in the transept and in the apse, see CERCHIARI, *La Chiesa di Sant'Andrea* and *La cripta di Sant'Andrea*; GIRONDI, *Un'introduzione all'architettura*.

⁴ «In the usual little wooden room»: I-MAAd, basilica di S. Barbara, Diario (ms. 1561-1601), c. [426v], April 29, 1598.

⁵ I-MAAd, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 12, vol. 1597 (cc. 60v, 61v, 62, 63v, 64) and vol. 1598 (c. 65v, the only page preserved taking note of payments).

⁶ See PARISI, *Ducal Patronage*, p. 28.

⁷ BARBLAN, *Musiche della Cappella di S. Barbara*, catalogue sheets n. 245, pp. 298-299; FENLON, *Music and Patronage*, pp. 25-26.

⁸ I-MAAd, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 12, vol. 1605, cc. 64v, 66, 67v, 69. Mazzucchi's name suggests a connection with the basilica of St. Barbara: he was paid in 1583 and 1584 for having written hymns and psalms for the palatine church (I-MAAd, basilica di S. Barbara, b. 81, payments November, 30, 1583 and March, 28, 1584). Furthermore, we can speculate the existence of a relationship with Simpliciano Mazzucchi, organist in the Cathedral between 1608 and 1615, composer and also employed at court (see *Motetti ... raccolti da Federico Malgarini*, ed. Mari, p. VIII). This further highlights the mobility of musicians within the town: another example is provided by the payment of Giulio Guarneri as a singing teacher for clerics in S. Barbara (1579-1584, I-MAAd, basilica di S. Barbara, b. 81, *Provvisioni*

«*maestro di cappella* in Sant'Andrea di Mantova».⁹ When Pallavicino died, Monteverdi did not obtain a standardized position but an all-encompassing title: «*maestro e della camera e della Chiesa sopra la musica*». Thus, we can infer that he became the premier musician in town, the only one who could direct solemn ceremonies under the Duke's aegis. At the same time, he was left without any fixed ecclesiastical role, and was linked directly to the Duke, subject to his demands, needs and whims.

The situation can be seen as a formalization of Monteverdi's previous status. Indeed, Claudio's first known association with sacred music dates from 1595, during Duke Vincenzo's expedition to Hungary in support of the imperial forces fighting the Turks. Prior to departure, there was a mass in Sant'Andrea, probably in polyphony of some kind, and probably under the responsibility of the *maestro di cappella* Giaches de Wert, though Monteverdi may have been involved to some extent. According to the chronicler, during the expedition itself, Monteverdi was listed as the *maestro di cappella* for an ensemble that said mass four or five times per day, probably in plainchant, and sang Vespers on major feast days, probably in polyphony, accompanied by an organ. Duke Vincenzo's music was extremely appreciated by the other princes, allowing the duke to increase his fame through his very special musical servant. In the summer of 1599, Monteverdi traveled with the duke on a trip to Spa in Flanders, and, although we have no accounts of music on this trip, his role was quite likely again as *maestro di cappella* for both secular and sacred music.¹⁰

Returning to Sant'Andrea itself, we know that a new organ was built in 1604-1605 by the brothers Giuseppe e Angelo Vitani from Pavia.¹¹

In the final deed of 1605, signed by the organ makers and the *primicerio* of Sant'Andrea, we find, as a witness, a Mantuan musician, Stefano Nascimbeni.¹² He was employed as the *maestro di cappella* of the Mantuan Cathedral of San Pietro in 1600, following the suggestion of Bishop Francesco Gonzaga, a Franciscan friar. The employment document states that Nascimbeni had previously worked in Pavia.¹³ Bishop Francesco, after five years in Cefalù (Sicily), had been appointed in 1594 as bishop of Pavia, but ended up obtaining the Mantuan diocese following the death of the previous bishop of

mensili) and in Sant'Andrea (I-MAAd, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 12, vol. 1597, c. 62v, June 30; vol. 1605, c. 64v, March 31, c. 65v, June 30, c. 67v, September 23, c. 69v, December 31).

⁹ BARBLAN, *Musiche della Cappella di S. Barbara*, catalogue sheets n. 5 and n. 6 (pp. 5-6).

¹⁰ A clear exposition of Monteverdi's situation is in KURTZMAN, *The Mantuan Sacred Music*, pp. 141-154.

¹¹ The legal documents regarding the organ construction were quoted and transcribed in MISCHIATI, *Documenti sull'organaria*, pp. 212-217. The first agreement between the *primicerio* and the Vitani brothers was stipulated on May 16, 1604 (I-MAA, Notaio Giovanni Battista Bignami, b. 2157, 16 Maggio 1604, cc.n.n.: the agreed payment was for 700 «ducatoni da L. 5 s. 14 per cadauno ducato»).

¹² I-MAA, Notaio Giovanni Battista Bignami, b. 2157, October 1, 1605.

¹³ I-MAAd, Capitolo della Cattedrale, Liber Massariae 1600, c. 1 (*Terminationes Capituli*, March, 23, 1600).

Mantua, Alessandro Andreasi. Thus, the choice of organ builders from Pavia does not seem accidental and suggests further research regarding the movements of musicians on the axis of the southern part of the Po Valley. A hypothetical 'Music Road' starts likely in Piedmont, Novara and Monferrato (where the Vitani and Nascimbeni worked), and proceeds to Pavia, Cremona, and Mantua.¹⁴

From the contract we know that the organ was similar to the one built by Giuseppe Vitani for the Cathedral of Genova:¹⁵ five divisions, split keys, 12 feet, two *principali*,¹⁶ located on a balcony. The *primicerio* also stipulated an agreement and then a final contract with two carpenters from Brescia, Andrea Zilioli and Adriano Tosani, for the organ case and the balcony.¹⁷ Some payments for this work are notated in the 1605 register,¹⁸ which also contains information about payments for the paintings on the doors of the instrument¹⁹ and for decorations on the balcony (featuring also gilded items).²⁰ The previous organ pipes were placed in a service room.²¹ From March to July a clavichord player, Battista Buzzo, was employed,²² probably to fill the void during the construction of the new organ.

Despite the fragmented state of the documents, it is possible to obtain an idea of the musicians employed in Sant'Andrea between the end of the XVI century and the beginning of the XVII. In 1597 the organist Giovanni Berlinghieri was paid L. 20-8 per year, with a bonus of L. 6-16 on December 28,²³ while in 1605 the organist Jeronimo Correggiani was paid L. 3 per month.²⁴

To have an idea of the preparations involved in solemn celebrations, we can look at those described in the 1605 documents: at the beginning of January, 1605 «diversi cantori e otto cappellani» were paid L. 261, probably for the Feasts immediately preceding;²⁵ on June 10, some *trombetti* were paid

¹⁴ See NASCIMBENI, *Messe a otto*, ed. Mari, pp. VII-IX and the entry in *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁵ About the organ of the Cathedral of Genova, see BERTAGNA, *Gli organi della Cattedrale*; about the cultural and musical context, with a bibliographical note, see MORETTI, *Vita e cultura musicale*.

¹⁶ In the contract we read «un principale avanti e uno dietro» (a principale forward and another behind): it is more credible that the second principale was 'inner'.

¹⁷ See I-MAA, Notaio Giovanni Battista Bignami, b. 2157, quoted in MISCHIATI, *Documenti sull'organaria*, p. 214. The agreed payment was for 200 «scudi di Mantova, da lire sei per scudo».

¹⁸ I-MAAd, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 12, vol.1605, cc. c. 63r/v, 65, 67, 68.

¹⁹ Bernardino [Maspici] was the painter (see *ibid.*, c. 68v): he was paid L. 120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 68; he was paid L. 63. Tomaso Batiloro (also paid by the court for similar work, e.g. to decorate with gold leaf a pavilion for a tournament in 1589: see the document recorded as P20 in the database *Herla* – <www.capitalespettacolo.it>).

²¹ *Ibid.*, cc. 64 and 67.

²² *Ibid.*, cc. 64, 65v, 67.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1597, cc. 61v and 64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1605, cc. 64, 65v, 68, 69v.

²⁵ «several singers and eight chaplains»: *ibid.*, c. 63.

for having played during the procession of Corpus Domini (9 June);²⁶ in July the *primicerio* gave money to two singers: to Spinazino del Gallo L. 18 and to Stanghelino L. 12.²⁷ From the sources we can argue that, for the Vespers celebrated in Sant'Andrea in 1611 with music by Monteverdi,²⁸ the basilica boasted an excellent organ and a *maestro di cappella* with singers.

The palatine basilica of S. Barbara, constructed by Vincenzo's father Guglielmo, continued to be important during Vincenzo's government, even if not with the same *pietas* of his father, and, indeed, when Vincenzo died, his body was taken first to St. Barbara. However, from there, on March, 10, 1612, the deceased was carried out in a great procession, counting more than 3000 people, towards Sant'Andrea; at the door of the palatine basilica the new Duke Francesco placed an inscription celebrating his filial love and honoring the late sovereign.²⁹



Figure 3. Basilica of Sant'Andrea, interior, sketch (V-CVbav, Vat.Lat.12345, c. 285; copyright© V-CVbav)

²⁶ I-MAad, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 12, vol. 1605, c. 65v. In June 1597 they were paid L. 9 (vol. 1597, c. 61v).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, c. 66v, July 17.

²⁸ About this Vespers and its context, see KURTZMAN – MARI, *A Monteverdi Vespers in 1611*.

²⁹ V-CVbav, *Urbinate Latini*, cc. 226 and 230: *Avvisi al duca di Urbino*, March 10, 1612 (Herla L166 and L165).

Regarding the space management for the funeral rites for Vincenzo I, a sketch preserved in the Vatican Library (fig. 3) shows the position of civil and religious authorities during one of the ceremonies for Vincenzo organized by his son Francesco on June 7, 1612 (*Octava* of the Ascension),³⁰ before Francesco's coronation as the new Duke of Mantua, which occurred on June 10 on the other side of the Ducal Palace in the palatine basilica of Santa Barbara.

The funeral mass is described as very solemn and magnificent, as never seen before,³¹ rich in beautiful *apparati*, with five bishops and six abbots.³² The sketch in Figure 3 was sent to the Vatican with a detailed anonymous commentary about the doubts that had arisen regarding the suitability of the position of the authorities:

Nasce dubio, se nella messa celebrata da monsignor Illustrissimo vescovo di Mantova nel funerale del Serenissimo Duca Vincenzo di felice memoria alla quale assisteva il Serenissimo Duca figlio nel corno dell'Evangelio [A red] luogo eletto sino al detto suo Padre per diverse commodità, quando istituì l'ordine dei Cavaglieri del Santissimo Sangue; et dico, venisse fatto per giudicio de sito al **Capitolo** [Cattedrale] signato **DD.** [black] dalli **Abbati** segnati col **E.** [black] et dalle Dignità di Santa Barbara col **FF** [black].

Considerato il luogo della sedia episcopale del celebrante, la quale non può essere situarsi nel proprio corno dell'Evangelio per l'impedimento sodetto ne meno nel corno dell'Epistola per il palchetto della Serenissima Infanta, o pure dove sedevan li vescovi per l'angustezza et impedimento di sepolture finte [C black], che dietro loro spingeva fuori dalle colonnate, ne meno altrove, dove fosse commodità di formarne il semicircolo proposto dal nuovo Cerimoniale.

Pare a chi dispose il sito et luoghi a detti prelati intervenienti in Capella che non venisse pregiudicato a detto Capitolo sì perché egli sedeva in prospettiva et unione del suo capo su banchi et gradi uguali a quelli degli Abbati e dignità mitrate sì perché trovandosi il celebrante nel mezzo, e li vescovi forastieri nel luogo più degno e vicino, cioè nel principio dell'ala destra (se però sia lecito chiamarla un'Ala, sendo disgiunta non solo dall'Assistente Archipresbitero da Capellani [G black] che servivano de libro e mitra et da altri, ma dalla cantonata della chiesa ch'impediva la vista del Vescovo celebrante a tutti quei mitrati); venivano più tosto detti Abbati e Dignità che finivan nella credenza a dipender da vescovi forastieri, che dall'ordinario; et detto Capitolo che formava l'ala sinistra, veniva a torre il secondo luogo e più degno dietro li vescovi; et così non gli era pregiudicato in modo alcuno.

Chi puoi tiene contraria opinione, adduce per ragione che la parte destra anco nel fine è più degna della sinistra benché vicina, e congiunta al Prelato, valendosi dell'autorità del *Cerimoniale Episcoporum* al Cap. 13 sulle parole *Alij vero episcopi hospites* etc. il quale se non erro parla in termine [che] dalla

³⁰ V-CVbav, Vat.Lat.12345, c. 284r/v.

³¹ I-MAg, b. 2725, fasc. II, doc. 108, letter by Oratio Aragona to Alessandro Striggi, Mantova, June 8, 1612 (*Herla* C999).

³² *Ibid.*, doc. 107, letter by Eugenio Cagnani to Alessandro Striggi, Mantova, June 9, 1612 (*Herla* C998).

sedia episcopale situata in uno dei Corni dell'Altare nasce la linea o semicircolo de Prelati, che n'assistono.³³

The bishop of Mantua is in the point **B** black, in front of Duke Francesco Gonzaga (**A** red). The problem concerns the disposition of the prelates, which had to be arranged according to their dignity: the members of the Chapter of the Cathedral are positioned on the left of the bishop, without any obstruction (**D** black), while the Abbots and the Chapter of S. Barbara are on his right, but in a corner of the church which hides them from the view of the bishop himself (points **E** and **F** black), who is also hidden by the bishops from elsewhere, who were guests at the ceremony (in point **C** black). One opinion is that the position of the Chapter of the Cathedral is appropriate, as it is still near the bishop; on the contrary, others hold that on the right side of the bishop would be better, because it is near the bishop's guests, who should be, according to the *Caerimoniale Episcoporum*, in the most worthy place after the Diocesan bishop, above all the Canons.³⁴ This written note can be related to the frequent quarrels about precedence between chapters of the Cathedral and of S. Barbara (e.g. for the funeral of Giaches the Wert in 1596).³⁵ Regardless, we can see that the priests of S. Barbara were held in high regard.

The Vatican sketch, though not a very accurate representation of the interior of the church, nevertheless complements the written text. It is clear in indicating the several positions of the notables, as well as some other details. The words *Capella Sancti Andreae Mantuae* probably mark the place where the relic of the Holy Blood was exposed and the point below, where it was preserved. Additionally, we can see the nave without any lateral chapels: it is possible that, as in the following centuries, the structures built for the authorities occupied the entrances of the chapels, making it unnecessary to draw them (to compare the sketch with the church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see figs. 4-5-6-7).

The most important indication is the position of the singers in the apse (**K** black, even though this part of the church was not exactly the same as we see now). The organ is not indicated, but, analyzing some later documents, we can suppose that it was near the singers, on the left.

According to a description of the organ written in 1836 by the musician Francesco Comencini, «le canne di facciata contano circa tre secoli d'età avendo esse figurato nell'antico organo di costruzione dell'artefice Antegnati, che era situato nell'altra cantoria prima del 1790», which means that the organ in 1836 was located on the opposite side from the older one.³⁶

³³ V-CVbav, Vat. Lat. 12345, c. 284.

³⁴ *Caerimoniale Episcoporum* (ed. 1670), cap. XIII: «Alij vero Episcopi hospites sedebunt in digniori loco post Episcopum Dioecesanum supra omnes Canonicos».

³⁵ See MARI, *Il diario di S. Barbara*, pp. 494-495.

³⁶ I-MAAd, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 337, letter by Francesco Comencini to the Fabbrica of Sant'Andrea, Mantova, August 12, 1836.



Figure 4. Basilica di S. Andrea, interior, Lithography, sec. XIX, print by Negretti, Mantua (I-MAad, Raccolta mappe e disegni, Sant'Andrea, m. 5)

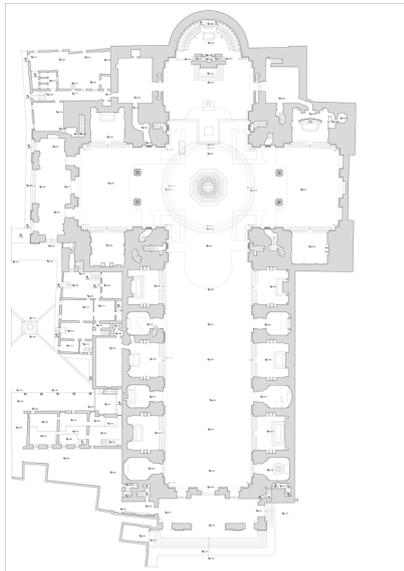


Figure 5. Basilica di Sant'Andrea, plan by arch. Guido Galvani, 2016 (copyright © Diocesi di Mantova)

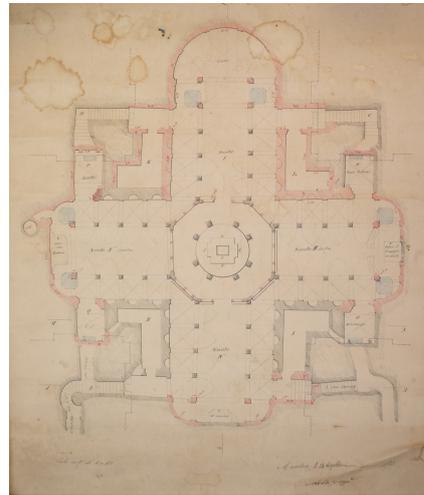


Figure 6. Fig. 6: Basilica di Sant'Andrea, crypt, plan by Giuseppe Madella 1875 (I-MAad, Raccolta mappe e disegni, Sant'Andrea, m. 35)

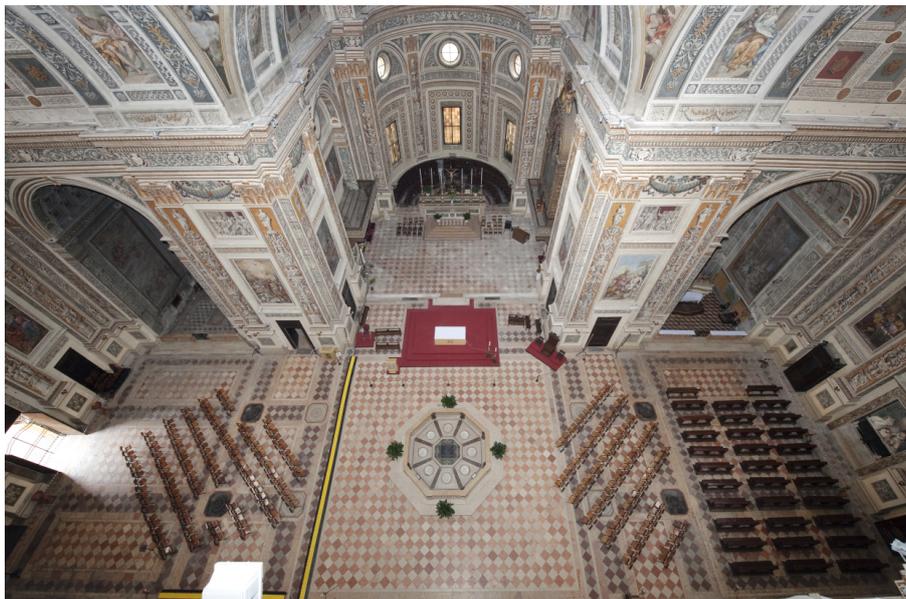


Figure 7. Basilica di Sant'Andrea, Transept and apse

But the 1836 document is not quite precise: in 1788-1790 Andrea and Luigi Montesanti had built a new organ.³⁷ Comencini defined the ancient pipes as if they had been made by Antegnati, probably because in 1783 an Antegnati organ was transferred to Sant'Andrea.³⁸ Yet a careful examination of the organ has shown that Montesanti used several pipes from the Vitani instrument of 1604.³⁹ We know that the Montesanti instrument was in the same place as the present one (built by Serassi, 1843-1850),⁴⁰ which is located *in cornu epistulae*. Therefore, the previous one, before 1790, was *in cornu evangelii*, on the left in the sketch.

Furthermore, the description attached to the Vatican sketch⁴¹ mentions «colonnate» (columns) in the choir. Thus, if we sum up everything we know about the Vitani's organ, we can try to depict its location on a balcony, well decorated and gilded, between two such columns, whose height and size, at the moment, we cannot establish.

³⁷ Letters, agreements and reports for this new organ are in I-MAad, basilica di Sant'Andrea, b. 337. About the history of the organ between the end of XVIII century and the forties of XIX century, see CARMELI, *La perizia dell'organista*, pp. 307-326.

³⁸ The organ – coming from the city church of S. Maria del Carmine - was then disassembled and its components scattered and lost, see L'OCCASO, *Santa Maria del Carmine*, p. 105.

³⁹ The presence of pipes made by the Vitani was apparent during the restoration of the instrument, that was sold and transferred in the parish church of Governolo (a little village not far from Mantua, near Po river) in 1846: see AZZONI – FORNI – FORMENTELLI, *L'organo Montesanti*, pp. 7, 11, 46.

⁴⁰ See CARMELI, *La perizia dell'organista*, p. 313.

⁴¹ See note 33.

These documents contribute additional details previously unknown about the musical life in the churches of Mantua, particularly in the basilica of Sant'Andrea, where Claudio Monteverdi was probably involved on several occasions, likely many more than the few explicitly mentioned in the documents in our possession.

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NOTA BIOGRAFICA Licia Mari insegna Didattica della Musica (Università Cattolica di Brescia), è vicedirettore dell'Archivio Diocesano di Mantova e ricercatore per il database *Herla* (<www.capitalespettacolo.it>), direttore del gruppo vocale “Lusit Orpheus”, membro del Comitato Scientifico del progetto musicale per la basilica palatina di S. Barbara in Mantova (<www.antegnatisantabarbara.it>).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE Licia Mari is a lecturer in Music education (Catholic University – Brescia), vice-director of Diocesan Archives of Mantua and researcher for the

database *Herla* (<www.capitalespettacolo.it>), conductor of the vocal ensemble “Lusit Orpheus”, and a member of the Scientific Committee of the musical project for the Mantuan palatine basilica of S. Barbara (<www.antegnantisantabarbara.it>).