

Parish Church of San Michele Arcangelo

The parish church of San Michele Arcangelo is located in the old town of Ollolai, surrounded by the village's main square named after Guglielmo Marconi. A majestic square bell tower stands on the right side of the façade, while on the left side is the rectory. Behind the building, a kindergarten is located in the area where the old churchyard was. Built around the 17th century in natural stone and in Gothic-Aragonese style, the church has undergone various renovations over time. In 1956, the façade, floor and vault (which collapsed in 1953) were restored and the altar reconstructed; in 1980, the bell tower (topped by a small ogive dome) was raised and the belfry was restored.

The Romanesque façade is quite simple in appearance, with no decorative elements except for two vertical pillars (lesenes) flanking the central part. The arched wooden portal can be accessed via a flight of steps; it is topped by a small niche painted in blue containing a small statue of St Michael and a big circular window. Other lunettes, decorated with polychrome glass, open on the side walls. They are located in correspondence with the six chapels (three on each side) that flank the hall and house the statues of other saints (St Joseph, St Bartholomew) and Madonnas (including a sleeping Madonna and Our Lady of Gonare).

The hall is roofed with a barrel vault supported on transverse arches that extend from the lesenes dividing the different chapels, of which four have a ribbed vault, while the third chapel on the right and the third on the left have a cross vault. Of particular interest is the chapel on the left, which still preserves its original decorations, consisting of the pointed arch and the ribs supporting the vault. This chapel is dedicated to St Bartholomew, the saint the church was probably dedicated to in the past and whose feast is celebrated every year from August 23 to 26. The third chapel on the right also has a cross-vaulted roof.

A number of works by painter Carmelo Floris are housed inside the church, including the altarpiece and the tabernacle door. Floris was a renowned artist from the nearby village of Olzai, who spent his youth in Ollolai painting landscapes and local women dressed in traditional clothes. The apse, above the wooden choir (restored in the 1950s) dating back to 1799, houses a wooden crucifix by local artist Franco Bussu, Floris' nephew. In 2020, local artist Fernando Piras donated a painting to the church in memory of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic. The painting depicts St Gregory the Great, the pope who evangelised the Barbagia area, and is currently housed in the presbytery along with a small statue of St Michael.

Text by Cecilia Mariani

