

Francesco Venezia  
***Transitus\****

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Abstract

Francesco Venezia laconically describes the project for the double hypogeum of Caserta Cathedral. The architect guides us along a path of descent and ascent accompanied by the rhythm of shadow, light and penumbra.

Keywords

Architecture — Excavation — Light

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The idea of circulation and circularity emerges immediately as dominating – a double ramp descends from the sides of the Presbytery to the solid shadow of the first Hypogeum; from here, a further descent leads to the Crypt excavated into the Temple's foundation and to the barely announced light beyond the folding path; one gets to the second Hypogeum to find even more light, then climbs back up to the rearward garden and the twilight of the tiny space that completes it in an elevated position. From here, one finally returns to the formerly abandoned concave presbytery- albeit from the back of the Apse, from behind the high altar's detached body; and, once skirted the obstacle, the perspective, in the reverse angle, of the Hall comes as a surprise with its giant columns aligning towards the door. Walking through this architecture means discovering a rhythm made of shadow, light, twilight.

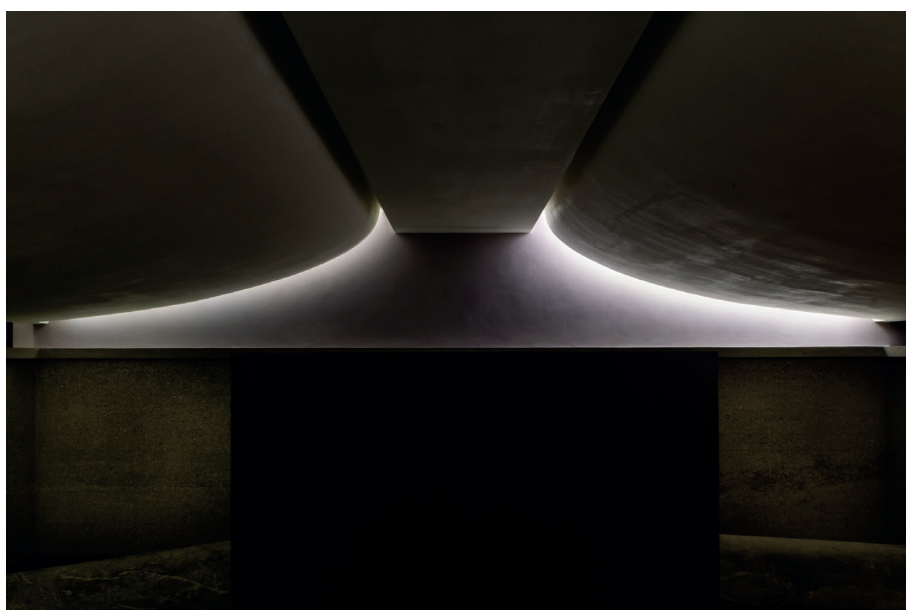
The first Hypogeum, below the Presbytery, shows a «Syracusan» section that remotely evokes a descent into Syracuse's deep quarries: two bulging surfaces divided by a cross-beam.

The Hypogeum is also a «storage» used to preserve objects that were once dispersed in the *Ager*, such as two broken shafts of columns and a sepulchral relief with faces perhaps disfigured by the wheels of carts that passed through that field, reconstituted in a space where the very nature of materials – the walls' scraped off concrete, the poured concrete on the ground – conveys an accessory idea of time's action.

At the center, the black steel ark, placed on a shaft that emerges from the ground, barely opens its panels to reveal the day tile with a graven cross. The cross conveys the instantaneous nature of a gesture – it is as primarily iconic as the cross graven on the secret *cubiculum* of a *domus*, or on the walls of a Catacomb at the dawn of Christianity.

**Figg. 1-10**

The photographs accompanying the text were taken by Mario Ferrara in January 2021.









A symbolic harbinger of the new faith affirming itself upon the ruins of the pagan world.

A "Cumaean" section – clearly evoking the Cavern of the Sybil – defines the space of the ribbed Crypt that descends in a fold towards the second Hypogeum. Here, the materials become brutal: uncertain stones for the walls, *cocciopesto* (lime mortar with crushed pottery) on the ground.

After a fold to the left, the Crypt finally leads to the second Hypogeum. Here, the space is defined by a "Roman" section. A vaulted space almost resembling a Hall in a Roman bath, with a double line of *loculi* on the longitudinal walls articulated by elegant Ionic pilaster strips. A remarkable decision: the interior of the central well is kept visible by letting the headstone that used to cover its opening «fall» to the ground below – a terrible image that eternally evokes an uncovered burial.

A stream of light floods in from a very high opening on the back wall to show the way back outside. A very narrow garden encircled by walls welcomes us as we emerge from the stairs. A play of fragments returns here: the giant fragment made of slabs of various kinds of marbles salvaged from a long abandoned open-air storage; fragments of consoles that support the beams of a double pergola with the joist changing colours in the two directions. This 'archeological' garden is completed by a tiny space for rest, reading, meditation – a *diaeta*.



\* VENEZIA F (2014), *In the depths of the cathedral*, Libria, Melfi.

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Francesco Venezia (Lauro, Avellino 1944), a refined and sensitive architect, occupies a prominent place among the designers working on the international scene. He is professor of Architectural Composition at the University Institute of Architecture in Venice. He has taught in several universities in Europe and the United States. His works have received several awards and have been published, like his writings, by major international magazines. Among the publications that collect his studies, there are *La Torre d'Ombre o l'architettura delle apparenze reali* (1978), *Francesco Venezia* (1989), *Scritti brevi Napoli* (1990), "Korean Architects", 8, 1995, *Architetture in Sicilia 1980-1993*, (1993), *Francesco Venezia. Ideas and occasions* (2006), *In the depths of the cathedral*, (2014). He lives and has professional practice in Naples.