

BASIC IDENTIFICATION**Site name:**

Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca

Location:

Verona (Veneto, Italy), Piazza SS. Apostoli, along the ancient Via Postumia (modern Corso Cavour)

Associated complex:

Parish complex of the Church of the Holy Apostles (Santi Apostoli)

Geographical context:

South-western suburban area of Roman and early medieval Verona, immediately outside the Roman pomerium, later absorbed into the medieval urban fabric

Chronological range (site):

Mid-5th century – present, with major phases in the 5th–6th, 12th, and 14th centuries

Focus period for roofing systems:

Late Antiquity (5th–6th centuries) and Romanesque period (12th century)



Figure 1. Verona, aerial view of the Church of the Holy Apostles and the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca. (Source: LRA University of Florence)

1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca represents one of the most remarkable survivals of early Christian architecture in Verona and, more broadly, in the Veneto region. Embedded within the dense urban fabric near the Church of the Holy Apostles, the building preserves substantial portions of its original late antique elevations and roofing structures, a condition that is exceptional within the architectural heritage of northern Italy.

The sacellum stands along the line of the ancient Via Postumia, the principal Roman road connecting Genoa to Aquileia, which entered Verona through Porta Borsari and continued as the *decumanus maximus*. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the site was occupied by a Roman residential complex from at least the 1st century CE, as attested by mosaic pavements, coins, and construction remains uncovered beneath and around the sacellum. Following the abandonment of the domestic structures, the area underwent Christianisation between the 4th and 5th centuries, in close relation to the early basilica *Apostolorum*, one of the earliest Christian foundations in Verona.

The erection of the sacellum belongs to this phase of suburban Christian expansion, when martyrial and commemorative buildings were frequently established outside the city walls, often in proximity to major roads and burial areas. Although documentary evidence prior to the 12th century is scarce, architectural analysis and comparative studies firmly place the foundation of the building between the mid-5th and early 6th century.

Originally conceived as a small cruciform martyrium, the sacellum underwent a profound transformation during the Romanesque period, when it was reconfigured into a longitudinal, three-aisled structure with a single apse, in connection with the rebuilding of the Church of the Holy Apostles. Further alterations occurred in the 14th century, when the sacellum became the dynastic mausoleum of the Bevilacqua family, though these later interventions had limited impact on the primary roofing systems.



Figure 2. Verona, Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca, exterior view. (Source: A. Passuello)

2. BUILDING PHASES AND CHRONOLOGY

2.1 Late Antique Phase (5th–6th centuries)

The earliest phase of the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca corresponds to a late antique martyrion of cruciform plan. Architectural archaeology identifies this phase through extensive surviving fabric in both the exterior and interior elevations, as well as in the roofing structures.

The original building consisted of four arms arranged in a simple Greek cross, each arm covered by a barrel vault and terminated externally by pitched roofs with double slopes. At the crossing rose a square lantern (tiburio), pierced by narrow splayed openings and surmounted internally by a dome resting on pendentives. This system combined vaulted ceilings with timber-roofed external coverings, a solution typical of late antique architecture in northern Italy.

Masonry techniques include river pebbles laid in opus spicatum, alternating with brick courses and reinforced by stone quoins. The walls were constructed using a double-shell technique with a rubble and lime core, providing sufficient thickness and stability to support both vaults and the central dome.

Stylistic and typological comparisons firmly associate this phase with Ravenna-influenced architecture of the mid-5th century, particularly the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia and early martyrial buildings in Padua and Vicenza.

2.2 Romanesque Transformation (12th century)

During the 12th century, the sacellum was radically reconfigured to accommodate the newly promoted cult of Saints Teuteria and Tosca and to integrate the building more closely with the rebuilt Church of the Holy Apostles.

Four additional bays were constructed at the corners of the original cross, transforming the plan into an approximately longitudinal structure articulated into three aisles and terminating in a newly built semicircular apse. This intervention necessitated a complete reorganisation of the roofing systems, especially along the lateral aisles.

The Romanesque phase is clearly identifiable through masonry in thin, elongated bricks laid in regular courses with characteristic surface tooling. New barrel vaults were introduced over the added bays, supported by a system of arches springing from the original late antique piers.

2.3 Later Medieval and Post-Medieval Interventions

In the 14th century, under the patronage of the Bevilacqua family, the sacellum acquired a funerary function. While altars, tombs, and decorative elements were introduced, the primary roofing structures were largely preserved. Minor repairs and adaptations occurred

in subsequent centuries, culminating in extensive restoration campaigns in the early 20th century.



Figure 3. Verona, Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca, interior view. (Source: A. Passuello)

3. STRUCTURAL AND TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROOFING SYSTEMS

3.1 Conceptual Framework: Ceiling Structures and External Roofs

The roofing system of the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca must be understood as a composite architectural apparatus, in which internal ceiling structures (vaults and dome) and external timber roofs operated in a closely integrated yet functionally distinct manner. This dual system reflects late antique constructional practice, whereby masonry ceilings articulated the sacred interior, while timber roofs ensured weather protection and adaptability.

The original late antique phase was characterised by a simple Greek-cross plan, whose four arms were each covered by barrel vaults constructed in regular brick courses, while the crossing was surmounted by a hemispherical dome. The dome rests on pendentives, which

mediate between the square lantern and the circular curvature of the cupola, enabling an efficient transmission of loads towards the four central piers.

Externally, these masonry ceilings were not exposed but protected by pitched timber roofs with double slopes, whose geometry is recoverable through preserved constructional traces. The roofing system thus combined Roman vaulting techniques with a carpentry-based superstructure, a solution well suited to the climatic conditions of northern Italy.

3.2 The Tiburio as Structural and Luminous Device

The tiburio constitutes the pivotal element of the roofing system. Structurally, it functions as a vertical load concentrator, channeling the weight of the dome onto the central piers while reducing lateral thrust. Architecturally, it acts as a lantern, admitting light through narrow, splayed openings that animate the otherwise compact interior.

The masonry of the tiburio, executed in river pebbles laid in opus spicatum with brick reinforcements at the corners, demonstrates a high degree of technical competence. The upper cornice, composed of three projecting brick courses, likely supported a low-pitched timber roof, distinct from the roofs of the arms but harmonised with them in height and inclination.

Internally, the pendentives reveal a refined understanding of spatial transition: they initially project outward before retracting to form an almost hemispherical surface, allowing the dome to rise to a height of approximately 7.75 m above the floor. This solution anticipates later Byzantine developments while remaining firmly rooted in late Roman building traditions.

3.3 Archaeological Evidence of the Original Roof Geometry

One of the most significant aspects of the sacellum is the survival of direct archaeological indicators of the original roof geometry. On the inner face of the eastern wall, above the later Romanesque apse, clear imprints of the roof pitches are preserved. These traces indicate that the displuvi of the eastern arm converged at a precise height (approximately 6.96 m), providing reliable data for reconstructing the original roof slopes.

Such evidence confirms that each arm of the cross was originally covered by an independent double-pitched roof, whose ridges met the vertical faces of the tiburio. This roofing configuration generated a dynamic and articulated roofscape, markedly different from the unified roof introduced in the Romanesque period.

3.4 Romanesque Reconfiguration of the Roofing Systems

The Romanesque transformation of the 12th century entailed a radical rethinking of the roofing systems. The addition of four corner bays required the insertion of new barrel vaults

over the lateral aisles, supported by semicircular arches springing from both late antique and newly constructed masonry.

Externally, the differentiated late antique roofscape was replaced by a single, continuous double-pitched roof covering the entire building. This unification reflects Romanesque preferences for volumetric compactness and structural clarity. While the *tiburio* was retained, its visual dominance was reduced as it became partially absorbed within the new roof profile.

The Romanesque roofing system thus represents a process of architectural homogenisation, subordinating the original cruciform articulation to a longitudinal spatial logic aligned with contemporary liturgical practices.



Figure 4. Verona, Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca, ribbed vault of the tiburio. (Source: A. Passuello)

4. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE ROOFING SYSTEMS

4.1 Late Antique Martyrium Typologies in Northern Italy

The roofing systems of the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca align closely with those of late antique martyrial architecture in northern Italy, particularly in the Veneto. Buildings such as the Sacellum of Saint Prosdocius in Padua and Santa Maria Mater Domini in Vicenza share the essential combination of barrel-vaulted arms and a centrally domed crossing, although both adopt an inscribed Greek-cross plan.

In these contexts, the coexistence of masonry vaults and timber roofs reflects a transitional phase between Roman engineering traditions and early medieval constructional practices. The Verona sacellum stands out for the clarity with which this hybrid system is preserved and legible.

4.2 Ravenna as a Primary Reference Model

The most compelling architectural parallel is the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, erected in the first half of the 5th century. Like the Verona sacellum, the Ravenna mausoleum features a cruciform plan, barrel-vaulted arms, and a central dome concealed externally by a pitched roof system.

In both buildings, the external sobriety of brick elevations contrasts with the structural and spatial complexity of the interior. The use of narrow windows, stepped cornices, and plain wall surfaces underscores a shared constructional language rooted in late Roman architecture and adapted to Christian commemorative functions.

4.3 Adriatic and Transalpine Comparisons

Beyond Ravenna, similar roofing concepts appear in the Adriatic region, notably in Santa Maria Formosa in Pula and in early Christian complexes in Grado and Poreč, where domed crossings and timber roofs coexist within compact masonry envelopes.

At a broader European level, the sacellum can be contextualised alongside early medieval buildings such as Saint-Laurent in Grenoble and San Miguel de Lillo in Oviedo, where vaulted ceilings are paired with timber roof structures in response to both symbolic and practical considerations. These comparisons situate the Verona sacellum within a pan-European architectural discourse on sacred space and roofing solutions during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

4.4 From Late Antique Articulation to Romanesque Unity

The Romanesque re-roofing of the sacellum mirrors a wider European trend towards the unification of roof volumes and the simplification of external profiles. Similar processes can

be observed in Romanesque churches across northern Italy, where earlier articulated roof systems were replaced by continuous pitched roofs aligned with longitudinal plans.

In this sense, the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca offers a rare opportunity to study, within a single building, the diachronic evolution of roofing systems from late antique cruciform articulation to Romanesque volumetric coherence.

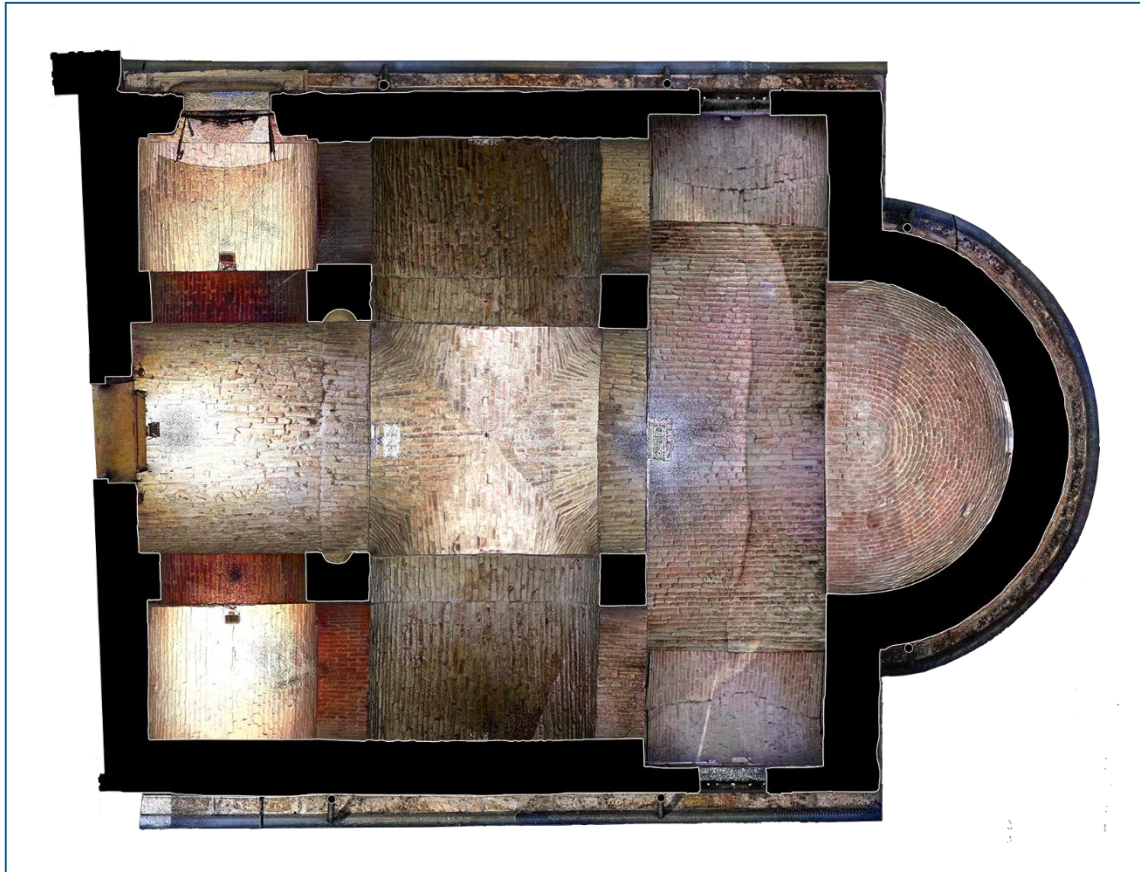


Figure 5. Verona, Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca, plan of the vaulted roofing system. (Source: LRA University of Florence)

5. RESTORATION HISTORY AND CONSERVATION STATUS

The present appearance of the Sacellum of Saints Teuteria and Tosca owes much to the extensive restoration campaign conducted between 1913 and 1914 under the direction of Alessandro Da Lisca. These works involved the removal of later plaster layers, the reopening of original windows, and the reconstruction of damaged masonry using historically informed techniques.

Crucially, the restoration uncovered significant evidence of the original roofing systems, including traces of roof pitches and the remains of the late antique lantern. While Da Lisca's intervention was criticised by some contemporaries for its radical approach, it nonetheless provided invaluable documentation for the study of the building's constructional history.

Today, the sacellum is in a stable state of conservation. The masonry vaults and dome remain structurally sound, and the Romanesque barrel vaults show no significant signs of distress. The timber roof structures, largely renewed during modern restorations, faithfully replicate the historical roof geometry inferred from archaeological evidence.

6. ESSENTIAL/SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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