

BASIC IDENTIFICATION**Site name:**

Basilica of Santa Anastasia

Location:

Verona (Veneto, Italy), Piazza Santa Anastasia

Associated complex:

Dominican convent of Santa Anastasia (basilica, cloister, conventual buildings)

Geographical context:

Eastern sector of the historic city of Verona, close to the Adige river, within a densely stratified medieval urban fabric characterised by mendicant foundations and aristocratic patronage

Chronological range (site):

Late Antiquity (titular continuity) – present

Focus period for roofing systems:

Gothic period (13th–15th centuries)



Figure 1. Verona, aerial view of the Basilica of Santa Anastasia. (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Basilica of Santa Anastasia represents the most monumental and structurally ambitious Gothic church in Verona and constitutes a fundamental reference point for the study of medieval masonry roofing systems in northern Italy. Conceived and built under Dominican patronage, the basilica embodies a deliberate architectural and ideological choice that distinguishes it sharply from the timber-roofed basilicas of San Zeno and San Fermo Maggiore.

The site preserves a long-standing sacred continuity, reflected in the dedication to Saint Anastasia, whose cult is documented from the early Middle Ages and traditionally linked to a late antique titular church. Although the architectural remains of the earlier building phases are largely obliterated by the Gothic reconstruction, the persistence of the dedication indicates an enduring sacralisation of the area.

The arrival of the Dominicans in Verona during the 13th century marked a turning point. The order rapidly became one of the principal religious and intellectual forces in the city, requiring a church capable of accommodating large congregations and supporting the activities of preaching, teaching, and public liturgy. Santa Anastasia was conceived as a monumental urban basilica, integrated into the fabric of the city and supported by the patronage of leading Veronese families, whose chapels line the aisles.

From the outset, the Dominicans adopted a fully vaulted Gothic architectural language, consciously aligning themselves with international models and rejecting the timber-based roofing strategies still prevalent in much of the Veneto. This choice reflects both theological considerations—stone vaults as symbols of permanence and doctrinal authority—and practical ones, including acoustics, fire resistance, and visual impact.

2. BUILDING PHASES AND CHRONOLOGY

2.1 Pre-Dominican Structures and Site Formation

Before the Dominican intervention, the site hosted one or more earlier churches dedicated to Saint Anastasia. These buildings, likely modest in scale and timber-roofed, established the religious identity of the area and conditioned the layout of the later basilica through property limits and urban alignments.

2.2 First Dominican Building Campaign (c. 1290–early 14th century)

Construction of the present basilica began around 1290, shortly after the consolidation of the Dominican presence in Verona. The initial campaign focused on the eastern sector, including the presbytery, transept, and first bays of the nave. This strategy allowed partial liturgical use while construction continued westward.



Figure 2. Verona, Basilica of Santa Anastasia, exterior view. (Source: A. Passuello)

The structural system adopted from the outset was based on ribbed stone vaulting, supported by massive clustered piers and articulated through pointed arches. Foundations were carefully designed to accommodate the significant loads generated by the vaults, particularly in light of the alluvial soil conditions near the Adige.

2.3 Progressive Completion of the Nave and Chapels (14th century)

Throughout the 14th century, construction advanced along the nave and side aisles. Lateral chapels were added incrementally, funded by aristocratic families and confraternities. These chapels not only enriched the decorative programme but also contributed structurally by thickening the lateral walls and acting as buttressing masses against the thrust of the nave vaults.

2.4 Late Gothic Completion (15th century)

By the early 15th century, the basilica reached its final architectural form. While stylistic refinements continued, the structural logic of the building remained consistent. The

prolonged construction period resulted in minor variations in detailing, but the roofing systems form a coherent and unified Gothic ensemble.



Figure 3. Verona, Basilica of Santa Anastasia, interior view. (Source: A. Passuello)

3. STRUCTURAL AND TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROOFING SYSTEMS

3.1 A Unified Masonry Roofing Concept

Santa Anastasia is characterised by a unified masonry roofing system, in which the entire interior is articulated by stone vaults. This approach contrasts sharply with the differentiated roofing strategies of San Zeno and San Fermo, where timber ceilings dominate the nave.

The choice of full vaulting imposed substantial structural demands, requiring precise control of load paths, thrust management, and foundation stability.

3.2 Nave Vaults: Ribbed Cross Vaulting

The nave is covered by a regular sequence of ribbed cross vaults, whose geometry is defined by pointed transverse arches and diagonal ribs (*costoloni*). The ribs function as structural frameworks, concentrating loads and transferring them to the clustered piers below.

The webs between the ribs are comparatively thin, reducing weight while maintaining continuity. The vaults generate both vertical loads and lateral thrust, which is counteracted through a combination of:

- massive piers;
- thick aisle walls;
- lateral chapels acting as buttresses;
- external buttressing elements integrated into the urban fabric.

This system allows the nave to achieve considerable height and spatial clarity, reinforcing the vertical emphasis typical of Gothic architecture.

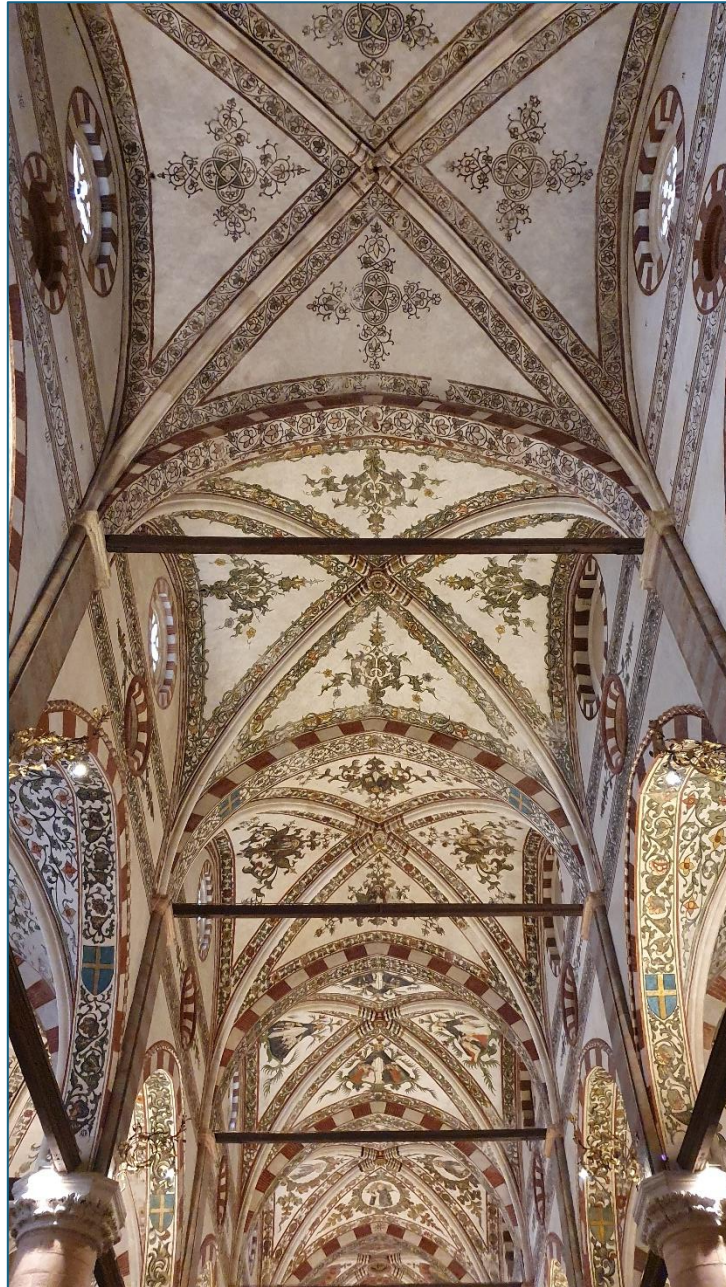


Figure 4. Verona, Basilica of Santa Anastasia, quadripartite rib vaults of the central nave. (Source: A. Passuello)

3.3 Presbytery and Apse Vaulting

The presbytery culminates in a deep polygonal apse covered by complex ribbed vaults, whose articulation emphasises the liturgical focus of the church. Here, the vaults reach their highest degree of refinement, both structurally and symbolically.

The increased complexity of the rib patterns reflects a mature Gothic language and demonstrates the technical competence of the builders in managing intersecting load paths.

3.4 Relationship between Vaults and External Roof

Above the stone vaults lies a conventional timber roof structure, which serves exclusively as environmental protection. Unlike timber ceilings, this roof does not shape the interior space. The clear separation between structural vaults and protective roof is characteristic of Gothic construction and underscores the primacy of masonry in defining the spatial experience.

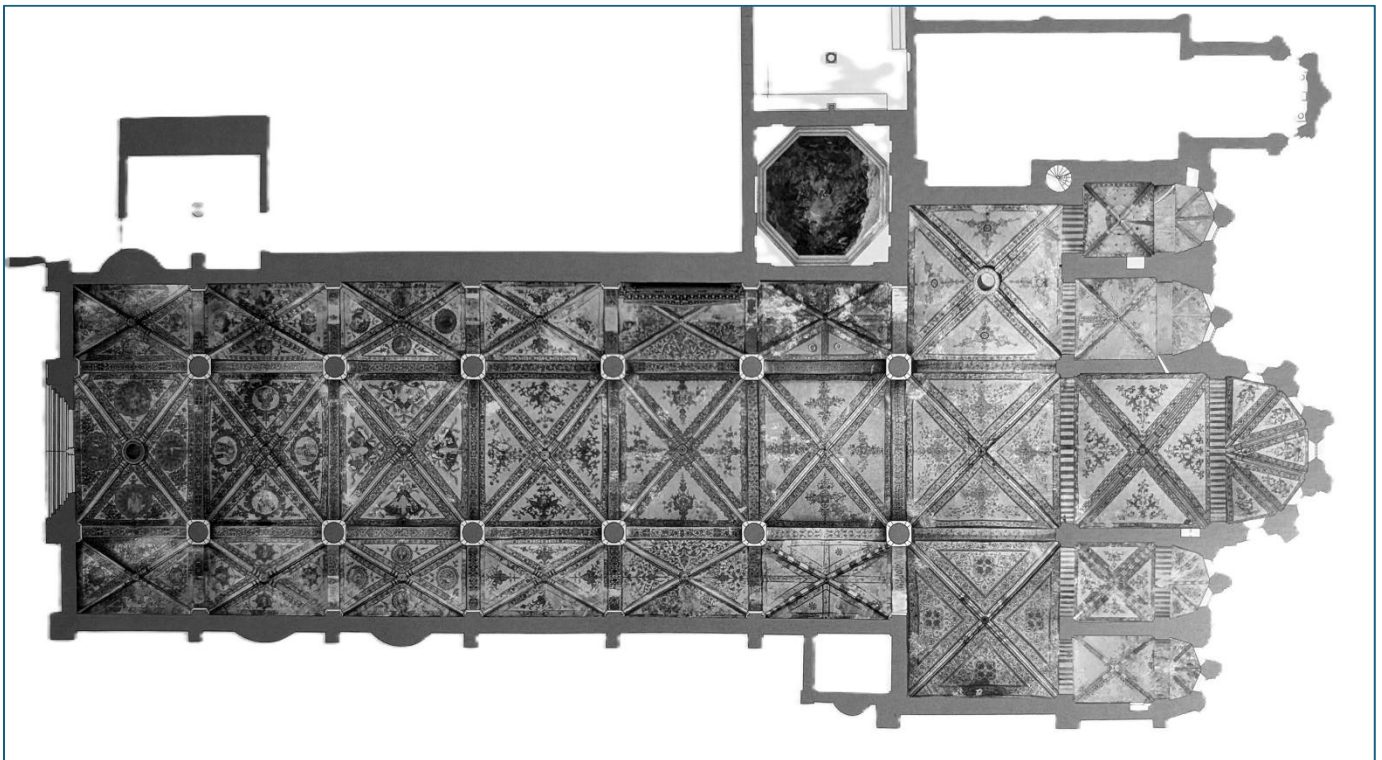


Figure 5. Verona, Basilica of Santa Anastasia, ceiling plan showing the quadripartite rib vaults. (Source: *La basilica di Santa Anastasia a Verona*, Verona, 2011)

4. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE ROOFING SYSTEMS

4.1 Dominican Architecture and Vaulted Space

Santa Anastasia aligns closely with Dominican architectural ideals, which favoured clear, acoustically efficient, and symbolically elevated spaces. Vaulted interiors supported preaching and chant, while their visual permanence reinforced the intellectual authority of the order.

4.2 Comparison with San Fermo Maggiore and San Zeno Maggiore

Within Verona, Santa Anastasia represents the structural antithesis to San Fermo and San Zeno. Whereas those basilicas exploit the flexibility and lightness of timber ceilings, Santa Anastasia relies on mass, stone, and vertical thrust.

This coexistence of radically different roofing systems within the same city highlights the plurality of medieval construction cultures and the absence of a single dominant solution.

4.3 Italian and European Parallels

Santa Anastasia can be compared to other major Dominican churches, such as Santa Maria Novella (Florence) and San Domenico (Bologna), as well as to mendicant foundations north of the Alps. In doing so, Verona emerges as a participant in an international Gothic network, distinct from the timber-oriented traditions of the Veneto hinterland.

4.4 Symbolic Implications of Vaulted Roofing

In Santa Anastasia, symbolism is embedded in structural form. The vaults articulate a space defined by ascent, order, and permanence, contrasting with the metaphorical *navis Ecclesiae* evoked by inverted ship-hull ceilings. Here, the sacred is expressed through stone geometry and vertical continuity.

5. RESTORATION HISTORY AND CONSERVATION STATUS

Santa Anastasia has been subject to numerous restoration campaigns since the 19th century. Early interventions focused on stabilising vaults and piers affected by settlement and material decay. In the 20th century, conservation efforts increasingly adopted scientific methodologies, including structural analysis and material diagnostics.

Recent restorations have concentrated on monitoring the vaults, consolidating stone ribs, and improving environmental conditions to mitigate the effects of pollution and humidity. Non-invasive diagnostic techniques have confirmed the overall stability of the roofing systems, while also highlighting the need for continuous maintenance in such a large vaulted structure.

Today, Santa Anastasia is in a good state of conservation and offers an exemplary case study for the long-term performance of medieval masonry roofing systems.

6. ESSENTIAL/SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cappelletti, G. (1970). *Santa Anastasia*. Verona.

Cavallo, D. (1998). I restauri alla basilica di Sant'Anastasia nel decennio 1871–1881. *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia di Agricoltura, Scienze e Lettere di Verona*, 172, 505–564.

Cipolla, C. (1882). *Ricerche storiche intorno alla chiesa di S. Anastasia in Verona*. Venezia.



Figure 6. Verona, Basilica of Santa Anastasia, detail of the attic spaces above the central nave. (Source: A. Passuello)

- Franco, T. (2011). Attorno al “pontile che traversava la chiesa”: spazio liturgico e scultura in Santa Anastasia. In P. Marini & C. Campanella (Eds.), *La basilica di Santa Anastasia a Verona. Storia e restauro* (pp. 33–49). Verona.
- Marchini, G. P. (1982). *Santa Anastasia*. Verona.
- Marini, P., & Campanella, C. (Eds.). (2011). *La basilica di Santa Anastasia a Verona. Storia e restauro*. Verona.
- Napione, E. (2011). Storia architettonica della basilica e del convento: dalla fondazione al Quattrocento. In P. Marini & C. Campanella (Eds.), *La basilica di Santa Anastasia a Verona* (pp. 15–31). Verona.
- Rama, G. (2003). Spazio e liturgia in una chiesa dei Frati Predicatori: S. Anastasia in Verona (secc. XIII–XIV). *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia di Agricoltura, Scienze e Lettere di Verona*, 177, 395–419.
- Scapini, A. (1954). *La chiesa di Santa Anastasia*. Verona.