

# GUIDED TOUR OF THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO APOSTOLO

## in Figlino

led by Dr. Ferrara

Free Event – EMOTIVE Project  
19 October 2025

### Exploring the Church of San Pietro Apostolo – Figlino

As part of the outreach activities developed within the **EMOTIVE** – Emotional Interactive Videotour Experience project (**CHANGES SPOKE 9, CUP H53C22000850006, PNRR M4C2**), Emoticon S.r.l., in collaboration with the Municipality of Tramonti and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, organized a series of free guided tours dedicated to the historical and identity landmarks of the area.

The goal is to make Tramonti's cultural heritage accessible to everyone — residents, visitors, scholars, and enthusiasts — through experiences of valorization, guided exploration, and public storytelling. For this reason, we make the full transcriptions of the guided tours available on our website.

The Church of San Pietro Apostolo, located in the hamlet of Figlino, is one of the most ancient and significant religious sites in Tramonti. Its defining features include an Arab-Norman style bell tower — originally a watchtower of the Amalfitan Republic — and a stratified architectural structure consisting of three superimposed churches, making it a unique example within the Amalfi Coast.

The area also preserves one of the rare Byzantine crypts in the region, a precious testimony of early Eastern Christian worship and of the monastic communities that inhabited the Monti Lattari during the Early Middle Ages.

During the free guided tour held on 19 October 2025, Dr. Vincenzo Ferrara led participants on a journey through the centuries: from the Amalfitan defensive tower to the medieval church; from the 18th-century Capodimonte ceramic floor to the Baroque stuccos; and finally to the evocative Byzantine crypt — a place normally closed to the public.

Below you will find the full transcript of the guided tour held on **19 October 2025** at the Church of San Pietro Apostolo, conducted by **Dr. Ferrara**.

## **The Tower That Became a Bell Tower: Origins of San Pietro Apostolo in Figlino**

By listening to the explanation of the structure and observing the position of the bell tower, it becomes immediately clear that this construction did not

originate as a bell tower, but rather as a **watchtower**. The Republic of Amalfi, in fact, did not defend only its coastline: it also protected its hinterland. A network of fortifications connected the strategic points of **Chiunzi, Montalto, and Ravello**, forming a defensive line designed to prevent attacks coming from the Monti Lattari.

Amalfi was nearly impossible to conquer from the sea; its vulnerability was inland. The Lattari mountains had only one weak point: **the Chiunzi Pass**, the route from which invading armies could attempt to enter. For this reason, control of the pass was essential, and the Republic—like the kingdoms that followed it—equipped the area with military outposts and watchtowers.

The current bell tower is therefore a pre-existing structure, originally built in **Arab-Norman style**, and thus predating the church we see today.

The Church of San Pietro Apostolo also preserves a unique architectural stratification: it is, in fact, the result of **three overlapping sacred buildings** constructed across different centuries. The earliest structure, no longer visible above ground, survives in the crypt, as the original church was buried to allow the construction of the one above it.

Next to the church once stood a **Byzantine chapel** and a **foundling home** (*brefotrofio*). This institution is not to be confused with an orphanage: it specifically welcomed newborns abandoned at birth or born out of wedlock. From this function may derive one theory on the origin of the name *Figlino*, linked to the word “children”.

A second theory, however, connects the name to the Latin *figulinae*, the ancient Roman kilns used for producing terracotta objects and bricks. The Latin roots *ficus/figulus* refer to molded clay, and this area—like another nearby hamlet—was known for its clay quarries and ceramic workshops.

We may now continue with the visit.

4

## A Sacred Panorama: Entering the Church of San Pietro Apostolo in Figlino

As you enter the church, I invite you first to observe the landscape that surrounds this place: on both sides the view is extraordinary, stretching all the way to Mount Cerreto, rising 1,316 meters above sea level, the second-highest peak of the Monti Lattari. It is a natural setting that alone would justify a stop. To me, this building is a true museum—an intimate space that preserves artistic treasures of exceptional value.

### The 18th-Century Capodimonte Ceramic Floor

Beneath our feet once lay an 18th-century ceramic floor created by the renowned Capodimonte master ceramists Ignazio and Biase Chiaiese, among the most important artisans of Bourbon Naples. Biase Chiaiese is the author of the celebrated majolica floor of San Michele in Anacapri, considered one of the most beautiful ceramic pavements in the world.

The floor of San Pietro, unfortunately worn down by centuries of foot traffic, survives only in fragments on the left side of the nave. Yet those fragments still reveal floral motifs, stylized fruit, opposing peacocks, and symbolic figures. Even in partial form, they allow us to imagine the original splendor of this work.

## Paintings

In front of us stands an 18th-century painting depicting the Madonna with Saints, created by the Tramonti-born painter Domenico Ferrara. Tramonti has produced several artists, but its most illustrious figure is Luca Giordano, one of the greatest painters of the 17th century, whom Matteo Camera claimed to be of Tramonti origin. Five of Giordano's works were once preserved in the churches of Pucara and Cesarano — all unfortunately stolen.

Next to the main altarpiece is another painting by Domenico Ferrara: a splendid **Saint Lucy**, notable for its expressive intensity, typical of the Neapolitan school of the 18th century.

## The Wooden Sculpture of Saint Peter (1600)

Moving toward the side nave, we find a 17th-century wooden sculpture depicting Saint Peter in papal vestments.

It is an exceptionally expressive figure: observe the face, deeply human and marked by time, and the refined carving of the wood.

## The Three Superimposed Churches

As mentioned outside, this building is the result of three construction phases:

1. **The Byzantine crypt (8th–9th century)** — the only surviving part of the oldest church.
2. **The medieval church above it (12th–13th century).**
3. **The current Renaissance-Baroque church**, built between the 16th and 17th centuries, originally dedicated to the Annunciation and later to Saint Peter.

## Choirs, Vestments, and Sacred Objects

The side display cases hold ancient liturgical vestments, French banners, and sacred objects from past centuries. Particularly noteworthy is a **12th-century marble relief**, a small but exquisite **Nativity scene**. Notice the delicate angel and the expressive faces of Mary and Joseph. Though little known, it is an artwork of remarkable historical and artistic value.

## 18th-Century Stucco Work and Baroque Vault

Now look up at the central vault, decorated in the 17th century with a representation of the Trinity: below stands Saint Peter, above the Madonna, Christ, and God the Father. The stucco decoration framing the vault belongs to the school of **Domenico Antonio Vaccaro** and represents one of the finest examples of Tramonti Baroque.

The angels and side moldings still display the craftsmanship of highly skilled artisans. Even the small painting of God the Father, placed between two angels at the end of the nave, is an artwork of considerable merit.

### Access to the Byzantine Crypt

We now move toward what I consider the most remarkable part of the complex: the **Byzantine crypt**, which is rarely opened to visitors. You are among the very few who have had the opportunity to enter.

The crypt is small but extraordinary. Originally, it was entirely decorated with *minium* (Pompeian red), the most precious pigment of the time, now almost completely lost. The space includes what remains of the ancient Byzantine apse.

### The Byzantine Chapel – Historical Notes

Here is a brief historical summary essential to understanding the significance of this site:

- The Byzantine chapel was a **martyrion**, a type of structure built over the tombs of martyrs.
- It features the characteristic **three-lobed trifoliate apses**, typical of Athonite architecture between the 9th and 14th centuries.
- The domes once bore frescoes of **Christ Pantocrator**; the apses portrayed the Virgin Mary.
- The nave displayed the **Twelve Great Feasts** of the Eastern Church.

- The **narthex** was reserved for catechumens and penitents.

The chapel was largely buried to allow the construction of the later parish church, causing the loss of many original decorations.

### Byzantine Origins and Iconoclasm

The chapel was almost certainly built in the **9th century** by Byzantine monks who took refuge here to escape the iconoclasm decreed by Emperor Leo III (726–730).

Persecuted for defending sacred images, these monks arrived on the Amalfi Coast — at the time Byzantine territory but loyal to Rome — bringing with them their liturgy, architecture, and artistic traditions.

### A Possible Martyrdom

One hypothesis suggests that the chapel was built not only in accordance with liturgical tradition, but also to honor a monk who may have died here in martyrdom.

The absence of historical memory may be due to the Great Schism of 1054, when the two Churches separated and many traces of Eastern tradition were intentionally erased.

**Some photographs from the free guided tour held on 19 October 2025**

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9





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