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The Sacred Heart of Monreale – A Journey Through History, Stones, and Symbols

When we think of Monreale, our minds immediately turn to the gold of the Cathedral's mosaics and the solemnity of the Norman kings. It is a universal, magnificent image, but it must not become a shadow hiding other treasures.

Today, through this book, which represents the first work—published by Kalòs—commissioned by the Grand Bailiwick of Sicily in conjunction with the Accademia di San Luigi, we wish to make a symbolic gesture: we wish to walk a few steps outside the Cathedral, turn the corner, and cross the threshold of the Church of the Sacred Heart.

This volume is not a simple art catalog; it is a compass that allows us to orient ourselves in a universe of symbols that has remained silent for too long. It is the result of a dialogue between two complementary perspectives: that of historical research and that of architectural interpretation.

The first guide on this journey is **Flavia Alaimo**. Her contribution takes us directly to the beating heart of the project: the presence of the Jesuits. Flavia has not limited herself to describing what we see, but has become an "archive investigator." Through his research, we discover how the Society of Jesus shaped this place, not only as a place of worship, but as a tool for education and devotion. His discoveries, based on unpublished documents, now

allow us to rewrite the site's chronology, revealing the background to a construction site that reflected a precise political and spiritual strategy.

But once the history has been reconstructed, the task remains of "reading" what surrounds us. And this is where **Salvatore Machi** comes in. With his expertise, Salvo teaches us that the walls of this church are not silent: they are pages of a "wall book" written in an alphabet made of stone. From the majesty of the façade, which serves as a true architectural manifesto, to the smallest details of the heraldry, every element has a meaning. He explains that a coat of arms is not a simple decorative frieze, but a complex signature, a sign that speaks of power, patronage, and celestial aspirations.

However, this historical and symbolic narrative would not be complete without the ability to truly "see." And it is here that the book takes on an additional dimension thanks to **Zino Citelli's** gaze.

Zino's photographic work is not simple documentation; it is a work of revelation. Through his lens, light caresses the surfaces, revealing details that the naked eye often ignores: the grain of the marble, the chromatic depth of the canvases, the emotion of the sculpted faces. His images not only accompany the text, but interrogate it, conveying to the reader the majesty of the space and the intimacy of the detail. Zino Citelli allows us to "inhabit" the church even from a distance, transforming the book into an immersive experience.

The true beating heart of the story, however, emerges in the encounter between art and faith. The book explores with extreme subtlety the connection between the iconography of the Visitation and the cult of the Sacred Heart. You will discover how these images were not placed randomly, but represent the fulcrum around which the entire decorative system revolves. It is a journey that leads us by the hand from the "visible" – the painted canvas, the sculpted marble – to the "invisible," that is, the religious sentiment that gave rise to so much beauty.

Why, then, did we feel the need for this work?

Because we believe that Monreale deserves to be looked at with new eyes. Reading this book means holding the keys to a door that has long been ajar. It means discovering that, beyond the shadow of the Duomo, beats a Baroque and Jesuit heart of extraordinary richness.

In conclusion, this volume is not only dedicated to specialists, but to anyone curious to discover how man managed to transform matter into prayer. We invite you to browse these pages and then, book in hand, return to that church: you will realize that the stones have finally begun to speak again.

Thank you.

