

[Vecchiattini Rita & Moggia Cecilia \(2023\), “Votive Shrines in the Historic Centre of Genoa: A Project to Enhance a Historical, Artistic, and Popular Heritage”, in *NAM - Notiziario di Archeologia Medievale*, 88 \(2021-2022\), 17-21.](#)

Abstract of the article¹

The article by Rita Vecchiattini and Cecilia Moggia focuses on the votive shrines (*edicole votive*) in Genoa's historic centre, highlighting their significance as part of the city's artistic and popular heritage. These shrines, beyond their religious importance, reflect the political, social, and cultural history of Genoa. The project aims to catalogue, restore, and promote these shrines as valuable components of the city's identity. Votive shrines in Genoa are deeply embedded in the city's history and urban fabric, symbolising not only religious devotion but also the political and economic organisation of the city. A key example of this is the coronation of the Madonna as the Queen of Genoa in 1637, a political response to the expansionist ambitions of the House of Savoy. This event led to a proliferation of Marian shrines across the city, which served as both religious symbols and expressions of civic identity.

These shrines are integral to Genoa's heritage, representing a fusion of popular devotion and artistic expression. Many shrines were erected to protect the city and its inhabitants, and over time, they have become markers of local identity. The city's commitment to the *Madonna* as a protective figure is further exemplified by the installation of statues of the Madonna at the gates of the city's walls, with inscriptions indicating her role as the city's guardian.

The Department of Architecture and Design (DAD) of the University of Genoa, in collaboration with the Municipality of Genoa and the Superintendency of Archaeology, Fine Arts, and Landscape, initiated a project to catalogue and restore the votive shrines. This project builds on earlier efforts, such as the *Rollindagando* project, which was part of Genoa's UNESCO site management plan.

The project has documented 285 votive shrines in the historic centre, using geographical databases to record data on their iconography, materials, structural elements, and state of conservation. This data has been cross-referenced with previous studies, including the CIVIS mapping project conducted by the Faculty of Architecture in the 1990s, which catalogued 244 shrines. The new documentation process has added updated information, reflecting changes over time, including relocations due to urban developments or war damage. The project has identified several key challenges in preserving these shrines. Many of them are in poor condition, with some having lost their original sacred images. Theft of sacred statues and paintings in the 1970s and 1980s has resulted in some shrines being left empty or being filled with inappropriate replacements. Efforts to trace missing statues have included archival research and the use of old photographs. To prioritise restoration efforts, the project has established criteria for evaluating the significance of each shrine. These criteria include the richness of the decorative elements, the state of conservation, proximity to

¹ This abstract in the English language was drafted by using AI tools and Google Translate tools only for the IX EAAE Conservation Network Workshop purposes to facilitate work group sessions and study visits to the historic centre of Genoa. It will therefore be forbidden to copy and reproduce the contents in any form for purposes outside the IX EAAE Conservation Network Workshop activities. This article has been translated in support of the study visit to the historic centre of Genoa.

tourist routes, and ownership. Publicly owned shrines located along existing tourist paths, in a state of disrepair but still retaining their sacred images, have been given the highest priority for restoration.

The project also aims to raise public awareness of the importance of votive shrines. Information about the shrines has been made available on Genoa's Geoportal, where users can access detailed descriptions and historical contexts. New tourist itineraries have been developed, including a route called "Regina di Genova" that focuses on shrines dedicated to the Madonna.

Additionally, accessibility has been a priority, with efforts to include some shrines in routes designed for people with disabilities. Audio descriptions and 3D-printed models of selected shrines are being developed to provide an inclusive experience for all visitors. The votive shrines of Genoa represent a fragile yet significant aspect of the city's cultural heritage. The project led by the DAD, in collaboration with local authorities, seeks to preserve and promote these shrines through restoration, public engagement, and integration into the city's tourist offerings.