

4. The Doorway between the Churches

The first documentary reference to a doorway connecting the two adjacent churches is in the visitation report of 1621. The report of 1636 described it: *intus utramque est ianua aperta*.¹ It would, however, appear to have been there at least by 1575 when the *pavimentum* of the Visitation church was mentioned,² since its paving stones are visible beneath the stones now blocking the doorway and were evidently laid so as to run through it (Plate 20). While it is not possible to decide beyond all doubt how much earlier than that the doorway was constructed, there are several points which suggest that it was not an original feature of the Annunciation church.

The way in which the door is constructed contrasts notably with the careful masonry of the west and south doors, and of the arches and piers, all of which are original parts of the Annunciation church.³ The jambs are not of squared stone. The head of the doorway is formed not by a true arch but in part by corbelling, the eastern half being angled more sharply, and in part by lintel stones (Plates 3, 14). The lintel stone on the Visitation church side is set a few centimetres lower, and the internal height of the doorway is 1.94 m on that side and 1.75 m on the Annunciation church side. There must thus have been a step down to the Visitation church about 25 cm high. Although some of the clumsy stonework may have been less obvious if it were plastered over, the difference in the way in which this doorway was built when compared with the build of the west and south doors does seem to suggest that it was a later insertion. This may also be deduced from the condition of the fresco which survives above it (Plate 14). The remaining part of the figure tentatively identifiable as St. James the Major⁴ now finishes 35 cm above the underside of the door lintel. The red borders of the fresco continue down to slightly below the level of the lintel. The figure is laid out in exactly the same way as its companions in the other bays, that is with a background divided horizontally at about the waist height of the figures into two zones of different colours, and with a rectangular framing executed in white against the black background round the upper part of the figure. This similarity of layout suggests that the saint in this bay was originally executed at full length like the other figures, but there would have been insufficient room to do this if the doorway were there. By implication, therefore, the doorway was inserted later, and thereby destroyed the lower part of the fresco. Fragments of wall plaster in similar colours to the Annunciation church frescoes were found in layer BN and BQ beneath the Visitation church floor on its side of the door, though none had any element of design which could positively be identified with the frescoes which are preserved.

The paving stones between the piers of this bay within the Annunciation church, occupying a space equivalent to that containing the benches in other bays, appear

1. Hal Millieri, 72, 141, and Plate 14B.

2. *Ibid.*, 139.

3. *Infra*, 46–48.

4. Hal Millieri, 98.

to have been put in as a separate piece of work since they do not continue the lines in which the paving stones were laid across the rest of the church, as might be expected if there were originally a doorway at this point. If there had originally been a bench in this bay also, its removal would have left no trace, since the benches were not bonded into the piers or the wall behind. The layer of compact dark earth BE (Fig. 4: section 1) might thus be explained as what had lain immediately beneath a bench removed when the doorway was inserted; this would involve reinterpreting what is shown on the north end of the section as a continuation over BE of layer AF, the floor make-up, as being a functionally similar deposit not distinguished from AF in excavation. AF attenuated almost to nothing over the southern edge of BE, and some such interruption is quite possible. An alternative possibility, that BE represents dirt trampled in by men passing between the piers during the construction of the Annunciation church, does not require that the doorway was then built or even planned, for the walls might not have risen above foundation level at that stage.

There is little to indicate that the doorway should be regarded as an original feature of the Annunciation church; indeed, there are several pieces of evidence which, though falling short of proof, combine to suggest that it was a later insertion, for which one might consider the building of the Visitation church the most likely occasion. The closure of the doorway was ordered when the Visitation church was deconsecrated in 1667,⁵ and it is now walled in with a single thickness of irregularly-laid blocks. The internal plaster rendering was added when the frescoes were restored in 1974.

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5. *Ibid.*, 122.