



## Restoration work has begun on the mosaics of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo's Royal Palace

Restoration work is underway on the mosaics of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, which will shine in a new light by the end of summer 2025. The work was handed over on 17 December 2024 to the contractor 'Lithos Restauri' of Venice for the safety and conservation control of the Chapel in the Royal Palace, planned by the Palermo Superintendency of Cultural Heritage and financed by the Cult Buildings Fund of the Ministry of the Interior, owner of the building, for an amount of € 1.1 million. The delicate restoration operation, initiated by virtue of the existing memorandum of understanding between the Sicilian Region and the Ministry of the Interior, will be entirely overseen by the Superintendency of Palermo, headed by Selima Giuliano, in agreement with the Regional Department of Cultural Heritage, and will last 240 days.

### Restoration details

The project is aimed at the restoration of artistic artefacts and valuable surfaces made of stone and glass paste. The study of the state of conservation conducted to elaborate the project for the conservation and enhancement of the monument highlighted the need to plan a broader project of planned protection.

The work takes into account both restoration and the completion of work that over the centuries had taken place. They follow the criteria of compatibility and reversibility, respecting the historical and artistic value of the building as well as its proper function. Moreover, the intervention provides for a detailed technical documentation at all stages, through an accurate documentary and photographic campaign of the building.

Although recent restoration work has been carried out, the mosaics show some forms of alteration that has led to the implementation of a plan of prompt intervention and aesthetic restoration, in order to halt the deterioration process and safeguard the precious heritage preserved within the monument. As a result of the preventive monitoring activity, it was possible to identify the two main causes of the deterioration in progress: uncontrolled exchange with the thermo-hygrometric gradient present in the environment; lack of ordinary maintenance activities, instability of the heterogeneous constituent mortars and previous interventions.

Precisely for these reasons, a conservation model is implemented for the Palatine Chapel aimed at avoiding or minimising all the criticalities encountered through a planned conservation activity that defines effective solutions: microclimate and microbial aerosol monitoring; microclimate control system; new artificial lighting system; chemical and microbial characterisation of the environment; air filtering and screening of accesses; application of dust-attracting mats; opening to the public and correct usability; regular maintenance and control of the works.

# Monument Factsheet

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Located inside the Norman Palace, it was built at the behest of Roger II between 1130 and 1132 as the Chapel of the Royal Palace dedicated to St. Peter the Apostle and was consecrated on the 28 April 1140. The Chapel is one of the main testimonies to the marked cultural and artistic syncretism of the three main ethnic groups then present in Palermo during the Norman period: Latin, Byzantine and Islamic.

The building has a basilica layout with three naves separated by ten columns, five on each side, in granite and cipollino marble recovered from pre-existing buildings. The slightly elevated sanctuary features three apses and is covered by a hemispherical dome.

The chapel is entirely covered with mosaic decorations made of lithic tesserae and glass paste and executed over different periods of time that have been restored and modified several times over the centuries, especially in the area of the presbytery.

Also belonging to the period of Roger II are the floor mosaics in the cosmatesque opus sectile style, one of the most refined and prestigious marble ornamentation techniques, both in terms of the materials used (some of the rarest marbles) and the technique of execution.

The wooden ceiling, the work of Islamic Fatimite craftsmen, was made in the central part in around 1143 and is richly carved and inlaid with muqarnas motifs and twenty concave eight-segment star polygons (eight-pointed stars). The wooden roofs of the aisles, on the other hand, present a less complex plastic articulation, characterised by a series of panels with semicircular endings.

The chapel is connected by two symmetrical staircases built in the 16th century to the floor below where the lower chapel is located. This pre-existing chapel was built at the beginning of the Norman settlement and houses the Palatine Treasury consisting of numerous relics, furnishings and sacred objects, among which the collection of ivory and wooden caskets of Islamic origin is particularly noteworthy.