



TUSCANY

Land of spirituality

The places of silence:
routes, hospitality and traditions





Tuscany is a land rich in spirituality, homeland of great men of faith and values of hospitality, a land where, everywhere, beauty accompanies the journey that becomes an inner experience.

This is the reason for this guide dedicated to the places of silence, to the paths of spirituality which reveal hidden treasures and invite the visitor to discover where contemplation and the inner journey combine with the love for discovery of unexpected corners of great spiritual, historic and artistic value.

A new way to travel and to learn about history and art through the spiritual testimonies that, in the course of history, have inhabited and made this land unique. The detailed descriptions of the places accompany the visitor and allow him to rediscover hidden corners, works of art of unexpected value, panoramic views and architectural details of great charm.

An original reading to learn about the local traditions of the Tuscan territories through stories of the saints, anecdotes, exceptional facts and legends that are rarely described in a tourist guide and that have always been part of the life and devotion of the local populations.

A different approach to travel, discovering the many identities of Tuscany, which reveals itself to be a land of great spiritual vitality, a land that will surprise even those curious travelers and visitors who do not know the Christian faith and those who put themselves on the way to the discovery of suggestive paths for living in the atmosphere and love of diversity. A land where one can, everywhere, value what Father Giovanni Vannucci wrote about his hermitage in Chianti: *"In this small space I would like every man to feel at home and, free from constraints, could reach the knowledge of himself and set off on his strong and confident path. I would like it to be a pause for peace, for reflection for every wayfarer who reaches it, a place where the ideal becomes reality and where joy is the spontaneous fruit."*

TOSCANA, land of spirituality	3
The ecclesial organization	4
The places of faith: from cathedrals to oratories	5
The orders and congregations	6
The new communities	8

THE PLACES OF SILENCE	11
------------------------------	-----------

1. Madonna del Monte	- The sanctuary of Lunigiana	12
2. San Pellegrino in Alpe	- Balcony on the Garfagnana	14
3. Eremo di Calomini	- A pearl set at the foot of a high cliff	16
4. Badia di Montepiano	- The church and the places of the blessed Peter	18
5. Monte Senario	- The "Good Retreat" of seven friends	20
6. Camaldoli and Vallombrosa	- The friars of the forests	22
7. Around the Amiata	- Humble hermitages among great abbeys	24
8. Island of Elba	- The sacred paths of Mount Capanne	26
9. San Galgano	- The charm of the abbey open to the sky	28

THE ROUTES OF THE SPIRIT	31
---------------------------------	-----------

1. Montenero	- The sanctuary of the patron saint	32
2. Santa Maria a Ripa	- The Benedictines of Montecatini Alto	34
3. Certosa di Firenze	- The exceptional gift of Niccolò Acciaiuoli	36
4. San Vivaldo	- The Jerusalem of Valdelsa	38
5. Passignano	- The ancient abbey Disguised as a castle	40
6. La Verna	- The mountain loved by Saint Francis	42
7. Lecceto	- The Augustinian Hermitage of Saint Salvatore	44
8. Monte Oliveto	- The monastic oasis of the Sienese Crete	46
9. Monte Argentario	- The great work of Paul of the Cross	48

THE HOSPITALITY IN TUSCANY	51
-----------------------------------	-----------

Hospitality along the Via Francigena	53
Other historic reception sites	55
Religious hospitality today	56

FEASTS AND TRADITIONS	59
------------------------------	-----------

TUSCANY

Land of spirituality

Since the first centuries of Christianity, Tuscany has been a land of great spirituality: history, culture, artistic and architectural heritage are clear in this sense. Here, according to legend, Peter arrived in the year 44, erecting the first altar in the place where, during the fourth century, the first church dedicated to him would be built and later transformed in to the current Basilica of Saint Peter the Apostle at **San Piero a Grado**. In nearby Pisa, on April 29 of the year 68 AD, **Saint Torpes** would be beheaded and, in spite of the uncertainty of historical sources, it appears that **Saint Lino** would have been Peter's first successor to the papal throne. Some of the oldest dioceses are certainly in Tuscany, thanks also to its proximity to Rome. In Tuscany, near the abbey of San Salvatore al Monte Amiata, the oldest full copy manuscript of the Bible in the vernacular Latin of Saint Girolamo was received and kept for almost a thousand years, the so-called **Amiatino Code**, is now housed in the Laurentian Library of Florence. By the first millennium of the Christian era the groundwork was prepared for the **great religious blossoming** that began to manifest from the beginning of the next, with the Camaldolese reform of the Order of the Benedictine and the work of the Ravennese Saint Romualdo, followed shortly after by the Vallombrosian at the hand of the Florentine Saint Giovanni Gualberto. It was then the turn of Francis of Assisi to forever mark with his presence La Verna, *the savage rock between the Tiber and Arno*, as he described it almost a century after Dante in the *Divine Comedy*. But Saint Francis, son of the merchant Pietro di Bernardone, was certainly not the only rich young man from a good family to leave a well-to-do life to follow Jesus Christ through prayer, contemplation and poverty. Always in Tuscany, he was preceded by Galgano Guidotti and shortly after the wealthy Florentine merchants, who would emulate him, and who founded the Servants of Mary and the convent of Monte Senario. In Siena, however, a century later, it would be the turn of Bernardo Tolomei and his companions, founders of the Olivetans. And in same city, in the second half of the fourteenth century, it was the sanctity of the young Dominican tertiary **Catherine Benincasa** which shone forth.

In times of bitter and bloody struggles between enemy cities, Medieval Tuscany was characterized by an **enormous spiritual richness** of which the heritage still remains today, not only in the places and structures that it generated but also in the same religious orders still present. Other experiences would be added over the following centuries, like those of the numerous religious congregations, especially women's, which also have their origins here. Not because this region had had its own "vocation to the sacred" in relation to others, but because of its many peculiarities which many undoubtedly favored. Its' proximity to Rome, cradle and center of the Catholicism, the fact that passage through this land was practically obligatory to arrive at the eternal city from north, crossed from top to bottom on the great arterial road, the





The parish church of Saint Pietro a Romena. On the previous pages, the cell of Saint Romualdo at the Hermitage of Camaldoli and the crypt of the abbey in Abbey San Salvatore

Francigena, cannot be underestimated. This undoubtedly encouraged not only commercial exchanges but even more so those cultural and spiritual, as evidenced by the fact that two **Irish monks** stopped there after they were elected bishops by popular favour, Frediano in Lucca and Donato in Fiesole, and also other **saints coming from beyond the Alps**, like Guglielmo of Malavalle or, between history and legend, the scottish Pellegrino and Bianco. The same **natural landscapes** with their contrasts - sweet and wild, harsh and welcoming, however characterized by a great beauty - must have played a partial role in the choice of the many hermitic and monastic settlements. We cannot forget the Romanesque churches that, as we shall see, constituted the capillary network of reference of the entire population throughout the territory.

• The Ecclesiastical Organization

The two essential dimensions of catholicity are those of the universal Church, guided by the bishop of Rome, that is to say by the Pope, and of the local Churches, each of them headed by a bishop "in communion" with him. The first Tuscan **dioceses** of which there is some historical documentation were Lucca, Chiusi, Arezzo, Fiesole, Florence, Pistoia, Pisa, Siena, Populonia, Volterra, Roselle and Luni, which pushed out as far as Versilia, all erected by the fifth century, while Sovana was added in the seventh. In the eleventh century the Episcopal seat of Populonia was transferred to Massa Marittima and in 1138 that of Roselle to Grosseto. New dioceses were established from the fourteenth century, beginning with Cortona (1325), followed by Pienza and Montalcino (then separated, with Pienza subsequently united to Chiusi), Sansepolcro, Montepulciano, Colle Val d'Elsa, San Miniato, Prato (united *in persona episcopi*, that is to say both under the direction of a singular bishop, that of Pistoia, until 1954), Pescia, Pontremoli, Livorno and, in 1822, Massa. Moreover, in 1844, the transfer of the Episcopal seat of Sovana to Pitigliano was officially sanctioned by the

Holy See, which had in fact been the reality for 170 years. Dating back to 1886, a reunification of different dioceses which reduced the number to 17, to which was then added the **territorial abbey** of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, which since 1765 actually constitutes an ecclesiastical circumscription in its own right. They had, eventually, the title of **archdiocese**, and so are ruled by archbishops, the local Churches of Florence, Lucca, Pisa and Siena.

The territorial unity inferior to that of the diocesan was originally constituted by the **pievi**, or parish churches (from the Latin *plebs*, people), which in the height of the Middle Ages served as point of reference also from the civil point of view as well as being, together with cathedrals, the only churches it was possible to administer the sacrament of baptism, while the **chapels** that depended on them were devoid of the baptismal font. Even today, in Tuscany, their network is an exceptional historical testimony, besides the architectural and artistic one of the Romanesque period, in spite of the restructuring carried out in many cases. At the beginning of the twelfth century they had begun to establish themselves in **parishes**, which is present to this day.

• The Places of Faith: From Cathedrals to Oratories

Having spoken of the **parish church** and of the parishioner, with the **parochial church** at its center, it is opportune to dwell for a moment on the other types of places of faith present in the territory, also to facilitate a correct interpretation of the terms used in the following profiles. The **cathedral** is the church in which the bishop's seat is located, therefore the main church of the diocese, located in the city where the bishop resides. The **concathedral**, where it is present, has the same dignity as the cathedral but is located in a city in which the bishop does not regularly reside, usually the seat of a previously merged diocese. The **duomo** (from the Latin *domus*, for house) is the principal church of a city: it can, therefore, coincide with the cathedral or the concathedral, but it can be present even if the locality is not or has not been a diocesan seat. Similarly, we sometimes have the **collegiate** (called so because, at least in the past, it was administered to by a college of priests), while with the title of **basilica** (to be precise *minor basilica*, since the four largest are all in Rome) is assigned by the Holy See to diverse churches of particular importance from the historical and artistic, but above all the spiritual, perspective. The **sanctuary** is instead founded on a particular worship, in most cases Marian but also related to Christ, to a saint, often linked to an image, a relic, an event (apparition, healing, prodigy) or a natural place (sometimes a source) considered miraculous, officially recognized by the Church or simply by popular tradition. Minor places of worship, in some cases private, are the **chapel** and the **oratory**, this last sometimes with the characteristics of a small sanctuary. It should also be kept in mind that different types may overlap: we have already seen this in the cathedral and



The church of San Marcello at the Hermitage of Vivo d'Orcia

the duomo, just as a basilica can be both a cathedral and/or a sanctuary. Finally, we must not forget the particularity of the **Sacred Mountain**, a devotional complex comprised of a set of chapels and/or niches where principally, on the inside, are represented scenes of the Passion, as in San Vivaldo (pp. 38-39).

And we come to the monastic structures, beginning obviously with the **monastery**, a generic name to indicate a complex inhabited by monks or nuns of a determined order. The **convent**, where friars or nuns live, is instead the place of mendicant orders like Franciscans and Dominicans (not of their female branches, which maintain a monastic structure) and of the most recent congregations, which could be male and female: new realities in fact alternative to that of the **abbey** as a form of monastic settlement given autonomy at the ecclesial level, with its own **abbey church**, governed by an abbot or abbess and owner of properties and also vast estates. On the contrary, the **hermitage** is properly the place of anchorites, an experience born as a spontaneous choice, then also framed within orders which may include both the hermitic and the community form, as in Camaldoli (pp. 22-23), which at the latter is reserved for the **cenobio**. But sometimes (as is the case of Lecceto, pp. 44-45) the term hermitage indicates a monastery, in this way underlining the separation from the world, even if lived together.

• The Orders and Congregations

Born between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century in Egypt, Palestine and Syria with the anchoritic experiences of the Fathers of the Desert - beginning with Paolo of Thebes, Antonio Abate and Girolamo - as a form of withdrawal from the world to dedicate oneself to God, **monasticism** found a first cenobitic form, that is to say community, already around 320 with Pachomius, founder of a first abbey in the region of the Thebaid. Its landing place in Tuscany soon

took place: the **islands of the archipelago**, in fact, offered an ideal solitary environment. Many testimonies of monastic presences in **Capraia** come in succession from the end of the fourth century, while in the following the bishop of Palermo Mamiliano, exiled with the persecution of the Vandals, retreated in the last part of his life in **Montecristo**, where, in addition to the cave that hosted him, there are the remains of the monastery later dedicated to him. The stories of the life of Saint Giulia, patron of Livorno, also speak of a monastic presence in the fifth century also in **Gorgona**.

Meanwhile, in Celtic Ireland, where Christianity had just spread, the great monastic movement commenced in the fifth century

and culminated with **Saint Colombano**, author of a rule in the last decade of the sixth century and who died in 615 in Bobbio after having founded his abbey in the previous year. But the rule that would have guided or at least inspired a great part of Western monasticism had been written in 534 by **Benedetto of Norcia**. The benedictines, in fact, had established themselves and spread a little everywhere, acquiring power and prestige throughout Europe but progressively exposing themselves to the influence





The Franciscan convent of Saint Romano, in the Lower Valdarno. Below, the interior of the church of the Trappist monastery of Valserena. On the previous page, the Certosa di Farneta near Lucca

of temporal powers. What this elicited, towards the end of the century, was a **reform** movement of the order, starting with the **cluniac** one, characterized by the strong relationship with the mother abbey of Cluny, in Burgundy, which in Italy spread almost exclusively in Lombardy. For the rest, as mentioned at the beginning, it was truly Tuscany that served as a cradle in the eleventh century, to two other important reforms: the **camaldolese** with Romualdo and the **vallombrosana** of Giovanni Gualberto (pp. 22-23), to which three centuries afterward the **olivetana** of Bernardo Tolomei would follow (pp. 46-47).

Other experiences arriving from the other side of the Alps separated themselves from the Benedictine family, even though they referred equally to the rule of its founder: it is the case of the **cistercians**, who left among other things, the great testimony of the Abbey of San Galgano (pp. 28-29), and of the **carthusians**, still present today in Farneta (pp. 36-37). To the first they added in the following centuries the Cistercians of strict observance, better known as **trappists**, whose female branch founded the monastery of Valserena in Tuscany in 1968 (p. 33).

At the great season of the abbeys which followed their foundations, and the subsequent development, of the so-called **mendicant orders** followed, that is to say deprived of possessions and personal income, starting from the **Minor Friars** - the first among the Franciscans - and from the **Preacher Friars** - the Dominican Order - both born at the beginning of the thirteenth century and characterized by an active testimony in the world. Also in this case Tuscany was largely interested, for the presence of Francesco alla Verna (pp. 42-43), for that of the hermits, the **guglielmites** born in Maremma near the tomb of Saint Guglielmo di Malavalle (p. 29), and for the **augustinians** present mainly in Lucchesia and in the Siense, or at any rate in the Tuscia, invited in the middle of the century, on the initiative of Pope Innocent IV, to merge into the Order of the Hermits of Sant'Agostino (today **Order of Saint Augustine**), governed by his own rule dating back to 400 (pp. 44-45). Another great novelty of a little earlier was the birth of the **Order of Servants of Mary** a work of the Seven Founding Saints (pp. 20-21).

Naturally, the of presence of other realities was not lacking, beginning with the **carmelites**, originally an eremitical order then conducted as the Augustinians among



the Mendicants. To their intention, in addition to the great figures of Saint Andrea Corsini (fourteenth century), Saint Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi (sixteenth-seventeenth century) and Saint Margherita Redi (eighteenth century), it is worth mentioning the **convent of Santa Maria delle Selve** near Lastra a Signa, where, around 1412, the reform began which later gave life to the Congregation of Mantua, also called Observance of the Selve.

The era of the Counter-Reformation (sixteenth century) - preceded, as regards the Franciscans, from the foundation of the Order of the Capuchins in the nearby Marche - did not register the birth of new religious experiences in Tuscany, but it was a Florentine, **Filippo Neri**, who gave life to the Congregation of the Oratory in Rome. From then to the twentieth century, even if no monastic or conventual vocations were to come, it was these new forms that took hold: **clerical congregations** (indicated in some cases with the expression “**regular clerics**”) and **institutes of consecrated life** multiplied, thanks also to the birth of numerous female realities, no longer contemplative branches of monastic orders or mendicants, but characterized by an active apostolate life, centered particularly on teaching and attention to the poor. And there are more than a few, even in this case, those that have been born in Tuscany.

• The New Communities

In the last decades of the last century, and especially after the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, new realities of laity and consecrations were formed which gave life to communities recognized at the ecclesial level, often simply as “public associations of the faithful”. We present here several of those born or at least present in Tuscany, beginning with the two “citadels” visited by Pope Francis on May 10th of 2018: the Mariapoli of Loppiano and the community of Nomadelfia.

Loppiano, located near Incisa Valdarno, began construction in 1964 by the **Focolare Movement**, founded during the Second World War by Chiara Lubich. It permanently hosts about two hundred people from seventy countries, and is engaged in agricultural and artisanal production but also artistic. Here they have offices between each of the two musical complexes of the movement, the Gen Rosso and the Gen Verde, as well as the Sophia University Institute and, in the nearby town of Burchio, the Lionello Bonfanti Center for the promotion of the so-called “Economy of Communion”, to which more than two hundred Italian companies belong. In 2004 the sanctuary of Maria Theotokos, that is “Mother of God”, was erected there.

Nomadelfia, the village “where fraternity is law”, was founded by the Emilian priest **don Zeno Saltini** (who died in 1981) after the end of a first experience at Carpi, his city of origin. It is located north of Grosseto, between Batignano and Roselle, on a hill marked by a large cross that lights up the night. Founded on hospitality - in particular of minors in foster care - and the sharing of assets, currently has about 350 inhabitants. The experience and the ideal of the community are witnessed through a traveling show. In 1989 he was also visited by John Paul II.

Another charismatic priest, **don Divo Barsotti** (1914-2006), a mystic who is deeply linked to Eastern and in particular Russian spirituality, has instead originated the **Community of the Children of God**, which gathers priests, lay and consecrated laity



The sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso, run by the Community of the sons of God



The monks of Siloe on the hill of the Monastery of the Incarnation at Poggi del Sasso.

On the right, the Hermitage of Gamogna

and married people. In addition to the headquarters of Casa San Sergio in Settignano, near Florence, he also cares for the sanctuaries of the Madonna del Sasso, above Santa Brigida in the town of Pontassieve, the Madonna di Pietracupa near San Donato in Poggio and, on the Samminiatese hills, the hermitage of Fornace, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, in the territory of Palaia, birthplace of the founder.

The beautiful Romanesque church dedicated to St. Peter (photo on p. 4), in the upper Casentino, is instead the place of the **Fraternity of Romena**, founded by Don Luigi Verdi following the intuition of **Father Giovanni Vannucci**, of the Servants of Mary, who had started a similar experience at the **Hermitage of San Pietro alle Stinche** near Panzano in Chianti. *“In this small space,” wrote Vannucci, “I would like every man to feel at home and, free from constraints, could reach the knowledge of himself and set off on his strong and confident path. I would like it to be a pause for peace, for reflection for every wayfarer who reaches it, a place where the ideal becomes reality and where joy is the spontaneous fruit.”*

Small fraternities of consecrated life are also present in **Pomaio**, in the municipality of Arezzo (**Fraternity of Saint Lorenzo**) and in **Iano** (see page 39, **Fraternity of Mary Immaculate Mother**), while at Monte San Savino the ancient sanctuary of **Santa Maria alle Vertighe**, proclaimed patron of the nearby Autostrada del Sole, has for some years been home to a community of the **Franciscan Fraternity of Betania**, founded by the Capuchin father Pancrazio, born Nicola Gaudioso, spiritual son of father Pio da Pietrelcina. The shrine of Our Lady of Fatima at the parish church of San Frediano in **Montignoso**, in the territory of Gambassi Terme, is managed by the **Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**, a religious family with priests, consecrated men and laity founded in 1991.

Within the section *The Places of Silence (Luoghi del silenzio)* and of *Walks of the Spirit (Cammini dello spirito)* other sacred sites are mentioned: **The Disciples of the Annunciation** (Hermitage of Calomini, pp. 16-17), the **Community of Mary Servant of the Lord** (Montepiano, p.19), the **Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem** (Gamogna, page 21, also present in the center of Florence in the Badia Fiorentina), the **Community of Bose** founded by fr. Enzo Bianchi (Cellole, p.41), the **Community of Saint Leolino** (Certosa di Firenze, pp. 36-37), takes its name from the parish church of San Leolino in Panzano, where it is located and where the nearby oratory takes care of it di Sant’Eufrosino) and finally the **monastic community of Siloe** (Poggi





THE PLACES OF SILENCE



- 1** MADONNA DEL MONTE
- 2** SAN PELLEGRINO IN ALPE
- 3** EREMO DI CALOMINI
- 4** BADIA DI MONTEPIANO
- 5** MONTE SENARIO
- 6a** CAMALDOLI
- 6b** VALLOMBROSA
- 7a** SANTUARIO DELL'ERMETA
- 7b** EREMI DEL VIVO
- 7c** GROTTA DI SAN FILIPPO BENIZI
- 8** MADONNA DEL MONTE AND SAN CERBONE
- 9** SAN GALGANO

*The remains of the
church of San Bruzio
near Magliano*



MADONNA DEL MONTE

The sanctuary of Lunigiana

You have to climb mountain roads up to almost one thousand meters to reach the Madonna del Monte, the oldest sanctuary of Lunigiana, located in the municipal territory of **Mulazzo**: the same from which the roaming booksellers originated, a tradition which inspired the Bancarella Awards, which take place every year in the nearby Pontremoli, a city where, for more than a thousand years, the Via Francigena had its first stopping point to the south of the Apennines. It may seem strange that they wanted to build a sanctuary up in this exact place, near the pass called **Crocetta**, on the highest peak of the ridge separating the villages of **Pozzo** and **Montereggio**. The reason, according to ancient oral legend, is found in the gratitude of a Genoese man, for having escaped danger after being unjustly accused of murder and becoming a fugitive in these places which, at that time, were quite inaccessible, and who received reassurance of his fate by the Madonna who appeared to him in a dream. In fact, the real culprit was arrested and the inhabitants of the area, struck by the fact, decided to erect a church as a sign of their gratitude. Having chosen the place, more than once they

• HOW TO ARRIVE



The nearest toll booth to the Madonna del Monte is that of Pontremoli, on the A15 to Cisa. From here drive toward Mulazzo but before you arrive at the village, deviate to the right for the road that leads to Pozzo, from where you ascend to Crocetta and so to the sanctuary. From the Ligurian territory of the Val di Vara you can arrive, rather, passing from Montereggio.



were unable to find the tools they had hidden nearby the previous evening, so they decided to lie in wait. They saw a white dove come down to lightly touch the tools then ascend again to the top of the mountain. Their work tools were miraculously transported and it was precisely

there, in fact, that they decided to build their new temple. The legend ends here.

From the historical-geographical perspective, the sense of this elevated sacred place is in the fact that the nearby passage of Crocetta served as an important means of communication, which connected the Val di Vara with the Francigena. Having risen, probably, near the end of the twelfth century, a work of the **Benedictines of La Chaise-Dieu**, as a priory dependent upon the Chiavarese Abbey of Saint Andrea of Borzone, the complex is dedicated to Saint Mary and, in fact, also functioned as a place of hospitality for wayfarers until it was abandoned by the order at the beginning of the sixteenth century and subsequently acquired by the Marquis **Ottaviano Malaspina** of Mulazzo, who continued to assure liturgical service through a priest. In the following centuries another Marquis Malaspina, **Ottavio**, installed long mule tracks rising from Montereccio and Pozzo, then rejoining the Crocetta and going on from there to the sanctuary, the “majesty” (votive niches) with bas-reliefs in marble, dedicated to the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary: the Joyful on the road from Montereccio to the pass, the Sorrowful on that which rose from Pozzo and the Glorious on the conjunction to the church set on the peak of the mountain.

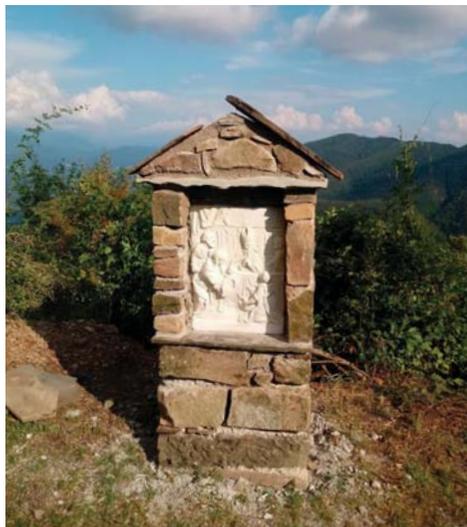
With time the niches disappeared, save for that of the Annunciation in the **Barcola** area (the first above Montereccio), while the following bas-relief of the Visitation, near

Locara, had been moved into the small church of **Saint Elizabeth** constructed there in memory of a deceased. Another ten of the fifteen original bas-reliefs, however, have been saved and set into the walls in the parish church of Montereccio, in the bell tower of Pozzo and on some private homes. In the last years, thanks to the work of the association “**Le Maestà di Montereccio**” (www.montereccio.eu), and of the Pro Loco of the town, the originals have been restored and copies have been made and placed on the ancient path between the village and the sanctuary, reconstructing the niches based on the model

of the only original which exists, situated at Barcola. A worthy endeavor completed with the generous contribution of sponsors and donors, it is desired that the work be continued for access from Pozzo. In the meanwhile, however, the paths have been restored and it is possible

IN THE WOODS OF EQUI TERME

La Lunigiana, beautiful land but also rugged, presents unique secondary valleys, like that of Equi Terme, characterized by the Solco of the same name, a real canyon carved into the rock in front of the imposing wall of Pizzo d’Uccello. Before you arrive at the village, turn off to the right of the course, a walk of about half an hour brings you to the little sanctuary of the Madonna del Bosco (Madonna of the Woods), built in the place in which the Madonna appeared to two female shepherds on June 7, 1608, a day in which the memory of the event is celebrated still today.



to travel a beautiful ring which includes both of the villages and the sanctuary, thanks also to a low connection on which has been restored an additional niche. The ancient and venerated **wooden statue of Mary** of the sanctuary, in the past an object of great devotion, was, unfortunately, stolen in 1979, the copy which has been substituted is nothing like the original, but this takes little away from the beauty and the evocativeness of this place, which continues to be a destination of pilgrimage on the part of the surrounding population.





SAN PELLEGRINO IN ALPE

Balcony on Garfagnana

Just below the ridge that marks the border with Emilia, at an altitude of 1525 meters, we find San Pellegrino in Alpe, the highest of the Apennine villages. There are few buildings around the sanctuary which houses the mortal remains of the saint, for whom the location is named, and of his disciple, Bianco, each in one of the two crystal urns located near the alter in an

elegant little temple built in the second half of the fifteenth century by the Lucchese sculptor **Matteo Civitali**. According to tradition, Pellegrino was heir to the throne of the Roman king (in fact, in his urn is also a crown), but he renounced the throne to go to the Holy Land to visit the Holy Sepulcher and then, upon his return, settled in the places of the



Abbey of Frassinoro, living as a hermit and dying, at nearly 100 years old, in 643, at the height of the period of diffusion of Irish monasticism in Europe.

• HOW TO ARRIVE



The sanctuary of San Pellegrino in Alpe is located on the Apennine side of the Garfagnana region and can be reached from Castelnuovo by taking the Passo delle Radici road. An alternate route, which is shorter but steep, takes off from Pieve Fosciana and leads directly to the village of Chiozza.



To testify to the importance of these two figures for the mountain people, including those on the Emilia side of the border, there is also a curiosity of the border: a piece of the land which in fact depends upon the municipality of Frassinoro, in the **province of Modena**,



where the ancient Benedictine abbey, now disappeared, was located. This administrative enclave which includes the square and some of the buildings on both sides, including the church itself, is “cut in two” in such a way as to divide “equally” the bodies of the saints, with the upper halves resting in Emilia and the lower halves resting in Tuscany.

The peculiarities of this place, however, go far beyond administrative matters. Beginning with the spellbinding landscape, “**Voltone**” on one side of which the church is accessible and on the other side is an old hospital,

both dating back to the twelfth century, and both having been modified many times. From a place of welcoming for pilgrims and travelers, the hospital was transformed in the second half of the last century and is now one of the largest ethnographic museums in Italy thanks to the commitment of the parish priest **Luigi Pellegrini**, to whom it is dedicated today.

Those who climbed, or climb still today, on foot from the valley floor of Garfagnana, reach the Voltone after having met a rustic cross of beech at the edge of a small plateau from which one can admire the breathtaking panorama of the valley and the entire chain of the Apuan Alps, situated on the opposite side. The cross is replaced every year on the

occasion of the traditional celebration of August first and which, appearing in a picturesque position to those who traverse the Voltone from the opposite direction, is easily reached by those who comfortably arrive in the area by car.

BETWEEN APUANE AND APPENNINO

SANCTUARY OF S. MARIA DELLA STELLA

Situated near Migliano di Fosciandora, it dates back to the 13th century, although the first mentions of the Marian cult date back only to the 16th century. It is managed by the Order of the Regular Clerics of the Mother of God, founded by Saint Giovanni Leonardi, whose birthplace is found, rather, in Diecimo, a hamlet of Borgo a Mozzano.

SANCTUARY OF THE MADONNA DELLA GUARDIA AT MONTE ARGEGNA

It rises just before the mountain of the Foce dei Carpinelli, the pass that separates the Appennine from the Apuan, joining the Garfagnana to the Lunigiana. Realized at the end of the nineteenth century, it is a branch of the Genoese sanctuary same name. From the plateau in the front, you can admire a breathtaking panorama of the northern Apuans. The feast day is celebrated on the last Sunday of August.

HERMITAGE OF THE BEATA VERGINE DEL SOCCORSO

Of sixteenth century origins, it rises at two kilometers from Minucciano and is still inhabited by three hermits. Other “places of silence” situated on the Apuan side of Garfagnana, starting from the Eremo di Calomini, are described in the following pages.

Another place of interest, about one and half kilometers from the sanctuary and accessible by an easy path, is the **Giro del Diavolo** tour, characterized by piles of stones brought by pilgrims as a sign of penitence. The name comes from the legend, which says that the devil, angry at the uselessness of his temptations of Saint Pellegrino, slapped him and caused the Saint to spin three times. A legend adds that the reaction of the holy hermit was such as to send the devil to sink in the sea after having passed through the Apuan, thus giving rise to Monte Forato.



EREMO DI CALOMINI

A pearl set at the foot of a high cliff

Tuscany also has its rugged churches. The most beautiful and imposing is set at the foot of the Penna di Calomini, high rock walls above which rises its' namesake village. We are in the valley of **Turrite of Gallicano**, which goes into the Apuan side and ends below the characteristic Monte Forato and the Pania Secca, in whose womb opens the spectacular Grotta del Vento, equipped for the tourist visits. In the last years, a couple of "adventure parks" have integrated the offer for those who, in total safety, desire to explore the wild nature of this corner of Garfagnana. Those who go to the hermitage of Calomini, instead, seek simply the silence and the peace. Even if it can make a bit of an impression to stand under the great cliffs, it is not a reassuring perspective. But it is, above all, this particular environment that gives the place its fascination, and which, in the eighteenth century, attracted the attention of the celebrated doctor and geographer, **Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti**. He authored a report about his journey in the autumn of 1743, in which he wrote:

"On the top of this secondary mount, or should we call it a hill, where the mountain leans

on a cliff, tall and perpendicular, passersby are offered a wonderfully consoling view amidst these terrible deserts. It is such a beautiful little church, with such pleasant decoration, that it could appear in any city. It is dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary and known as Calomini Hermitage, under the name of Saint Mary of Martyres, included in the care of Calomini, is a small castle at the peak, and sits right on the edge of that



• HOW TO ARRIVE



The Hermitage of Calomini is reached from Gallicano, in the valley floor of Garfagnana, by the road that goes toward Vergemoli, Fornovolasco and the Grotta del Vento. Passing through the town of Crocette, turn left at the fork in the road, toward Verni and Trassilico, a short, narrow branch on the right will lead you up with a single hairpin turn. The complex, which is accessed through a gate, is open to visits only on Saturdays, Sundays and religious holidays.

vertical-cut mountain that seems ready to ruin onto the bottom of the valley [...]. The church is, as I said, founded at the top of the little mountain of earth, and on the edge of the very face of the mountain, more than half rather, with the sacristy and almost all of the convent, rests inside an excavation made with chisels to enter the same mountain, so the rain, if it does not arrive with violent wind of mid-day, cannot fall upon it. The summit of this excavation, or cavern, ends in an ample, white vault, which supports itself well, attesting to the vastness of the lode of the mountain, and does not suffer from water."

Born in the medieval times as a hermitage and known also, simply, as "**The Hermit**", the church is frequented as a sanctuary for the presence of a miraculous statue of the Virgin. Destination of pilgrims from the surrounding areas, but also from the Versilia territory and from behind the Apuan chain, in the last Sundays of May and September, the hermitage owes its actual appearance, above all, to **Bartolomeo of Vergemoli**, one of the many hermits who maintained it over the centuries and began making the first changes in 1618, exactly four centuries ago. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the hermit tradition was interrupted and the entire complex was



managed by the clergy and by the local populations, until the arrival of the capuchins in 1914, who remained until a few years ago (2011), after which it was entrusted to the religious family of the **Disciples of the Annunciation**.

In addition to the statue of the Virgin, the church presents numerous paintings as well as distinctive wooden furnishings. Along side is found the sacristy, the original place of worship, also carved into the rock, as an external grotto which serves the chapel. Another characteristic are the **two springs** which flow forth from the cliff, one on each side of the entrance gate. Most recently, lastly, the Stations of the Cross were installed along the access road.

To enjoy the characteristic panorama of the sanctuary and the surrounding environment, lastly, it is worth heading to the town of **Verni** to take advantage of some scenic points along the access road.



IN SILENCE OF THE APUANS

HERMITAGE OF SAN VIANO

Another small sanctuary, that proceeds in part in the rock, is the Hermitage of San Viano, or Viviano, reachable in a short time from the breathtaking plateau of Campocatino, at the foot of Mount Rocchandagia, in the town of Vagli Sotto. The holiday, that traditionally was held the 22nd of May, day of the blessed dead, today is celebrated on the second Sunday in June.

HERMITAGE OF SAN DOROTEO

The hermitage is found in the area of Cardoso di Gallicano, along the street that climbs up toward the town, and rises in the place where the Hermit Doroteo had lived, known also as Tiroseo or Tiroteo, after having been separated from his friend Saint Pellegrino (see the preceding section), but staying in contact with him through the lighting of bonfires. Beside the church is the fresh spring which, according to tradition, which the saint miraculously made flow forth.

SANCTUARY OF BELL'AMORE AL PIASTRAIO

Rising on the other side of the chain, not far from Stazzema, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, there is the most important of the many little churches, reachable only by foot and located in the Alpine pastures and within the woods of the Alta Versilia.

BADIA DI MONTEPIANO

The church and the places of the blessed Peter

A short distance from the lowest road between Tuscany and Emilia, at roughly 700 meters or slightly higher, rises a significant but little-known abbatial church. We are in **Montepiano** on the former highway 325, which connects Prato to Bologna. Here, exactly, you disconnect, but for a couple of kilometers you remain in Tuscany, up until La Storaia, where right fork takes you to the **Sanctuary of Boccadriro**, in Tuscan territory but very dear and frequented by the Tuscans, for the simple fact that Cornelia Nutini, the female shepherd to whom, in 1480, the Madonna appeared while she was grazing the sheep with her little brother

Donato, and who became a nun area near Prato.

The events that instead gave origin to the Badia di Montepiano are much older and are linked to a laic hermit, the blessed **Peter**, who lived in these forests in the last quarter of the eleventh century. There is not much historical information about him, but moreover a *legend* that attributes to him a series of seven miracles. The very few certain documents in existence however allow us to affirm that between 1096 and 1099, although not actually a priest, he was "*prior and rector and custodian of the church and hermitage of Santa Maria*

located in Montepiano". In all probability, in fact, his life of penitence and prayer - solitary but not closed to the encounter with others, as testified to by the choice to reside not far from an important route of communication - gave life in that time to a real and true religious



• HOW TO ARRIVE



The fork to reach the Badia di Montepiano is found right at the height of the parish church of the village, also dedicated to Santa Maria. The road (*via della Badia*) is one-way and brushes the small Lake Fiorenzo: On the way back you have to pass by Via della Repubblica.

community: a monastic experience that then merged in the Vallombrosani with the participation of the blessed in the general chapter of the congregation gathered in 1101 in the monastery of San Salvi in Florence.

Regarding the death of Peter there are no certain dates, but it is presumed to have occurred between 1103 and 1105. In the year 1107 is instead the first historical source related to the **new abbey church**, which is the current one, built in place of the previous little church and consecrated precisely on 2 September of that year by the Bishop of Pistoia, Ildebrando.

In the second half of the thirteenth century the **miracles** of the blessed were represented inside the church, in the left wall, by frescoes that tradition had attributed to Cimabue. We can still admire some fragments: an ancient bas-relief with an inscription proposes that their



memory is not lost again. We see, among other things, on the left, the tree on the back of the horse, a miracle followed by that of the hare followed by hunters who had hidden under the clothes of the hermit. It was so, according to the legend, that one of the Counts Alberti became acquainted with Peter and, convinced of the sanctity of the man who had further assuaged him and his companions by turning water into wine, gave him a large area of land upon which to build a monastery. The place where the church would stand had been indicated by some doves.

The other wall also presents frescoes and is dominated by a gigantic figure of **Saint Christopher**, patron saint of wayfarers, while the relics of the holy hermit are preserved in a niche in the apse. The surrounding mountain environment also offers memories of the holy hermit and his miracles: from the nearby **Spring of Romito**, near which there is a tabernacle dedicated to him, from here departs the **ring of the blessed Peter**, a hiking path consisting of the CAI paths 23 and 25, which rises towards the Alpe di Cavarzano where, in a pine forest, flows the Fonte dei Monaci (Spring of the Monks), also according to the tradition of prodigious origin. Another beautiful spring along the trail is the Fonte Canapale.

A NEW COMMUNITY

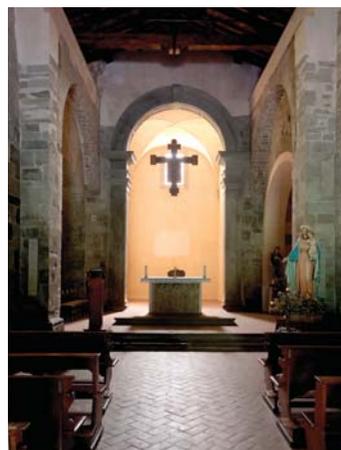
THE "SISTERS" OF THE BURRAIA

Not far from Montepiano, in the locality of La Burraia, in a secluded place in the middle of the green woods, at 850 meters of altitude, having

taken up residence for some years is the Community of Mary Servant of the Lord, welcomed by the then bishop of Prato Gastone Simoni. It is a feminine fraternity that at determined periods of the year (specifically during the summer) opens to the brothers in search of God and of themselves,

sharing with the guests their days of prayer, fraternal work and life, in an interior behaviour of poverty and smallness inspired by the concealment of the Madonna in her daily life (telephone 0574-959973; e-mail comunita.maria@alice.it).

In Montepiano you find also a house of Carmelite nuns, present only during the summertime. In the chapel you can admire a fresco by Bruno Saetti dedicated to *Virgo Carmeli*.



MONTE SENARIO

The “good retreat” of seven friends

“**T**here is a mountain far from Florence about eight miles. When it is struck by the wind, from the inside of its caves a sound echoes. For this echo, since ancient times, the mountain has taken the name of Sonario or Sonaio, even if people refer to it mainly as Mount Asinario, for a corruption of the term... This mountain therefore was God showing his inspiration to our fathers; here he urged them to finally realize the desire they had of Him and fix their home.

From a distance they saw the mountain indicated to them by God: it rose above the surrounding mountains. They approached to see what it was like. At the top they found a beautiful, though small, clearing: on one side a source of excellent water, all around a very orderly forest, as if it had been planted by human hand. This was indeed the mountain prepared for them by God. It seemed, in fact, very suitable for the ideal that they wanted to realize, above all because it was far from the houses and its summit was fully conformed to those who wanted to do penance. [...]

So they climbed up the mountain and on the summit they built a small house as their first home and here, left the first house they had had in Florence, they moved their residence.”

Thus the Legend of the origin of the **Servants of Mary** narrates the choice of Monte Senario by the seven founding saints as the place where, since 1246, they would live in contemplation and prayer. A group of Florentine merchants of diverse ages, familial status, and political affiliations, in

times in which the climate in the city was anything but peaceful: good Christians particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary, members of a Marian company dedicated to works of mercy, who at a certain point chose to dedicate themselves wholly to God living together as



• HOW TO ARRIVE



The sanctuary of Monte Senario is easily reached from the regional road 65 or 302 from Faentina, leaving the first in Vaglia (for those coming from the north) or Pratolino, then over Bivigliano, and the second at the Quattro Strade, near the pass of Vetta le Croci. The first parking lot allows you to walk up to the convent along the old road.

brothers outside the city walls of that time – in a place called Cafaggio, where then would rise the **Cathedral of the Santissima Annunziata** – but then feeling the desire to move to a place better suited to their quest for silence and peace.

It is peace and silence being sought still today by the many faithful followers who make their way up to the convent-sanctuary built on the very top of the mountain, enriched by significant works of art (such as the Pietà in terracotta of the Chapel of the Apparition, the



neo-Gothic **Chapel of the Seven Holy Founders**, the fresco of the “Ascent of the Seven to the Mount” by Pietro Annigoni or the seventeenth-century “Last Supper” of the refectory) and surrounded by other places connected to the memory of the seven friends and those who followed their example. As the spring that would arise from the rock in answer to the prayers of **Saint Filippo Benizi**, one of the first priors of the order, author of his definitive rule. Easily reachable from the complex of the convent, the spring is surmounted by an elegant temple and flows near the cave where the saint used to retire. Other **caves of the mountain** are those of Saint Alessio Falconieri and Saint Manetto, while the spring cited by the legend is perhaps that of Gallo, or Cantagallo, are reachable by a short path – with lots of directions – which goes off to the left from the last stretch of the road going up to the convent complex. Then there are the hermitages of Saint Alessio and of Saint Filippo, also known as Cellina Salvati, which are open to those who want to live an experience of “intense solitude”. Then those who want to make a small pilgrimage walking up to the convent on the old road, would find along the way the seven tabernacles of the “**Via Matris**” and the evocative cemetery of the friars.

IN MUGELLO

HERMITAGE OF GAMOGNA

Located in a suggestive position on a ridge of the mountain of the same name, in the territory of the Upper Mugella or Romagna Toscana, it was founded by Saint Pier Damiani in 1053. Dedicated to Saint Barnaba, it includes a small Romanesque church and is now run by nuns of the Monastic Fraternity of Jerusalem. It can be reached by foot from Marradi or by shorter routes from Passo dell'Eremo or from the valley of Acerreta River, upstream from Lutirano (photo on p. 9).

CHURCH OF BARBIANA

Dedicated to Saint Andrea, it is located on the northern slope of Mount Giovi, not far from Vicchio. It owes its fame to the school, promoted and managed by the prior Father Lorenzo Milani, for the children of the farmers and mountain people who inhabited the territory between 1954 and 1967. In June 2017 it was visited by Pope Francis on the memorial of the death of Father Lorenzo who is buried in the small local cemetery.





CAMALDOLI AND VALLOMBROSA

The friars of the forest

“*You, therefore, will be cedar for nobility of sincerity and holiness, acacia for injection of correction and penance, myrtle for discretion of sobriety and temperance, olive tree for joy of peace and mercy, fir for height of meditation and wisdom, elm for the work of support and patience, box tree for model of humility and perseverance.*” These words, taken from the Liber Eremitice of Prior Rudolph (twelfth century) would be enough to explain the strength of the bond between the Camaldolese monks and the trees in general, but moreover, they exemplify the particularly stupendous forest which the monks actually created. You can read these words, in the original Latin text, on the internal

• HOW TO ARRIVE

The Monastery and the Hermitage of Camaldoli are reachable from the valley floor of Casentino across the country roads that come up from Bibbiena, Poppi and Pratovecchio. The Abbey of Vallombrosa is arrived at, rather, from Pontassieve or from the Florentine Valdarno; the nearest highway toll booth is that of Incisa-Reggello.

part of the bronze *Porta speciose* (Beautiful Door), the new entrance to the **sacred hermitage** created by artist Claudio Parmiggiani and inaugurated on All Saints Day, November 1, 2013, at the end of the celebrations for the millennial of the foundation of the congregation founded by **Saint Romualdo**. The conclusion of the words of the Blessed Rudolph, “*When you have possessed these trees of solitary life, you will immediately arrive at the perfection of love,*” are inscribed, rather, in the stone that is found outside the gate.

Romualdo gave life to the Camaldolese experience in the reform of the Benedictine Order, and his rule was swiftly and kindly embraced in Italy as well as in Europe. Within his rule, as evidenced by the coat of arms (two doves drinking from the same chalice) both solitary and cenobitic (community) monastic living coexisted at the same time, in the same environment, albeit at a certain distance. The **Cenobio (monastery)** is, in fact, located a few kilometers below the Sacred Hermitage yet is connected by the main road as well as by a pedestrian



path that crosses the forest, and those who make the climb they will encounter, in this order, a pair of chapels (dedicated to the Madonna della Neve and Saint Romualdo). The **“Three Crosses”** and Lake Traversati, where the monks raised fish necessary for their meals, once marked the limits of their hermetic life.

Of the two monastic environments, the more evocative, naturally, is that of the Hermitage, with its characteristic spiral-shaped cells arranged in parallel rows and surrounded by the walls. The only cell which can be visited is that of Saint Romualdo (photo p. 1), towered over by the library and accessible only from the central courtyard, which also overlooks the church of the **transfigured Saint Salvatore**. As mentioned before, however, we must not forget the third environment, that of the forest, lovingly cared for by the monks themselves until the suppression of 1866 which, through eminent domain, incorporated the forest into the state. Thanks to the monks we have, among other things, what can be defined as the first “forest code”, inserted into the *Rule of the Hermetic Life* of the **blessed Paolo Giustiniani**, Prior of the hermitage in 1520. Among the most characteristic secular trees is the monumental Miraglia Chestnut, with its large, hollow trunk, a little downstream from the monastery. Today, all of this priceless woodland heritage has been inserted in the National Park of the Casentino Forest.

Yet another example of the relationship between the monks and the forest, on the Florentine side of the Pratomagno, is the **Abbey of Vallombrosa**, the place of origin of another great Benedictine congregations, founded in 1039 by **Saint Giovanni Gualberto** and called, precisely, “Vallombrosana”. Also, in this case, the monks tended to the forest until the suppression of

IN CASENTINO

SANCTUARY OF SANTA MARIA DEL SASSO IN BIBBIENA

The sanctuary takes its name from a huge boulder on which, during the year 1347, the Madonna appeared to a 7-year old child named Catherine (Caterina). Managed by the Dominican Order, the renaissance complex consists of a convent of friars with guest quarters and a female monastery. The venerated statue of the Madonna in multi-colored wood, called “del Buiro” (in the dark), is preserved in the sanctuary.

1866, cultivating, in particular, the majestic white fir with a forestry technique later widely adopted. Their founder, moreover, after the second world war was proclaimed Patron Saint of Forests and of foresters in general.

An excellent opportunity to admire a little of the great forest that surrounds the Abbey, after having visited the Abbey naturally, is offered by the **Circuit of the Chapels**, ten in total, beginning with that of Masso del Diavolo (Rock of the Devil) and following with another dedicated to Saint Torello, followed by that of Masso di San Giovanni Gualberto (Rock of Saint Giovanni Gualberto), the Chapel of the Columns, those of the Blessed Migliore, of Faggio Santo, of Saint Giorolamo, and of Saint Catherine of Alessandria. The path concludes with the Tabernacle of Saint Sebastiano and the chapel near the font of Saint Giovanni Gualberto, which was once a place of worship for the women who could enter the Abbey only once each year, for the feast of the Assumption.



7 AROUND AMIATA

Humble hermitages among great abbeys

It cannot be by chance that two of the most important Tuscan abbeys rise at the foot of its highest southern peak, characterized by the grand iron cross placed there over a century ago and restored immediately after the damage suffered in the last world war. With its forests and their silences, Amiata has always been a fitting place for contemplation. The area has not lacked in “alternative” religious experiences either, such as Juris Davidism of the “prophet” David Lazzaretti, who in the second half of the nineteenth century built his holy places on the nearby **Monte Labbro** and after the excommunication was tragically killed by force of the order.

It is obviously to the Middle Ages, however, that we must return to reconstruct the picture of the monastic presence in the territory, both cenobitic and hermetic. The incredibly ancient abbeys of **San’Antimo**, to the northwest, and of **San Salvatore**, to the east, continue to establish an eloquent testimony of beauty and majesty. The first, with its mighty Romanesque architecture, stands out in the peace of the Valle Starcia, at the foot of Castelnuovo dell’Abate. The latter, founded according to tradition by the Lombard king, Rachis, and in any case documented since 762, and still today the central focus of the town which gave its name, with its high, narrow facade enclosed between two fortified towers, one of which remains unfinished. Inside is the majestic *Christus Triumphans*, Christ on the cross with open eyes as he has



• HOW TO ARRIVE



From Abbadia San Salvatore you arrive at Ermeta by taking the road to the summit of Amiata then, on the left, a rough dirt road.

To arrive from Vivo all’Ermicciolo you need to follow Provincial Road 65 to the south and then leave it for a dirt road on the left that leads to the beginning of the path.

At the Grotta di San Filippo you can arrive to the Bagni by following the road to Campiglia d’Orcia until an road sign on the left, from where you continue briefly on foot.

been victorious over death, as well as the beautiful crypt (photo on p. 3).

Equally rich in suggestion are the places even yet more humble, which can create ideal stages of an itinerary of silence at the foot of the ancient volcano. Starting again from Abbadia San Salvatore we find first of all the small church of **Santa Maria dell’Ermeta**, not far from the village, built at 1047 meters in altitude in the solitary place



THE ICON OF THE VAL D'ORCIA

MADONNA DI VITALETA

It is a privately owned chapel in the middle of a large green lawn, bordered by cypress trees, of modest historical importance but with great panoramic value. Its image has become over time the most famous symbol of this territory and placed under the protection of UNESCO. It is found in the territory of San Quirico d'Orcia, not far from the road that leads to Pienza.



where, always as according to tradition, was the retreat of Thesia, wife of Rachis, and her daughter Rutruna. Visited in 1462 by Pope Pius II Piccolomini, inside it preserves a venerated and very ancient Crucifix.

Another pontiff is linked to the **Eremi del Vivo d'Orcia** (hermitage complex), in the locality also called Contea, just outside the later developed village. Built as a Camaldolese monastery, it was first ceded to the Farnese family and, in 1517, to that of the Cervini counts of Montepulciano, to which belonged also the then young Marcello, later ordained a priest and, in 1539, nominated cardinal by Paul III.

To him we owe the transformation of what remained of the monastery to the current imposing building, before his election to the papal throne in April 1555, with the name of Marcello II and for one of the shortest papacies



in history lasting only 22 days. The parish church instead, dedicated to San Marcello, was later radically restructured and reconsecrated in 1726 (photo on p.5).

The Oratory of San Benedetto, better known as the **Ermicciolo**, has rather maintained its antique appearance standing isolated in the woodlands south of the village near the homonymous source of the river Vivo, a tributary of the Orcia supplying the Sienese aqueduct. Dating back to the eleventh century, it probably constituted the first monastic settlement in the area and then retained the function of a hermitage after the construction of the monastery.

A missed pope is instead tied the most particular hermitical settlement of the territory, the **Grotta di San Filippo Benizi**, situated as the Ermicciolo in the vast municipal territory of Castiglione d'Orcia but more to the east, not far from Bagni di San Filippo. It is here that the then Prior General of the Servants of Mary took refuge in 1269 from the rumors that accredited him as a possible successor of Clement IV, not considering him worthy, leaving the interminable endless conclave of Viterbo, which lasted over a thousand days, continued. The cavern, excavated in travertine, is today transformed

into an oratory and remains an object of devotion. Also dedicated to the same saint is the small church of the nearby village, famous for its thermal waters and the pure white limestone formations of Fosso Bianco.

ISLAND OF ELBA

The sacred paths of Monte Capanne



Between the highest peak of Elba and the blue sea that extends as far as the eye can see, at your feet winds an ideal route between places of faith which has its fulcrum at Marciana. To the west, less than an hour's walk from the village - the highest on the island - first of all rises the **sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte**, the most important of Elba, situated at an altitude of 627 meters: already in existence in the fourteenth century, it reached its present aspect over the centuries through successive additions and renovations, lastly that of the bell tower dating back to 1919. The sacredness of the place is first announced by the bronze sculpture of an angel and by the simple and suggestive niches of the **Via Crucis** that accompany the visitor in the climb along the wide, paved path. To reach the destination, in fact, it is necessary to become pilgrims, but this only increases their appeal.

The focal point of the sanctuary is the fresco of the Madonna Assunta (Assumption of Mary), built on a block of granite (granodiorite, to be exact), which according to legend is the origin of the cult: discovered by some Marcianese shepherds under the **Monte Giove**, it



• HOW TO ARRIVE



From Portoferraio, the capital of the island and the landing point of ferries arriving from Piombino, you reach Marciana crossing through Procchio and Marciana Marina. The pedestrian paths for the Madonna del Monte and the hermitage of S. Cербone are indicated on the card; between the two places exists also a high, connecting route, which passes under the peaks of Monte Giove and Stretta, useful for those wishing to make a ringed route from the village.

was brought to a place near the town called Campo al Castagno, with the intention of building a small oratory to house it: but miraculously it disappeared only to return where it had been found and hence where the original church came to be built. The interior features other fine works of art as well, among these are some sixteenth century frescoes discovered during some restoration works in 1995 and attributed to Sodoma, while outside the space

across from the entrance is embraced by the characteristic **Teatro della Fonte**, a late-eighteenth-century fountain and granite exedra (semicircular recess) with three exquisite marble masks and a crucifix, also in marble, above the central one, the only one from which a fresh and clear spring water still gushes out.



BETWEEN RUINS AND SANCTUARY

The island of Elba is an authentic treasure trove of places of faith and even those of which today we can admire only the ruins which still retain their charm. Among these are some on the western slope of Mount Capanne, but the most interesting are the parish church of San Lorenzo, not far from Marciana and Poggio, that of San Giovanni, above Sant'Ilario in Campo and, next to the latter, the Hermitage of San Francesco Saverio. On the eastern part of the island, and worth remembering, are the Hermitage of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria near Rio nell'Elba, the sanctuary of Santa Maria del Monserrato (descended of the Catalan one) above Porto Azzurro and finally, in the territory of Capoliveri, the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie, that of the Madonna della Neve above Lacona and the parish church of San Michele, of which the apse remains transformed into the chapel of the old village cemetery.

At the side of the church there is also the **hermitage**, a long, low construction which, in times gone by, lodged the hermit guardians of the place and which also served as support for Napoleon who, from 23 August to 5 September 1814, stayed and also met with his Polish lover Maria Walewska, and with her son Alexandre, of whom the emperor was the natural father. During this period, Bonaparte communicated telegraphically from the nearby and panoramic **Masso dell'Aquila**, one of the characteristic granodiorite formations typical of the area surrounding the sanctuary, connected from 2013 with the so-called "Path of the Stone Monster". Also in granodiorite, next to a station of the Stations of the Cross along the access path, is the boulder popularly called "Culata della Madonna", whose characteristic hollow was made, according to legend, by the Virgin who, tired, would have sat there.

Another Marian feature near the monastery is the Grotta della Madonnina (Grotto of the little Madonna), where a statue of Her has been placed. To point out lastly, among the illustrious visitors, we should mention **Saint Paul of the Cross**, the founder of the Passionists (see pp. 48-49), who although not succeeding to found a convent here as he intended, worked some miracles and left a grateful memory among the local population.

Very picturesque also is the **hermitage of Saint Cerbone**, located instead to the south of Marciana, at an altitude of 529 meters, not far from the cable car track that, from the village, rises to Monte Capanne. It has been salvaged by a restoration promoted, as a plaque reminds, by a group of friends from different countries and con-



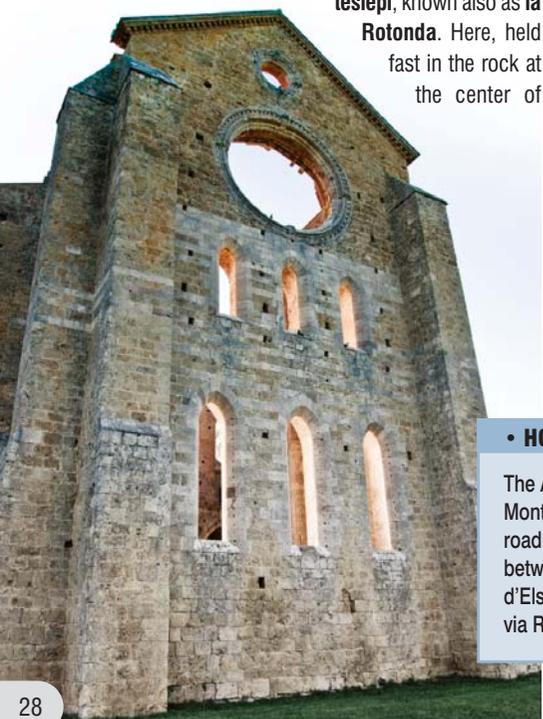
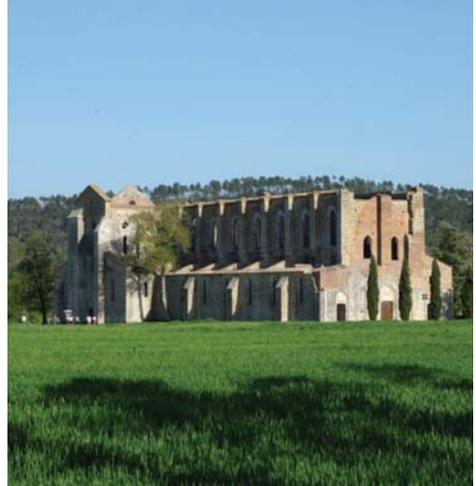
cluded in 1993. In the area nearby there is the grotto that welcomed the saint of African origin, in the memory of which, according to tradition, then built this place of worship that would now be the oldest of the island. You can go up the path from Marciana or on a dirt road not accessible to cars that detaches from the road to Poggio, near this last village. For those who don't like to work too hard it is possible to go off from Monte Capanne, after having reached it with the cable car, to then return downhill to Marciana.

SAN GALGANO

The charm of the abbey open to the sky

A grand and beautiful church/abbey with a floor of lawn and ceiling of sky, blue by day and starry on clear nights. There are no other words to describe the enchantment of San Galgano, universally known and also “consecrated” cinematically in various films, above all by the great Russian director Andreij Tarkovsij in the finale of his film, *Nostalgia*.

Although there are similar examples of unearthed abbeys and churches elsewhere – such as Santa Maria dello Spasimo of Palermo, Bauport of Saint Matthew in Bretagna, Melrose and Jedburgh in Scotland, Tintern in the Galles and the Convento of Carmo in Lisbon – the jewel of Val di Merse can boast, in addition, the particular fascination of the countryside in which it rests as well as its connection to with the nearby **Hermitage of Montesiepi**, known also as **la Rotonda**. Here, held fast in the rock at the center of



the characteristic circular chapel, is preserved the sword that according to legend, was plunged there by the young nobleman **Galgano Guidotti**, ideally transforming it on the cross and forever renouncing the use of weapons. A sort of King Arthur on the contrary from the dissolute past whose conversion aroused great impressions and admiration far beyond his own land, so much so as to be proclaimed a saint just four years after his death, which occurred in 1181 at just 33 years of age.

From a strictly historical point of view we know, in reality, very little about the events of Galgano: the tradition, based also on the numerous legends that that were dedicated to him, tell of his birth in Chiusdino to elderly parents through the intercession of Saint Michael and the beginning of his new life following the apparition of the same archangel. The choice of the hermitage in Montesiepi is considered a result of the direction received by **Guglielmo di Malavalle**, as his guide and spiritual father.

The fame of Saint Galgano and his story was, in any case, so important as to bring, a few years after his

• HOW TO ARRIVE

The Abbey of San Galgano and the nearby Hermitage of Montesiepi are situated just to the side of the former state road and current provincial road 441 Massetana, in the zone between Chiusdino and Monticiano, reachable from Cole Val d'Elsa, Siena, Follonica via Massa Martima or from Grosseto via Roccastrada.





death, the construction of the Rotonda, consecrated by the bishop of Volterra Ildebrando Pannocchieschi in 1185, the same year as the canonization. Then, in 1340, next to the original building, the rectangular, frescoed room by **Ambrogio Lorenzetti** was placed with a cycle of *Stories of the Virgin*.

The construction of the **cistercian abbey**, of which we admire the majestic remains today, began instead in 1218 while the consecration dates back to 1288, but in reality, the works were practically finished 26 years earlier. The great importance immediately acquired, however, suffered a severe setback with the plague of 1348, which marked the beginning of a progressive decline, so that, already, in the sixteenth century the complex began to appear structurally compromised. Deconsecrated in 1789, when all the roof had collapsed and a thunderbolt had destroyed the bell tower, it owes the preservation of the evocative appearance to the conservative restoration carried out in the first post-war period.

To complete the visit to the places of Galgano it is worthwhile to reach **Chiusdino**, at a distance of only

ANTIQUE RUINS IN MAREMMA

A substantial series of the ruins of churches, abbey and monastic complexes are present in Maremma, some of which, like the noteworthy Cistercian abbey of San Galgano, reserve their notable charm.

HERMITAGE OF MALAVALLE

Located in a valley north of Castiglione della Pescaia, it was constructed in the thirteenth century around the chapel built on the tomb of San Guglielmo, the spiritual guide of San Galgano cited on page 28, and restored by the Augustinian father Giovanni Nicolucci at the end of the sixteenth century.

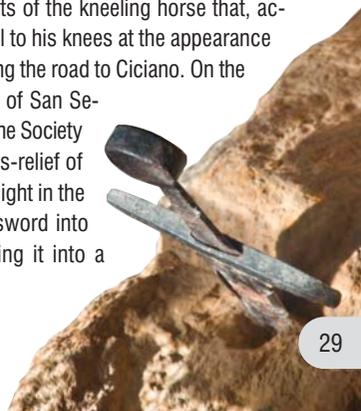
ABBEY OF SAN RABANO

It is found in the magnificent setting of the Uccellina Park, on the saddle between Poggio Uccellina and Poggio Lecci, and preserves a powerful but elegant Romanesque bell tower; next to the ruins, the fourteenth-century Torre dell'Uccellina rises nearly to the sky, and on the internal side, you find the remains of a hermitage.

CHURCH OF SAN BRUZIO

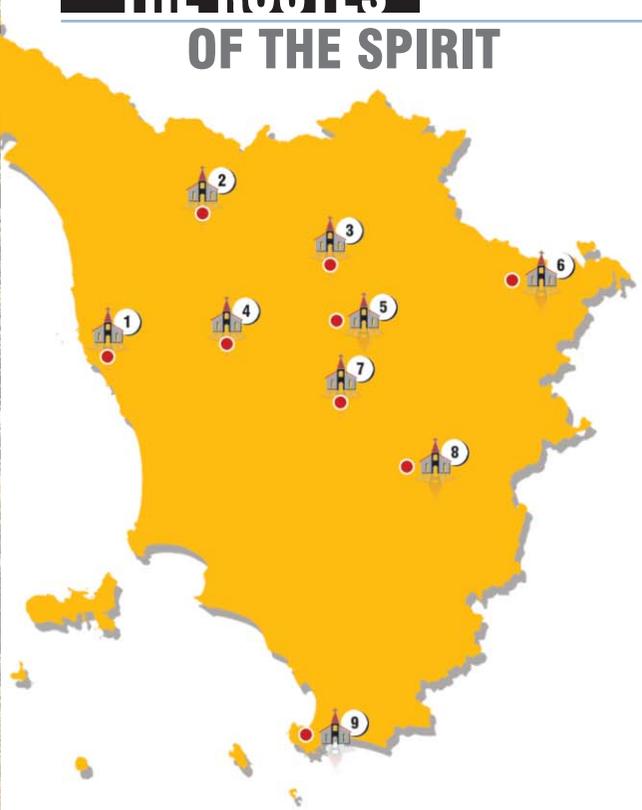
Raised by the Camaldolese near Magliano between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it presents today with the imposing Romanesque remains of the apse and the transept, including remarkable decorated capitals (photo on pp. 10-11).

8 kilometers from the abbey: here, in the ancient parish of **San Michele Arcangelo**, the saint's head is conserved in a silver reliquary. In that which tradition indicates as his birthplace has been walled in instead, the boulder with the prints of the kneeling horse that, according to legend, fell to his knees at the appearance of **Saint Michael** along the road to Ciciano. On the façade of the church of San Sebastiano, location of the Society di San Galgano, a bas-relief of 1466 portrays the knight in the act of plunging his sword into the rock, transforming it into a symbol of peace.





THE ROUTES OF THE SPIRIT



- 1 **MONTENERO**
- 2 **SANTA MARIA A RIPA**
- 3 **CERTOSA DI FIRENZE**
- 4 **SAN VIVALDO**
- 5 **ABBAZIA DI PASSIGNANO**
- 6 **LA VERNA**
- 7 **EREMO DI SAN SALVATORE A LECCETO**
- 8 **MONTE OLIVETO MAGGIORE**
- 9 **MONTE ARGENTARIO**





MONTENERO

The sanctuary of the patron saint



On the hill of **Montenero** stands the Marian sanctuary in which, for over 70 years, the Tuscan faithful venerated their **patron saint**. And perhaps many of them think that there could not be a better location, seeing in this beautiful natural balcony overlooking Livorno and its sea an evident sign of the benevolence of the Creator towards their region. In reality the story of the proposal and of the subsequent proclamation to *Mater Etruriae* by Pope Pius XII had its' beginning in 1945 with the celebrations of the

• HOW TO ARRIVE

Montenero is connected by several roads to Ardenza and Antignano, southern quarters of Leghorn. Between the lower part of the village (piazza delle Carrozze) and the upper part (where the sanctuary stands), a historic funicular, inaugurated in 1908, is still in use.

sixth centennial of the discovery of the miraculous Marian image and its transfer to the hill. The Second World War had just ended and hope, combined with the desire for reconstruction, was beginning to take the place of the suffering. It was then that the bishop of Livorno Giovanni Piccioni and the abbot Alfonso Salvini, superior of the Vallombrosano congregation who has been the custodians of the sanctuary since 1792, invited the bishops of the region to take part in an honorary committee expressly for the festivities, which everyone willingly joined. The proposal to proclaim the Madonna di Montenero patron saint of Tuscany was successively advanced by the passionist **Stanislao Amilcare Battistelli**, bishop of Sovana-Pitigliano, and found the consent of Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa, archbishop of Florence. Subsequently, all the Tuscan bishops, gathered in Florence, decided to advance the request to the Pope, who on 15 May 1947 gave the expected answer. It needs to be emphasized that **May 15** was not a ran-

dom date, but was, rather, the date of the miraculous discovery of the image, which in that year, 1345, was also that of Pentecost. The protagonist of the event was a **poor crippled shepherd**, who had discovered the image abandoned near the mouth of the Ardenza, and who, obeying a voice, carried it on the hill in spite of his condition. Arriving at his destination, he realized that he had been miraculously healed.

According to some scholars, the legend could have an historical link with what had happened in 1341, when the archbishop of Pisa prohibited the cult of Marian images that the inhabitants of Livorno, then a small fishing village, had autonomously organized. The image found by the shepherd could therefore have been one of those venerated, hidden near the pebbly riverbed of the brook, and Montenero a safe destination as the hill was frequented, according to tradition, by brigands but was also a place of eremitical settlements, in grottos like those that open near the sanctuary. The relatively recent attribution of the work to the Pisan **Jacopo di Michele, known as Gera**, a painter active only in the second half of the century, seems to have debunked the evocative hypothesis.

In any case, the icon soon became the object of the veneration of the faithful. By the end of the century a small oratory had already been built, which soon proved to be insufficient. Enlarged for the first time in 1445, in the first centenary of the recovery, it reached its actual current appearance after the passage of custody from the Gesuati to the Teatini in 1668.



A TRAPPIST MONASTERY

OUR LADY OF VALSERENA

In the immediate backcountry of Cecina, in the diocesan territory of Volterra rises, since 1968, the female Trappist monastery of Valserena, the only presence of the Cistercian Order of strict

observance in our region. The church, reminiscent of the shape of a large sail, has, as the base of the altar (photo on p. 7), a 12th century capital originating from the Volterranean Abbey of Saints Giusto and Clemente, fallen into ruin more than a century ago.

The monastic community specializes in various products of which

include liqueurs, confections, oil and above all highly appreciated soaps and cosmetics, and welcomes visitors in a guesthouse who want to share a period of meditation and prayer.



Inside the church, in baroque style, the image of the Virgin above the altar, a luminous focal point in the dim light, immediately attracts the eye. A testimony to the devotion and the graces received from the faithful is above all the surrounding **gallery of the ex voto** (votive offering), that includes a great number of suggestive testimonies painted with great simplicity, and is connected with the **coats of arms of the towns of Tuscany** that surrounds the apse. Signs of the devotion of the faithful also completely fill the walls of the small adjacent cloister, while outside it is a modern chapel destined to receive votive candles. Finally, it is always remembered that the link between Tuscany and its patron is renewed on May 15th of each year by the traditional **offering of oil** carried out in turn by a diocese of the region. The first to do so was Sovana-Pitigliano, that of the bishop who initiated the proposal.

SANTA MARIA A RIPA

The benedictines of Montecatini Alto

If Montecatini Alto is the balcony on the Valdinievole, the Monastery of Santa Maria a Ripa seems to be the lighthouse, above all because of the affection the local population have always had in the comforts of the Benedictine nuns who inhabit it, a point of spiritual reference for the entire diocesan territory of Pscia.

For those who arrive at the village by car, rather than with the **historic railcar** that ascends from Montecatini Terme, the monastery represents the lower point of access to the characteristic, historic city center of the medieval installation, placed as it is near the **Porta del Borgo**, the only surviving door of the many which opened along the antique city wall. The name of Santa Maria a Ripa, documented from the year 1260, refers actually to the hill that must be ascended to arrive at the real nucleus of the habitat, set between two twin hills. The monastic presence had its beginning in the first half of the sixteenth century, as a result of the work of a group of women desirous of a life of meditation and prayer. Until the Napoleonic suppression of 1808 it was inhabited by the augustinians. The Benedictines only arrived in 1881, coming from Borgo a Buggiano, where their monastery had been transformed into the town hall of Buggiano.

The sixteenth-century monastery includes two cloisters, within which are contained several works of art, including a *Madonna with Child* attributed to the school of Giuliano di Simone (end of the fourteenth century), restored in the year 1978 and previously placed in the **church**. The latter, documented as previously mentioned in the thirteenth century but probably already present in the eleventh or twelfth century, retains, however, very little of the original Romanesque structure, of which, probably, only to the access stairs and the façade are attributable. The interior



• HOW TO ARRIVE

You can reach the monastery of Santa Maria a Ripa in a short time from Montecatini Terme by means of the former state road (now provincial) 633 Mammiense-Marianese or on foot crossing Via Amore and Via Foresta. You can also arrive from the other side of the hill from the hamlet of Nievole, reachable from the Ponte di Serravalle (Bridge of Serravalle), between Serravalle Pistoiese and Pieve a Nievole. Those who go up, instead, at Montecatini Alto with the funicular must then walk about 600 meters, mostly downhill.

has a single nave and present in the center of the choir above the entrance, hidden by grates and reserved for the nuns, is a beautiful organ from the eighteenth century, with decorations in carved and gilded wood. Also interesting are some frescoes brought back to light through various restorations. Despite the seclusion that distinguishes the female Benedictine rule, Santa Maria a Ripa is not lacking in

welcome: in addition to the church, preceded by, among other things, a large, interesting cross with the symbols of the Passion of Christ, a **guesthouse** is also open with the explicit invitation to a moment of rest and reflection.

THE ORDER IN TUSCANY

Other than Santa Maria a Ripa, there are two other Benedictine female monasteries in Tuscany. We remember two in particular:

SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI IN PISTOIA

with its antique and much appreciated spice shop, which specializes above all in the elaboration of wild oranges gathered in the claustal garden (www.spezieriabenedettinepistoia.com).

ABBEY OF SANTA MARIA IN ROSANO

near Pontassieve, also specializing in monastic products, known for having hosted Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger many times before he became Pope Benedict XVI. Also worthy of note is the Romanesque structure.



On special occasions or in agreement with volunteers of the Pro Loco you can visit, other than the church and the guesthouse, some cloistered spaces, such as the cloister, the refectory, the rich library, the choir, as well as admire the panorama from the top of the complex (for reservations write to info@montecatini-alto.it, other news on www.monasterodellebenedettine.com).

Naturally, for those who come here, it is also a must to visit the village, set on the two hills that rise just above, between which you find the characteristic and elegant square dedicated to the poet Giuseppe Giusti. On the southern stands the **Clock Tower**, with its six-hour dial - one of the few functioning in Italy - and the enormous internal pendulum; on the north you find, rather, the parish church dedicated to the Apostle St. Peter, with the attached **parish museum** established by the historic parish priest Don Tito Paponi where you can admire, among other things, a great fresco of the *Triumph of Christ* attributed to the school of Orcagna. Of particular

interest is also the reliquary containing the upper part of the skull attributed by the tradition to Saint Barbara, the patron saint of the village, to whom is also dedicated, between the church and the overlying cliff, a monument dedicated to the four corps of which she is patron saint.

Those who love to walk have room to stretch their legs, but for the more passionate there are also several **trekking routes** parting off from Montecatini Terme, conveniently marked with signs: the so-called "Corta" (short) with the Stations of the Cross, which rises steeply alongside the funicular, the Via Amore, which also arrives in the central part of the town, Via Coloredo, which puts you at the middle of the course and from which, after a short flat stretch, begins Via della Foresta. The last trail goes directly to the monastery, from where you can then go up to the historical center from the east side across Via Porta di Borgo.



CERTOSA DI FIRENZE

The exceptional gift of Niccolò Acciaiuoli

Those who have seen, *The Great Silence*, a long film by the German director Philip Grönig, will have a clear idea of the characteristics of the **Carthusian Order**, one of the most radical monastic reforms, promoted by Saint Bruno with the foundation of the Grande Chartreuse in 1084, the same monastery protagonist as in the film. An experience which rapidly diffused and that later, in Italy, developed particularly in the Kingdom of Naples thanks to the support of the Angevins, the ruling house: which, in the first half of the fourteenth century, took advantage of the services of the Florentine **Niccolò Acciaiuoli**, a member of a family of wealthy and influential bankers, named Grand Seneschal of the kingdom and Viceroy of Puglia.

Acciaiuoli, stimulated by the idea of founding a monastery in his hometown, thought of a charterhouse. He made agreements with the order and the choice fell on **Mount Acuto**, a hill in the south of Florence not too far from the city. Even more in contrast with the Carthusian spirituality was the edifice which Acciaiuoli himself wanted to build alongside, to found a multidisciplinary *study* in which he would retire in old age. But Niccolò died at 55 years old, and neither project followed, as a result of the financial difficulties of his sons and because the monks looked after themselves well, careful not to follow the testamentary dispositions as it did not favor the isolation



required by their rule. So, with the subsequent modifications that the complex underwent over the centuries, in respect to the original fourteenth century, the same building was reduced to enlarge the square in front of the church and incorporated into the monastery.

Abandoned in 1917 also by the **cistercians** originally from Casamari, who had replaced the carthusians in 1958, the Charterhouse of Florence - also called the **Galluzzo**, from the name of the neighboring village - was entrusted by the diocese to the **Community of Saint Leolino**, for the vocation to the cultural commitment that is of their nature. The areas that can be visited today allow us to immerse ourselves in the Carthusian spirituality, made up of solitude and silence

but also of sharing the journey of faith with the brothers. Next to the **church**, subdivided between presbytery, choir of monks and choir of the converts - who were entrusted with the talks of service - and adorned with marvelous wooden stalls, opens the parlor, closed on the side of the small cloister intended for weekly recreation, the unique time in which the Certosini could talk with one another. Even meals were consumed in their own cells, except during the festivi-



• HOW TO ARRIVE



The Certosa (Carthusian Monastery) is located on the side of regional road 2 Cassia, between the village of Galluzzo (which is crossed for those coming from Florence) and the Firenze Impruneta toll booth of the Autostrada del Sole.



ties when the refectory was used, next to the elegant cloister of the converts, where their apartments were located. The monastic cells, rather, open onto the **grand luminous cloister**, situated behind the church and enhanced with tondos by Della Robbia and a sixteenth-century central well. Preceded by a small corridor with a little window that allowed for food to be received without any contact, they are structured as real mini-apartments and also include a personal vegetable garden.

Of particular interest is the **chapter hall**, a place where, among other things, decisions were made regarding the life of the community. Here, in the center, covered by a stupendous funereal bas-relief by Giuliano da Sangallo, you find the tomb of **Leonardo Buonafè**, or Buonafede (good faith), Prior from 1495 to 1501, who decided to restructure and enlarge the complex and enriched it with numerous new works of art. Nominated as head of the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova and subsequently bishop of Cortona, he always remained tied to the Monastery as demonstrated by the choice of his burial place. Also worthy of mention are the “apartments of the Pope”, on the side of the guesthouse, which between 1798 and 1799 hosted Pius VI for nine months on his way to exile in France, wanted by Napoleon and later Pius VII, who was also on his way to the other side of the Alps to



THE TUSCAN SISTERS

The only certosa still inhabited by monks of the Order is that in Farneta, near Lucca (photo p. 6), and is therefore not accessible. In the province of Pisa it is instead possible to visit the Certosa di Calci, which also houses, among other works, a Cenacle by Bernardino Poccetti and where there is also the Museum of Natural History of the Pisan university. Finally, of the Sienese certosa, Maggiano has been transformed into a luxury hotel and Pontignano transformed into the University congress center, but it is also open to hospitality for events of other types and to visitors as well. What remains of the Certosa di Belriguardo - the first of the three to be founded, but also to be abandoned - was purchased by the singer Gianna Nannini and turned into a winery.

crown the same as emperor in Paris. Currently they are closed to the public but the intention of the Community of San Leolino is to restore them and make them newly accessible to visit.

Finally, the **Palazzo Acciaiuoli** hosts the art gallery on the upper floor where there are five frescoes by Pontormo conserved depicting scenes of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, originally located in the large cloister and then moved here to save them from degradation. The lower floor, restored not many years ago, is used for temporary exhibitions.



SAN VIVALDO

The Jerusalem of Valdelsa



A miniature Jerusalem. This is how the San Vivaldo complex is presented, built five centuries ago among the woods on the western side of the Valdelsa as a “substitute” pilgrimage to the Holy Land, not only for reasons of sustainability but also for security reasons, given the Ottoman dominion over sacred places. The idea was conceived and realized by the franciscans who arrived at the end of the fifteenth century where the church of **Santa Maria in Camporena** was and where, a couple of centuries prior,

• HOW TO ARRIVE

The complex of San Vivaldo is found along the street that, crossing three provinces with various numbers and denominations, connects Poggibonsi and San Gimignano with Pontedera. Those coming from Florence or in anywhere from the north can reach it more easily by taking the provincial road 26 going from Castelfiorentino through Montaione. A third alternative is presented by the via Volterrana, which crosses the first route mentioned in Il Castagno, only 6 kilometers south of the Sacro Monte.

the hermit **Vivaldo Stricchi** had lived in the adjoining homonymous wilderness, according to tradition. In a few years this corner of Tuscany__ the idea of reproducing sacred places of the Passion. The death and resurrection of Christ, enhanced by almost “cinematographic” scenes in painted terracotta (as above all in the *Onward to Calvary*), took shape thanks to **Brother Tommaso of Florence** and his direct knowledge of the Holy Land, where perhaps he had also had a way to compare with the Brother Bernardino Caimi, custodian of the Sacred Places from 1487 to 1489 and creator of the Sacred Mountain of Varallo Sesia. However, the brilliance of the

project of Brother Tommaso comes in the realistic reproduction of the geography of the Holy City on that soil, with many reliefs, depressions, and correct orientation of the places. An authentic and precise *Jerusalem translated*; a topographical rigor accompanied by attention to detail, as in the Chapel of *Calvary* with many fake cracks to recall the earthquake that verified the death of Christ.

The success of the Tuscan Sacred Mountain was nearly immediate, as in 1516 Pope Leo X, with a brief papal decree, decided to grant indulgences to visitors. This was an important document, also for the reconstruction of the **original project** of work, thanks to the 34 places that are cited. Today the number of chapels and superstitious niches, including those added later, is considerably lower: but perhaps the original number actually built did not exceed 25, was reduced to 22 in 1576, after only a few decades. Some were lost to a landslide and others were added, like the *Annunciation*, the *Escape in Egypt*, the *Samaritan*, the *Ladies of Charity* and the previously mentioned *Onward to Calvary*.

Of the **most notable scenes**, in the absolute sense, those of the *Onward to Calvary*, and *Calvary*, must be remembered. The first, other than presenting a dramatization which leaves us moved and in awe, also involves the spectator physically who, entering from the door on the right and exiting on the left, has the sensation of joining in the procession. The other presents the small niche of the *Stabat Mater*, with Mary, the Pious Women, and Saint John, on a lower level in respect to the three crosses. The shrines of the *Ecce Homo* and the *Crucifige*, the Chapel of the *Madonna of the Agony*, that of the *Holy Sepulcher* and the Com-

plex of *Mount Sion*, with the *Last Supper*, the *Washing of the Feet*, the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* and the *Pentecost*. Farther from all of the others, lastly, the octagonal Chapel of the *Ascension*, ideally raised from the ground thanks to a double base.

The **church of San Vivaldo** is contemporaneous with the building of the first chapels and which, inside, offer also a chapel of the *Nativity* and which is situated together with the adjoining convent just before the entrance to the Sacro Monte. Among these there is an interesting permanent exhibition that reconstructs the story and the peculiarities, well summarized by the words of the art historian, Antonio Paolucci: "*San Vivaldo is much more than a place of art. It is a fascinating synthesis of painting, sculpture, architecture; it is objectified liturgy; it is symbolic representation of the territory; it is scenography and show. There does not exist, in all of Tuscany, a sacred open-air theatre as captivating.*"



THE SANCTUARY AMONG THE RUINES

MADONNA DELLA PIETRINA

Appearing not far from San Vivaldo, beyond the hamlet of Iano and the small town of Palagio, a sanctuary was erected in 1988 for the devotion to the painting of the Madonna with Child, conserved today in the Episcopal building of Volterra but which, every year on the last Sunday in September, is carried back for the traditional celebration. The wall near the church is part of the remains of an ancient castle, built on the top of a panoramic cliff. In the ancient cistern a small, permanent nativity has been staged.

In the surroundings, the parish church of Cellole and the Sanctuary of Pancole, described in the following pages.



PASSIGNANO

The antique abbey disguised as a castle

• HOW TO ARRIVE



The fastest road nearest to the abbey is the Florence-Siena highway connection. For those arriving from the north, it is convenient to exit at the Tavarnelle junction, while from the south you can use that of San Donato, and then reach Sambuca in either case and from there go up to Passignano.



A castle or a fortified villa, along the street that connects Panzano and Greve, or the hills of Chianti anyway, to the hamlet of Sambuca in Val di Pesa. And instead that which appears at a certain point to those who travel is one of the most antique Tuscan abbeys, **San Michele Arcangelo a Passignano**, documented as early as the ninth century and returned in 1986 to the Vallombrosian monks after many historical events that, over the centuries, have changed the appearance. The last interventions, following the suppression of 1866, concerned the neogothic additions to the fifteenth century walls, typical of the period, given that the complex,

after the auction by the Italian State, was effectively transformed into a luxurious castle, with the surviving monks confined to the current rectory, despite the availability of the church.

The re-acquisition of the property by the Vallombrosian congregation allowed the abbey to regain its sacredness, accentuated by the fact that the founder, **Giovanni Gualberto**, died and was interred here in 1073. The marvelous frescoes by **Alessandro Allori** dedicated to the saint, created at the end of the sixteenth century, are housed in the chapel also dedicated to him, and are located to the left of the main altar of the abbey church. Of particular interest is the exceptional depiction, below, of the *Recognition of the Saint's Relics*, which took place in 1580: practically the documentation of a fact not of history but reported, seeing that the fresco was made a little later.

The other two chapels are dedicated to the Archangel Michael, namesake of the church, and, on the right of the altar, to **Saints Sebastian and Atto**. The latter, abbot of Vallombrosa and later bishop of Pistoia, had a significant role in the history of the abbey when, contacted in 1125 by the Florentines to intercede on their behalf to the pope after the destruction of Fiesole, claimed in exchange the passage of territory of Passignano from Florence to the diocese. Canonized in 1605, it was then celebrated in the chapel dedicated only to Sebastiano with paintings and frescoes by **Benedetto**





Veli on episodes of his life, among which are the reception of the relics of Saint James and the meeting with Pope Innocent II.

Of great interest also, always in the church, is the sixteenth century monastic **choir**, with writings in Hebrew and Greek on the upper frieze of the columns. In the sacristy you find instead a precious reliquary bust in silver of Saint Giovanni Gualberto. Another great work, recently restored, is the fresco of the Cenacle completed by **Domenico Ghirlandaio** in the refectory, while in the adjacent Sala del Capitolo has been placed, even more recently, the wooden Crucifix attributed to the tradition of Michelangelo, returned to the abbey after 18 years of restoration. Significant from an historical point of view, lastly, is the antique **kitchen** which was not affected by the restructuring in the late nineteenth century.

Passignano is the environment that surrounds it as well,

ALONG THE FRANCIGENA



A SANCTUARY AND A PARISH BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

Beyond Pesa and Elsa, along the stretch of via Francigena that connects Gambassi Terme to San Gimignano, at least close to the “city of the towers” you find, a few kilometers away from each other, two important churches, the sanctuary of Mary Most Holy Mother of Divine Providence in Pancole and the parish church of Santa Maria Assunta a Cellole, curiously belonging to different dioceses, respectively Siena-Colle Val d’Elsa-Montalcino and Volterra. In the sanctuary of Pancole, from the elegant seventeenth century forms, one venerates an image of the Virgin nursing the Child frescoed by Pier Francesco Fiorentino towards the end of the fifteenth century. At the Romanesque parish of Cellole (in the photo), built between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a fraternity of the monastic community of Bose was established in 2013, founded by Enzo Bianchi.

with vineyards, olive groves and woods typical of the Chianti landscape. In this environment, near the road, **two elegant chapels** are to be found: going towards Greve the one called “dei Pesci” (of the fish), built, in 1510, on a spring to remember a miracle of San Giovanni Gualberto at which they found two pikes, and towards Sambuca la Chapel of Morandello, erected towards the end of the same century and recently restored.



LA VERNA

The mountain loved by Saint Francis

Among the savage rocks, which 'tween the Tiber and the Arno rise, he took from Christ himself the final seal, which on his limbs he bore for two whole years.

In this way Dante describes the mountain of Verna in the 11th poem of Paradise, recounting that it was in this precise location, on September 14, 1224, that the stigmata were impressed upon Saint Francis as a sign of his participation in the Passion of Christ. The saint had received the mountain as a gift from **Orlando Cattani**, Count of Castle Casentinese of Chiusi, eleven years prior who, meeting the saint at San Leo, proposed the offering. From then on, Francis returned there many times, and showed through his words, how dear the place had become to



• HOW TO ARRIVE



Situated in the Alps of Catenaia - the ridge between the Arno and Tiber valleys, as recalled by the greatest Poet - the sanctuary can be quickly reached from the village of Chiusi della Verna, which arrives mainly from Bibbiena, in Casentino, and from Pieve Santo Stefano in the Tuscan Valtiberina.

him. According to the biography written by the blessed Tommaso da Celano, Saint Francis said, when last he greeted Monte Foresto, the site where the **Eremo della Casella** would arise sixteen days after the miraculous event: *"Farewell, mountain of God, beloved mountain, flowering mountain, fruitful mountain, mountain where God chose to dwell; farewell, Mount Alverno, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit bless you; remain in peace for we shall never again see one another."*

The complex on the mountain that we admire today has been rebuilt several times, beginning from the Church of **Santa Maria degli Angeli**, which is adjacent to the cathedral and begun by Francis himself. Another chapel, precisely named **"The Stigmata"**, was constructed in 1263 and later connected to the main church by a corridor of the same name, which is painted with episodes from the life of Poverello of Assisi (Saint Francis). The corridor connects with other chapels and sacred places, among which is also the small cavern containing the "Bed" of the saint, a flat stone which he used to rest. Another evocative place, the **"Sasso Spicco"**, a great overhanging rock where Francis went for meditation and prayer, can

THE HERMITAGES OF THE POVERELLO

EREMO DELLA CASELLA

Cited on page 42, can also be reached by car along a dirt road from Fragaiolo, a hamlet of Caprese Michelangelo.

EREMO DI CERBAIOLO

“Who has seen La Verna and not Cerbaiolo, has seen the mother and not the son”, is a popular saying. Born as a Benedictine settlement, it was donated to Francis in 1216 but no evidence exists of this transfer. It is certain, on the other hand, that Saint Anthony of Padua, to whom the church is dedicated, stayed there and a chapel rests on the place where he used to pray. It can be reached from Pieve Santo Stefano, along the same road that leads to Passage of Viamaggio.

EREMO DI MONTECASALE

Of Camaldolese origin, and managed by the capuchins since the sixteenth century, this is a real convent with great historical importance, where Francis stayed and where he placed the statue of the Madonna with Child which is still venerated today. It can be reached by the roads which climbs from Sansepolcro.

EREMO DELLE CELLE

An exceptionally appealing complex perfectly integrated within the environment, this hermitage was founded by Francis himself in 1211 and has been expanded many times. Also managed by the Capuchins, it is 4 kilometers from Cortona and is accessible by car (photo on pp. 30-31).



be reached from the outside, leaving from the **Quadrante**, the central square, and passing from the Chapel of the Maddalena. In the back of the cathedral resides the convent and the reception area for pilgrims. Among the works of art that characterize the complex, and meriting special mention, are the numerous Della Robbia terracottas in the cathedral and in the chapels of both Santa Maria degli Angeli and The Stigmata.



Together with the cathedral and other places in Assisi, La Verna is, without a shadow of doubt, the most important Franciscan sanctuary, an absolute place of spirituality that includes not only the church and other sacred buildings but also the entire surrounding environment. To this end,

it should be remembered that it is customary for those with a minimum of time to go to the highest peak of the mountain, the so-called **Penna** (1284 m), through the monumental forest composed of majestic beech and fir trees. Going up, you meet the Chapels of the Beech and the Blessed John, and further on the Boulder of Brother Wolf where, according to legend, the Poverello converted the brigand which bore this name (Brother Wolf). A circular route allows you to not retrace your steps and, when combined with a second circular route (longer and lower, at the foot of the rocky cliffs which surround the mountain on three sides) it forms the “**Frassati Path**” of Tuscany, one of the routes of the Italian Alpine Club dedicated to the blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young Piedmontese with a passion for mountaineering.

LECCETO

The Augustinian hermitage of San Salvatore

The **Montagnola Senese** (little Sienese Mountain) is an authentic treasure chest of history, art, and nature. Peace, solitude and silence are at home: for this the entire territory has always represented an ideal environment for those who wish to dedicate themselves to the contemplative life. The many Romanesque parish churches that arise in the small hamlets have hence added over time several hermitages, including those of rugged, rocky formation, such as that of **Motrano**, whose ruins are still visible not far from the road that goes from Ancaiano to Pievescola. None of these, however, can compete for importance or majesty with that of **San Salvatore a Lecceto**.

Illicetum vetus sanctitatis illicium, you read on the entrance portal of the surrounding, perimeter wall. “Lecceto, ancient refuge of sanctity”, according to a widespread interpretation: but, as underscored on their site, the **Augustinian nuns** who have been living there since 1972, the term *illicium* has more the value of “attractiveness”. It is not foremost, however, that of the place, as the nuns themselves explain: “*The attractiveness of holiness referred to by the term illicium is in fact Jesus himself who, in his life of resurrection, attracts to His discipleship and to His life of grace. The Hermitage obviously has its own charm and its location makes it an emblematic place to express the struggle and the effort of grasping to hold on to our trust in God under the insidiousness of temptation and fear that disturbs the peace of the place and*



• HOW TO ARRIVE

The Hermitage of Lecceto can be reached fairly quickly from the junction of west Siena on the orbital road that connects the Florence-Siena highway to Siena-Grosseto. Arriving at the nearby town of Costafabbi, turn right to Montalbucco, then follow the signs for Lecceto, or alternatively, San Leonardo al Lago. Both of these options finish on dirt roads.

the stillness of silence.”

The images of the Risen Savior are repeated many times in the church and in the monastery, whose appearance is that of an **authentic fortress** immersed in the nature reserve of Lecceto, complete with a mighty square tower on a corner. An aspect acquired over time: if in fact the first documents which attest to the presence of an Augustinian hermitage date back to 1153, the dedication of the church dates back to 1228 and the extension of the structure including the city walls was realized between 1317 and 1344, while the tower was erected at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

According to an oral history though, the first Christian settlements in these woods of intense dark green and go back even to the time of the preaching of Saint Ansano, between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries: here those baptized by the patron saint of Siena, then martyred in Dofana, would have found





THE TREASURES OF THE LITTLE MOUNTAIN

Other than the already mentioned hermitages of Motrano and San Leonardo al Lago, on the Montagnola Senese and in the immediate surroundings you encounter many other places of faith, beginning with many Romanesque churches, some of which are dedicated to Saint John the Baptist (Pievescola, Pernina, Ponte allo Spino near Sovicille, and, more to the south, Rosia) and the other to Saint Giusto (in Balli) and Saints Mary and Gervasio (in Marmoraiia). To the northern and to the southern elevations appear two other significant abbeys, respectively those of San Salvatore e Cirino at Abbadia a Isola, historic point of rest on the Via Francigena (photos on p. 50-51), and Saint Mustiola

at Torri, with its stupendous cloister and three orders of private property which can be visited on Mondays and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to noon (but not on holidays).

Beyond Rosia, near the historic Ponte della Pia, you can instead admire the Gothic remains of the hermitage of Santa Lucia. Another particular hermitage, in the heart of the little mountain, is the one connected to Villa

Cetinale - built by Cardinal Flavio Chigi - from a long stairway called Scala Santa, reachable on foot more quickly from the parish church of Pernina.



refuge from persecution. It is also said that **Saint Augustine** himself passed in these places on his return journey to Africa, and tells of other saints who then visited him, among whom include Girolamo, Domenico and Francis of Assisi. All of these pious legends testify, above all, to the real fame of holiness of the friars of Lecceto, who from the start of the hermitic experience in the grottos were then the origin of the Hermitic Order of Saint Augustine (founded by the Holy See in 1244). Historically documented also is the attendance of **Saint Catherine**, commemorated by a small chapel next to the church, as well as the respites of pontiffs (Gregory XII and Pious II) and cardinals.

The presence of the **male community** ceased with the Napoleonic suppressions in the early nineteenth century, but the return of religious life by the contemplative female branch of the Order renewed the thread of Augustinian spirituality. Other than offering the participation in the litur-

gical prayer of the community, the nuns are available for meetings and interviews. Of the complex, where silence accompanies the visitor and the pilgrim, only the church and the first cloister can be visited.

At only three kilometers away you can reach, by road or by trail, the **Eremo di San Leonardo al Lago**, with interesting frescoes in the church and the refectory, which was joined to Lecceto from the mid-thirteenth century to 1516 and is now managed by the Polo Museum Complex of Tuscany. The lake, called Verano, was reclaimed and dried up in the Lorraine period by means of a drainage canal in a tunnel of more than two kilometers, walkable with boots and an electric torch, which leads back to Lecceto.



MONTE OLIVETO

The monastic oasis of the Sienese Crete

The desire of a Sienese nobleman to withdraw from the world to fully dedicate his life to God is the origin of the abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and of the Olivetan congregation to which the Abbey is the mother house. It was the year 1313 when **Giovanni Tolomei** - who had adopted the name of **Bernard**, in homage to the founder of Chiaravalle, and was proclaimed saint by Benedict XVI in 2009 - decided to start a hermit's life with his friends Patrizio Patrizi and Ambrogio Piccolomini in the solitary area of Acona, or Accona, near Chiusure. Six years later, the bishop of Arezzo, Guido Tarlati, sanctioned the new community with his seal of approval, linking it to the Benedictine rule but reformed

in some aspects, such as the limited duration of the abbot's office and the possibility for the monks to move to a different monastery from that of the profession.

The new congregation, confirmed by Clement VI in 1344, distinguished itself by its attention to culture and the arts, hosting painters, sculptors and writers.

The construction of the monastery began in 1317 but the original small church - later transformed into the

so-called *De Profundis*, the ancient *monochrome sepulchre* as a plaque recalls - soon proved insufficient, so much so that by 1401 construction began of the current, of Lombard style, whose interior was restored in Baroque style in 1772. The dedication - as evidenced by the large canvas above the high altar, the work of Jacopo Ligozzi (1598) - is of the **Nativity of the Virgin**, to emphasize the centrality of the Marian cult within the Olivetan experience. Of great signifi-



cance, among other numerous works of art, is the chorus carved and inlaid by **Fra Giovanni of Verona** in the early sixteenth century, the lectern of Fra Raffaele of Brescia with a cat inlaid at the base (1520), the Crucifix from the early fourteenth century which was brought to the monastery by Tolomei himself and the fresco of an unknown author who depicts himself together with his first companions.

The true artistic heart of the complex is, however, rep-

• HOW TO ARRIVE

Monte Oliveto Maggiore is located near the provincial road 451 connecting Asciano with Buonconvento and the regional road 2 Cassia. Coming from Siena, or from the north anyway, it can be more easily reached through the first of the two locations; instead it is more convenient, rather, to climb from the second if you come from the south.



THE NEW BENEDICTINES

MONASTIC COMMUNITY OF SILOE

Established in 1997 on a panoramic hill received as a gift near Poggi del Sasso, in Maremma (photo on p. 9), the construction of their monastery began, dedicated to the Incarnation, bringing to completion two of the four wings, in addition to the chapel of the Holy Trinity obtained by the transformation of an old sheep pen. Open for artistic and cultural initiatives and hospitality in particular, the Benedictine monks of Siloe are attentive to environmental ethics and the safeguarding of creation by practicing, among other things, their livelihood of organic farming. The monastery itself is built according to the principles of green building.



resented by the **grand cloister**, with 35 wonderful frescoes on the life of Saint Benedict realized between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century by Luca Signorelli and especially by **Antonio Bazzi called the Sodoma**, the cycle considered as the most complete among those dedicated to the father of the Rule. Of great interest as well is the monumental **library** with three naves, designed by the same author as the choir, Fra Giovanni of Verona, who also carved both the capitals of the columns and the entrance door. The library heritage herein preserved comes from an abolished Olivetan monastery, Santa Maria of Monte Morcino Nuovo near Perugia, since the original one was dispersed at the time of the Napoleonic suppressions. The **refectory** is also remarkable, for the vaults entirely frescoed in the seventeenth century by Fra Paolo Novelli, present on the back wall is the large canvas of *Coena Domini* created by Lino Dinetto in 1948. Other works of art preserved in the museum of the

abbey are located in the former chapter house. In the crypt underlying the church an artistic nativity set has been created in the surrounding landscape of the Sienese Crete.

In obedience to the Benedictine Rule, the abbey is open to hospitality and the life of the monks centers on work as well as on prayer: to emphasize how the complex is, the fortified entrance structure is followed by an avenue of cypress trees skirted by a botanical vegetable garden, a fishpond and some chapels, offering the visitor a sense of welcome, peace and deep harmony with the surrounding nature. A **agricultural farm** run by the monastery takes care of the production and marketing of wine, grappa, oil, wheat, chickpeas as well as the traditional liqueur, Flora di Monteoliveto, an infusion of 23 herbs, as well as other productions of the herbalists.

Lastly, it should be remembered that Monte Oliveto Maggiore is one of the few Catholic **territorial abbeys** still present in the world, that is to say it is equivalent to a diocese with its own territory, although small and sparsely populated, which includes the nearby village of Chiusure and another pair of rural parishes. The abbot, elected for a term of six years, fulfills the role of bishop as well as leading the entire congregation, which in Tuscany has another community near the ancient Florentine basilica of **San Miniato al Monte**, above Piazzale Michelangelo and the Viale dei Colli, which in April 2018 opened its millennial celebrations.

MONTE ARGENTARIO

The great work of Paul of the Cross

“**B**ut how you want me to contain the tears, while I remember that, when I came to this mountain, I did not bring provisions other than a piece of cake and about twenty muscat grapes given to me as charity in Pitigliano, and now I see you, two numerous houses of worship, full of religious fervor and praising God day and night?” Saint Paul of the Cross addressed his confessor who had accompanied him in 1770 to Monte Argentario and who jokingly, seeing his cheeks wet with emotion, had asked him if it had rained. There, between 1733 and 1737, he had built the first convent of the passionist congregation and now the novices, knowing of his arrival, came to greet him singing. He stayed with them a few days before returning to Rome, leaving, for the last time, the beloved place.

Paolo Francesco Danei, born in Ovada, Piedmont, in 1694, had expressed, from his youth, a particular vocation for a life of penance centered on the meditation of the Passion of Christ and preaching of the Gospel: an alternation that would also characterize the new congregation. Ordained as a priest on June 7th, 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII, together with his brother Giambattista, he settled the following year on



Monte Argentario, which he had already visited in 1721. They lived near a **hermitage dedicated to Saint Anthony** and the first community formed around them. But Paul’s desire was to found a true “retreat”, a place where he and his companions could actually retreat into prayer and contemplation between one period of preaching and the other, and so it happened. The rule of the new congregation which, to the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, added the participation in the mystery of the Passion, was later approved by Benedict XIV in 1741.

The **Retreat of the Presentation**, the name given by the founder of the passionist convent, is built on a marvelous natural balcony overlooking Orbetello and its lagoon, halfway up the mountain, and stands out as a white mass in the intense green of the vegetation. The church situated on the right side of the large square and officially established as a sanctuary on November 21, 2000, is dedicated to the **Presentation of Mary Most Holy in the Temple**, represented by the



• HOW TO ARRIVE



The Retreat of the Presentation is found along the road that climbs towards Punta Telegrafo, the summit of Monte Argentario, and which starts from the section of coastal road between Terrarossa, at the end of the Orbetello dam bridge, and Santa Liberata, where Tombolo della Giannella arrives.

canvas of the school of Sebastiano Conca above the altar, given by Cardinal Altieri. In the back of the choir, reserved for the passionists for the recitation of the office, is the venerated seventeenth century image of the *Madonna del Monte Argentario*, with the Child holding the Sacred Heart and Saint Joseph in the background, attributed to Carlo Maratta, and damaged in 1799 by the French who occupied Orbetello. In the **chapels** which open up to the inside of the building you can admire, among other things, the painted Crucifix originally placed on the main altar and a painting by Pietro Aldi (1880) depicting the *Madonna with Child who gives Saint Paul of the Cross the Plan for the Convent*, with the view of Orbetello in the background, without the dam bridge that connects it to Argentario, later built in 1842.

Beyond the Retreat - which was unexpectedly visited by John Paul II on 12 December 2000 - the road continues towards the peak of the mountain, meeting shortly after the **cemetery of the passionists**: from here a dirt road on the left leads toward the hermitage of Saint Anthony, incorporated into a private property, but accessible to the brothers that have the keys to the gate, and as such is visitable on request. A little beyond, on the right, a short offshoot brings you rather to the **retreat of Saint Joseph**, called "the Novitiate" dating back to 1761. Endowed also with its own church, not currently used for its formative purpose, which has found its place in the convent below. Just before the fork, on the left side of the street, a marble statue from 1927 portrays the founder with his hands in an attitude of protection towards the two

IN THE LANDS OF TUFF

CERRETO, A HUMBLE AND RICH PLACE

A modest hamlet in the municipal territory of Sorano, almost on the border with Lazio, has hosted a female Carmelite monastery since 1992, installed near a small but important Marian church. The sanctuary regards Mary Most Holy and Sorrowful of Cerreto, appearing in the place in which the Virgin appeared on May 19, 1853 to the twelve-year-old Veronica Nucci, who later died at the age of 21 after having taken her vows. The church was opened for worship on September 8, 1864, two years after her death. In the solitude of Cerreto, the Janua Coeli monastery has now become an active and frequented beacon of spirituality.

complexes, while on the right is an iron cross with the passionist symbol in the center.

Going up again you reach the ridge, near the first relief - reachable by a short walk - beyond a couple of telecommunications antennas stands the great **Croce del Predicatore** (Cross of the Preacher) overlooking the lagoon, under which is the chapel of **Nostra Signora del Predicatore**, surrounded by a railing to which have been affixed, for devotion on the part of the faithful, numerous crosses made simply by joining two branches. The statue of the Virgin in terracotta situated inside is a recent work of the Orbetellan, Federico Capitani.





THE HOSPITALITY IN TUSCANY



- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Aulla | 14 | Pistoia |
| 2 | Borgo del Ponte (Massa) | 15 | Spedaletto |
| 3 | Altopascio | 16 | Bigallo |
| 4 | Poggibonsi | 17 | Figline Valdarno |
| 5 | San Gimignano | 18 | Villa di Tresana |
| 6 | Abbadia a Isola | 19 | Ospedale di Tea |
| 7 | Castiglion Ghinibaldi | 20 | Isola Santa |
| 8 | Siena | 21 | La Chiesaccia |
| 9 | Montalcino | 22 | Lucca |
| 10 | Cuna | 23 | San Miniato Basso |
| 11 | Castello di Spedaletto | 24 | Pontremoli |
| 12 | Le Briccole | 25 | Adelano |
| 13 | Radiconfani | 26 | Firenze |



The Piazza degli Ospitalieri in Altopascio. Below, the plaque commemorating the foundation of the Castiglion Ghinibaldi hospital



“Let all guests who arrive in the monastery be received as Christ, because one day He will say: ‘I was a stranger and you took Me in’. And let due honor be shown to all, especially to those of the household of the faith and to pilgrims.”

The beginning of chapter 53 of the Rule of Saint Benedict is eloquent: for the monks, **welcome** and **hospitality** are a duty, but not only for them. “Housing the pilgrims”, for every Christian, is the fourth work of corporal mercy. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”, as Jesus said to his disciples talking about the day of judgment. Moreover, the sacredness of the guest was a concept very

present not only in Jewish tradition but also in Greek and Roman civilization.

In the Tuscany of the Middle Ages, the hospitality at the monasteries was attached to the pilgrimage routes, starting naturally from the Francigena. Along the way many **hospices** or **hospitals** were born and various are preserved or at least traces remain. The same word *hospital*, in the sense of place of medical care, comes from the same root (Latin *hospes*, meaning guest) because originally the reception of the sick was added to that of the pilgrims and the poor, in structures that then, over time, specialized only in the care. Some toponyms, then, are eloquent: it is the case of Spedaletto, the name of at least six localities in the regional territory. Of two



of these are, the castle near the Francigena, to the south of Siena, and the village on the ancient Via Francesca della Sambuca that connected Bologna to Pistoia, of which we will talk later. A third along the same Francigena is found near Gracciano d'Elsa, while the other three are hamlets of the municipalities of Lajatico, San Casciano in Val di Pesa and Subbiano.

• Hospitality along the Via Francigena

It is therefore along the way of pilgrimage documented even before the year one thousand by Sigerico, the Archbishop of Canterbury, that we can especially find such testimonies. Proceeding towards Rome, then descending from north to south, we want to remember first of all **Aulla (1)**, whose parish church of **San Caprasio**, although profoundly remodeled, is what remains of the ancient abbey of the same name, which was annexed to a hospital for pilgrims. Recent archaeological excavations have however brought to light in the apse the possible remains of the nominal saint, originally from Provence, and for some years the tradition of hospitality has been resumed for those who now travel this way.

Much less remains of the ancient hospital of the saints Giacomo and Cristoforo of **Borgo del Ponte** in Massa **(2)**, in the namesake village located near the banks of the river Frigido. Interestingly, however, is its urban structure of village roadways with the church of San Martino and the adjacent Piazza Ospedaletto.

Other than Lucca, the most famous haven for pilgrims - almost the hospice par excellence - was undoubtedly that of **Altopascio (3)**, seat of the Knights of the Tau, placed specifically to protect the travelers in this difficult stretch of the journey. The location was in fact an obligatory passage between the waters of Lake Bientina and the Padule of Fucecchio (marshland) and preceded the treacherous woods of Cerbaie, a den of brigands: a bell called "la Smarrita" sounded to indicate the direction to the travelers. The structure of the ancient complex is still quite visible, especially in the Piazza degli Ospitalieri which opens up beyond the parish church dedicated to **Saint Jacopo**.

In **Valdelsa** the development of hospitals was particularly notable. Before entering **Poggibonsi (4)**, coming from Certaldo, we still find a surviving tower of the villa of **Torri**, the knights of San Giovanni or Gerosolimitani, now transformed into guest accommodations. Beyond the city center, along the ancient road to Staggia Senese, is the well restored and preserved mansion of **San Giovanni del Ponte**, with the adjoining church of San Giovanni in Jerusalem, home of the Temple Militia - Order of the poor knights of Christ.

Besides the one dedicated to the patron saint Saint Fina, now transformed into a mu-

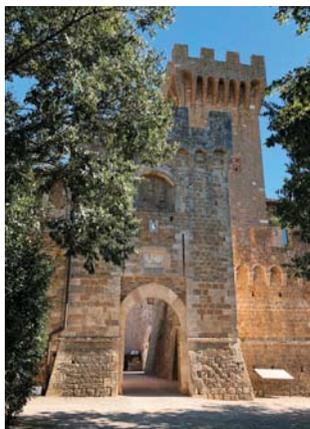
External view of the historical center of Altopascio, corresponding to the ancient villa of the Knights of the Tau



The church of San Pellegrino at Briccole. Below, the entrance to the Spedaletto Castle



seum complex, also in **San Gimignano (5)** there arise **Jerusalem hospitals** near the churches of Saint Jacopo of the Tempio, Saint Bartolo and Saint Francesco, the second of which is dedicated to Saint Matteo and the third to Saint John. Today only the first two churches remain and of Saint Francesco only part of the facade, but to resume and carry on the tradition there is now also the **Confraternity of Saint Jacopo of Compostella**, based in Perugia (www.confraternitadisanjacopo.it), which manages the new hospital of the Saints Agostino and Giacomo in Piazza Sant'Agostino.



Further on, another place that has picked up the heritage of hospitality from the past is **Abbadia a Isola (6)**, the abbey at the foot of **Monteriggioni**, where - in addition to the abbey church dedicated to Saints Salvatore and Cirino - we find a hospital operated by the parish and a hostel opened in the ancient monastic structures thanks to recent restorations within the operational plan for the Francigena of the Tuscan Region. Not far, on a hill near Cassia just south of Castellina Scalo, a beautiful architectural testimony of a military castle, later turned into hospital (although currently in a state of neglect), is **Castiglion Ghinibaldi (7)**, also called Castiglionalto.

And we arrive in **Siena (8)**, which, in Piazza del Duomo, offers the jewel of **Santa Maria della Scala**, today a museum and exhibition center but for many centuries was the city hospital and in the Middle Ages also a shelter for pilgrims, as it was indeed in use and as testimony the great hall of the **Pellegrinaio**, with the wonderful frescoes of the fifteenth century. A similarly frescoed room, which in the past was used for the same function, is the so-called desk of the hospital of Saint Mary of the Cross in **Montalcino (9)**, now home to municipal offices, which gradually absorbed other small reception facilities present in the city, close to the main infrastructure of the Francigena, which was actually a network of roads with many variations.

Numerous **grance**, that is to say granaries, belonged Santa Maria della Scala, like those of **Cuna (10)** near Monteroni d'Arbia and of **Spedaletto (11)**, not far from Bagno

Vignoni, both originally places of welcome - as evidenced by the church of the first, dedicated to the saints Giacomo and Cristoforo, protectors of the wayfarers, and the same name of the second - later fortified for defensive purposes. Cuna, very well preserved, is to this day engaged in a lengthy restoration while the other, now known as Castello di Spedaletto, has been transformed into an agriturismo.

Of great importance, a little beyond the town Gallina, across the 43rd parallel, is the settlement of **Briccole (12)**, also cited by Archbishop Sigerico between his stops on the return journey from Rome to Canterbury, and where the Countess Matilde of Canossa also sojourned. The hospital that was based there was named after **San Pellegrino**, like the little church which still exists.

We close our ideal outing along the Francigena with **Radicofani (13)**, strategic stop along the way and also the seat, over the centuries, of numerous hospitals of which unfortunately no traces remain, if you exclude the **Posta medica** commissioned in the sixteenth century by the Grand Duke Ferdinando I a destination for travelers on horseback, in an age already distant from medieval habits. But even here the heritage has been collected: for more than ten years the **Hospital of Saint Peter and James**, operated in the summer also by the Brotherhood of Saint Jacopo and the rest of the year by volunteers from the local Brotherhood of Mercy, welcomes modern pilgrims from the street.

• Other historic reception sites

In addition to the Santa Maria della Scala of Siena, previously cited, a well-known historic city hospital, open originally also to welcome travelers, pilgrims and the poor, is that of the **Ceppo in Pistoia (14)**, seat for centuries of an important medical school and that only recently, with the construction of the new city health complex, has concluded its function. In the beautiful glazed terracotta frieze with the seven works of corporal mercy which dominates the loggia, *Hosting the pilgrims* - the first on the left of the façade - is a sequence divided into three scenes and portrays in the second the rector of the hospital who commissioned the work, the monk Leonardo Buonafé or Buonafede (see pp. 36-37) in the act of washing the feet of a traveler with a halo,

The façade of the Hospital of Ceppo in Pistoia with the frieze depicting the works of corporal mercy. "Hosting the pilgrims" is the first on the left



perhaps Saint John the Baptist, while the saint in the first scene would be James, patron of the city preserved in whose relics are preserved in the cathedral. But the opinions are not univocal: according to another interpretation, in both the figures with the halo, or at least in that of the washing of the feet, it represents Christ in the clothes of a pilgrim.

In Pistoia, crossing the Porretta Pass (called also the Hill Pass) arrived the so-called Via Francesca della Sambuca, from the name of the castle of Sambuca Pistoiese, located on the Emilia side of the Apennines, as well as, at the foot of the passage, the small town of **Spedaletto (15)**. Here rose the ancient hospice of **Pratum Episcopi**, dedicated to Saint Bartolomeo as well as the church, the only surviving structure. A bell, as in Altopascio, rang to recall the pilgrims.

Near Florence it is worth mentioning the Hospital of **Bigallo (16)**, located beyond **Bagno a Ripoli** at the so-called “*bivius Galli*” between two of the roads leading to the Upper Valdarno and Arezzo, in front of the Fonteviva which safeguarded the water supply. Still well preserved, it has been transformed after renovations into a welcoming hostel and a multi-purpose facility for events. Of the original **Spedale Serristori**, in **Figline Valdarno (17)**, founded in 1399, only the lower loggia remains, located in the central Piazza Marsilio Ficino on the opposite side from the church.

In Lunigiana, along an ancient road connecting the Francigena, Liguria and Piacentino, across the Casoni pass, there stood the **Villa di Tresana (18)**, a small hospital in named after Saint Mary Magdalene, later also dedicated to Saint Lucia for the miraculous recovery of numerous soldiers affected by a serious eye disease. Converted into an oratory with a characteristic loggia to the side, it has been recently restored. Only ruins remain, however, of the **Ospedale di Tea (19)**, located near the pass of the same name between Garfagnana and Lunigiana on the plateau overlooking the town of **Regnano**, along the way today called Volto Santo, which represented an internal variant of the Francigena to reach Lucca. Following an excavation campaign conducted between 1996 and 1998, the remains of the structure, dedicated to Saint Nicolao, have been brought to light and are plainly visible thanks to a raised wooden walkway which surrounds them.

Also in Garfagnana we find antique places of hospitality along the streets connecting the Francigena and the Versilia that run through the Apuan valleys.

Along the street that connects Castelnuovo to Massa and Forte dei Marmi there is Isola Santa (20), an ancient village built around the church of the hospital of San Jacopo, today surrounded by an artificial emerald lake and transformed into a meandering hotel. In the next valley to the south, just upstream from Fornovolasco and not far from the marvelous Grotta del Vento, are the ruins of the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, called the **Chiesaccia (21)**, near which stood the *Hospitale de Volaschio*.



The Spedale del Bigallo at Bagno a Ripoli

• Religious hospitality today

The recent rediscovery and promotion of the Francigena and of the other historic routes of pilgrimage pertaining to Tuscany (such as the Romea Germanica or Romea di Strata, the Romea Strata and the Walks of Francesco) has favored, as

we have seen, the reopening of places for the welcoming of new pilgrims to parishes, canons or specific structures, including historical ones, some of which are managed directly by ecclesial realities born for this purpose. Others, such as the **Misericordia** (lay confraternities of charity and assistance to the needy and the sick, born in Florence in the thirteenth century and still very widespread and active) have rediscovered one of the tasks that had characterized its beginnings, organizing forms of hospitality in **Lucca (22)**, **San Miniato Basso (23)** and, as mentioned, in Radicofani. In **Pontremoli**, rather, a missionary group, together with other local volunteer organizations, has taken over the reception of the **convent** from the Capuchin friars, when in 2014 they had to leave it. Still in Lunigiana, in the Franciscan hermitage of **Santa Maria Maddalena in Adelano**, Zeri (25), at the western end of Tuscany near the borders with Emilia and Liguria, the hermit brother Cristiano had discovered it from four French pilgrims on the route from the **Chemin d'Assise**, which connects Vézéley with the Umbrian city, and since then, in addition to people in search of silence and peace, it also hosts those who travel through.

But apart from the renewed forms of hospitality along pilgrimage routes, it should be emphasized that traditional hospitality has never been lacking in most of the convents and monasteries for those who desire a prolonged moment more or less of silence, prayer and meditation away from the places and from the rhythms of daily life. Every entity naturally has its own rules to be respected, but the Benedictine spirit recalled is always the same.

To this we must add other forms of welcome particularly directed at families and ecclesial groups, in the same convents or monasteries or in special structures run by parishes, religious communities or associations, for purposes related to spiritual needs, such as conferences, retreats or liturgical celebrations. Many of these, however, are also open to tourism and they are generally referred to as **holiday homes**. There are many portals now which allow you to contact them via the internet, such as www.hospites.it, www.ospitalitareligiosa.it, www.viaggispirituali.it, www.istituti-religiosi.org, www.turismoreligioso.eu, to which you can easily refer for any need.

A particular aspect however, not to be forgotten, concerns the attention of the Church towards mothers and minors in difficulty, the disabled, young people with problems of addiction, migrants, the poor and marginalized in general through the diocesan **charities** or special associations and organizations, which materialize in particular other services such as soup kitchens and support for other daily needs. It is Tuscany, on at least one of these fronts, that was the progenitor. The **Spedale degli Innocenti** (Hospital of the Innocents), located in **Florence (26)** in Piazza Santissima Annunziata, was the first real institution for the reception and education of abandoned children throughout all of Europe. Financed by the Art of Silk, it was created in the first half of the fifteenth century on the original project of the great Filippo Brunelleschi, demonstrating how much this work of charity and civilization was at heart to the Florentines.



The entrance of the Spedale degli Innocenti in the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata in Florence



FEASTS

AND TRADITIONS

Tuscany is incredibly rich in festivals and traditional celebrations anchored to the principal Christian events or linked to the worship of local patrons and saints. It is impossible to give a complete picture, we present the most evocative and significant, divided by season.

• Spring

The Feast of the **Annunciation of Mary** and the Incarnation of Jesus, nine months before Christmas, marked for centuries (until 1749) the beginning of the civil year in different cities and areas of the region (Florence, Pisa, Siena, Lucca, Prato). In **Florence, Siena** and particularly in **Pisa**, the so-called “New Year’s Eve of the Annunciation” has been remembered for some years with historical re-enactments. There are innumerable traditions related to the Easter period. Among those to remember during Holy Week are, in particular, the **Procession “dei Crocioni”** in **Castiglione di Garfagnana**, where on the evening of Holy Thursday a hooded penitent, in order to keep his identity secret, impersonates Jesus walking barefoot and in chains through the streets of the country bearing the weight of a big cross. The evening of Good Friday in **Grassina**, near Florence, there is a very popular **re-enactment of the Passion**, while in **Radicofani** the four lay confraternities of the town animate the days of the Triduum with a series of processions and pious practices in addition to the staging of the **Calvary** in the church of Saint Agata, a wall of intertwined boxwood branches seven meters high. Processions during Holy Week also in **Castiglion Fiorentino**, with the hooded members of three confraternities, while the Mass of the Easter Vigil is characterized by the **Resurrection “con la volata” with the Spirit**, with the statue of the Risen that at the moment of Glory transported along the long route of the central aisle of the collegiate. In **Florence**, rather, at the sounding of the Gloria in the cathedral during the Mass of the day of Easter, the “colombina” is lit, the rocket that flies from the altar to the **Scoppio del Carro** – a little tower full of firecrackers placed outside, between the cathedral entrance and the Baptistery - and then returns back to the altar: a potential problem in the flight is considered, especially in the countryside, to be a bad omen. A similar event takes place in **Rufina**, Val di Sieve, during the Mass on the previous night.

On Easter Monday in **Santa Maria a Monte** there is the **Feast “delle Paniere”** in memory of the blessed Diana Giuntini, a procession in which the girls of the village in white dress carry large baskets with a floral composition on their heads. On Tuesday after Easter, in **Monticiano**, in honor of the blessed Antonio Patrizi the **sbraccettata** takes place, this is a celebrated annual procession to the Hermitage of Camerata, attended by the **patron saint**, with a lot of Masses and a substantial break-





The Lungarni Pisani during the luminara of San Ranieri. On the previous pages, the pilgrimage between the Marian shrines of Impruneta and Santissima Annunziata in Florence on the eve of the Nativity of Mary

fast. The return is always in procession but arm in arm, as the young couples of the country have done traditionally.

On the Sunday closest to the liturgical feast of 23 April, **Montorgiali**, a small hamlet of Scansano, celebrates the patron saint Saint Giorgio with a **historic horseback ride** and a Mass in the beautiful sanctuary dedicated to him, located just outside the village.

On the weekend of the sixth Sunday of Easter, **Cortona** remembers **Saint Margaret**, a thirteenth century Franciscan tertiary - whose liturgical celebration falls however on February 22 - with three days of festivities including the offer of candles by the neighborhoods of the city. Another patron saint, Santa Giulia, is celebrated in **Livorno** also with the particular Palio (district race) or **Giostra dell'Antenna**, a rowing event preceded by a procession of historical boats with the relics of the saint, which takes place on May 21, the eve of the anniversary, and it ends with the ascent along the ropes connected to the top of a flagpole for the winner of a banner.

The end of the season sees **Pisa** as the protagonist, with the **luminara** of the evening of June 16, eve of the feast of the patron **Saint Ranieri**, born in 1118 to a well-off family of the city and converted after an unruly youth. The city is illuminated in celebration by an infinity of lights placed on wooden frames called *biancheria* (sheets) giving life to a suggestive show that ends with fireworks. On the 17th, a day of liturgical celebration, On the Arno, the renaissance **palio remiero** dedicated to the saint takes place, preceded by a historical procession. Similarly to the Livornese Giostra, the crews must conquer the "paliotti" placed on the mast of a barge.

Between late spring and early summer the moving (unfixed date) holiday of **Corpus Domini** is characterized by solemn processions with the consecrated host in the streets of cities and towns, which in many places throughout Italy are covered by artistic carpets of flower petals, the so-called **infiorate** (decked in flowers), which form beautiful but obviously ephemeral paintings. In Tuscany that of **Fucecchio** is

especially remembered, but also set up in the nearby **Cerreto Guidi** and then in **Scarperia, Castelfranco di Sopra, Farnetella di Sinalunga, Pitigliano** and on Elba in **Marina di Campo**. In **Camaione** instead the streets are covered with **carpets of colored sawdust**.

• Summer

On June 24, **Florence** celebrates its patron Saint John the Baptist, ending in the evening with the traditional **fochi**, that is fireworks launched from the area of Piazzale Michelangelo. Also linked to the patronal festivities is the annual **Calcio Storico**, an historic Florentine soccer tournament.

More well-known and participated in, the **Palio** is held in **Siena** on July 2 in honor of the Madonna of Provenzano and on August 16 at the conclusion of the celebrations of the Assumption. Its religious origin is testified to by the blessing of the horses in the oratories of the 10 districts (out of 17) that run and by the thanks of the winning people in the church of jurisdiction, Provenzano or the Duomo depending on the date.

The **Giostra dell'orso** (Joust of the Bear) of **Pistoia** is also linked to the celebrations of a patron saint, Saint Jacopo (the apostle James the Greater), on July 25th. On the previous days the solemn dressing of the statue of the saint placed above the facade of the cathedral takes place. On August 10 **Grosseto** celebrates its protector **Saint Lorenzo**, whose statue, on the eve of the vigil, is carried in procession through the city streets on a cart pulled by two oxen and then returned to the Cathedral.

The 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of Mary, is remembered in particular in **Prato** with the display of the **Sacro Cingolo** (Sacred Belt) of the Madonna from the



The carroccio with the statue of San Lorenzo on the eve of the feast of the patron saint of Grosseto. Below, the exposition of the Sacro Cingolo of 8 September 2018 in Prato by the bishop Franco Agostinelli



The *Rificolona* festival in Piazza della Santissima Annunziata in Florence. Below, the Santa Celestina balloon in the sky of San Marcello Pistoiese



pulpit of the Cathedral of Saint Stefano, preceded by the historical procession through the streets of the city. It is the most solemn of the five planned during the year: the others take place at Easter, on May 1st, on the Assumption and at Christmas. For Prato it is the feast of the **Madonna della Fiera**, because it is linked to the ancient traditional town fair which will have already opened in the last week of August.

In **Florence** the Nativity of the Virgin is preceded by the **feast of the Rificolona**, which takes place on the evening of the vigil in Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, where in the past farmers arrived from the countryside to pay homage to Mary and at the same time to sell some products. In their memory, the children carry lanterns of colored paper, called, in fact, *rificolone*, sometimes bombarded by the blow-guns of the older children. To reclaim the tradition from the influx of people from the countryside to the city sanctuary, for some years a walking **pilgrimage**, garnering much participation, has been organized for the afternoon of the same day (photo at pp. 58-59) which starts from the Marian shrine of **Impruneta**, south of the city, and ends with the final entrance into the basilica and the party in the square.

On September 8th, the **Montagna Pistoiese** instead celebrates its patron saint **Santa Celestina** with a hot-air balloon that is launched from its capital of San Marcello.

The evening of September 13th, on the eve of the feast of the **Esaltazione della Santa croce** (Exaltation of the Holy Cross), **Lucca** - like Pisa for San Ranieri - also prepares its *luminara* (illumination) to welcome and accompany the procession from the Basilica of San Frediano to the Cathedral of San Martino, where the *Volto Santo* is preserved, the ancient wooden crucifix, an object of great veneration, covered for the occasion with rich vestments and jewels to draw attention to its royalty. Fairs, markets, games and historical re-enactments, in the end, characterize the summer, with some encroaching upon autumn, the traditional **Feste del Perdono** (Feasts of Forgiveness) which take place practically in all the centers of the **Upper Valdarno**, in different periods to avoid overlapping.

• Autumn

On the evening of November 24th, on the eve of the feast of Saint Caterina of Alessandria, in **Santa Caterina** in Roccalbegna they carry out the rite of the **Focarazza**, a



pyramid of faggots (small bundles of sticks) is set on fire. As soon as the fire dies out, the young *contradaioi* (of the districts) of the country contend for the *stollo*, a large wooden pole placed in the center of the pile, still incandescent, which represents the body of the martyr.

On December 1st, the feast of the patron **Saint Ansano, Siena** celebrates the beginning of the new *contrada* year with an historical procession and a Mass concelebrated by the archbishop with the presiding priests of the 17 districts.

• Winter

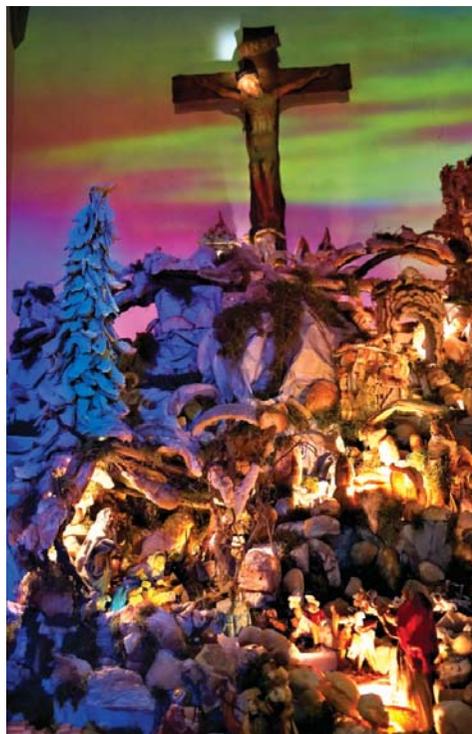
The Christmas season is characterized everywhere by the tradition of the **manger scene**, much followed throughout all of the territorial region. To further promote this, for several years from San Miniato the initiative *Terre di Presepi* (<http://terredipresepi.blogspot.com>), an initiative which has been joined by a growing number of productions throughout the region and also beyond, beginning with those closest to the city, such as the large nativity scenes of the sanctuary of the Mother of Children in the hamlet of **Cigoli** and the Franciscan convent of **San Romano** (photo on page 7), in the nearby town of Montopoli Valdarno. The vast panorama includes other artistic creations such as those of **Lecore**, near Signa, or of **Montignoso** of Gambassi, or very suggestive as the nativity in the grotto near **Piè Lucese** in Pescaglia, just to name a few. Not to be missed, naturally, are the live nativity scenes, such as those of **Equi Terme** in Lunigiana, **Casole d'Elsa** and **Le Ville** of Monterchi.

In **Gragnanella**, a village of Castelnuovo Garfagnana, still live is the **Sacred Representation** of the Nativity, an ancient tradition of popular theater in a sung form. Also in Garfagnana, in **Gorfigliano**, on Christmas Eve the **Natalecci** are burnt, these are tall cylinders patiently made with branches of juniper, while in **Abbadia San Salvatore** they light the traditional **fiaccole**, pyramidal piles of wood destined to burn until the morning.

The feast of **Saint Anthony Abate**, which falls on January 17, is celebrated everywhere with the traditional blessing of the animals. In **Bruscoli**, a suburb of Firenzuola near the border of Emilia, in the church square there is a large lottery that, not by chance, has also farm animals among the prizes. At **Filattiera**, in Lunigiana, on the evening of the eve homage is paid to the saint with the lighting of bonfires, as in other parts of Italy, while at **Buti** the Sunday after the holiday they run the traditional palio, preceded in the early morning by the celebration of the "Mass of the Horsemen" "at the end of which there is the traditional breakfast based on tripe and wine.

February 15 in **Arezzo** the miraculous glazed terracotta copy of the Sienese Madonna of Provenzano, is celebrated. Thousands and thousands of faithful ascend to pay homage in the Cathedral, open from before dawn until night.

The Christmas Nativity 2015 in Lecore, made with different types of bread



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