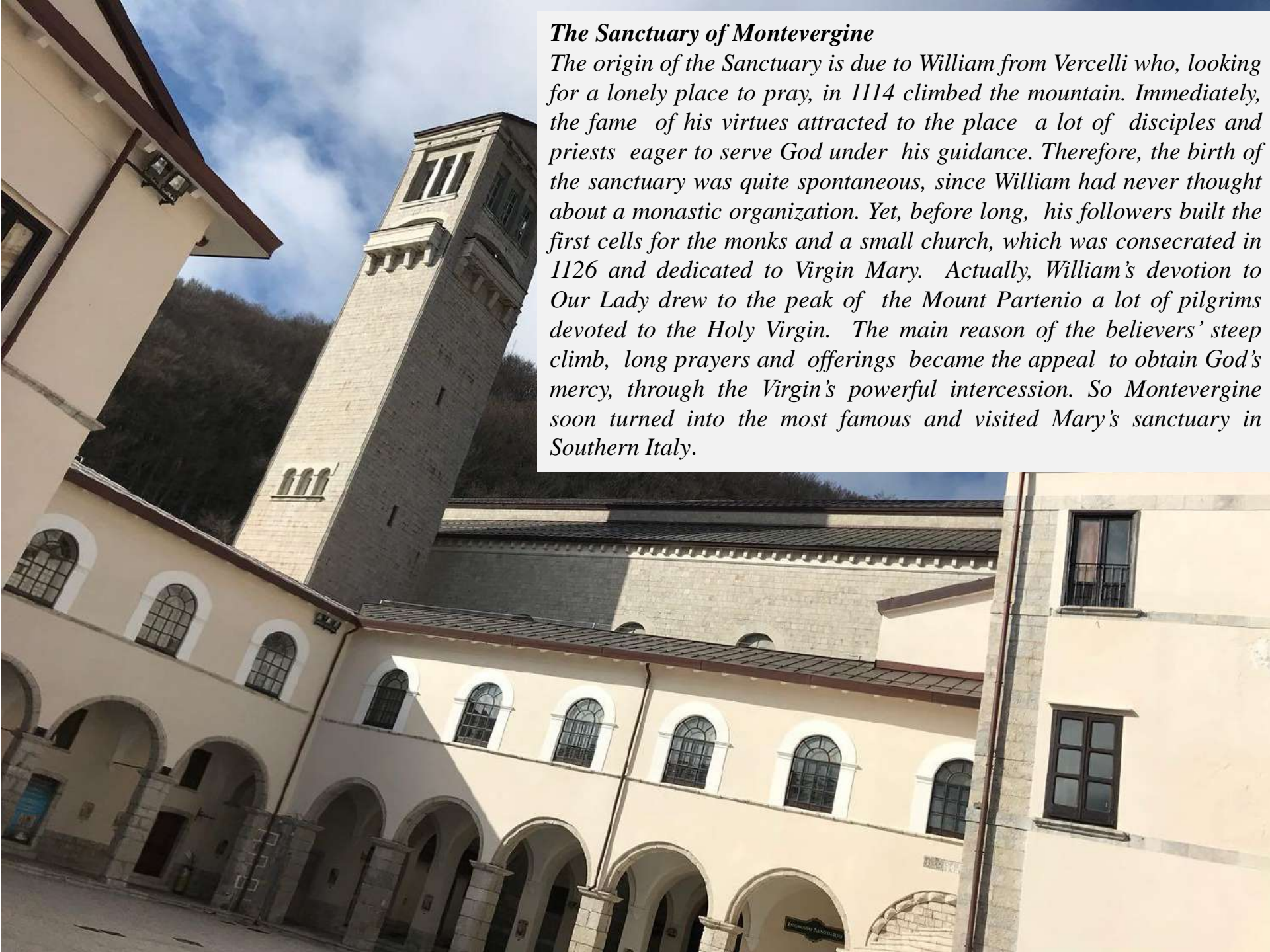
A panoramic view from a mountain peak looking down at a valley with a town and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

The journey to it was rather fatiguing; but the incomparable view it afforded made us pay little regard to the trouble of climbing.

Henry Swinburne

The Sanctuary of Montevergine

The origin of the Sanctuary is due to William from Vercelli who, looking for a lonely place to pray, in 1114 climbed the mountain. Immediately, the fame of his virtues attracted to the place a lot of disciples and priests eager to serve God under his guidance. Therefore, the birth of the sanctuary was quite spontaneous, since William had never thought about a monastic organization. Yet, before long, his followers built the first cells for the monks and a small church, which was consecrated in 1126 and dedicated to Virgin Mary. Actually, William's devotion to Our Lady drew to the peak of the Mount Partenio a lot of pilgrims devoted to the Holy Virgin. The main reason of the believers' steep climb, long prayers and offerings became the appeal to obtain God's mercy, through the Virgin's powerful intercession. So Montevergine soon turned into the most famous and visited Mary's sanctuary in Southern Italy.



The Icon

The history of the icon of Montevergine is surrounded by a halo of mystery. Many legends over the time have attributed the painting to different artists and made hypotheses on its transfer to the sanctuary. A legend wants the icon painted directly by St Luke in Jerusalem, displayed in Antioch and finally transported to Constantinople. During the VIII century Emperor Baldwin II would have cut off the head of the picture carrying it with him in his exile, to save it from the destruction by iconoclasts.

Through several stages of inheritance, the image of Mary's face would have come into the hands of Catherine of Valois, who, probably, had it completed by Montano d'Arezzo and gave it to the monks of Montevergine in 1310, placing it in the noble chapel of Anjou. Later on some historians and critics refuted any legends about the icon. The presence of Angevin lilies around the image of the Virgin seems to bind its origin unquestionably to this royal house. In recent years father Placido Mario Tropeano, a benedictine monk has accurately reconstructed the history of the prodigious icon, concluding that it can be reasonably ascribed to the style of Montano d'Arezzo, but, due to recurring rehashes, it may have lost its original feature.



THE MUSEUM

Montevergine Museum was opened to the public in September 1968, to contain artworks and findings of historic interest, but only in 2000, on the occasion of the great Jubilee, rooms were definitively reorganized.

The itinerary

The exposition is divided into four areas.

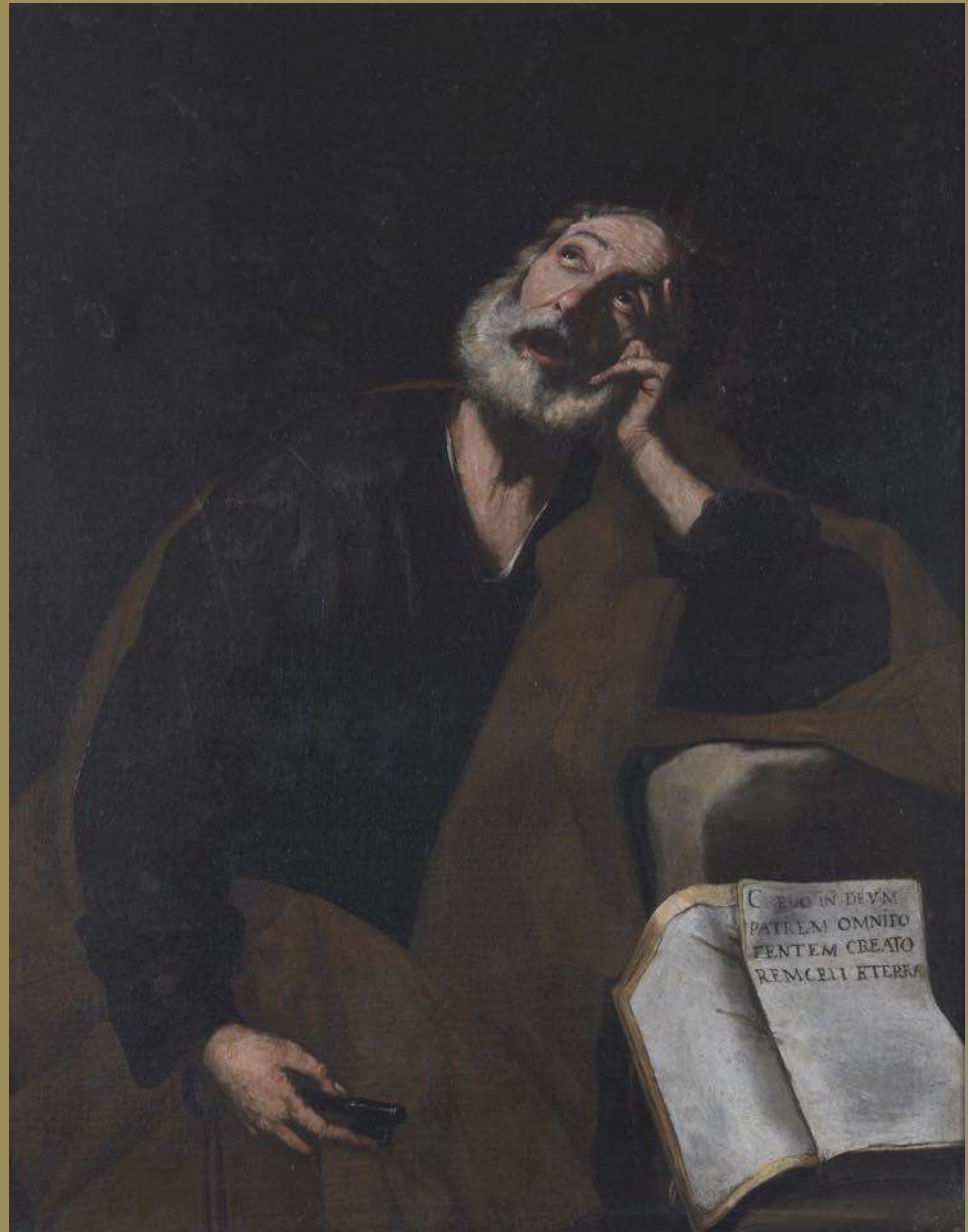


MUSEO ABBAZIALE *di*
MONTEVERGINE

Painting area

The first part houses paintings, eastern icons and wood findings. The most representative pictures are "San Francesco in estasi" attributed to Guido Reni, "Il perdono di Giuseppe" by Paolo Veronese's school, and some pictures, whose authors are among the main representatives of "Neapolitan Baroque", such as Luca Giordano, Mattia Preti and Andrea Vaccaro.

Particularly interesting is "Salomè", a copy from Caravaggio, attributed to Battistello Caracciolo





Full of charm is the collection of eastern icons and gorgeous medieval icons, such as "Madonna del Latte" (XII century), known as "Madonna di San Guglielmo", the first icon venerated at the Sanctuary.

The first section is completed by two wooden masterpieces: the monumental Christ deposed (XIII century) and the spectacular Chair (XII-XIII centuries).

Area of sacred vestments

*The **second** part exhibits sacred vestments and liturgical objects.*

The most interesting items are the astile cross (xv century) and the chalice belonged to the Pope St. Pio X, enriched with precious stones.

The section also includes ostensories, reliquaries and thuribles, but above all the jewels of Virgin Mary of Montevergine, coming from important donations over the centuries. Actually, the painting of the Virgin was enriched with jewels until 1960, when the icon was restored and therefore deprived of its precious goods.



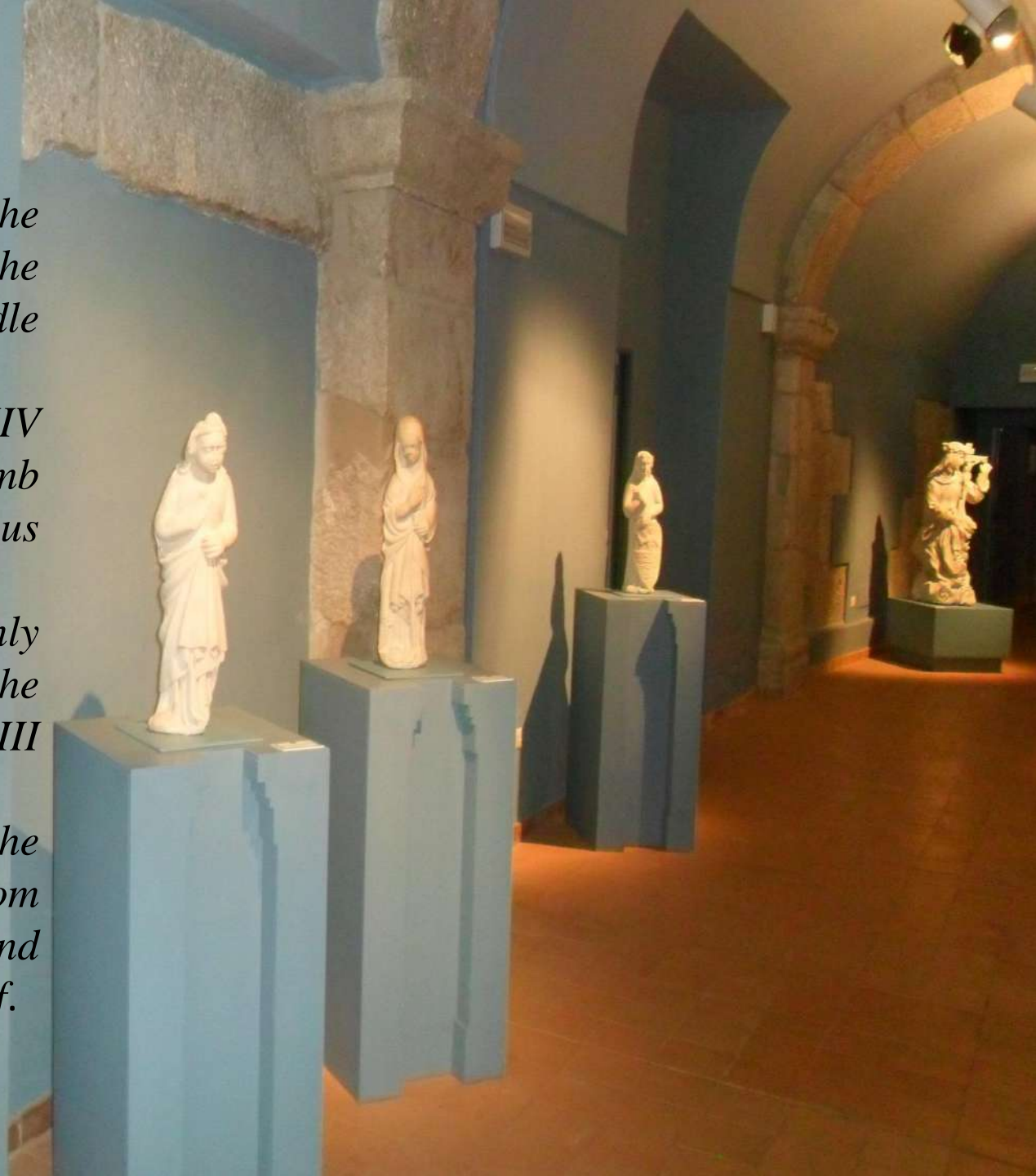
Marble Findings

This hall is dedicated to the marble findings from the Roman times and the Middle Ages.

The medieval section (XII-XIV centuries) contains tomb statues, Lautrec sarcophagus and several sculptures.

The ancient section mainly includes findings from the Roman period (II and III centuries).

Beautifully preserved is the strigil sarcophagus, from which two heads of lion and Gorgone emerge in high relief.



A large, circular stone well with a metal grate cover, set against a blue wall. The well is made of rough-hewn stone and has a circular opening in the center covered by a metal grate. The background is a blue wall with a stone pillar visible in the upper left.

Saint William's well

In a separate room there is the famous stone known as "Virgin Mary 's footprint" linked to the tradition of pilgrimages to Montevergine.

It introduces us to the ground floor, where the fourth and last area of the museum is located; it was inaugurated in 2006 and is dedicated to art and popular traditions. In this area we can also find the famous well, from which clean water springs, in the same place where Saint William decided to stop, exhausted by the toil of the journey, in the twelfth century; here the saint built the church dedicated to the Virgin Lady of Montevergine.



Exhibition of nativity scenes.

This exhibition is made up of valuable examples of regional Italian cribs. Over the years it has been increasingly enriched, and today it represents one of the most significant Italian collections. The exhibition includes several rooms where we can admire wonderful cribs from Abruzzo, Apulia, Sicily and Calabria .



Loreto

Not far from Montevergine Sanctuary, in Mercogliano district, we can visit Loreto Abbey where the monks of Montevergine live.

The present palace of Loreto was built in 1749 by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (an important painter, sculptor and architect), after the old one had been destroyed by an earthquake.



The Palace

Inside the Palace it is possible to visit:

The Pharmacy, with a collection of majolica vases;

The Archive, containing about 7000 parchments and just as many documents;

The Library, which has become in recent years an important cultural centre and houses about 200000 volumes; it is open to the public.

The pharmacy

The Pharmacy of Loreto was opened in 1753 and closed in 1901.

Initially, it was created for the monks only, but after some time it was opened to the public as well and was run by the friars expert in medical herbs.

In the past the pharmacy was made up of three rooms, but now, after the 1964-1965 restoration, it consists in one room only. Here about 200 majolica vases are on display, while on the ceiling we can admire a fresco by Giovanni Baratta, representing Tobia's healing from blindness.



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Discovering Irpinia on the footsteps of British travellers