



Provincia di Rimini

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MALATESTA PANDVLENE V FECIT

MALATESTA & MONTEFELTRO



RIVIERA DI RIMINI



# THE MALATESTA TEMPLE AND OTHER CHURCHES ON THE TERRITORY OF RIMINI

travel notes



## Places to visit and travel routes



- **Maiolo**  
Church of Santa Maria di Antico (St. Mary)
- **Mondaino**  
Parochial Church
- **Montefiore Conca**  
Church of San Paolo (St. Paul)  
Hospital chapel - Madonna della Misericordia (Our Lady of Mercy)  
Pilgrimage chapel of the Madonna of Bonora
- **Montegrolfo**  
Chapel of San Rocco  
Pilgrimage chapel of the Beata Vergine delle Grazie (Blessed Virgin of Mercy) (Trebbio)
- **Morciano di Romagna**  
Former abbey of San Gregorio
- **Pennabilli**  
Diocesan church San Pio V  
Convent church of Sant'Agostino (Miratoio)  
Church of San Cristoforo, called Sant'Agostino and Convent and church of Santa Maria dell'Oliva (Maciano)  
Parochial church of San Pietro (Ponte Messa)  
Pilgrimage church of the Madonna delle Grazie
- **Rimini**  
Church of Suffering (Chiesa del Suffragio)  
Church of the Madonna della Colonnella  
Church of the Madonna delle Grazie  
Church of San Fortunato  
Church of San Giovanni Battista  
Church of San Giuliano  
Church of Sant'Agostino  
Church of Santa Chiara
- **Church of Santa Maria dei Servi**  
Temple of Sant'Antonio  
Malatesta Temple
- **Saludecio**  
Church of San Biagio  
Church of San Girolamo
- **San Giovanni in Marignano**  
Oratory of the School (Oratorio della Scuola)
- **San Leo**  
Cathedral of San Leone  
Convent of Montemaggio  
Convent of di Sant'Igne  
Domenican monastery of Mount Pietracuta  
Parochial church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Santa Maria Assunta)
- **Sant'Agata Feltria**  
Collegiate church  
Church of San Girolamo
- **Santarcangelo di Romagna**  
Collegiate church  
The monks' church  
Church of San Vito  
Parochial church of San Michele Arcangelo
- **Talamello**  
Cemetery chapel  
Church of San Lorenzo
- **Verucchio**  
Collegiate church  
Church of Suffering (Chiesa del Suffragio)  
Convent of Santa Croce (Villa Verucchio)  
Monastery and church of Sant'Agostino  
Parochial church of San Martino (Villa Verucchio)

## Where we are



## Distances

Amsterdam 1,405 km  
 Berlin 1,535 km  
 Brussels 1,262 km  
 Budapest 1,065 km  
 Frankfurt 1,043 km  
 Copenhagen 1,770 km  
 London 1,684 km

Munich 680 km  
 Paris 1,226 km  
 Prague 1,089 km  
 Stockholm 2,303 km  
 Warsaw 1,533 km  
 Vienna 887 km  
 Zürich 645 km

Bologna 121 km  
 Florence 165 km  
 Milan 330 km  
 Naples 586 km  
 Rome 325 km  
 Turin 447 km  
 Venice 270 km

**The Malatesta Temple**  
and other churches  
on the territory of Rimini

## **Riviera di Rimini Travel Notes**

Series on tourism published by the

### **Province of Rimini**

Tourism Department

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Photos taken from  
the Photographic Archives  
of the Province of Rimini

#### **With special thanks to the following photographers**

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L. Liuzzi, M. Lorenzi,  
Martinini, R. Masi,  
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#### **Graphic Design**

Relè - Tassinari/Vetta  
(Leonardo Sonnoli,  
Igor Bevilacqua)

#### **Cover photograph**

Detail of the façade  
of the Malatesta Temple, Rimini  
photo by Paritani

#### **Layout**

Litoincisa87, Rimini

First edition 2011

Reprint 2017

#### **The Malatesta Temple**

is a publication for tourist  
purposes and available  
**free of charge**

With the contribution of



Special thanks go to Tonino Guerra  
for having allowed us to use the  
drawings - the small fish and the  
apple cut in half - that inspired the  
Riviera of Rimini and Malatesta  
& Montefeltro brands, which  
appear on the entire coordinated  
range of promotional material  
published by the Tourism Council  
of the Province of Rimini.

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**The Malatesta Temple**  
and other churches on the territory of Rimini

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**THE  
MALATESTA  
TEMPLE**

AND OTHER  
CHURCHES  
ON THE  
TERRITORY  
OF RIMINI

## **A widespread diffusion**

Thanks to its rolling hills and two rivers (the Marecchia and the Conca), the Riminese hinterland enjoys a varied landscape. It is a territory that has been inhabited since time immemorial, especially in the areas containing steep downward sloping hills. Inhabited by both small and large settlements, it is crossed by a dense network of roads that connect it to neighbouring regions and the sea. Its position between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea and in view of the Pianura Emiliana (*the Emilian Plains*) has always made it a zone of transit. As such, it was and remains a hub for crossing cultures but also for conflict and collision; its landscape is vividly painted by traces of that very disconcerting fact. The remnants of the combative and scintillating Middle Ages lie atop the mounts of Montefeltro and San Marino. The strategically important hillsides remain crowned by falling walls, ruins and towers. Such traces, as devastating as they are picturesque, are the fruits of affairs decidedly concluded and removed by time.

Less garish and possibly less picturesque but more frequent are testimonies of another nature. Artefacts of a religious nature have long-standing roots within ancient history (as often demonstrated by the elements within the artefacts themselves), yet they still represent a reality that is alive and well today. Such artefacts represent the balance between pacifism and centuries-old industriousness. Among cultivated fields and along country roads, it's easy to find little shrines whose believers are continually devoted. On the outskirts of towns there live preachers who, in the past, would accompany travelling hospitals servicing pilgrims. Within villages and towns one may find parish churches of varied dimensions and sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mother.

World War II had long raged against the area on the outer limits of the "Gothic Line" (the last line of defence during the war), causing numerous casualties and seriously damaging settlements. Naturally, structures of a religious nature were damaged as well. These buildings often housed important historical testimonies and were, in essence, the keys to history, tradition, faith and art themselves. During the 1960s while flight from the countryside was at an all-time high, this movement towards the cities played a role in saving the religious character of the territory. Even today, bell towers are a frequent sight. In a certain sense, they are the most characteristic image of the landscape: they signal the presence of fairly modest, well-restored and well-maintained cult buildings.





**San Leo. View of the main church interior (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century).**

The traveller to this region will find numerous examples of interesting and visually pleasing sacred art, some of which can be considered masterpieces. The beauty and meaning of these works can only be highlighted by the fact that they are housed within their original locations and are still used today as they were in antiquity.

**Rimini and San Leo: two (rather, three) cathedrals serving two dioceses**

Thanks to the presence of heavily trafficked Roman roads and an efficient port dealing in trade with Africa and the Orient, the territory of Rimini fairly quickly adopted Christianity. As a consequence, Rimini was soon considered one of the most important sites for the new religion. It was for this reason that in 359 the city was selected by the emperor Constantius as the site of a religious council. The goal of the council was to align bishops of the west with Aryan positions sustained by the majority of bishops in eastern churches along with the emperor himself. Unfortunately, all physical or material traces of the council (later defined as a “consultation” and not recognized as valid by the Church) have been lost in time, as happens with almost everything tracing back to the very beginnings of Christianity.

However, it is certain that religious organization within the territory was concentrated since the early stages in two areas: the dioceses of **Rimini** serving the northern and maritime parishes, and that of **San Leo** serving southern and hillside parishes. Both dioceses boast two large and beautiful cathedrals.

The oldest cathedral amongst dioceses is San Marino-Montefeltro whose territory comprising the Marecchia valley has been part of the province of Rimini as of 2009. Consecrated in 1173 but constructed some time later, San Leone cathedral is located in the fortress-city of San Leo. It is a grand Romanesque building built in sandstone with three aisles with an elevated presbytery over an ample crypt. Largely restored, its original characteristics have been saved, boasting a solemn interior divided in three columned aisles under slightly angled arches.



Top  
**San Leo.**  
**The cathedral**  
**(12<sup>th</sup> century).**

Bottom  
**Pennabilli.**  
**Panorama view**  
**of the cathedral.**

During construction, cast-off Roman materials were used to construct columns, bases and relief details. The crypt houses the stone lid to Saint Leo's sarcophagus (attributed varyingly to the 5<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> century). According to tradition, Saint Leo was a friend and colleague of Saint Marinus and was ordained by the Riminese bishop San Gaudens sometime between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup>. Both the cathedral and the city's names are dedicated in his honour. A local unverified legend dictates that his body was collected by emperor Enrico II in 1014 and brought to Voghenza (Ferrara), where it can be found today.

The cathedral is perfectly "oriented," or rather, its apses are all eastward facing (as is the custom for all traditional sacred Christian edifices). As a result, its entrance is placed on the buildings southern side. Visitors to the cathedral are greeted by three round apses crowned by arches and massive pillared walls. The bishop's seat was originally built on the side opposite to the entrance next to which rises the bell tower from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Now isolated, the tower has the external form of a tall quadrangular prism (at 32 meters tall) while its internal form is round and also dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1973 during restorations, ample parts of a tabernacle and a pluteus dating to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century were found. They belonged to a sacred edifice preceding the current one on site; the interesting structures are housed within the local Museum of Sacred Art.

Owing to the importance of the San Leo fortress, during the later half of the 1500s Guidobaldo II della Rovere asked the bishop of Montefeltro to transfer the function of cathedral to the collegiate church of **Pennabilli**. The request was accepted in 1572 and as of today Montefeltro has a cathedral served by two distinct locations. The "new" cathedral was founded in Pennabilli in 1577, finished at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently dedicated to Saint Pius V. Reworked many times throughout history thanks to restorations between the 1800s-1900s it has assumed a decidedly eclectic, academic character. Atop its numerous altars lie many 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century altarpieces inspired for the most part by the works of Federico Barocci.



## The Malatesta Temple, basilica and cathedral of the diocese of Rimini

The most celebrated and important cathedral within the province is not its oldest one; it is the cathedral of Rimini, since 1809 housed within the Malatesta Temple. The structure is of Benedictine, and later, Franciscan origin (see map of the building at the bottom of this publication) and became cathedral upon Napoleon's order. It is called Santa Colomba just like the original ancient on-site cathedral demolished during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (whose original earlier names were, in turn, Santa Maria in Trivio and San Francesco). Rebuilt by the Franciscans during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it stood at the outskirts of the city next to a large cemetery containing the tombs of its most illustrious citizens. Among the tombs were those of the Malatesta family who were coincidentally devout followers of Saint Francis and very favourable to the pacifist nature of Franciscan monks. During the period between the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 14<sup>th</sup> Giotto frescoed the Temple's apse on commission by the Malatestas. Today all that remains of the famous Tuscan painter's work is a large *Crucifix* painted onto a table. In 1447 Sigismondo Malatesta began to erect two family funerary chapels on site for himself and his lover (who would later become his wife) Isotta degli Atti. Subsequently he had them completely renovated and soon after in 1450 Leon Battista Alberti began architectural work on their exterior continuing in the traditional Gothic style of the two previous chapels. The internal work for the project was left in the care of Matteo de' Pasti and Agostino di Duccio.

The original project plan and the architect's construction model approved by its benefactor (and naturally, by the Franciscans who continue to be the church's legitimate proprietors) have not survived. The only thing remaining to give us an idea of how the building was to be completed is a modelled and melted medallion by Matteo de' Pasti. According to Alberti's original plans, the edifice should have included a large vaulted dome, but remained incomplete following an excommunication (1460), a defeat (1463) and the death of Sigismondo (1468).

Although it is incomplete, the Malatesta Temple remains one of the most notable and important monuments dating back to the

Top  
**Rimini. View of  
the interior of the  
Malatesta Temple.**

Bottom left  
**Rimini, private  
collection. Medal  
depicting the  
Malatesta Temple  
exterior as planned by  
Leon Battista Alberti,**

**designed and cast  
by Matteo de' Pasti.**  
Bottom right  
**Rimini, Malatesta  
Temple.  
Crucifix by Giotto.**

early Renaissance. Its external architecture draws upon antiquity and its richly ornate interior houses sculptures by Agostino di Duccio, prompting Cesare Brandi in 1956 to claim “there is possibly no other monument, save for the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore, that has the ability - rather, the right - to call itself an emblem of the Renaissance.” Even contemporaries were able to see the innovation the structure represented. It can be said that during its construction, the Temple was already considered a symbol of the Renaissance and its contradictions; in fact, it was at once exalted and denigrated, carefully considered and yet ostentatiously ignored. Just its name is indicative of a new outlook on life, art and religion with its reference to classicism and the family that constructed it, and not the saint to whom it is dedicated.

Like ancient Roman monuments it is covered in snow white stone walls. Its solemn façade, formed by three arches framed by semi-columns, shows attentive observation of the Augustus Arch in Rimini. Extraordinarily severe and harmonious in their simplicity, its side walls are supported by a series of pillars and arches below which should have been placed yet more arches illustrating the most illustrious members of the Malatesta court (on only the right side was this partially carried out). Among the 15<sup>th</sup> century internal pillars there are visible small gaps which were deliberately placed there; they are similar to Gothic architecture and aim to create an architecture of logic and harmony founded upon faith in reason and classicist architectural precedent.

The whole building is on a raised striped podium showcasing many heraldic Malatesta images which continue on the inside of the building. These elements include the real family crest along with the crest including Sigismondo's initials alternating with shields, a four-petalled rose and an elephant. The figure of the elephant is utilized within the Temple to support pillars and sarcophagi, to crown traditional coats of arms and to form seats for the statue of Saint Sigismund (*Sigismondo* in Italian). An animal whose symbolism creates many meanings, it was a favourite of Sigismondo and his brother Malatesta Novello, who attributed to it the motto: “the Indian elephant is not afraid of mosquitoes” (the mosquitoes were enemies of the Malatesta family, haughtily regarded as annoying insects).







**Rimini,  
Malatesta Temple.  
The chapel of the  
Madonna dell'Acqua  
(Madonna  
of the waters).**

A Latin inscription along the façade and two Greek inscriptions on the sides of the building indicate that Sigismondo Malatesta constructed the building in Holy Year 1450 (most probably a symbolic or conventional date) on a vote taken during the “Guerre Italiche” (*Italian Wars*) and dedicated it to God and his city. It's certain that Malatesta's original intentions were quite modest; he wanted to construct two family chapels on the right side of the old Franciscan church. The vote, a proposed grand dynastic mausoleum and work on the first two cathedrals jeopardizing the integrity of the construction as a whole all played a part in convincing Sigismondo to intervene and request the services of Leon Battista Alberti, architect cum humanist who was a vital part of the papal court. Internally, the works were continued according to the style adopted for the first two chapels on the right whose walls were already constructed. As such, the contemporary Temple boasts a classic style on the outside with Gothic decoration on the inside, reflecting the tastes of the court tempered by Alberti's own suggestions.

The only element uniting the exterior and interior is a clear celebratory intent: the exterior represents the new man who dominates history and is aware of his own noble intellectualism; the interior, the principle in which man is pleased with his riches, his court of erudite contemporaries and his following of captains for whom he has already constructed predisposed solemn funerary arches.

It is highly probable that Leon Battista Alberti had given authoritative suggestions for the internal area, preferring to exclude frescoes and give preference to bas-reliefs and marble coverings. This style corresponds in part to his own concept of decorating as stated in his treatise on architecture (*De re aedificatoria*) which he was composing at the time and is distinctly Gothic in taste.

Only the first six chapels date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century; they are characterized by high, protruding marble balustrades, Gothic windows and vaults, marble coverings, bas-reliefs and statues. All the sculptures inside the Temple are attributed to the Florentine Agostino di Duccio who worked there for 10 years (or at least until 1456). The Temple's architectural-decorative aspect is instead attributed to the Veronese Matteo de' Pasti, medalist, miniaturist, architect and overseer of all constructions ordered

by Sigismondo. Di Duccio and de' Pasti both signed their works with inscriptions. The themes and figured embellishing the chapels were suggested by the most erudite members of the court (along with the contributions of Sigismondo and Alberti) and were carried out according to research conducted by Guarino da Verona, Basinio da Parma, Roberto Valturio, and Poggio Bracciolini.

The first chapel on the right was founded first and then consecrated later to San Sigismondo in 1452; by 1449 it was already completed but awaiting its last decorative touches (it would have most probably been frescoed according to tradition). It is possible that the edifice was covered in marble at Leon Battista Alberti's request. The painter assigned to decorative work, Piero della Francesca, was used to paint the fresco *San Sigismondo venerato da Sigismondo* (*San Sigismondo venerated by Sigismund*), signed and dated 1451, in the modest adjoining *Hall of Relics* (Cella delle Reliquie). On top of the altar sits a statue of Saint Sigismund, king of Burgundy, seated atop a throne of two elephants; in fact, elephants support the Temple's pillars representing the theological and cardinal Virtues (faith, hope, charity, prudence, temperance, fortitude - justice is not represented). Next to a chapel whose original intended use was a familial funeral area, is the marble sepulchre of Sigismondo, who died at little more than 50 years of age in 1468 (actual inscription reads 51 years, 3 months and 20 days).

Between the first and the second chapel lies the Cella delle Reliquie (*The hall of the relics*). Originally designed to house treasure and a vestry, other items began to be kept there. Such items include precious vestments and prominent relics donated by Sigismondo among others. Now the area houses original and antique marble artefacts from the Temple and the old cathedral, (Santa Colomba) archaeological finds from Sigismondo's tomb and Piero della Francesca's *sinopite* (a brick-red clay used for red paint) and his rendering including preparatory instructions for the fresco (it was detached during WWII and is now displayed in the fourth chapel on the right).

The second chapel contains the marble statue of Saint Michael Archangel within its central tabernacle; delicate angels play music and sing on panelled pillars. Lovely child angels ("Malatesta's little cherubs") decorate the balustrade. In the middle of the left wall lies the





**Rimini,  
Malatesta Temple.  
Agostino di Duccio:  
tile with child angels  
playing in the water  
in the chapel of the  
guardian angels.**

tomb of Isotta degli Atti, lover-turned-third wife of Sigismondo, supported by elephants and crowned by the Malatesta coat of arms whose crest is the head of an elephant with the biblical motto *Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi*. Recent renovations have uncovered the beautiful decorations in fabric that line the inside of the tomb. The placard dates the tomb to 1450 in reference to the Holy Year, not the death of Isotta (deceased in 1474). This chapel also houses the sepulchre of Riminese bishops.

The third chapel, covered in red marble from Verona, was most likely dedicated to Saint Girolamo. It was called the “Temple of the Planets” for its depictions of the planets and their relative Zodiac signs; it is to be considered among the most wonderful of Agostino di Duccio’s masterpieces of 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian sculpture. Their placement on pillars faithfully illustrates the prevailing idea of heaven in the Middle Ages and invokes the perfection and the harmony of the sky.

It is perfection and a harmony that man on earth must strive for in all of their endeavours. As a play on a dedication to the planets, this particular chapel faces opposite the chapel of “liberal arts” (now dedicated to St. Joseph with a bronze statue by Enrico Manfrini, 1999). The finely worked pillars showcasing the Muses and the arts were among the last sculpted in Rimini by Agostino di Duccio (1456); such refined works, they were wrongly thought to be made by ancient Greek sculptors and taken during Sigismondo’s last campaign in the Peloponnese against the Turks (1464-66). Following on the same side of the Temple is the chapel of “infantile games,” originally dedicated to the Archangel Raphael, decorated by bas-reliefs of angels and cherubs playing in perfect symmetry of form and meaning with the chapel facing it dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Within the 15<sup>th</sup> century alcove there is a silver reliquary of Saint Gaudens. The work depicting the saint, bishop, martyr and patron saint of the city is by the German silversmith Franz Rupert Lang (1735) and was donated to the cathedral in 1857 by Pope Pius IX. Next to the right wall stands a table made by the Riminese painter Bartolomeo Coda upon which is placed his work *Pentecoste* (*Pentecost*) which at one time was housed within the ancient Santa Colomba cathedral.

The successive chapel (preceded by the Chapel of the Fallen, symmetrical to the Hall of the Relics but on the opposite side) was



**Rimini,  
Malatesta Temple.  
Piero della Francesca,  
detail of a fresco  
depicting Sigismondo  
praying to  
San Sigismondo (1451).**

the last to be constructed facing the façade. Once dedicated to martyrs of Christ it is now dedicated to the Madonna of the waters, invoked as a protector against natural disasters. The alabaster image of the Madonna with a deceased Jesus sprawled out onto her lap (*la Pietà*) at the centre of the chapel is a German work from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The pillars - supported by elephants just like those in the chapel facing it - contain figures of sibyls and the Prophets who foresaw the incarnation and death of Christ; the chapel also contains two portraits of Sigismondo.

The sarcophagus for Sigismondo's ancestors and descendants placed by the left wall is covered by luxurious, Gothic-style drapery showcasing two bas-reliefs that symbolize Sigismondo and his family's merit within cultural undertakings (*Il trionfo di Minerva - Minerva's triumph*) and their military glory (*Il trionfo di Scipione - The triumph of Scipio*). The chapel was reworked in 1862 based on a project designed by the architect Luigi Poletti: we can attribute the brightness of the chapel's gilding and the splendour of its blue colours to that project. Originally the entire Temple was planned to be polychromatic - with a sumptuous interior of blue, gold, red, green and white (the colours of the Malatesta family - and rich in decorative painted accents and gilding. The Malatesta fingerprint is quite visible in all the 15<sup>th</sup> century parts of the building, characterized by familial elements, inscriptions and initials. Because of this and its use of classical forms and scholarly citations, the building was acclaimed and sometimes scorned as a "Pagan temple." In fact, Pope Pius II considered its construction among Sigismondo's many - either real or presumed - misdeeds. In reality it was nothing more than a first, inedited attempt at giving classic forms to a Christian building and depictions of traditionally Christian significance. Even the most apparently profane images like those who express the beauty and perfection of heaven (the planets and the sign of the zodiac) and the works of man (liberal arts) were heavily present in churches until the high Middle Ages. However, they were never represented in such an imaginative way or as full of ideas for return to antiquity. After the fall of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, the Franciscan monks had to complete the structure to the best of their ability, constructing the bell tower and the apse on their own accord. The latter, redone many times between 1548 and 1809 housed at its centre Giorgio Vasari's large altarpiece *San Francesco che riceve le stimmata* (St.





**Santarcangelo  
di Romagna.  
Exterior and interior  
of the parish church  
of San Michele  
(6<sup>th</sup> century).**

*Francis receives stigmata*) which is now exposed in the last chapel on the left. Today at the centre of the apse is the only remaining relic from the church during the 14<sup>th</sup> century: a large and beautiful *Crucifix* painted on a table by Giotto in around the year 1300.

During World War II the building was hit by numerous bombs that had ripped the roof off of, and subsequently destroyed, the apses, the 18<sup>th</sup> century chapels, the vestry and its liturgical furnishings and finishing and shattered balustrades and altars, damaged bas-reliefs and the exterior wall surface. The adjoining Franciscan convent serving as a Civic Museum was also destroyed. Reconstruction and restoration of the church was made possible by consistent contributions from the American committee for the Restoration of Italian Monuments and completed with a reconsecration in 1950.

In occasion of the last Holy Year - coinciding with the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building's founding and with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its post-war reconstruction - new restorations funded by the State and a foundation from the Cassa di Risparmio bank in Rimini, have given the Temple back its original décor and have partially salvaged its original colour scheme. Upon the restorations' completion, the area was adapted once again to liturgical use according to canonical law. The 18<sup>th</sup> century altar (originating from the destroyed Teatini church) was placed in the last chapel to the right, which already housed a beautiful neoclassical monument (Giacomo De Maria, 1828). In 2002 the title of Basilica was bestowed upon the cathedral.

## **Ancient parish churches**

The diffusion of Christianity within the territory of Rimini and Montefeltro is surrounded by fables and legends, and it is difficult to ascertain fact from lore. Considering the city's important role in commerce with Africa and the Orient during the late Roman era and its important harbour, Christianity most likely enjoyed quite a rapid onset.

Considering Rimini's close relations with the territory that depended upon it, one can hypothesize that Christianity rather rapidly spread to the province's hinterland. Medieval documents present to us a rather dense network of parish towns (at least 16 within the Riminese



territory by the 10<sup>th</sup> century and 18 within the Montefeltro territory before the 12<sup>th</sup> century) in defence of the more populated and important cities placed along routes which connected the city to other major hubs in Italy (Via Emilia and Flaminia, Via Aretina (now Via Marecchiese), *Via Flaminia Minor* or *Via Regalis* (towards Marche). Unfortunately, time has all but destroyed these historical monuments, and today we do not know their exact original locations and all that remain of some historical buildings are modern reconstructions. The same phenomenon happened in the city of Rimini- all of the most ancient sacred buildings in the city have been lost, including its primitive cathedral, Santa Colomba which was deconsecrated and demolished during the Napoleonic era.

Out of the surviving ancient sacred buildings, the oldest and most fascinating lies within the ancient parish city of **Santarcangelo di Romagna** and is dedicated to the Archangel Michael. It is found on a plain towards the river a kilometre away from the town. An exquisitely proportioned building with one central aisle and a luminous internal area, it is typical of the Byzantine style as practiced in Ravenna during the 6<sup>th</sup> century; even its externally polygonal apse, walling in soft brick and harmonious series of scalloped windows hark back to Ravennate art. It is not surprising, because the whole territory of Rimini was included in the Byzantine and Pentapolis and has long been defended against the barbarians and because the Church of Ravenna owned various properties between Romagna and Le Marche for many centuries. One of the few surviving traces of this period are several churches dedicated to Lombard and Byzantine saints (including St. Michael the Archangel). The parish today has no decorations, but archaeological excavations have allowed us to recover fragments of mosaic floors and marble deposits, documenting particular decorative richness. Its continuous use during this period gave witness to the bell tower built in front of the façade in the twelfth-thirteenth century and the stone on which rests the remains of its sole altar table, a high-medieval sculpture with branches, leaves and a bird of prey clawing and raising a small fore-paw, depicted with dramatic lines and sharp carvings of a “barbaric” nature.

To find complete (but not always intact) monuments of ancient sacred architecture, one must go back up the Marecchia valley. Just outside Villa Verucchio the parish town of San Martino sits with its



Top

**Pennabilli.**  
The parish church  
of San Pietro  
in Ponte Messa  
(12<sup>th</sup> century).

Bottom

**Pennabilli. Detail**  
from the entrance  
portal of the parish  
church of San Pietro  
in Ponte Messa.

rustic Roman-Gothic architecture, atop a downward slope shaded by olive trees and the rock under the town of **Verucchio**. Continuing to look further in the valley towards Montefeltro, one can find the most characteristically Romanesque parish towns. **San Leo** houses an important parish community dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century dedicated to Saint Maria Assunta where worship takes place in a sacred building which predates the society by at least two centuries, as indicated by the structure's beautiful ciborium above the altar. Its three Lombard style apses crowned by arches face the town's main square; the entrances are placed on the sides of the building in order to make it seem perfectly harmonious from the front; its façade is grounded on a precipice. The interior is divided into three aisles with pillars and columns with reworked Roman capitals and is always bathed in a semi-darkness slightly broken by the light entering from the façade, side doors and the apses' stone-arc windows. On a raised presbytery, Duke Orso's ciborium was put back together in white limestone and is supported by four columns with beautiful contemporary capitals; it is all decorated very simply with an inscription running the length of the structure citing the name of its purchaser (Duke Orso), and its era of construction (that of Pope John and emperor Charles III; between 1881 and 1882).

Continuing yet further towards Marecchia is the ancient parish town of Ponte Messa (in **Pennabilli**), which constitutes a great example of late 12<sup>th</sup> century Romanesque architecture. Dedicated to Saint Peter and also constructed on a building used for religious purposes at least two centuries before, it conserved its function as a parish church with a baptismal fountain until at least the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. After that time, the church began to degrade and its aisles were used for agricultural needs. It lost its apse, roof, bell tower, and the upper part of its façade, all of which were reconstructed at various points in its history. Post-war restoration has in part returned the structure to its original form; now it is a much thinner edifice divided in three pillared aisled with rounded arches and a presbytery over a crypt. The altar's lone table, located in the presbytery, is supported by a Roman stone. Yet, the most interesting part of the building is still its façade, characterized by horizontal riddles and pilasters that form a quadrangular lattice along with a porch over the main portal. The portal, like many of the structure's inner columns and capitals, is rich in "barbaric" sculptures of fantastic and monstrous animals.



Top

**Rimini, church of San Giuliano. Bittino of Faenza, winged altar with the history of San Giuliano (1409).**

Bottom

**Rimini, church of San Giuliano. Paolo Veronese, altarpiece showing the martyrdom of San Giuliano (1588).**

## Monasteries and Convents

Medieval maps often cited monasteries; in reality, these monasteries were small churches entrusted to a lone clergyman or, if located in the countryside, small hermitages. Within the Riminese territory the first real community of monks that lived an ascetic life was the Benedictine order.

**Rimini** boasts three important Benedictine abbeys and churches located just outside the city centre next to its main entrances. San Pietro is found in the centre of the San Giuliano district where Via Emilia begins while San Gaudenzo is on the outskirts of the San Giovanni district where Via Flaminia ends and, finally, Santa Maria in Trivio is near the old harbour. Given to the Franciscans in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and then later transformed into the Malatesta Temple by Sigismondo Malatesta, Santa Maria in Trivio is now the city's cathedral. However, San Gaudenzo church didn't fare so well; at its original location next to an ancient Christian and Pagan necropolis no traces remain of the building after being demolished during the suppressive Napoleonic era. The church of San Pietro still stands today and is now a parish by the name of San Giuliano. Built in a decidedly Venetian style, it is characterized by a large curved façade which gives the space a quality of solemnity. It was completely redone during the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the monks of San Giorgio in Alga (the same monks responsible for conserving Paolo Veronese's altarpiece entitled the *Martirio del Santo - The Martyrdom of the Saint* (1587) in a golden apse at the centre of an imposing wooden architectural frame). In its third chapel to the left, a splendid *polyptych* by Bittino da Faenza (1409) lies, telling the legend of the angels who transported San Julian's body from Istria to the Riminese coast in a large Roman ark (still conserved behind the altar). The other chapels house noted 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings, among which are Andrea Sirani's *The Annunciation*, c. 1650 and Pietro Ricchi's *La consegna della chiavi a San Pietro, Giving the key to Saint Peter*, 1649.

Much more recent is a fourth Benedictine abbey of the Olivetani sect (the "white robed monks"). This abbey, called Santa Maria di Scolca lies atop the hills of **Covignano** near Rimini. Its church still stands and is now known by the parish title of San Fortunato. Founded at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Carlo Malatesta, the abbey was able to expand its reach





**Rimini, church  
of San Fortunato.  
Giorgio Vasari,  
altarpiece showing  
the adoration  
of the mages (1547).**

towards more property within the territory thanks to the Malatesta family's protection. Eventually, Santa Maria di Scolca acquired the old monastery of San Gregorio in Conca (near Morciano) and all its appurtenances. Over the years the church has undergone many different transformations but maintains the façade, support structure, a beautiful Renaissance roof and a chapel with beautiful frescoes from 1512 attributed to Bartolomeo Coda and Girolamo Marchesi da Cotignola. In that same year, the monastery adjacent to the church housed Pope Julius II. The monastery also had one other famous guest: the painter Giorgio Vasari who stayed there for a long period in 1547.

During this period a well-read monk transcribed and corrected transcripts from the manuscript of the *Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (*The lives of the most excellent Italian architects, painters and sculptors*) subsequently printed in Florence in 1550, and, accompanied by various students carried out paintings for the abbey that still remain there in the 17<sup>th</sup> century apse today. Among them is the *Adorazione dei Magi* (*The worship of the mages*), largely considered his masterpiece and one of the most beautiful works of Italian Mannerism. The church's Benedictine origin is even more evident due to the presence of four imposing statues of Olivetani (white robed monks) saints who animate the luminous aisle along with two altarpieces painted around the mid-seventeenth century by father Cesare Pronti which depict Benedictine monks with white vestments and St. Benedict himself.

Within the territory of Rimini, only the Conca valley conserves traces of the ancient and numerous Benedictine abbeys which existed during the Middle Ages; in fact, the lower part of the valley was first organized and cleared for the abbeys themselves. The oldest, dedicated to Saint Gregory and founded by Saint Pier Damiani in around the year 1060, is now a pile of noble ruins suffocated by modern construction on the outskirts of **Morciano**, a town which most likely owes its very existence to having been constructed as a means to protect the abbey and as its marketplace. Even today, there is a large fair celebrated there during Saint Gregory week (March 12).

The Napoleonic era brought with it the suppression of religious communities of Romagna and Montefeltro until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. None of the numerous Benedictine monasteries had been built up again during the age of restoration- most of them were either quickly demolished or radically

Top  
**Rimini. Interior  
of the church of  
Sant'Agostino  
(12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century).**

Bottom left  
**Rimini. Detail of a  
14<sup>th</sup> century fresco  
in the church of  
Sant'Agostino.**

Bottom right  
**Rimini. Detail  
of the painting of  
the Last Judgment  
(14<sup>th</sup> century),**

**formerly in the  
church of  
Sant'Agostino,  
today to be seen in  
the City Museum.**

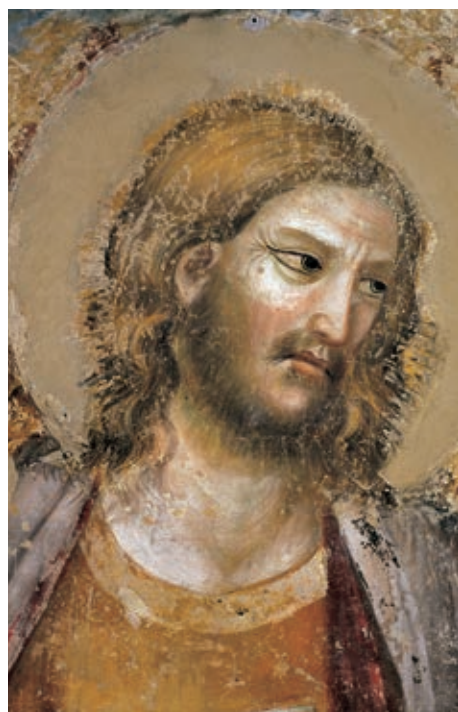
transformed and all their related furnishings were sold or sent away.

Many other orders never returned to the Riminese territory; among these orders were the Agostinians who actually had quite a few flourishing convents in the area. Their most important convent was founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the centre of **Rimini**. Its parish is dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist, commonly noted as Saint Augustine. It is one of the largest parishes in the city, and conserves within its bell tower and apse the best examples of the Riminese school of painting.

The Riminese school of painting was considered one of the most important artistic movements in Northern Italy during the 14<sup>th</sup> century; it was started by the miniaturist Neri and the painters Giuliano and Giovanni da Rimini. It centred on frescoes dedicated to the *Life of the Virgin Mother* and *The life of Saint John the Evangelist* and depicting *Christ, The Majesty of the Virgin Mother* and the scenes of the *Noli me tangere* (*Touch me not* - the words spoken to Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognizes him after his resurrection). The same painters, Giuliano and Giovanni da Rimini, also completed a *Crucifix* on a table placed by the right wall of the aisle and a grandiose scene of the *Universal Judgment* on a triumphal arch now in the City Museum. The church itself has undergone many transformations during the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and its current theme is Baroque. Beyond numerous altarpieces, other notable works of art are the stucco statues done by Carlo Sarti (c. 1750) and the beautiful ceiling done by Ferdinando Bibiena with paintings by Vittorio Bigari (1722), and, above all, on the first altar to the right, a beautiful 13<sup>th</sup> century wood statuette of *Jesus cast down from the cross* (which was originally supposed to be part of a Calvary) originally held in the ancient Santa Colomba cathedral.

Two of the Augustinian structures that were saved are the monastery and church of **Verucchio**, constructed in a stupendous panoramic position on the edge of the large rock below the town. The convent is now community property and is characterized by clean and simple architecture and has been recently restored to host an important museum of Verucchiese civilization; the adjoining church is pleasing to the eye for its Baroque stucco and for its golden framework holding beautiful 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings.

In Montefeltro, one must not also forget the destroyed





**Rimini, city museum.**  
**Ghirlandaio, altarpiece**  
**depicting the saints**  
**Vincenzo Ferrer,**  
**Sebastiano, Rocco**

**and members of the**  
**family of Pandolfo**  
**IV Malatesta (1494),**  
**formerly in the**  
**Dominican church.**

Augustinian convent at Poggiolo near **Talamello**, whose art originally contained a masterpiece of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Riminese school: a *Crucifix* which had long been attributed to Giotto but is instead by Giovanni da Rimini, conserved in the church of San Lorenzo di Talamello (now a parish church but was founded by Augustinians). Another church mentioning is that of San Cristoforo (also known as the church of Sant'Agostino) in **Pennabilli**, redone in 1521 and modified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It currently houses a miraculous 15<sup>th</sup> century image of the Madonna and Paolo Cipri's large organ constructed in 1587. However, the oldest Augustinian church of Montefeltro is possibly that of **Miratoio**, dated back to 1127, which houses relics from the blessed Rigo da Miratoio, an Augustinian hermit who died in 1347. Within this part of the territory, Dominican monks had a large presence as well all the way until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In **Rimini** they had a large convent with a church dedicated to Saint Cataldo. Unfortunately, it has been completely demolished, but one of its beautiful tables from the Ghirlandaio was saved and is now housed in the City Museum. It depicts the *Saints Vincent, Ferreri, Sebastian and Rocco venerated by Pandolfo IV Malatesta and his family* (1494).

The remnants of an imposing Dominican convent can be seen in the Marecchia valley atop a plain near **Pietracuta**; it was constructed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century thanks to donations from the Riminese Giovanni Sinibaldi, and was completed in 1664. Suppressed in 1812, it was then partly demolished and left to go in ruins. Its imposing façade is part of the cloister and the church completed in 1640 which originally housed a beautiful *Crucifix* painted on a table during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, now on show in the Museum of Sacred Art of San Leo.

The Gerolomine congregation as well has many churches and convents in all important towns. Two of these locations have survived, both of them dedicated to Saint Gerolamo: **Saludecio** and **Sant'Agata Feltria**. The latter conserves important works of art, among which is the altarpiece representing the *Madonna with the Infant Jesus and Saints Girolamo, Christina, Francis and Anthony of Padua*, c. 1640 done by Pietro da Cortona's school. It is considered the only truly "Baroque" painting throughout the whole area, thanks to the generosity of the marquis Fregoso of Sant'Agata in 1506: it sits atop the central altar enclosed in a splendid painted wooden and gilded frame.

Top  
**San Leo. The cloister  
of the Franciscan  
monastery of  
Sant'Igne  
(14<sup>th</sup> century).**

Bottom  
**Verucchio. The cloister  
of the Franciscan  
monastery of Villa  
Verucchio with the  
ancient "cypress  
of St. Francis"**

## Following the tracks of Saint Francis of Assisi

Deeply rooted in local society and more agreeable to the local mentality and devotion, Franciscanism was able to conserve - or rather, to reacquire - many of the convents that it possessed before the suppressive Napoleonic era along with those after the Italian Unification. The Franciscan message is profoundly tied to the area as St. Francis was there himself. According to tradition, the Saint travelled these locations in May of 1213, descending down the Marecchia valley after having received Monte La Verna's donation on behalf of Orlando de' Cattanei da Chiusi at San Leo.

At palazzo Nardini in **San Leo**, it is clear where that donation took place. According to tradition, before he reached San Leo, St. Francis slept on the outskirts of town where he was told to do so by in a vision in the flames of a mysterious fire. The convent of Saint Igne was built on that very spot in 1244; it still stands today, with its littler church dedicated to the Madonna and suggestive cloister dominated by a beautiful bell tower.

Continuing on his voyage towards Rimini, Saint Francis stopped in a forest at the foot of the hills of Verucchio next to a small isolated shrine dedicated to the Holy Cross. There, he performed many miracles: with his singing, he asked passers-by to not disturb his meditation and made a stopped spring of water start flowing. He also made a dying cypress tree grow healthy again. Soon after, his small isolated shrine and living area was transformed into a convent flanked by a church dedicated to the Holy Cross. It still stands today near **Villa Verucchio** and is the most ancient establishment of Bologna's Franciscana province. Its location, still today isolated and nestled among olive and cypress trees, is very suggestive; nearby healing spring waters flow to remind people of the miracles that occurred there. St. Francis' cypress tree lives within the cloister; it is a rare natural monument which botanists confirm is at least 700 years old. After the top of the tree fell on December 6, 1980, the tree was measured at about 25 meters high and with a circumference of 7.37 meters. Also nearby the convent is the place where tradition dictates stood St. Francis' cabin. A visitor to the convent and cloister must also



Top  
**Santarcangelo di Romagna, Historical archaeological museum. Iacobello di Bonomi, winged altar**

**showing the Madonna and saints, formerly in the church of San Francesco (1385).**  
Bottom  
**Rimini, pilgrimage**

**church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Ottaviano Nelli, The Annunciation (15<sup>th</sup> century).**

stop and see the church with its beautiful 14<sup>th</sup> century portal leading to a vast neoclassical interior and beautiful Renaissance inlays; on the leftmost wall amongst 19<sup>th</sup> century arches, there is a light-hued fresco populated with many figures from history: it represents the *Crucifixion*, and was painted during the early 14<sup>th</sup> century by a talented artist of the “Riminese school.”

In the Riminese territory between Verucchio, Rimini, Santarcangelo, Montefiore and Cattolica, Franciscan monks in all their orders (Conventuals, Friars Minor and Capuchins) still enjoy a large presence; naturally each of their convents is adjacent to an architecturally and decoratively interesting church. Among those which have been destroyed, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Church of the Conventuals of **Santarcangelo** is worth mentioning; it is a large building containing many works of art; its famous and important polyptych by the Venetian Iacobello di Bonomi, (1385) is now housed in the Museum of Santarcangelo; its finely carved Gothic frames wrap around 16 tables upon which lie the *Crucifixion and the Madonna with the Infant Jesus* among numerous icons of saints, all set upon a golden background.

Among the Franciscan remains in Rimini many are in commemoration of St. Anthony of Padua, who would go on to perform the miracle of the fish and the mule to confuse and convert the Patarini heretics. In remembrance of this last miracle in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a shrine to St. Anthony was built in the main square of the city, today's Piazza Tre Martiri. But undoubtedly the most important Franciscan church of Rimini was the famous Malatesta Temple, which as previously mentioned in 1809 became the city's cathedral standing close to an impressive monastery that was completely destroyed by war.

Within the territory of Montefeltro, the convents and churches of **Maciano** (in Pennabilli) and **Montemaggio** (in San Leo) have survived and are worth mentioning. The latter's church has a richly Baroque interior with a beautiful coffered ceiling (1707) and altars with beautiful gilded and carved wooden frames and fantastic 18<sup>th</sup> century frontispieces in multicoloured scagliola (a technique devised by ancient Italian monks using natural stone chips, bonding agents and pigments formed together to make a material indistinguishable from the original stone).





## Churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary

Many Franciscan churches are dedicated to the Virgin Mother. In fact, the oldest sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna in all the territory of Rimini is Franciscan; it is the church of the Madonna delle Grazie near Rimini, atop the hills of **Covignano**. As happens in many other cases, its origins are surrounded by miraculous happenings in legends. As the story says, in 1286 a shepherd whittled the visage of the Madonna in a tree trunk to pass the time while watching over his herd. The angels, seeing that the shepherd-cum-artist was inexperienced in his craft, decided to complete the Madonna's face for him. The work of art made its way by sea towards Venice, where it is now revered as the "Madonna di Rimini" in San Marziale church. At the site of the miracle among the hills of Covignano a chapel, and later a church were constructed (1391) called the Madonna delle Grazie. It was later expanded with the addition of another aisle in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The central altar holds the *Annunciation*, an altarpiece painted at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Umbrian Ottaviano Nelli (Up until very recently, the *Annunciation* was attributed to Giotto). Both the delle Grazie convent and sanctuary were heavily damaged during the war; but the reconstructed small cloister maintains the purity and the warmth of its simple Franciscan architecture. The leftmost aisle of the church - under by a beautiful 15<sup>th</sup> century Venetian-style faired ceiling - has a quiet beauty with its notable works of art and a series of votive tables. One surviving relic of the original construction is the 17<sup>th</sup> century door on the façade, with a Gothic portal flanked by fragments of frescoes depicting the *Annunciation*, most probably the work of Ottaviano Nelli.

The convent and the sanctuary were the work of Bernardino Gueritti; he was strikingly in tune with the important architectural styles from Forli inspired by Marco Palmezzano. Palmezzano's harmonious and ornate style played a part in the ideation of the two buildings. The first grand sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna in Rimini during the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the Madonna della Colonnella, built by the town in 1510 in honour of an image of the Madonna and the Infant Jesus painted in 1483. The image, painted in a monk's cell on Via Flaminia, became famous for a miracle in 1506 when it allegedly saving a pilgrim unjustly accused of murder from





**Montegrifolfo,  
chapel of San Rocco.  
Guido Cagnacci,  
altarpiece with the  
Madonna with child  
and saints (c. 1625).**

hanging. The building was largely damaged during the war, but was later restored almost completely. It is a real-life Renaissance masterpiece for its architectural harmony and the richness of its decorations in finely ornate pilasters and moulding with grotesque motives. The motives are by the Ravennate Bernardino Gueritti, who also built the building,

In the city centre of **Rimini** there is another important sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna called the Misericordia. Having been built following an episode in which the eyes of a Madonna icon moved (May 11, 1850), it is one of the most recent sanctuaries. The church, called Santa Clara (named after the Clarisse nuns), is eclectic in style and was envisioned by the Riminese architect Giovanni Benedettini. At the centre of its apse stands a miraculous image of the Virgin mother (a copy done by Giuseppe Soleri Brancaleoni of an equally miraculous image noted for its wonders half a century earlier - the original is still housed by the Confraternità in San Girolamo in the San Giovannino oratory)

For more than two centuries, the Franciscans were proprietors of the Madonna sanctuary at **Montefiore** - the most famous of all sanctuaries in the Conca valley. Its origins date back to the very early 15<sup>th</sup> century when the hermit Bonora Ondidei frescoed the walls of his cell in the forest with the image of the Madonna suckling the infant Jesus. In 1409 the hermit left his shrine to the Franciscans; only the wall covered in the sacred image has survived through time. Today, known as the *Madonna di Bonora*, the sanctuary has grown around this image. Solemnly crowned in 1926, it was restored and radically transformed within the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Conca valley, crossed by a road travelled by Pilgrims making their way to Loreto, houses many churches dedicated to the Madonna; more often than not, they are modest constructions but nevertheless they reveal the large number of sanctuaries dedicated to her in the area. Also at Montefiore, for example, is the 15<sup>th</sup> century church hospital on the outskirts of the populated area dedicated to the Madonna; it is called the Misericordia. A modest environment conserves fragments of frescoes covering all the aisles' and apse's walls depicting the *Universal Judgment*, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, *Inferno*, *Paradise* and *The Four Evangelicals*. The works were carried out between 1475 and 1480 by a painter from Urbino.

Top  
**Montegridolfo, pilgrimage church of the Madonna. Pompeo Morganti, altarpiece with the epiphany**

**of Mary (1549).**  
Bottom left  
**Pennabilli, Church of San Cristoforo (Sant'Agostino). The Madonna delle**

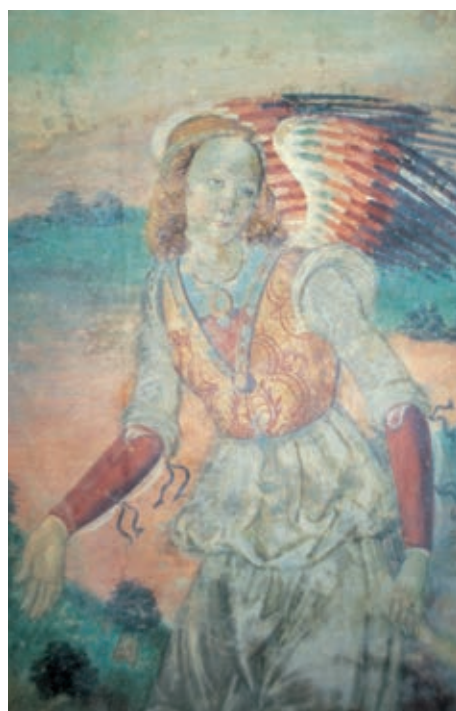
**Grazie, fresco (1432) in a marble aedicula of 1528.**  
Bottom right  
**Montefiore Conca, chapel of the Madonna**

**della Misericordia. Detail of a fresco depicting the joys of paradise (about 1485).**

An altarpiece containing a painting of the *Madonna of the Misericordia with the town patron saints* (1485) dominates the apse. Most likely done by the same artist that completed the frescoes, it was first attributed to Giovanni Santi and more recently to Bartolomeo di Gentile and then later Bernardino Dolci. After the war, it was placed upon the central altar of the parish church (San Paolo) which conserves its beautiful original stone portal and of its furnishings a large *Crucifix* painted into a carved table (the work of an unknown 14<sup>th</sup> century Riminese painter).

Along the southern hills of the Riminese territory and to the right of the Conca valley, in plain view of Foglia and the border with Le Marche, **Montegridolfo** offers many points of interest with regards to the cult of the Virgin Mother. Even on the outskirts of town one may find something interesting: here, there is a small church which, due to its location and its dedication (to Saint Rocco), must have been built for pilgrim passers-by. During the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century a painter from Le Marche frescoed *Madonna with the Infant Jesus among Saints Rocco and Sebastian* in its apse. A century later, the faithful wished to completely redo the image. As a consequence the image was frescoed on the buildings other apse but this time it was larger and done in a slightly newer style influenced by 16<sup>th</sup> century classicism. Done by a Romagnolo painter, the work was repeated a third time a century later when the image was influenced this time by 17<sup>th</sup> century devotion of Guido Cagnacci, who painted the scene on linen and added the image of another saint (Saint Giacinto) and modified the position of the personages in the painting. With a delicate removal process the frescoes have been recently recovered and restored: now all three of the works of art are clearly displayed within the church. Beyond showcasing themselves in all of their harmonious and beautiful glory, they prompt reflection on the persistence of faith, the function of imagery and the subtle variations in iconography with relation to devotion and changing styles and tastes.

At **Trebbio** in Montegridolfo, there is a sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna called the Beata Vergine delle Grazie (*the Blessed Virgin of the Graces*). Its origins are tied to the apparition of the Madonna to two farmers- Lucantonio di Filippo on June 25, 1548 and Antonia Ondidei on July 7 of that same year. A few months later Pope Paul III authorized







**Talamello, tomb.  
Interior with frescos  
by Antonio Alberti  
(1437).**

the construction of a chapel, which would later be extended thanks to the help of its faithful worshipers. Few traces remain of its original primitive construction, but the central altar still holds Pompeo Morganti's *L'apparizione della Madonna alla sessantenne Antonia* (*Madonna appears to the 70 year old Antonia*); within the background of the picture (depicting Montegridolfo and the area's rural landscape) the miraculous story of Lucantonio's meeting with who he described as "the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen, who was also of great stature."

The Marecchia valley and Montefeltro are both rife with churches dedicated to the Virgin Mother. The sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie at **Pennabilli** in the Agostinian San Cristoforo church is tied to two apparitions of the Madonna in 1517 and 1522 at the defence of the town from Tuscan armies. In the building reconstructed in 1526, people pray to a 15<sup>th</sup> century icon of the Madonna considered miraculous for the first time on the third Friday of March, 1489 when it shed tears. Originally it was a modest chapel whose altar was consecrated in 1432; after the two aforementioned miraculous apparitions it was included in the extended portion of the building and enclosed in a beautiful gold-painted stand of Renaissance stone under a trellis of engraved golden wood. At **Maciano** nearby Pennabilli another apparition of the Madonna appeared to a woman named Giovanna da San Leo in 1523. Consequently a renaissance-style church was erected dedicated to the Madonna dell'Oliva (now being restored) and given to Observant Franciscans who would erect a convent and keep it in use, religious suppression notwithstanding, until the greater half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Among the other numerous churches dedicated to Maria in Montefeltro, it is worth mentioning the frescoed Cell of the Cemetery in **Talamello** (1437) done by the Antonio Alberti from Ferrara. It is most likely a cell-shrine built according to the wishes of Giovanni Seclani, Franciscan monk and bishop of Montefeltro. Seclani had a portrait of himself kneeling next to the *Madonna and the Infant Jesus* in a scene of the *Annunciation*. The painting's layout is, in fact, quite similar to the Madonna delle Grazie at Pennabilli. The building's lateral lunettes are adorned with images of saints and scenes of the *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Presentation of Jesus at the Temple*, fascinating for their vividness and the richness of their picturesque 'modern' dress. The cross-vaulted ceiling contains paintings

Top  
**Pennabilli, church  
of San Cristoforo  
(Sant'Agostino).  
Interior.**

Bottom  
**Maiolo, church of the  
Madonna d'Antico.  
Interior with the apsis  
of 1520.**

**In the centre a  
ceramic figure of the  
Madonna with  
child by Andrea  
o Luca della Robbia.**

of the *Evangelists* and the *Doctors of the Church*. The tiny chapel is a rare and splendid example of a late-Gothic environment that has miraculously conserved its original decoration.

Unfortunately the church of Santa Maria di Antico has lost all of its original furnishings. Founded at the border of Marecchiese in the town of **Maiolo** by counts Oliva di Piagnano around the mid-1400s, it still conserves its original 15<sup>th</sup> century portal and its stone presbytery (1520). Inside the presbytery is housed the tender *Madonna con il Bambino* (*Madonna and the Infant*) in glazed terracotta by Andrea della Robbia (or by Luca, the count's son), dated the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Small cathedrals**

The Baroque period left many of its traces within both architecture and religious art. Within the 1600s, - both for sincere devotion and adherence to contra-reform dictates - almost all altarpieces were refurbished. During the 1700s many cult buildings were either redone or transformed into grandiose structures with a keen eye for decorative and elegant elements.

Sacred painting from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries passes from the strong naturalistic elements of Cagnacci and Centino (active in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century within the city of Rimini and its territory) towards the classicism and devout compositions of Guercino and the Bolognese school, along with the archaizing Baroque academies of Giovan Battista Costa (Riminese painter working until 1767). This particular era of painting is rich in masterpieces imported from Rome, Venice and Urbino. The architecture of the day avoided the more fantastical excesses of the Baroque period and concentrated on a more rational Romano-Bolognese style during later 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In that century, the most important churches of the city and its territory were renovated. Among others, the church of the Jesuits in **Rimini** was reconstructed and heavily modified and given new altarpieces and stuccoes (the most notable of which were those made by the Agostinians (Saint John the Evangelist), the Carmelites (Saint John the Baptist) and the Servites (Saint Mary of the Servants). It was





**Rimini, church  
"dei Servi". Interior,  
architect was  
Gaetano Stegani,**

**the stucco works  
were executed by  
Antonio Trentanove  
(1766-1779).**

reconstructed based on Bolognese architect Gaetano Stegani's design from 1774 through 1779 and embellished by stupendous rococo stuccoes by Antonio Trentanove, gilded in 1887. It houses paintings by Francesco Albani (1621), Lucio Massari (1620), Gaetano Gandolfi (1784) and Giovan Battista Costa (1740).

Travelling the territory one may find modest yet refined preachers along with parishes that are both extremely poor but rich in stuccoes and paintings. The oratory at **San Giovanni in Marignano**, the church parishes of **Mondaino** and **San Vito**, the church of the nuns at **Santarcangelo** and the Suffragio at **Verucchio**, for example, are lovely monuments of great artistic interest both for their architecture and for the art they house. To list them all would be beyond the possible scope of this booklet.

Here we must mention that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, dioceses wanted to evaluate and rationalize peoples' expressions of belief along with the lifestyles of the clergy and so they unified and reduced the number of sacred buildings by creating "collegiate: churches. At **Savignano** the collegiate church was built in 1732, at **Santarcangelo** in 1744, at **Verucchio** in 1796 (but due to a series of delays and hesitations, built only from 1865 to 1874), and at **Sant'Agata Feltria** in 1709. These churches were conceived as quasi-cathedrals, not only because of the constant presence and use of choruses, but due to their large size and their noble architecture.

The collegiate church of **Santarcangelo** is one of the most large and important 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings within the whole territory of Rimini. Constructed between 1744 and 1758 by Giovan Francesco Buonamici who was a governmental architect and creator of the cathedral of Ravenna, the building has a grandiose interior which harks back to sober Roman and Bolognese forms. Within the ample apse there is a beautiful altarpiece of the town's *Protector Saints* by Giovan Gioseffo Dal Sola; within the discrete shade of its lateral chapels and upon the altars of various confraternities with 18<sup>th</sup> century frontispieces in polychrome *scagliola*. The church also houses many altarpieces of notable beauty (one of which located on the second altar to the left was carried out by the confraternity of wood workers and locksmiths by Guido Cagnacci in 1635 depicting *Saint Joseph, Jesus and Saint Eligius*). Within the larger chapel



Top  
**Santarcangelo di Romagna, collegiate church. Guido Cagnacci, an altarpiece depicting**

**Jesus and the saints Giuseppe and Eligio (1635), detail view. Bottom left Verucchio, collegiate church. Interior,**

**designed by Antonio Tondini (1865-1874). Bottom right Verucchio, collegiate church. Giovan Francesco Nagli called**

**Centino, altarpiece with St. Martin and the beggar (c. 1650).**

to the right there is a delicate *Crucifix* on a table done by a Riminese painter (possibly Pietro da Rimini) during the later 14<sup>th</sup> century originally from the ancient parish city but probably painted for the destroyed Chiesa dei Francescani.

More refined and elegant, but still imposing and solemn, is the collegiate church of Verucchio, constructed later on due to a series of unforeseen circumstances (the Napoleonic occupation and the activities carried out during the Italian risorgimento and its aftermath - including difficulties in obtaining necessary materials for construction). The project for the church was designed by the Verucchiese Antonio Tondino, an erudite and pleasant artist with eclectic tastes and an amateur interest in architecture. Tondini, however, did not have the necessary permits, so the project was green lighted in 1863 by the Riminese Giovanni Morolli.

The internal structure harks back to Baroque and Renaissance motifs; it was originally all white and blue with gilded decorations. Thus, it appeared much more neoclassical than it does today; modern repainting has seemed to alter the interior spacing which used to be exalted by cold reflexes of light on coloured plaster and sharp mouldings. Within the collegiate church there are numerous altar pieces and furnishings and fittings from other churches on Verucchio; among which the notable *San Martino che dà il mantello al povero* (*Saint Martin gives his cloak to the poor*), by Giovan Francesco Nagli, also known as il Centino (c. 1650).

However, the real masterpieces in this church are two *Crucifixes* painted on silhouetted tables: the first, within the presbytery, was done by an unknown Riminese artist during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (he is known as the “Maestro of Verucchio”); the second is a Venetian work by Catarino (woodwork) and Nicolò di Pietro (painting). Catarino and Nicolò’s dated (1404) inscription appears at the base of the cross. The Collegiata di Verucchio seems to be loosely inspired by the “cathedral” of the mid Marecchia valley.

The Conca valley also has a church that can be considered its “cathedral.” The parish of **Saludecio** dedicated to Saint Blaise was built between 1794 and 1802, during very difficult years rife with economic and political crises. Its courageous benefactor was local parish priest don Antonio Fronzoni, who enthusiastically petitioned for the official

Top  
**Saludecio, church  
of San Biagio.  
Interior, designed  
by Giuseppe Achilli  
(1794-1802).**

Bottom  
**Saludecio, Museum  
of the Beato Amato  
and of Saludecio in the  
Church of San Biagio.  
Guido Cagnacci,**

**detail of his depiction  
of the procession  
of the Holy of Holies  
(1628).**

beatification (1776) of Amato Ronconi (venerated since the 14<sup>th</sup> century as the town's protector). The church, proclaimed "sanctuary" in 1930, enjoys elegant and harmonious forms, the fruit of an intelligent re-elaboration and rationalization of centralized Baroque plans.

The church's creator was Giuseppe Achilli. In idealizing the parish of **Saludecio** he left a legacy of what is possibly the most beautiful example of late 18<sup>th</sup> century architecture in all the territory of Rimini. The sober stuccoes by Antonio Trentanove enrich the building's architectural structure. Its paintings, executed by practised 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Romagnolo and Marchigiano artists depict beautiful themes. Among them are Guido Cagnacci's *Saint Sixtus, Pope* and *The Procession of the Holy Sacrament* (1628). In some of the vestry's adjoining rooms there is an improvised museum called the "Museo di Saludecio e del Beato Amato" which houses paintings, sacred vestments, furnishings and fittings mostly originating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries from churches within the area which were suppressed until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It also houses various testimonies with regards to the cult of the blessed Amato.

In conclusion, we must also make note of **Sant'Agata Feltria** collegiate church, redone in 1776 after the designs of the Riminese Giuliano Cupioli in a notably harmonious Baroque style. It has one middle aisle with lateral chapels, almost all of which are embellished by precious carved and gilded 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century linear framework among which one may find many notable works of art. Some of these include the dramatic *Crocifisso ligneo* (*Wooden Crucifix*) of the 15<sup>th</sup> century German school and an altarpiece with the *Madonna con il Bambino e Sant'Antonio da Padova* (*Madonna and the Infant with Saint Anthony of Padua*) by Giovan Francesco Nagli aka il Centino (1650).

## Local saints

This brief review was put forth as an invitation to discover the territory of Rimini and to follow the tracks of a religion that has left notable traces of its presence within the entire territory. Alessio Monaldi (from **Riccione**), Simone Balacchi (from **Santarcangelo**), Cipriano Mosconi (from **Saludecio**), Enrico Ungaro (from **Passano di Coriano**), the







Augustinian Rigo from Miratoio and the Franciscan Matteo from **Bascio**, founder of the Capuchin order.

Altars and cathedrals small and large alike adorn parish churches, housing relics relevant to saints. More often than not, their flock is local and limited with regards to territorial extension. Saints' lives are surrounded by legends and popular narratives rich in miracles which intertwine faith, poetry and fantasy. This is true for both the city's and dioceses' saints Arduino and Chiara from Rimini and for more ancient patron saints like Innocenza, Gaudenzo, Giuliano and Leone.

The modern era has well has brought forth men and women leading exemplary lives whose testimonies of sanctity are well-noted and documented. Among the modern blessed are brother Pio Campidelli, sister Elisabetta Renzi, sister Bruna Pellesi and engineer Alberto Marvelli. The venerable laywoman Carla Ronci, Sandra Sabbatini and the servants of God sister Angela Molari and Faustina Zavagli are all undergoing beatification at present time.

## **Art and remembrance**

The works spoken about in this review are not here arbitrarily: they permit the visitor to coherently put together the building blocks of this territory's history, art, culture and devotion. Naturally, within the scope of these works of art, each person will have his or her own preferences. In any case, to put together an historical discourse on elements which are, in and of themselves, quite fragmented, one must visit the "Museo della Città" in Rimini, the "Museo di Saludecio e del Beato Amato" at Saludecio, the "Museo d'Arte sacra" at San Leo, and the "Museo Diocesano" at Pennabilli which all almost entirely contain works religious works originating from the local area.

This brief review was put forth as an invitation to discover the territory of Rimini and to follow the tracks of a religion that has left notable traces of its presence within the entire territory.

In closing, we would like to suggest two or three topics that may be of interest for those who would like to learn more about art. The first is without about medieval art, with all the Romanesque architecture

present in Montefeltro and with Riminese painting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century: the oldest architectural works are found in the Marecchia valley, above all at San Leo and Pennabilli, while paintings significant to the Riminese School of the 14<sup>th</sup> century may be found, outside Rimini, at Santarcangelo, Villa Verucchio, Verucchio and Talamello in the Marecchia valley, and at Montefiore and Misano in the Conca valley.

The other subject of interest is Riminese painting during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whose originality played a noted role within the Italian naturalism movement thanks to the activities of Guido Cagnacci and Giovan Francesco Nagli, aka il Centino. Their works can be found at Saludecio and Montegridolfo, Montefiore, Santarcangelo, San Vito, Verucchio, Pennabilli, Sant'Agata Feltria and, naturally, Rimini.

These subjects are also relevant to research of the Renaissance with a focus on its major city players like Venice, Florence, Urbino or Rome or those who wish to trace importers of and important centres for Baroque art such as Rome and Bologna.

Whether it be in its cities or the hinterland, by the sea or by the hills, the churches of the territory of Rimini are, according to Andrea Emiliani veritable large "accumulations of the history of work and of work itself, dotted with individual and collective piety, signs of devotion and high-brow aesthetic norms." He also states that such structures underline the "highest cultural and artistic dignity" that distinguishes cult edifices so dense in memories and, as such, "incorporated into the vital insight and depth of what is technically a territory but what we describe as cities and countryside; an exquisitely Italian dichotomy, an opposition of power and function".

The Province of Rimini wishes to keep this in mind by having an eye to valuing, conserving and cherishing cultural and historical identities along with strengthening ties with local Regional Boards and Dioceses. For the Holy Year 2000, the Province has financed a series of art restorations for works contained in its churches, specifically centred upon those in smaller towns.



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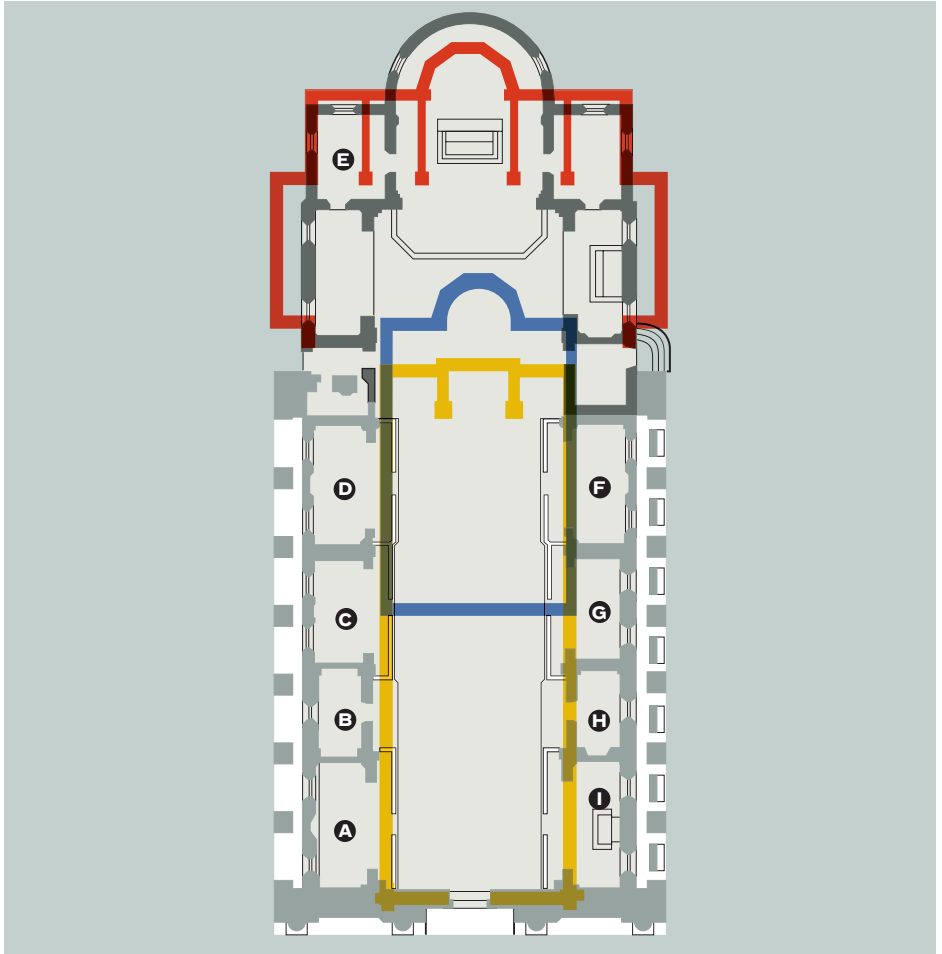
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# Site plan of the Malatesta Temple in Rimini



**● The Church in the eleventh century**  
 "Our Lady at the Crossroads",  
 Benedictine (order of Pomposa) church

**● The Church in the thirteenth century**  
 Built by the Franciscans and dedicated  
 to St Francis

**● The Church in the fifteenth century**  
 Malatesta alteration and enlargement

**● The Church in the sixteenth century**  
 Alterations to the apse

**● The Church in the eighteenth century**  
 Further and final alterations to the apse

**Ⓐ** Chapel of the Martyrs, or of Our Lady of the Waters

**Ⓑ** Chapel of the Fallen

**Ⓒ** Chapel of St Gaudentius, or Children's Games Chapel

**Ⓓ** Chapel of St Joseph, or of the Muses  
 and the Liberal Arts

**Ⓔ** Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament

**Ⓕ** Chapel of the Planets

**Ⓖ** Chapel of St Michael Archangel, or of Isotta

**Ⓗ** Cell of the Relics

**Ⓘ** Chapel of St Sigismund