

# A stroll in ancient Cori



## Foreword

This little guide to the ancient part of Cori is meant to contribute simple and clear information to any visitor about the city's many attractions. Consequently, I have chosen to divide old Cori into four or five easily manageable walks, each of which passes important historical sites, monuments and buildings. Thus, one can also choose to combine multiple routes or just a simple route, one at a time. Since the vast majority of illustrations and descriptions are numbered, you will easily be able to locate each scene on the route. Finally, you can, of course, choose to walk the length and breadth, as the important thing is the interesting and exciting experience you will have by moving around in this very exciting part of the city.

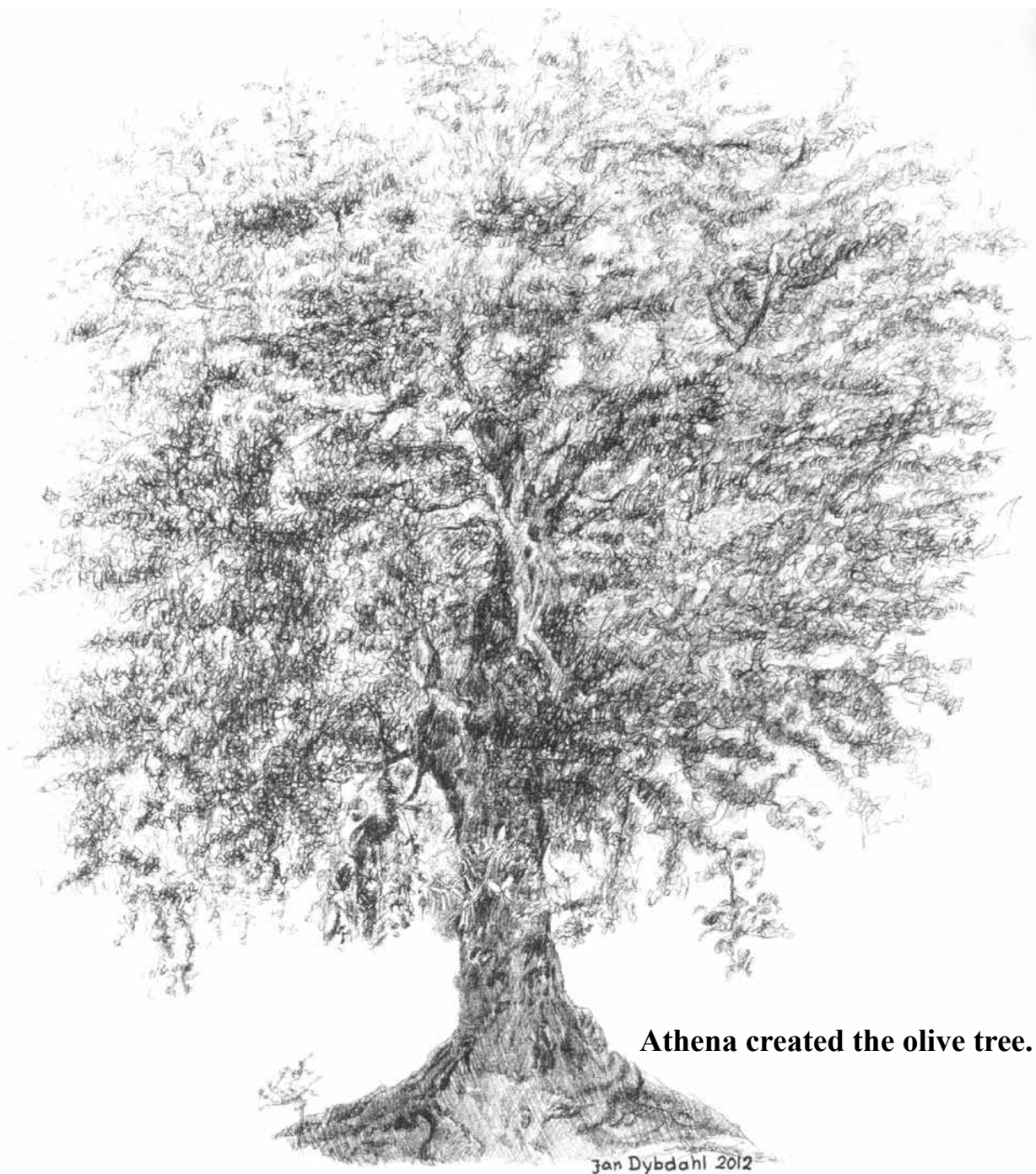
The Danish text is drawn up on the basis of a local Italian publisher, and then translated into Italian by **Diletta Ferri** and into English by **Billie Fraser** in collaboration with the undersigned.

I especially thank **Ivana Ferri** for information and guidance about old Cori, **Diletta Ferri** for help with the organization and practical review of routes and **Mette Brandt** for professional critique of illustrations and extended patience during the process.

Should there be any error the responsibility is mine.

Have a good stroll and enjoy.

Jan Dybdahl - [www.cori-vista.com](http://www.cori-vista.com)



**Athena created the olive tree.**

## Legends and historical track

According to ancient various legends, it was said that the origin of the Latins were created by mixing a native Italic peoples and Trojans, as the Aeneas management had established themselves in Lazio (Latium), where they supported themselves by farming and animal husbandry while they lived together in fortified cities.

Cora (originally) stands out by claiming no less than three incompatible myths about its founding, which nevertheless places it among the oldest cities in Lazio. Pliny the Elder and Solino (respectively the first and third century AD) suggests that Dardanus may have founded the city before going eastward, where one of his descendants may have founded Troy (Aeneid 29-19 BC by Virgil). Moreover, Cora is mentioned as one of the cities founded by the royal family in the Latin capital of Alba Longa, while Servius (late fourth century AD) attributed the foundation to Corace of Argo.

In historical sources the town is mentioned with the name Cora. It is regarded here as one of the oldest among 'Prisci Latini' (Association of sovereign Latin city-states) and is first mentioned in the year 642 BC, when Rome's legend-king Tullius Hostilius, after the destruction of Alba Longa, which had existed for 400 years, attempted to bring the Latin cities into submission, which was immediately answered with war.

Gradually Cora, possibly because it was involved in the war between Rome and its neighboring city Pomezia during the 'Tarquinius Superbus' (534-509 BC) control, was forced to provide labor for

the construction of the Roman temple of Jupiter ('Giove Optimo Maximo'). During the Latin War Cora had been under the control of the east-Italic Volscers.

For the Romans, Cora became an allied city. Also at its secession from the 'Lega Latina' (338 BC), the city preserved its legal independence as a sovereign state with its own coinage, public offices and courts. Over the last two centuries of the Roman Republic (second to first century BC) Cora had experienced a period of renewed urban planning that created reinforcement of the defense system and restoration of the most important religious buildings. (The Hercules Temple from 150 BC and the Dioscuri Temple: Castor and Pollux from the first decade of the first century BC.), As well, an assembly of the Roman states resulted in crucial rural municipal free passage.

With its rich archaeological findings, the city's flowering and importance in southern Lazio was emphasized.. Cora rises to 403 meters (1228 feet) above sea level and in the hillsides along the Monti Lepini are preserved remnants of heavy fortifications; work in polygonal techniques from the first method, a method which also roughly follows the structure of the ridge (morphology) and this was used from the last part of the sixth century BC. Then, there was a difficult time of renewal in the Middle Republican period. In the epoch of Sulla, the walls were reinforced with many semi-circular towers in the so-called 'opus incertum' technique. Its purpose was to create a chain of strength in the weaker-based Eastern part of the wall.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD., Cora gradually lost importance and was so severely attacked by barbarians, that the city's structure suffered serious damage. However, it survived, and gradually during the Middle Ages was released from its feudal yoke and again flourished in the 1200s. The medieval city continued to live and build above the remains of the original buildings, and in this way several pagan temples were replaced by Christian church buildings. The original city center stepped forward with typical medieval tower houses with exterior stairs above the covered arcades, so-called 'profferlo', as well as with streets of covered colonnades. Thanks to the close ties with Rome, Cora retained its own statutes and some acquired rights. However, the city was invaded and plundered twice by the German-Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa's troops during the twelfth century (1158 and 1167) and also by troops from the Balkans Ladislas Durazzo in the fifteenth century. With the aim of strengthening its defense Cora joined in an alliance with Velletri (another free city in Lazio), but together they became excommunicated because of common looting of Albano. Cora's autonomy remained intact until Pope Martin V (1417-31) decreed centralization of policy in which all free cities in Lazio were actually brought under the papal authority. This lasted until the nineteenth century when Cori was released from Rome's supremacy in 1847



## Today's Cori

The old part of Cori today has a typical medieval structure with a tightly fused system of squares, corridors, alleys, stairways and narrow winding streets that climb up the steep hills on the Pontine side of the Lepini mountain to the Hercules Temple, about four hundred meters above sea level. From here one can glimpse the Tyrrhenian Sea, 35 kilometers to the west, and get a further idea of the city's centuries-old, crowded red-tiled roofs and surrounding vineyards and olive groves. Likewise Cori is surrounded by groves of beech, chestnut, holly, wild rowan, hazel, lemon and pear trees, all of which support abundant wildlife.

Special buildings include the Roman temples, which once were the spiritual centers of the entire religious and political power:

- The Castor and Pollux Temple in Corinthian style from the first decade of the first century BC which still stands in the southeastern area of the sloping ancient terrace, built in the polygonal method from

the end of the sixth century BC.

- The Hercules Temple in late Doric style from the middle of the second century BC on the city's acropolis

Quite a few beautiful church buildings from the medieval and renaissance eras are definitely worth a visit, such as the sanctuary of Madonna del Soccorso, located near by, high above the city.

In addition, there is the church of Santa Maria della Pietà, a Romanesque building from the second half of the thirteenth century, extensively rebuilt in the beginning of the seventeenth century. It rises on top of the remains of an ancient temple, probably dedicated to the Goddess of Luck (Lady Luck?). In its interior the church houses a large, precious Easter candelabrum from the twelfth century.

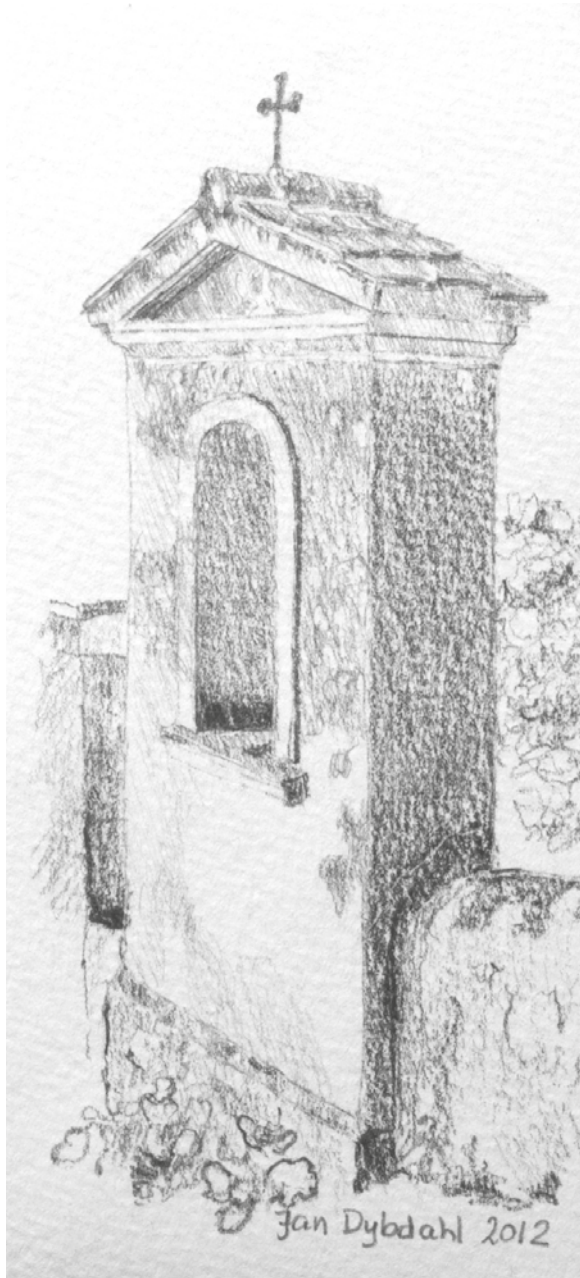
Likewise, the church of S.Oliva is a building dating from the twelfth century, built on top of a Roman temple dedicated to an unknown deity. It was probably changed to a Christian shrine by the end of

the second century AD. In the fifteenth century, it was named after the crucifix (Capella del Crocifisso). There was also added a meeting place for the Augustinian brotherhood constructed at the end of the fifteenth century. This was embellished with a magnificent monastery with an overhead colonnade, where there are preserved 27 fine ornamented figurative marble capitals with allegorical conceptions. The building has been recently restored and now houses the town and country museum in Cori. (Il Museo della Città e del Territorio di Cori), which is also worth a visit.

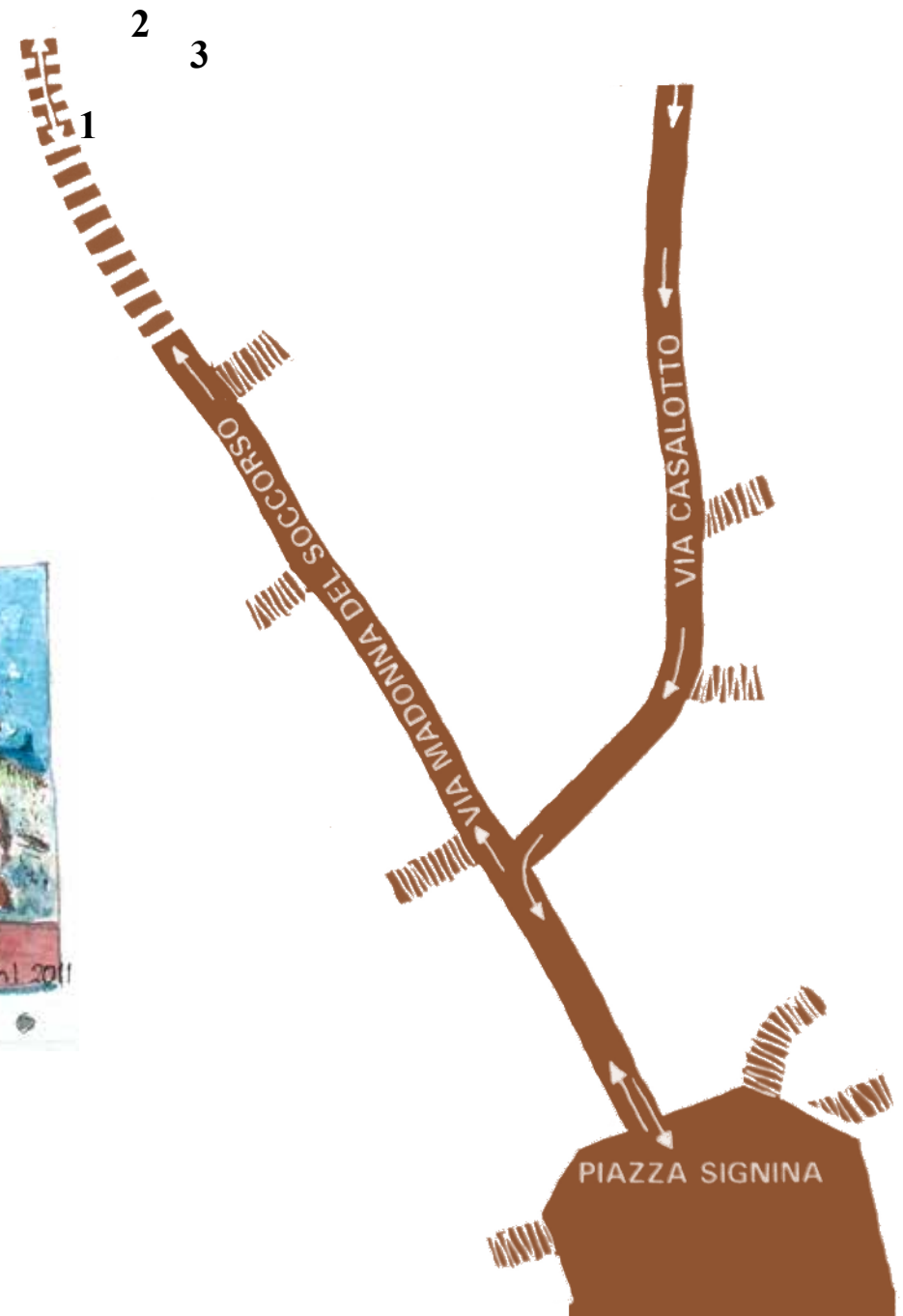
You should also allow yourself the pleasure of a visit to the oratory SS Annunziata which has exceptionally beautiful frescoes from the first part of the fifteenth century. In addition, a trip to this Renaissance church, associated with the monastery of San Francesco among others, manifests a particularly beautiful gilded coffered ceiling from the seventeenth century.



# Giro 1.



You will enjoy a magnificent view of Cori seen from the east, when you walk from Piazza Signina up the Via Santuario della Madonna del Soccorso, passing the many places of worship along the 220 steps of the path of penance, to the church and monastery of the same name.







1. Between Stations of the Cross X and XI, is a small humble building with remains of ornaments in the ceiling. The building is believed to be the first small chapel, which was built early after May 1521\*

## 2. Santuario della Madonna del Soccorso

At this place the Virgin Mary, according to tradition, revealed herself. The Sanctuary Madonna del Soccorso is dedicated to the miraculous event that ostensibly took place in May 1521. A three-year-old girl Oliva, during a terrible storm, had disappeared, and after eight days in the wild, was found safe and sound by a woman back at the place where the church is today, and so was reunited with her family.

Soon after the event a small chapel\* was built at the site, sanctifying the place, and in 1537 they built a church

named 'Our Lady of the Broom'. They later changed the name to 'Madonna del Soccorso' (the helping/rescuing woman). From the decorating of the first small chapel, there remains a painting, done in 'the Florentine school', which is still well preserved. It shows the baby Jesus held by the virgin, raising his own small arms as he gives his blessing to this chapel.

3. From the square in front of the church Madonna del Soccorso you can, especially with binoculars, enjoy a good view of the city and discern the Sulla - tower in Piazza Signina and the campanile belonging to the former church SS Pietro e Paolo, bombed in 1943 and located close to the Hercules Temple.

To return to the starting point Piazza Signina, you can choose either to walk down the same road from where you arrived, or continue further along the winding road through Casalotto, overlooking a beautiful landscape covered with olive trees; ( First go up a small staircase to the left of the church's facade and then right along with church and monastery. After a few hundred meters you will find signs showing directions down towards Cori Alto.)





# Giro 2.

## Cori Monte



Piazza Signina



**5. San Tommaso**  
Outdoors is the sculpture of the saint. Indoors is his birthplace and the church

**6. Via S. Tommaso** continues through an **overhead crossing** over Via della Peschiera.

**4. The Sulla - tower in Piazza Signina**







## 7. Monte Pio

It is said that the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, an avid swimmer and lover of water, on occasion did use the fountain that stands in Piazza Monte Pio as a bathtub.



Via de Rossi 33



## 8. Via de Rossi

The entrance in Via de Rossi 33 is made in Etruscan style.





## 9. Tempio d'Ercole

This national monument from the middle of the second half of the first century BC is commonly attributed to the cult of Hercules. It rises as one of Cori's most significant symbols, wonderfully elegant over the acropolis. From here you have a wide view over the Pontine plains. The temple is in late-Doric style and is a significant example of Hellenistic architecture in Lazio. It rests on two terraces, the first of which,, is from the first half of the fourth century BC., carried out in the polygonal work, while the second and later part, was placed at a lower level, and was carried out simultaneously with the temple in its final stage of construction.

The temple has been studied and admired by scholars, architects and famous artists since the Renaissance, including Antonio da Sangallo the younger, and probably also Rafael early in the 1500s, and by Giovanni Battista Piranesi and L.Rossini in the middle of the 1700s.

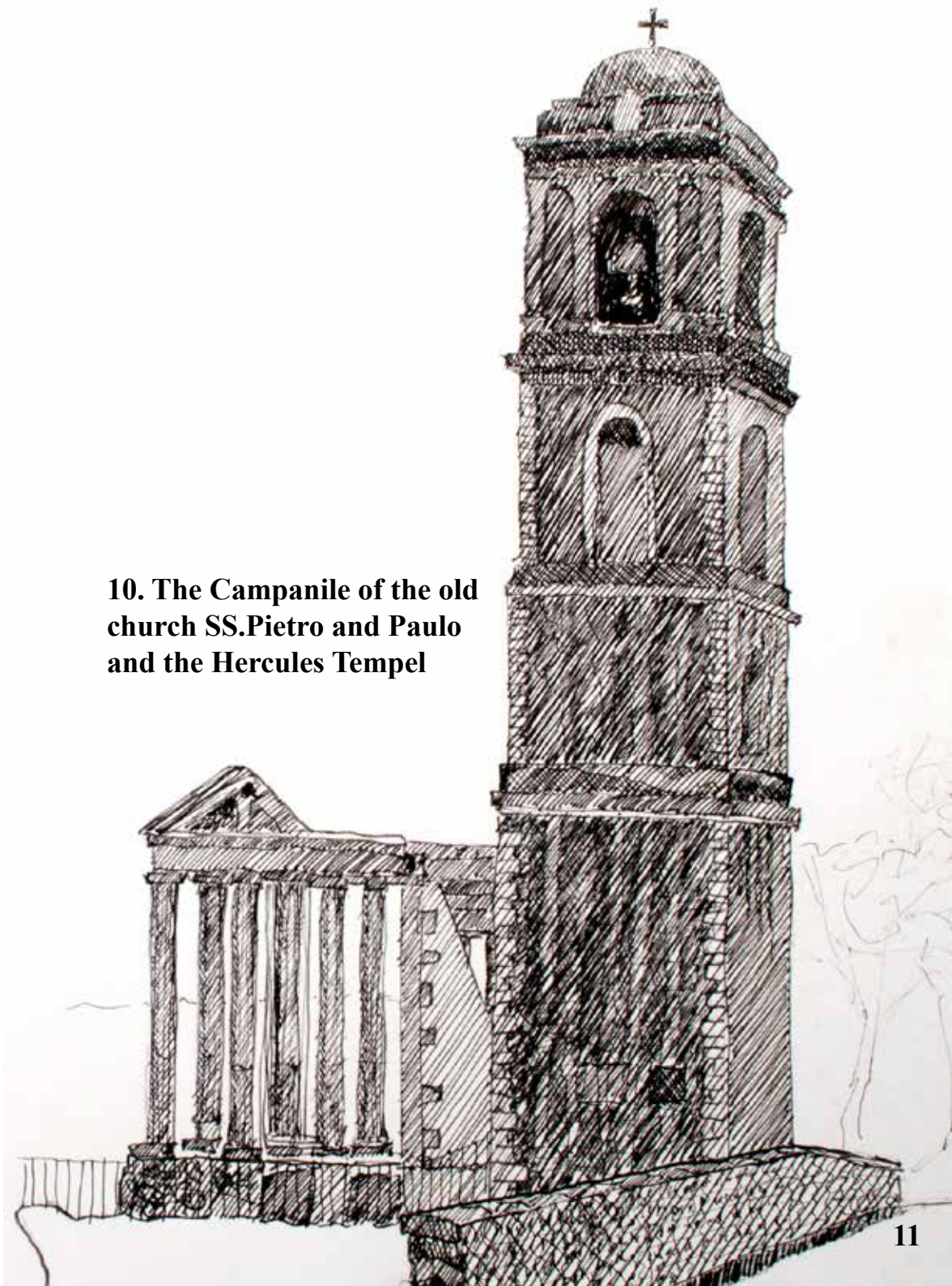
On the 30th of January 1944, large areas of Cori were devastatingly and pointlessly bombed during Sunday morning Mass, with the tragic result that very many people perished. While the church SS Pietro and Paolo and quite a lot of buildings around the Hercules Temple were left as rubble, curiously the temple building and the church bell tower remained standing almost undamaged. As a result, you can still admire the eight elegant pillars, architraves and foundation, while at the architrave over the entrance of the cell one can still read the names of the two officers (duumviri M. Manlius and L.Turpilius) who, nearly 2200 years ago, ordained construction and approved it. In Cori's museum you can, among many other things, see a reconstructed model of the Hercules Temple in scale 1:75.





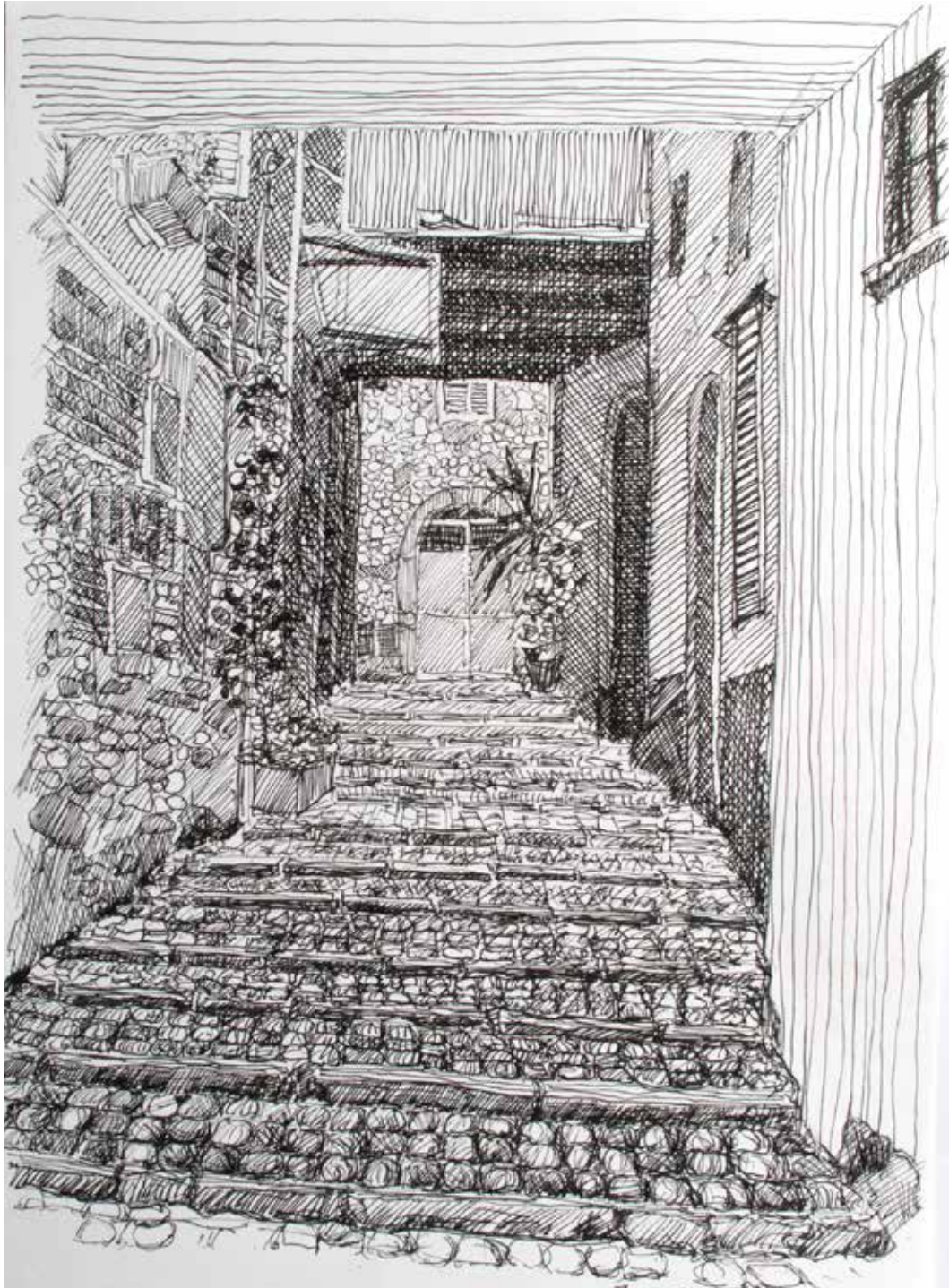


**10. The Campanile of the old church SS.Pietro and Paulo and the Hercules Tempel**





## 11. Via Leonardo da Vinci



## 12. Via SS Trinita/ Via Oratorio, campanile



Urna cineraria



## Cori Valle (left side)



### 13. Porta Ninfina /Ponte della Catena

The statutes of Cori in the sixteenth century showed specifically that residents near the three gates: “Ninfina, Romana and Segnina” were particularly committed to ensure maintenance of gates and walls, and instructed they should bear the cost of the trusted working men who controlled the fortifications and arranged for necessary repairs. Anyone who was found guilty of damage was punished with sanctions such as fines. The special ‘Portari’ were responsible for opening and closing the city’s three ports.

Only one of the three bridges, Ponte della Catena (Chain Bridge), which spans the mountain gorge at Porta Ninfina, effectively leading the way for centuries to Norma and Ninfa and other cities, has been preserved. It is located just outside Porta Ninfina, thus creating a connection with the trunk road network in the direction of Norma and Ninfa.

The Chain Bridge is from the fourth and third centuries BC and is one of the oldest original bridges throughout Lazio. It was built directly on the limestone walls of polygonal design and has a semi-circular arch made with customized ashlar and tuff in three rows. Until recently, a large part of the traffic in and out of Cori travelled directly on the vaulted arch of the bridge. To preserve this monument from the continuous vibration of the ongoing traffic, there has been built a new self-supporting bridge a few centimeters above the original. If you go over the bridge to reach Cori Monte,



and follow the road ‘via Sotto le Mura’, you will probably notice the deep ravine/gorge in connection with the remains of the wall circumference, which together bear witness to the formidable defense of the city against possible attack from the southwest.





Jan Dybdahl 2011



#### 14. Via del Porticato ('Sipportica')

Close to Porta Ninfina is the entrance to a remarkable, tunnel-like street, covered with a roof. 'Via del Porticato' based on the local coresi dialect, is called 'Sipportica', which means a covered street or colonnade. 'Via del Porticato' follows the trail of the ancient trench above the archaic walls, and has several street passages of varying sizes, of which one leads to the 'Porta Ninfina' and from there continues 'via Sotto le Mura' and 'Ponte della Catena'. Along the way, several gates lead to residential properties with courtyards. In the twelfth and thirteenth century, the street was covered over by new residential buildings and towers made of so-called 'tufelli'-brickwork and later - during the seventeenth century, new and larger residential buildings were added.





15. Via dell'Unità.



16. Via del Pozzo.

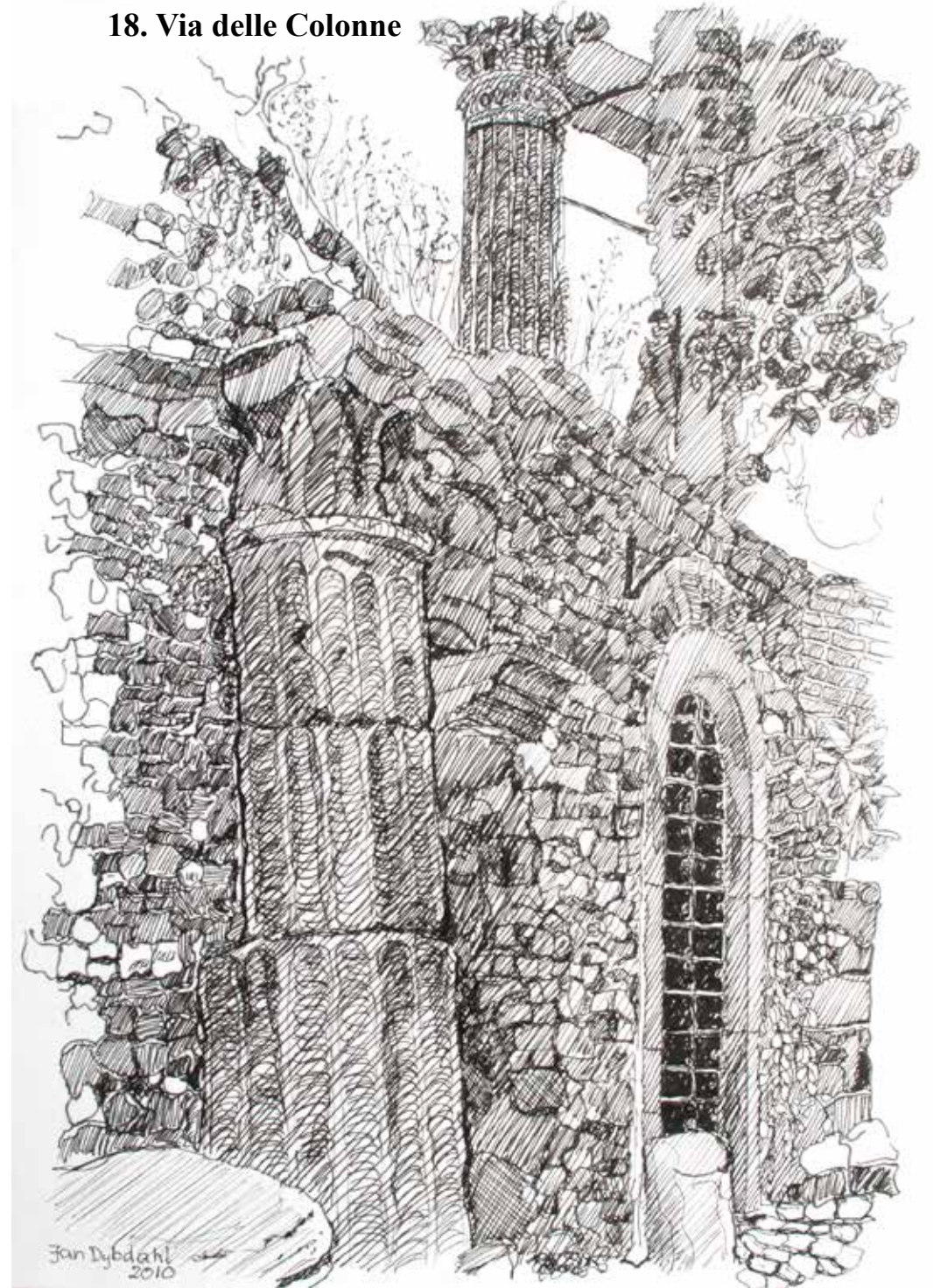




17. Via "Puzzaccio" del Pozzo



18. Via delle Colonne







## 19. Tempio di Castore e Polluce

The Castor and Pollux Temple, built in Corinthian style, is located in 'via delle Colonne', where it rises in the southeast area of the oldest terrace which is made of polygonal work. The temple is dated to the beginning of the fifth century BC, but the building, as we see it today, is dated to the first decade of the first century BC. Of the six pillars that adorned the temple vestibule (pronaos) at the time, only the two central ones still stand intact. The temple interior which afforded room for worshippers, consisted of one large and two smaller side rooms which presumably had contained groups of Dioscuri statues. Several sculptural and architectural fragments originating from these statues are exhibited in Cori's museum, where you also can see a reconstructed model of the temple in scale 1:75.

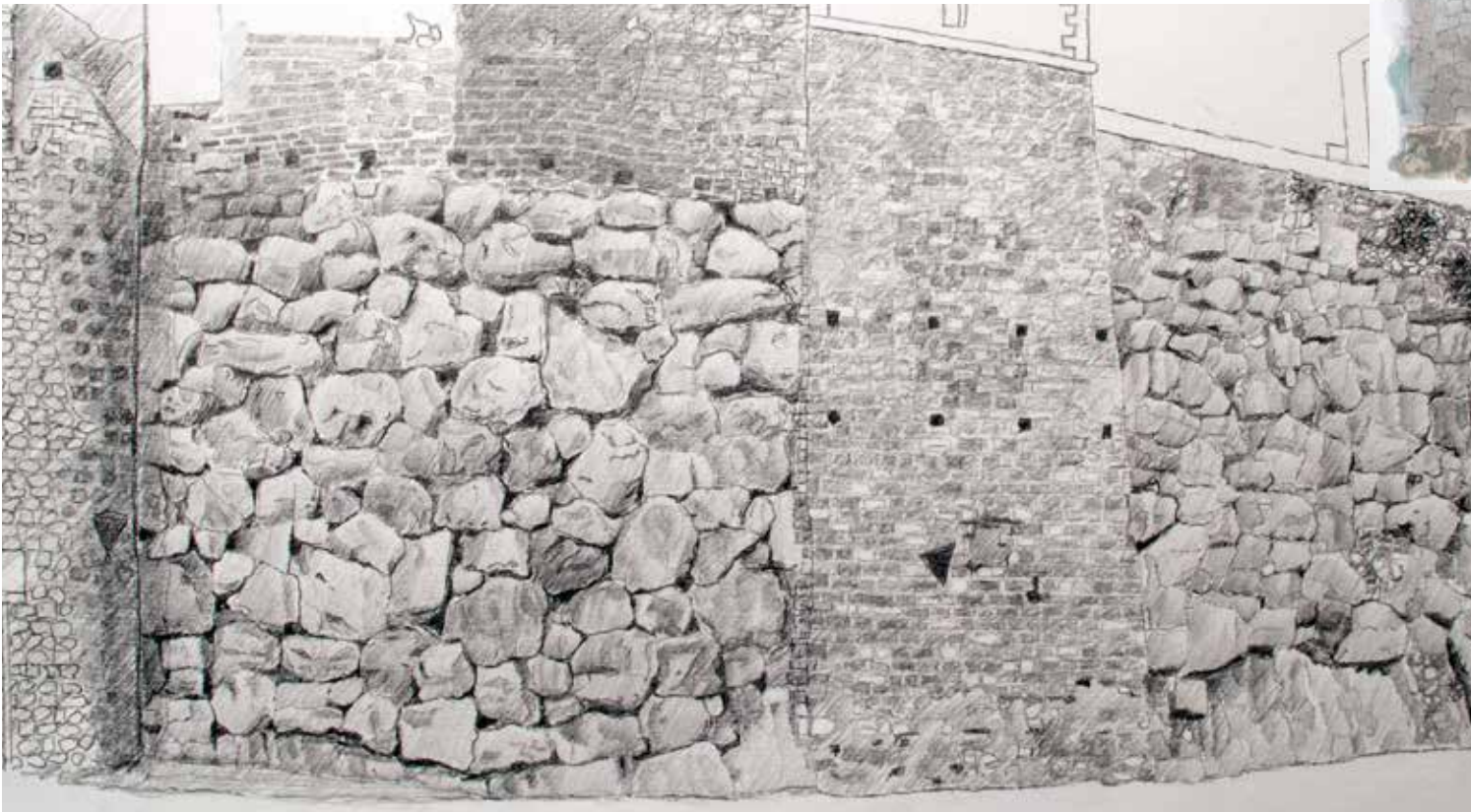


## 20. Piazza Pozzo Dorico.

This very large space from Roman times was constructed in the second century BC near the Castor and Pollux Temple as a supposed civic space, but at a considerably lower level. The site was and is accessible by stairs and you can imagine the area was used as a marketplace. As well, there were four large, high-ceilinged, vaulted rooms located, along with a cistern, directly underneath the square. These rooms served

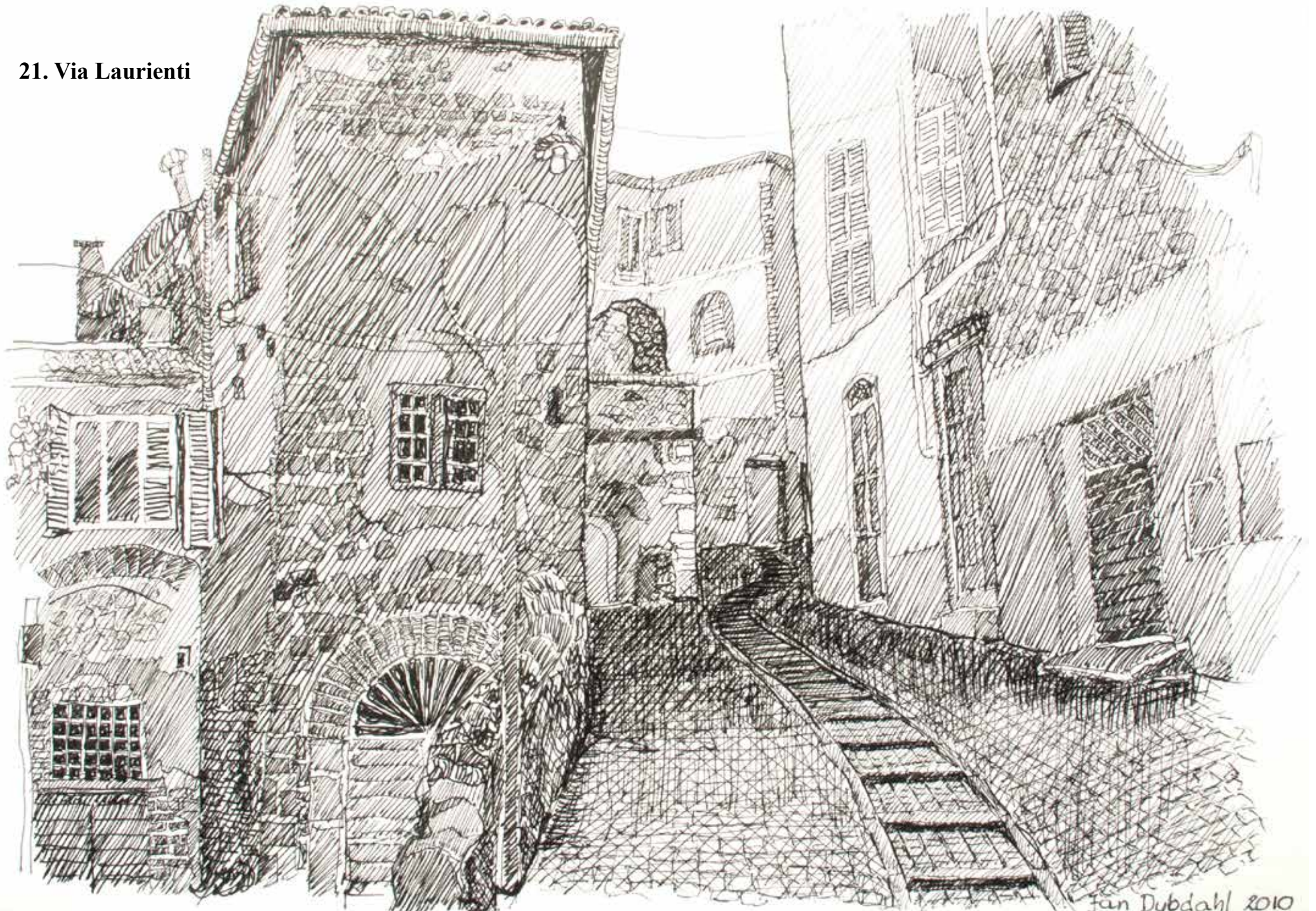
to process and store commercial products from the district, and were not available to the public, nor visible from outside.

The illustration in watercolor (Copy JD) is of the Castor and Pollux Temple, after reconstruction was done by Giovanni Battista Piranesi in the middle of the 1700s.





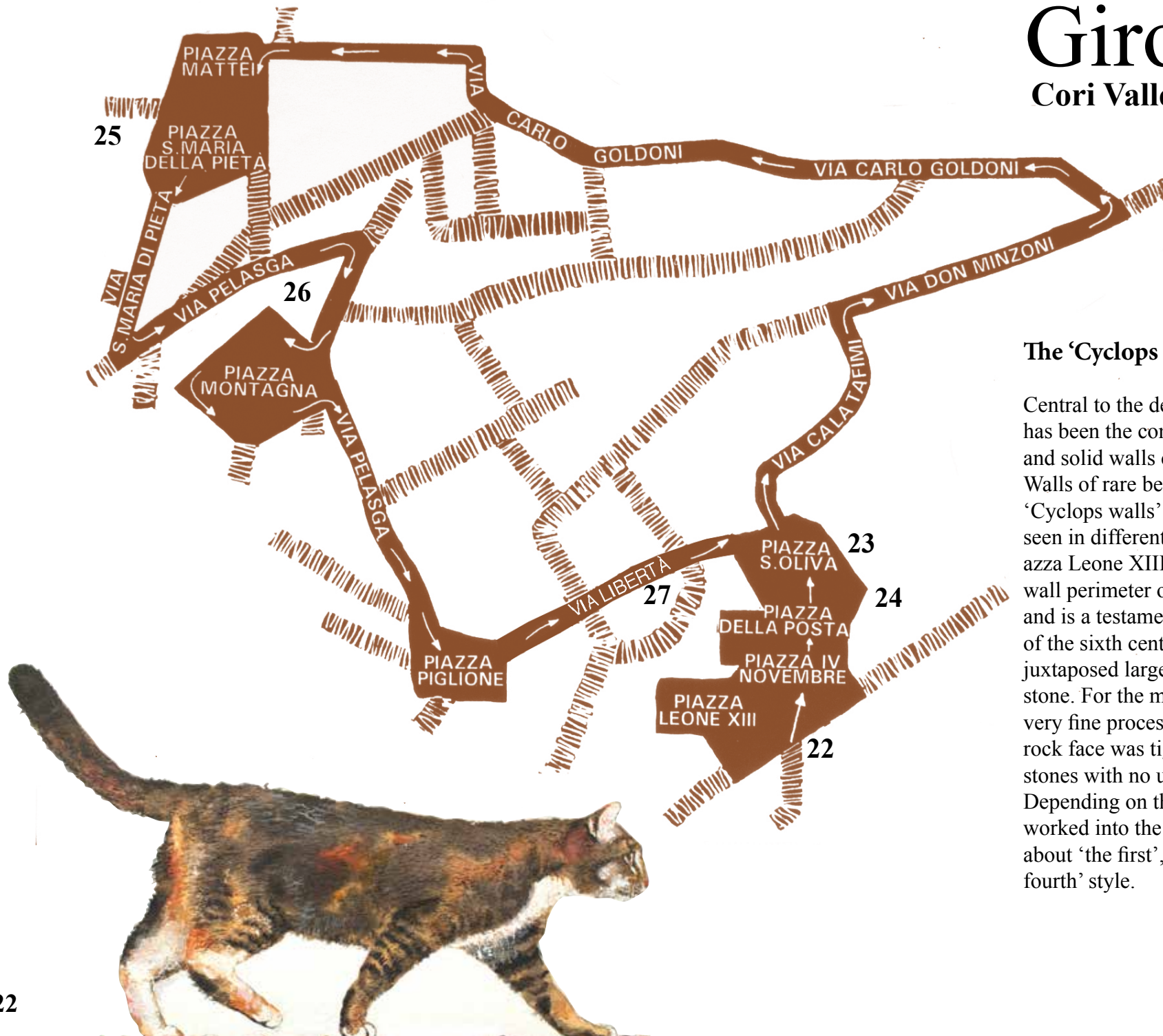
## 21. Via Laurienti





# Giro 4.

Cori Valle (right side)



## The 'Cyclops wall' on Piazza Leone XIII

Central to the defense of Cori through the ages has been the combination of inner patio plants and solid walls coming from different periods. Walls of rare beauty characterized by the name 'Cyclops walls' or 'polygonal work' can be seen in different parts of Cori, especially at Piazza Leone XIII. Fortification characterizes the wall perimeter of the urban terrace formation, and is a testament to a city from the last part of the sixth century BC. It had been built with juxtaposed large processed rocks of the local stone. For the most part, the front surface was very fine processed rock while the rest of the rock face was tightfitting against the adjacent stones with no use of binder. Depending on the character of the rocks worked into the various walls, one can talk about 'the first', 'the second', 'the third' or 'the fourth' style.



For example, the wall of the Via Leone XIII is in a trapezoidal shape where the visible faces are extremely clear and perfectly joined with each other. Elsewhere in Cori, you can look at examples of well-preserved city walls at: 'Via Pelasga', 'Piazza Pozzo Dorico', 'Via delle Colonne' and 'Via dei Lavoratori'.

During the second century BC, particularly on the eastern and western slopes, restoration took place, and a large number of semi-circular defensive towers added, the so-called 'Sulla Towers'. These you can see, either as ruins or as relatively well-preserved examples, in 'Via Carlo Goldoni', 'Via Sotto Cavour', 'Via dei Lavoratori' and near 'Porta Romana', while at the 'Piazza Signina' is a fully restored 'Sulla-tower', currently used as a private residence. Throughout the Middle Ages the city walls were subject to maintenance and improvements.

## 22. The 'Cyclops wall' on Piazza Leone XIII





# S. Oliva



## 23. Piazza S. Oliva

The most noteworthy, monumental complex S. Oliva shows evidence of a layering that goes from the Roman period to the Renaissance and includes the following interior buildings:

- Part of a Romanesque church from the first half of the twelfth century was built on top of the remains of an an-

cient temple which was the result of two construction periods from the third century BC and the last part of the second century BC. Beside the church building, was built a bell tower, horizontally striped by limestone and tuff, and decorated with multicolored ceramic works. It is currently stored in the adjacent museum (Museo della Città e del Territorio di Cori.)

## 24. S. Oliva

- Part of a monastery for the Augustinians (Aurelius Augustinus 354-430) from the fifteenth century and a chapel named after the crucifix ('la Cappella del Crocifisso') was constructed on the western side of the medieval basilica. This building was completed thanks to the Augustinian General prior Ambrogio Massari (originally from Cori) with the support of the bishop of Ostia and Velletri Guillaume d'Estouteville. 'La Cappella del Crocifisso' was greatly inspired by the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and as a result the vaults were fresco-painted with stories from both the Old and The New Testaments.

The monastery of the Augustinian order has a wonderful cloister and a characteristic loggia with iconological and iconographically rich figurative marble capitals. At the base of two of the loggia columns are engraved the year of completion - 1480 - and the name of the sculptor who created the work in the Lombard design, Antonio da Como, who performed the work together with his Lombardic craftsmen. Today this building is home to a significant collection of archaeological finds on display in this relatively new, well-appointed museum, for which we can be grateful:

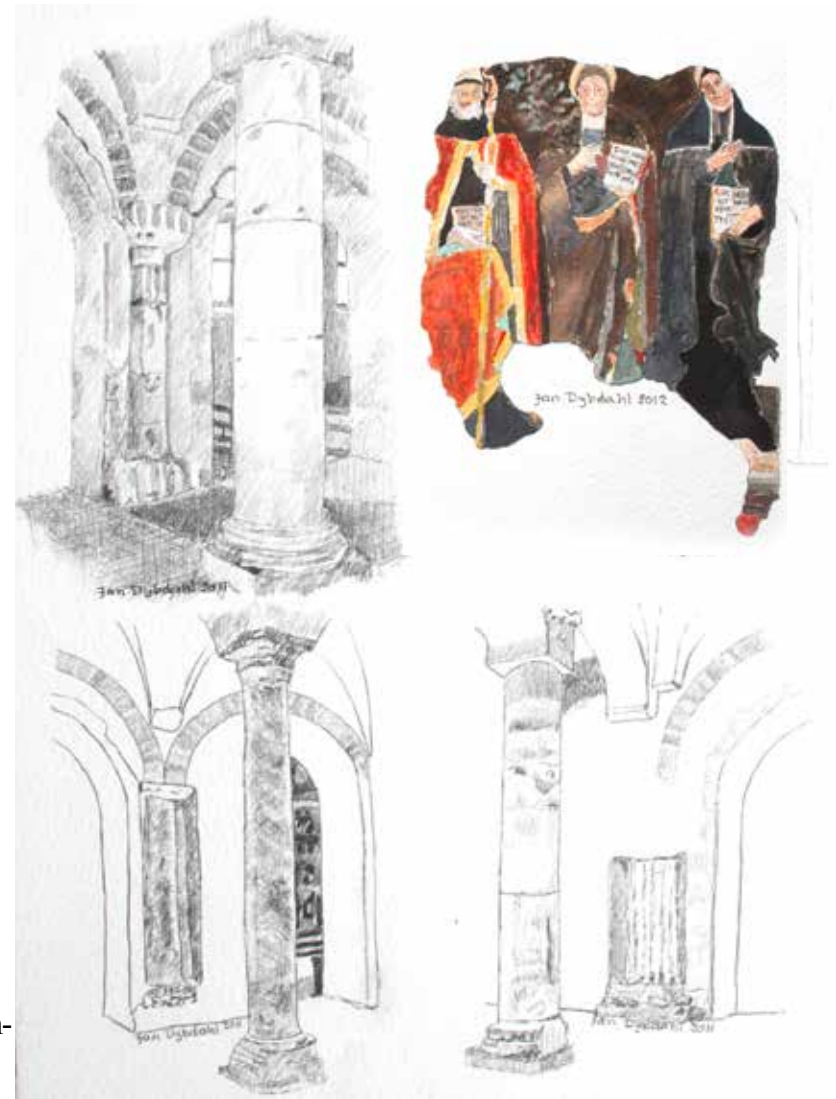


## Minerva Capitolina



- **Minerva Capitolina** the sculpture is from the first century BC. to the first century AD. In the Cori Museum you will find a plaster cast of the original, from 1593 which has been placed in a niche in front of the Palazzo Senatorio at the Capitol in Rome.

- **The urn.** The original of this Roman funeral urn from the first half of the first century AD, is displayed on an altar in the church SS Pietro e Paulo in Cori, while a copy is on display here at the museum.







## La Collegiata di Santa Maria della Pietà.

In the lower part of the old section of Cori, you will find Porta Romana, one of the city's three original gates, which from time immemorial, has ensured the citizens access through the western city wall. Close to that gate is Santa Maria della Pietà. The church building, of an unknown time, was built in Romanesque style on top of the remains of a pagan temple which was attributed to the goddesses Diana and Fortuna. The church appears today in the seventeenth century style having been rebuilt at that time, completely changing its appearance.

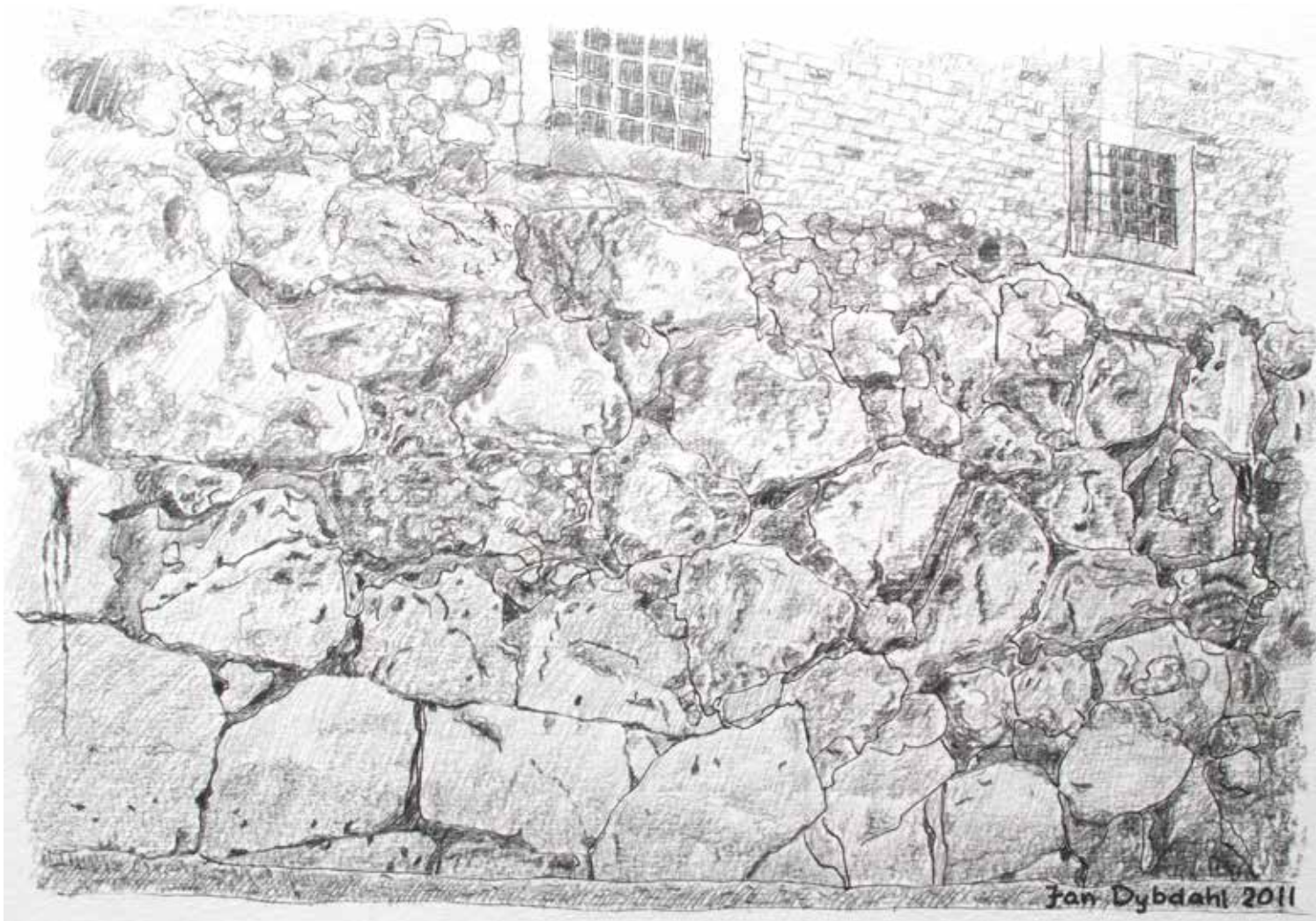
The church is built with three naves with four chapels on each side. Two examples of early Romanesque work were preserved: one sarcophagus in cosmatic style from between the late eleventh and early twelfth century, and part of a precious Easter candelabrum, which is the oldest known specimen of the twelfth century. Additionally, a bishop chair and relics from respectively the Holy Laurenti and the Holy Tommaso Placidi from Cori are there. To the right of the church building is located the oratorio for the church association banner from the fifteenth century ('Confraternita di Gonfalone')

## 25. Piazza Santa Maria della Pietà.





**26. Via Pelasga, the bastion.**

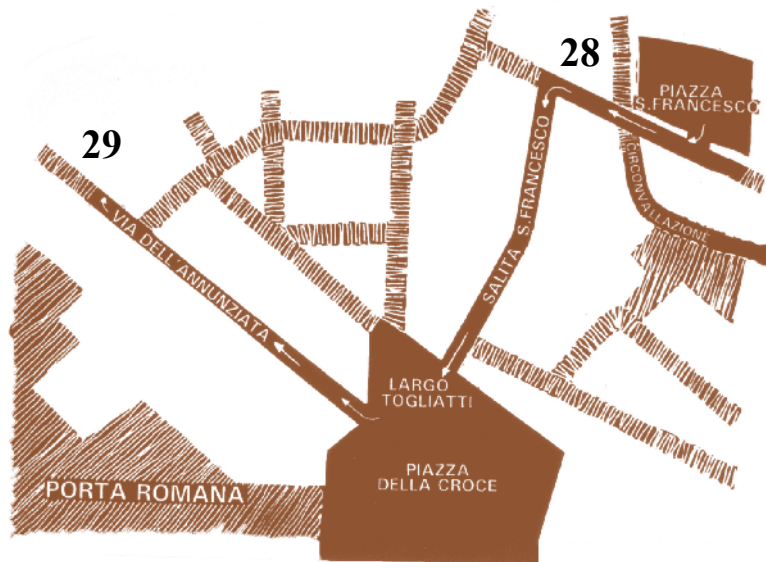


**27. A building in via Libertà/ via  
Maestre Pie Venerini.**



# Giro 4a

## Cori north



### Chiesa di S. Francesco.

The church of San Francesco is externally characterized by the simplicity of the Renaissance. It was built in the years between 1511 and 1526, but in the 17th century the interior of the church was restored with the addition of elements of Baroque style. Here you will find a precious gilded coffered ceiling done in 1673-

76 - a major work of Luigi Guarnieri. In addition, there is a picture attributed to the painter Pomarancio, where the subject is recognizable as Cardinal and Archbishop San Carlo Borromeo (1538-84.)

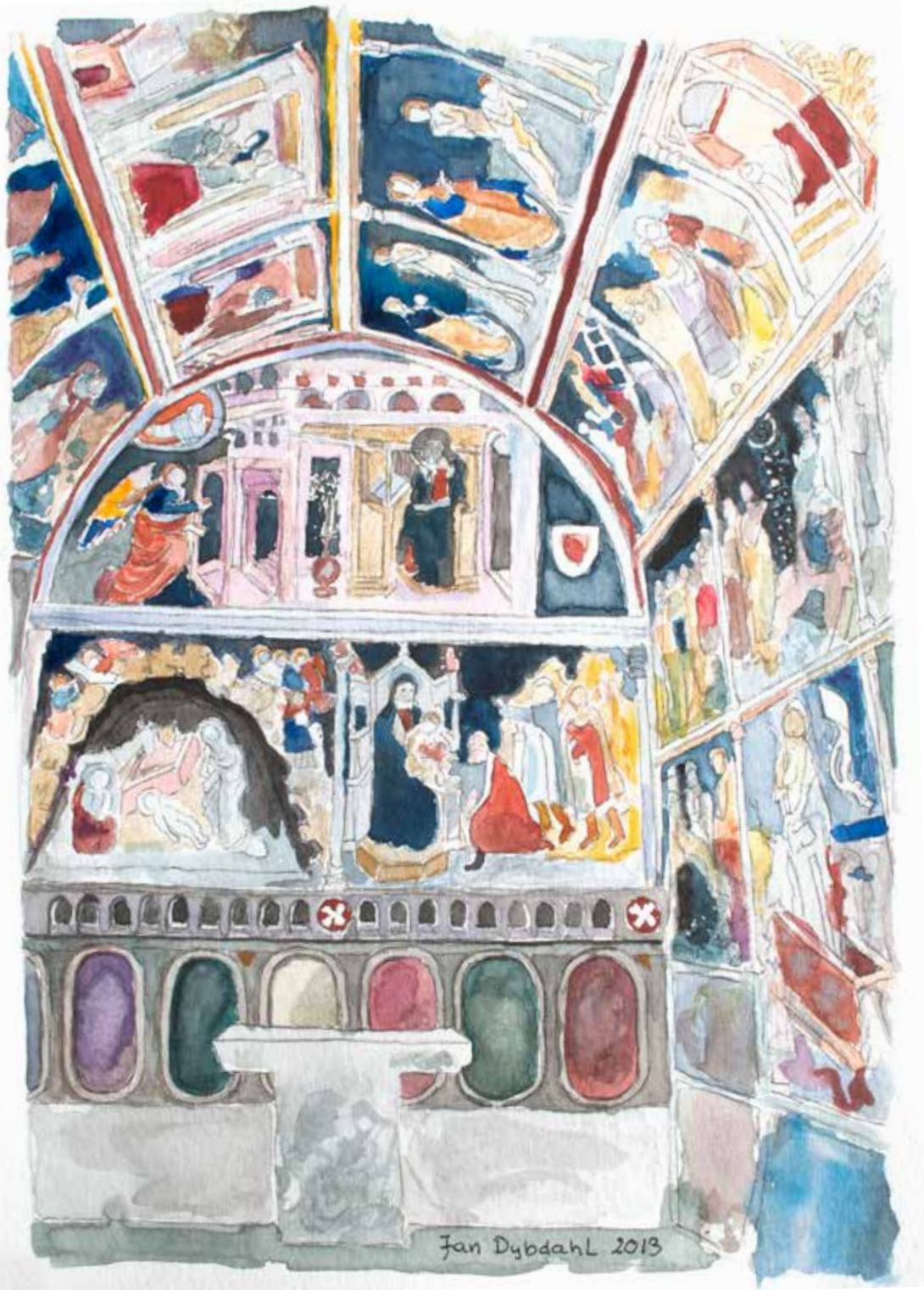
The recently restored, adjoining convent is done in a simple design with pilasters in local stone.



28. Piazza di S. Francesco







## 29. L'Oratorio SS. Annunziata

Located just a few hundred meters from the Cori city center on the road leading west towards the neighboring town of Cisterna di Latina, you will find it well worth seeing the chapel L'Oratorio SS. Annunziata, founded in 1420.

The oratory, a national monument, was founded in the second decade of the fifteenth century by Cardinal Fernando de Frias, whose coat of arms is inserted in front of the building.

Wall paintings in this small chapel represent a series of scenes from both The Old and The New Testament, showing two different schools in the choice of saints they included.

The frescoes, were carried out in the period 1422-1460, by different, excellent painters and consequently show slightly different styles. They completely cover the walls of the church's only nave. Experts and art historians have unanimously defined the church as "the Scrovegni chapel in southern Lazio."

The real Scrovegni chapel is located in Padova and contains the most complete series of frescoes by Giotto (1267-1337) in his mature age.



**www.CORI-VISTA.com**

This is a free guide to ancient Cori  
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