

From the “Inside Tuscany: A Second Time Around” Series

Central Tuscany: Le Crete and the Val d’Orcia

2018 / 2019 Edition

Scott Tiezzi Grabinger



2018

VERSO

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Cover Photos:

- Ripening spring wheat field in the Val d'Orcia.
- Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, pecorino cheese, and plain bruschetta from Ristorante Enoteca La Corte Medicea in Montepulciano.
- La Capella della Madonna di Vitaleta between Pienza and San Quirico d'Orcia.

Dedication

Don Francesco Tiezzi

He opened the doors for me.

20 February 1921, USA to 1 June 2014, Arezzo, Italy

My lovely, supportive wife and proof reader Jill.

My grandchildren Addie, Luke, Bailey, and Grace.

Hope you enjoy Italy some day. Hope I can show it to you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you friends and relatives, American and Italian . . .

None of this is possible without my wife, Jill, who funds my junkets and books and tolerates my long absences. She is my proof reader and takes on the job with far greater patience than I do. Blame the errors on me.

Second cousin Giovanni Tiezzi, his wife Antonella, and daughter Valeria have taken me around Tuscany, showing me some of the lesser known gems including San Giovanni d'Asso, Lucignano, Chiusure, Montefollonico, Chiusi, and great pizzerias in Foiano and Cesa. They house and feed me for several days each year. Angela and Daniele always graciously accept and help me. Maria Caldi, husband Valfrido, and daughters Gabriella and Alessandra have shown me around the Val d'Orcia, Pienza, and Monticchiello, taken me to fine restaurants, and hosted my whole American family to wonderful meals.

Thanks also to the patient teachers of *La Cultura Italiana Arezzo*, who take on the impossible goal of teaching me Italian every year with patience and smiles. They have become close friends as well as teachers: Paola, Laura, and Monica.

The *Tenuta il Palazzo* houses me each year for several weeks. The family operated *agriturismo* and *cantina* shows me great patience and acceptance. Thank you Isabella, Primo, Anna, Alessio, Lorenzo, and little Allegra.

Books by Scott Tiezzi Grabinger

Travel Adventures in Tuscany and Italy

Walking The Aqueduct: Tuscan Adventures and Culture

In Print Tuscany Guidebooks on Amazon

Central Tuscany: Arezzo

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Sections, Recipes, and Maps

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Giovanni's Quick Picante Tomato Sauce

Here is a quick pasta sauce from my cousin Giovanni. He and his wife Antonella both work and he often takes on the cooking responsibilities after he gets home from work about 7:00 pm, at least 30 minutes before Antonella. One of the tricks that Italians use when cooking pasta is to add the pasta to the sauce, not sauce to pasta. Take the pasta out of the water when *al dente* and then add to the sauce, cooking for another couple of minutes.

Ingredients

3 cloves of garlic finely minced. Giovanni uses a mezzaluna.
 2 T of onion, minced
 2 T olive oil
 1 t of hot red pepper seeds or 1/2 minced jalapeño without seeds
 4 fresh tomatoes or 1 small can of crushed tomatoes
 1 t of tomato paste
 1 lb. pasta

Directions

- Warm oil in wide pan.
- Put garlic and hot peppers in the pan and sauté very gently on low heat. Don't let garlic brown or it will taste bitter.
- Whisk in tomato paste.
- After a couple of minutes put the crushed fresh tomatoes or canned crushed tomatoes into the pan.
- Before draining the pasta, add 1/4 cup of pasta water to the pan. Stir.
- Place the drained pasta in the pan and mix well for a couple of minutes.



Mezzaluna used for mincing vegetables. My cousin Giovanni can move this so fast you don't see his hands moving. (WMC, Kagor)

Preface

People ask me, “Does it help to have relatives in Tuscany?” “Duh.” This book on the Val d’Orcia began when my relatives Maria Caldi, Valfrido, Alessandra, and Gabriella took me out one overcast October day to visit Pienza and Monticchiello in the Val d’Orcia. Even under that dark gray sky the unique beauty of the Val d’Orcia jumped out before me. They told me to tell them to “stop” whenever I wanted to take a picture, which was about every hundred yards.

The towns loomed dramatically on hills surrounded by green fields of grain and freshly plowed brown soil. The tall, skinny, Tuscan cypress trees lined the roads among the towns and driveways to farm houses. It was like I’d fallen into an Italy coffee table book with page after page of panoramic views. I knew then that I was going to add another guidebook to the “Inside Tuscany: A second Time Around” series on the Val d’Orcia. Little did I know when I started the research how expansive and varied the area is — from towns to vineyards to farms to fortresses to barren badlands to hot springs to *enoteche*. It became one of my longest books and could easily be twice its length.

I fell in love with Italy upon our first family visit in 1992. I found several cousins in Arezzo and Foiano della Chiana (my maternal grandparent’s home). I kept returning like a bad penny to learn more about Tuscany. I studied Italian so I could talk with my family who only spoke Italian — or so I thought. (I found out several years later that they would rather listen to my bad Italian than use their English.) I got serious about studying the language in 2004 when I began attending immersion school at *La Cultura Italiana Arezzo* for two to three weeks at a time forcing my old mind to learn.

The idea for a series of books on central Tuscany came after I retired from my position at the University of Colorado Denver. I sat down and thought about what to do and asked myself, “What do I know best?” One answer: Arezzo and Tuscany. So, I started on my first book of a planned series, *Central Tuscany: Arezzo* written for people who were coming back to Tuscany after their first visit — the world doesn’t need another guidebook on the major sites of Florence, Siena, or Pisa. I had a lot to learn and it took a year-and-a-half to finish the first book.

My relatives play a large hand in making my books unique from other writers. My cousins showed me places I, or another guide-book writer, would never find without knowing local people: restaurants, small museums, secluded towns, churches, and grand panoramas. They taught me about food and dining, harvesting grapes and olives, making wine, *limoncello*, and *vin santo*, and extending proper courtesies. They helped me blend in the culture to the point I wasn't always immediately identified as an American. Thanks to them I developed my philosophy of traveling — slow travel — to pair with Italy's "slow food" movement.

The language school *Cultura Italiana Arezzo* also shares responsibility for helping make my books. Learning the language opens doors almost every day. I once entered a small museum in Foiano and started asking the caretaker questions. He said, "Do you understand Italian?" After saying, "Sì," he took me by the arm and gave me a 45-minute private tour. The same has happened in museums and churches from Anghiari to Civitella to Lucignano and more. Waiters tell me of "secret" specialties and wines. I couldn't ask for a better way to help make my writing different from others.

Few in America know about the "inner Tuscany." They take a one week vacation and race to visit the grandest sites of Florence, Siena, Cortona, San Gimignano, Lucca, Volterra, and Pisa. They eat great food, see the beautiful landscapes, and meet a friendly people; but they learn little of the day-to-day culture in the Tuscan heartland. I hope my guidebooks will help you learn more about Tuscan living.

If you'd like to talk and share experiences write to:

Scott.Grabinger@gmail.com

Il Le Crete and Abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore

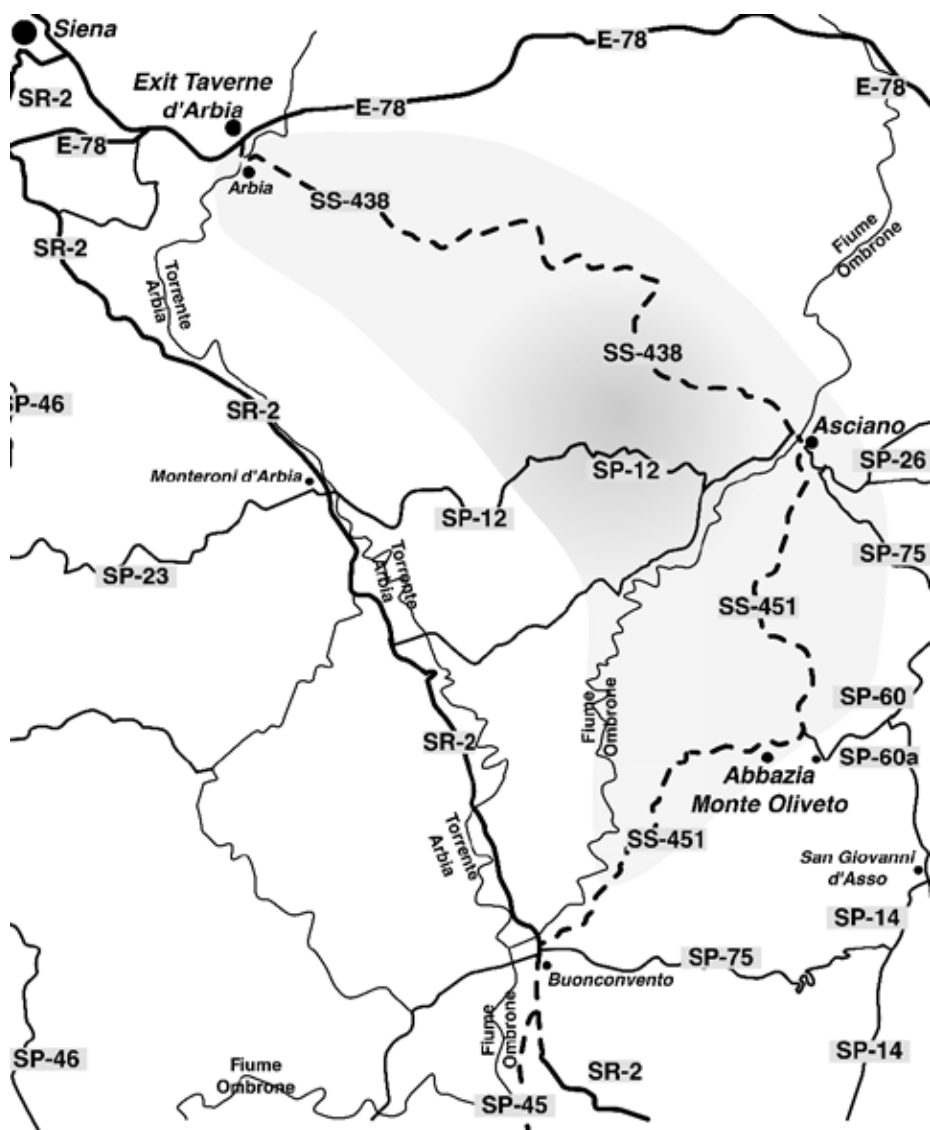


The sign for the herbal shop at the Abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore.

*There is no looking at a building here
after seeing Italy.
Fanny Burney*

Route through Le Crete

The dashed line — SS-438 to SS-451 to SR-2 — takes you through the best of Le Crete (the shaded area). SR-2 is one of the most important roads through Tuscany and part of the Via Francigena, the ancient pilgrimage route from Rome to Canterbury, England. After reaching Buonconvento, take SR-2 to SP-45 and the first stop in the Val d'Orcia, Montalcino.



5 Le Crete — Crete Senesi

Location:

43.299199,
11.403082

Take the Taverne d'Arbia exit off E-78 near the east side of Siena. Then follow signs to Asciano.

Time to visit: It takes about 30 minutes to drive straight through the *Crests* to the

Monte Oliveto Abbey. However, you will want to stop to take in the view and for pictures every few hundred meters, so give it an hour. The scenery is breathtaking on cloudy and sunny days.

Note: There is truck and tractor traffic on the road, so be patient.

Reasons for a visit: One of the most unusual and starkly beautiful geographic areas in Italy. In the spring the green fields shine in the sun and turn golden as the wheat fields ripen. In the fall, the grain fields have all been turned over and the scene becomes rolling, tan, clay hills. Many hills lead to blue ponds and green pastures filled with sheep. Others are punctuated by rocky cliffs.

Accessibility: You can see a great deal of magnificent scenery from the road. Note that there are a few places to drive off the road or to walk to a good view point.

MY DISCOVERY

I left Arezzo early one October morning and zoomed along the four lane E-78 toward Siena to go to Asciano, a small hill town south of Siena, to see if it was worth a chapter in my latest book. It was early, damp, and dreary with a heavy fog that hid the hills bordering both sides of the road. It was like opening your eyes underwater without goggles. My own attitude matched the weather. I was almost at the end of my two months of work and was tired and ready to go home. I did not expect to find anything worth including in my next book, but I had to be thorough.

The fog had lifted enough to not interfere with driving, so I cruised along at 120 km/h with farmland on the right and a range



Probably one of the most photographed farm houses in the world. It sits on a hill in the Le Crete.



of hills on the left. The tops of the hills were still hidden; they could have been 1000-foot mountains for all I knew. I was almost to Siena when I found my exit (Taverne d'Arbia) to head south to Asciano over a

A spring hay field in Le Crete. The wheat and hay are harvested in late spring.

curvy two-lane road.

Slowly, with my lights on, I started up a hill and just as I crested the fog lessened and I was stunned by the land below. I'd never seen anything like it in Tuscany: there were no vineyards, olive orchards, or forests — in fact there was nary a tree, only freshly plowed brown fields over a long series of undulating clay hills, or, in Italian, *Le Crete*, the Crests. This was the start of the Le Crete “badlands.”

One of the Le Crete farms that makes a success of farming through wise use of water and soil reconditioning.

The fog hung about 100-feet above the land. The light was totally flat with no shadows and suddenly it became a perfect day for viewing the Le Crete. The fog made the eerie, lunar landscape spectacular and the pictures turned out to be some of the best I took that year.



Every few hundred yards down the road I'd stop for more pictures: farms on hilltops, cypress lined roads to farms half hidden by the fog at the tops of hills, ponds at the base of hills, and sheep feeding in small green meadows. With the small patches of color

here and there the crests looked like an Impressionist painting.

It was one of those serendipitous discoveries that can move a trip from “nice/had fun” to one of the best of the year.



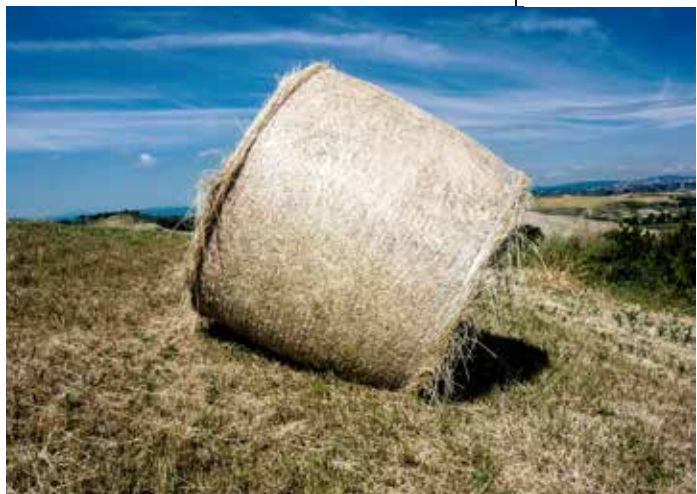
GEOGRAPHY

Heading south, the barren hills gradually turn into heavy forests bordered by cliffs. The most memorable place of this area is the road from the E-78 to Asciano. The clay, *mattaione*, comes from the rocky sediments of a Pliocene sea that covered the area between 2.5 and 4.5 million years ago. It became a wealthy agricultural area until the fall of Rome when the farmers had to move into the towns and around castles for protection throughout the long Middle Ages. Without farmers to care for the land, the topsoil eroded exposing the brown clay. In the late nineteenth century and again after WWII Sicilian farmers with experience growing crops under less than favorable conditions moved onto the land. They improved the land, enriched the soil, and with smart water management made a success of agriculture.

The rough grey/tan soil after being turned over in preparation for fall wheat planting.

CUISINE

The Tuscan cuisine of the Senese people of Le Crete focuses on seasonal local ingredients. The cuisine has ancient origins: first the Etruscans introduced the simplicity of local herbs like rosemary, oregano, and parsley; and then the Romans introduced spices



A bale of hay resting under the Le Crete sun in late spring.



Farm house with cypress lined driveway.

of handmade pasta (especially *pici* found in all the restaurants) are integral to the cuisine. The oak forests are home to the *cinghiale* (wild boar), coveted for its rich, nutty-flavored meat, attributed to the boars' diet of acorns. Typical dishes in the Le Crete and Val d'Orcia include:

- homemade *pici* (fat spaghetti noodles with a variety of sauces),
- traditional *crostini neri* (chicken liver mousse on small pieces of bread — a Tuscan staple for *antipasti*),
- simple *fagioli all'uccelletto* (beans in tomato sauce),
- popular *pasta e fagioli* (pasta and beans, see recipe at the end of this chapter),
- Italy's best *pecorino* cheese,
- white and black truffles,
- Tuscan salami and sausages, and

The iconic lone cypress of Le Crete and the Val d'Orcia.



from faraway places including allspice, cloves, anise, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Siena's prized cake, the *panforte*, is made from honey, candied fruit, spices, and almonds. Anise flavors the *cavallucci* cookies. Soups, roasted meat, wild game, and several types

- desserts like *panforte*, *cavallucci*, *ricciarelli* (biscuits), and *cantucci* (almond *biscotti*).
- To accompany the food are hearty Tuscan wines from Montalcino and Montepulciano.



Pasta e Fagioli

Pasta and beans may seem like a starch overload, though the beans provide the protein for this *primo piatto*. Think of it as a comfort food that makes a meal by itself.

Ingredients

1 large sprig of fresh rosemary
1 bay leaf
1/2 c chopped large onion (or 1 medium onion)
4 oz of pancetta (or bacon) diced into 1/4-inch cubes
6 c low sodium chicken broth
2 cans of white beans (preferably cannellini)
1 c penne (or other short pasta)
EVOO

Directions

- In a large sauce pan sauté onion and pancetta in EVOO over medium heat until the onion is soft.
- Add broth, beans, bay leaf, and rosemary sprig. Cover and heat to boiling. Turn heat down and simmer 10 minutes.
- Discard rosemary and bay leaf.
- Add pasta and cook until al dente. Add more broth if necessary.
- Salt and pepper to taste.
- Serve with a drizzle of EVOO.

6 Abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore

Location:

43.177464, 11.547365

From Siena, take road SS-438 to Asciano. Continue on road SS-451 to Monte Oliveto. You can also get to Monte Oliveto from the SS-2 at Buonconvento.

Email: abbazia@monteoliveto-maggiore.it

Website: <http://www.monteoliveto-maggiore.it/lang1>

Tourist Information:

Tourists may stay in the agriturismo house of the monastery:

Podere Le Piazze
53041 Chiusure (Siena)
0577.707269

Visiting Hours:

Nov-Mar: 09.15-12.00, 15.15-17.00
Apr-Oct: 09.15-12.00, 15.00-18.00
Closes at 12.30 on Sundays
Admission free.

Holy Mass (Sante Messe) Hours:

[Check for most current hours at: <http://www.monteoliveto-maggiore.it/abbazia/orari-ss-messe-e-liturgia-monastica/>]

Weekdays Mass: 06.45 (except Saturday), 07.30 (Gregorian Chant).

Sundays and Feast days Mass: 11.00 (Gregorian chant), 17.30.

Saturday Mass: 17.30.

Time to visit: One to two hours. Nice place for a picnic. They have a restaurant and bar where you can take a break after driving through the Le Crete badlands.



Divine Office Hours — Monastic Liturgy

Weekdays

06.00	Matins
07.30	Lauds and Mass (Gregorian)
12.30	Sext and Holy Rosary
15.30	None
18.30	Vespers (Gregorian chant)
20.45	Compline (21.00 in summer)

Sundays and Feast Days

06.50	Matins
08.15	Lauds
09.15	Terce
11.00	Mass (Gregorian chant)
18.30	Vespers (Gregorian chant)
20.45	Compline (21.00 in summer)

The Benedictine Rule

The Rule of Saint Benedict (*Regula Benedicto*) is a book of precepts (73 chapters) written by St. Benedict for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot. The spirit of the Rule is summed up in the motto: “pray and work.” Benedict’s concerns were the needs of monks in a community environment: namely, to establish order, foster an understanding of the relational nature of human beings, and provide a spiritual father to support and strengthen the individual’s ascetic effort and the spiritual growth that is required for the fulfillment of the human vocation. To see the precepts: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_Saint_Benedict.

Reasons for a visit: The bucolic setting, beautiful buildings and church, frescoes, and herbal store. The frescoes of the life of St. Benedict in the Great Cloister are masterpieces. Everything is free.

Accessibility: The paths around the building and through the forest are paved, though a couple are a bit steep. The buildings are OK, though the art museum is on the first floor (second American) and there is no elevator.

INTRODUCTION

At the southern edge of the stark landscape of Le Crete’s grey and tan clay hills gives way to deep cliffs and dense forests. The Abbey sits on the edge of a straight, white cliff surrounded by forests of pine, oak, chestnut, and olive orchards within 215 acres. The complex includes a bar and restaurant, museum,

church, library, refectory, chapels, herbal shop, gardens, and cloisters. Former monastic cells are available for overnight visitors (closed in the winter). It’s a wonderful place for a shady relaxed picnic.

HISTORY

The cistern was once used to raise fish for the monk’s meals.

John Tolomei, from a wealthy merchant family of Siena, founded the abbey in 1313 as a place of retreat for wealthy Senese. John, who changed his name to Bernardo, lived as a hermit with two other men from Siena, Ambrogio Piccolomini and Patrizio Patrizi.



The three built shelters in the dense, hostile landscape and over the years attracted others to the fledgling ascetic community. In 1315, Bernardo received permission to follow the Benedictine Rule with his band of merry monks. On March 26, 1319, the Bishop

of Arezzo, Guido Tarlati, confirmed the congregation as a new religious order. With wealthy backers, the Olivetan monastery became an elite hermitage for central Tuscany with extensive land holdings, either purchased or donated by wealthy estate owners buying their way toward salvation. It is still a retreat for about 40 monks.

VISITING THE MONASTERY

These aren't ruins, but well maintained buildings with straight walls, clean bricks, solid structures and a curved apse bordering the piazza.

- Enter the complex over a small drawbridge through a gate house and tower with high crenelations. This was the defensive outpost of the monastery. On the inner and outer gates are two della Robbia ceramics: a *Madonna and Child* on the outside and *St. Benedict* on the inside.
- Just after the tower you pass by the restaurant/bar complex and enter into a green area surrounding the monastery.
- On the way you will pass a cistern built to raise fish for the monks' meals.



Above: The short trail through the forest opens on to the broad piazza.

Below: The circular apse of the church.

ABBAY CHURCH

The fifteenth century Abbey Church has an elegant Gothic style façade. The side and the apse are supported by heavy buttresses. The square-based campanile has semi-pilasters at the corners and is crowned with a spire.



The high altar painting is the "Birth of the Virgin."

The interior, with a nave and two aisles, was remodeled in the nineteenth century. [NOTE: numbers in brackets refer to the map of the church posted near the entrance.]

- The frescoes are mostly from the sixteenth century.
- The oldest work in the church is the painting above the high altar, the *Birth of the Virgin Mary* (Jacopo Ligozzi, 1598). [1]
- The carved and detailed two-level wooden choir lines both sides of the nave (Fra' Giovanni da Verona, 16th c.) and is a treasure of holy scenes done in intaglio. There are 96 seats. [2]
- The chapel on the left of the high altar has a large box enclosing a large statue of the *Crucifixion* (brought to the church by San Bernardo in the 14th c.). The background painting has *San Bernardo Tolomei Worshipping Christ* (Antonio Nasini, 1701). Around the walls are scenes from the *Passion of Christ*. [3]
- The *De Profundis* chapel, the first church of the Olivetans, is a short way down the nave on the left, important because it is a relic from the beginning of the order. [4]
- The high altars, both the original and the Vatican II altar, are rather plain with a refined apse of marble columns with Corinthian capitals. On the sides of the apse are two stained glass windows that let in bright light.



- To the left of the high altar is another painting of *San Bernardo Tolomei* (Bartolomeo Neroni aka Il Riccio and a disciple of Sodoma, 16th c.) kneeling before God. God blesses him from above and angels surround him. On the side walls are scenes from the life of Bernardo.
- In a small chapel on the right side of the high altar is a painting of Santa Francesca Romana holding a book and looking down upon a child angel. She is patron saint of chauffeurs.
- A lectern by Fra Raffaele da Brescia (1518) is a carved work of intaglio with a magnificent book stand above a wooden chest.
- At the center of the cross vault is the *Assumption*.
- Two frescoes on the sides of the transept (Francesco Vanni, 16th c.) depict the *Consecration of the Church* and the religious *Investiture of the First Olivetans*.
- The right side front altar vault has a seventeenth century tondo of the *Annunciation*.
- In the chapel of the Blessed Bernardo Tolomei (founder of the abbey) is a delicate ceramic and metal representation of the *Infant Mary (Maria Santissima Bambina)*, studded with precious stones.
- There is some very fine stained glass around the abbey, however it is difficult to see because it is up high and many areas are roped off.
- Note the unusual dome with an octagon of interlocking arches, an Islamic Andalusian design.

A Roman monk bestows the habit on Benedict (#5). (Sodoma).



GREAT CLOISTER WITH FRESCO CYCLE OF ST. BENEDICT

The Great Cloister, the most important treasure of Monte Oliveto, was built during three time periods between 1426 and 1443, thus there are subtle differences in the architecture. Some arches are wide and others are narrow. There are more arches on the north side than on the south. This in no way interferes with its graceful beauty. Under the vaults of the cloister are

St. Benedict teaches the gospel to visiting peasants, #8 (Sodoma).



frescoes of events from the life of St. Benedict according to the *Book of Dialogs* by St. Gregory.

Abbot Domenico Airoidi designed the project. He first gave the task to Luca Signorelli, who painted eight stories between 1497 and 1499 with bulky white-robed monks and sparing use of color. After he left, Giovanni Bazzi, better known as Sodoma, completed 27 images between 1505 and 1508. He painted colorful scenes of ladies and monks with blue and purple backgrounds of ideal landscapes and Tuscan cities. One is by painter Il Riccio (Andrea Bioso).

Eastern Side (Sodoma)

1. St. Benedict introduces the “rule” on the Olivetan Monks. Benedict is in a white robe sitting and handing open books to a group of monks also in white robes.
2. St. Benedict leaves home and goes to study in Rome.
3. He leaves the school in Rome.
4. He miraculously restores a broken tray which had fallen from the hands of his nurse. (The man in the center with

white gloves is a self portrait of Sodoma and the group is his family with his pet badgers and goose.)

5. A Roman monk grants Benedict the habit of the hermit (the Tuscan town of Subbiano is in the background).
6. The devil breaks the bell which was attached to a plate used to lower food to him while he was living in solitude in a cave.
7. A priest, at the request of the Lord, brings food to St. Benedict on Easter.
8. Benedict instructs visiting peasants in the Holy Doctrine of the Church.
9. The saint, tempted by impurity, flees from the temptations.
10. He meets with some monks and consents to be their leader and abbot.
11. With the sign of the cross, Benedict breaks a glass containing poisoned wine offered by hermits who were unable to bear his strict discipline.
12. Benedict completes construction of twelve monasteries.

Southern Side (Sodoma)

13. Benedict meets with two young Roman men, Mauro and Placido. This fresco includes portraits of many artists of the period, among them Signorelli. Rome is in the background.
14. He scourges a monk to free him from a demon.
15. He produces water from the mountainside for the monks.



Detail from #4 (Sodoma). This character with the white gloves is a self-portrait of Sodoma.

Detail from #9 (Sodoma). Benedict throws himself into a thorn bush to overcome temptation.





God punishes Florenzo (#22, Signorelli). He is buried under the collapsed building. Just above the kneeling monk's outstretched arm is Florenzo's tiny head.

16. He causes a curved knife for pruning to rise up from the waters of a lake and return to its handle.
17. The saint orders Mauro to walk on water to save Placido.
18. He changes a flask of wine, hidden from him by an errand boy, into a serpent.
19. The priest Florenzo tries to poison the saint by giving a poisoned roll to a servant who gives it to Benedict.
20. Florenzo sends evil women to the monastery.

Western Side (all but two are by Luca Signorelli)

21. Benedict sends Mauro to France and Placido to Sicily (by Riccio).
22. God punishes Florenzo.
23. St. Benedict preaches at Monte Cassino freeing it from idolatry.
24. He chases away the forces of evil from a stone.
25. He revives a dead monk on whom a wall has fallen.
26. He knows the date and place when his monks ate outside the monastery, violating their fast.

27. He chastises the brother of the monk Valerian for breaking a fast.
28. He exposes Totila's deception.
29. Benedict receives the Arian king of the Goths, Totila.
30. He predicts the destruction of Monte Cassino (by Sodoma).

Northern Side (Sodoma)

31. Benedict obtains an abundance of flour and feeds the monks.
32. He appears to some distant monks and suggests a design for a monastery.
33. He excommunicates two nuns and absolves them after their deaths.
34. He places the Eucharistic Body of Christ on a monk who was rejected by the earth when they tried to bury him.
35. He pardons a monk who, fleeing the monastery, met a serpent along the road.
36. He frees a bound peasant simply by staring at him.

In the same cloister there are two other frescoes by Sodoma: *Jesus Carrying the Cross* and *Jesus at the Pillar*. *Jesus Carrying the Cross* dramatically depicts the lashes on His back, the crown of thorns and a cruel figure at the top. *Jesus at the Pillar* is more delicate with Christ calmly, but sadly looking away. The ropes squeeze his skin and he wears a diaphanous wrap emphasizing the sympathetic nature of the painting.

REFECTORY

Though you can't enter, you can see the room through a wide door and admire the traditional crockery used for the monks' meals. Frescoes from the seventeenth century cover the walls and ceiling. The subjects are the Council of Trent and events from the Old Testament (Fra Paolo Novelli, 15th c.). Fragments show the *Last Judgment* and the *Crucifixion* by Taddeo di Bartolo (14th c.). On the back wall is the *Last Supper* (Dinetto).



Detail of intaglio of the lower right panel of an armoire in the library. The "open" doors are a deceptive use of skilled perspective.

Madonna of the Rosary with images of the Mysteries of the Rosary.

LIBRARY

The library consists of a large reading room and its collection. The reading room is a large chamber (Fra Giovanni da Verona). It is constructed like a small church with three naves divided by marble columns with Corinthian capitals. The arches are edged in marble. Glass cases hold illuminated manuscripts and precious incunabula. Most works have disappeared leaving only a fraction of what the abbey once owned. The heavy library door and an armoire at the back of the room are two of the greatest masterpieces of intaglio you'll ever see.



ORIGINAL PHARMACY

The original pharmacy is two floors up from the Library. It is in a room with a high arched ceiling and ancient wooden furniture. It holds a precious collection of blue and white earthenware jars with vases painted with the Olivetan coat of arms.

PHARMACY/BOOKSTORE

Today's herbal pharmacy sells a collection of jars once used to preserve herbs and medicines produced by the Monastery. You can also buy herbal tinctures, homemade liqueurs, books, and religious articles.

MUSEO DELL'ABBAZIA DI MONTE OLIVETO MAGGIORE

This little museum holds works of art from the abbey and parishes of the surrounding area. There is little of note here, in fact, some of the works are poorly done. Works to catch include:

- The *Acquarello dell Torre di Guardia* (1700). Painting on canvas.
- The most valuable work is the copy of the *Self Portrait of Sodoma* (Antonio Salveti, late 19th c.). It is a copy of part of the fresco of Event #4 in the Great Cloister.
- A *Crucifixion* (Daniele Lonati). Painting on canvas.
- Sculpture of a *Crucifix* (Senese school, 13th century).
- Portrait of *Santa Margherita*.
- Painting of *Madonna with Child and Saints Giovannino, San Francesco, and Catherine of Siena*.
- A *Madonna of the Rosary* (Francesco Bartolini, 1599) with the Mysteries of the Rosary.
- Portrait of *St. Benedict* (16th c.).
- Solitary *St. Joseph* (Luigi Mussini, 19th c.).
- The *Holy Family (Sacra Famiglia)* (Tuscan painter, 16th c.). Donors for the painting are painted in as extras. It's on my notable list because of how terrible it is. Proportions and perspective are off and the characters have flat features. This could be expected in the thirteenth century but not the sixteenth.
- At the end of a wall are some glass cases with liturgical objects.
- Another room has some interesting and well done sketches of the area.



Santa Margherita in the Abbazia museum.

San Bernardo's grotto.



This 10-foot candle stick holds the Easter candle. It takes four monks to move it to the church and place the candle upon it.

SAN BERNARDO'S GROTTA

Outside the abbey church is a short trail leading to San Bernardo Tolomei's grotto and the abbey cemetery. A brief walk in the shadows of the trees takes you to a small brick building covering the grotto. The entrance is gated, but you can look through to see a small cave with a white, life-sized statue of San Bernardo. This was an initial place of shelter after he renounced the world.

A TYPICAL MONK'S DAY — THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The monks' lives are balanced between work, prayer, study, silence, and brotherhood. The Liturgy of the Hours (when Psalms are read or sung along with other readings from the Bible) provides the basis of their daily ritual. The monks meet in the Church choir six times a day to pray: Reading the Office, Lauds and Third Hour, Noon and the Rosary, None, Vespers and Mass, and Compline (see beginning of chapter for the times). In between prayers the monks work: they restore ancient books, produce herbal liqueurs, tend gardens, and take care of domestic chores. They eat breakfast, dinner, and supper in silence, listening to readings or classical and religious music.

VISITOR ETIQUETTE

- Please keep a spirit of silence and respect as you are in a monastic complex where monks are living.
- To preserve the frescoes and paintings photos are only allowed without flash.
- Do not litter (chewing-gum, food, etc.).
- No pets in Abbey (in other words leave your husband in the car).

