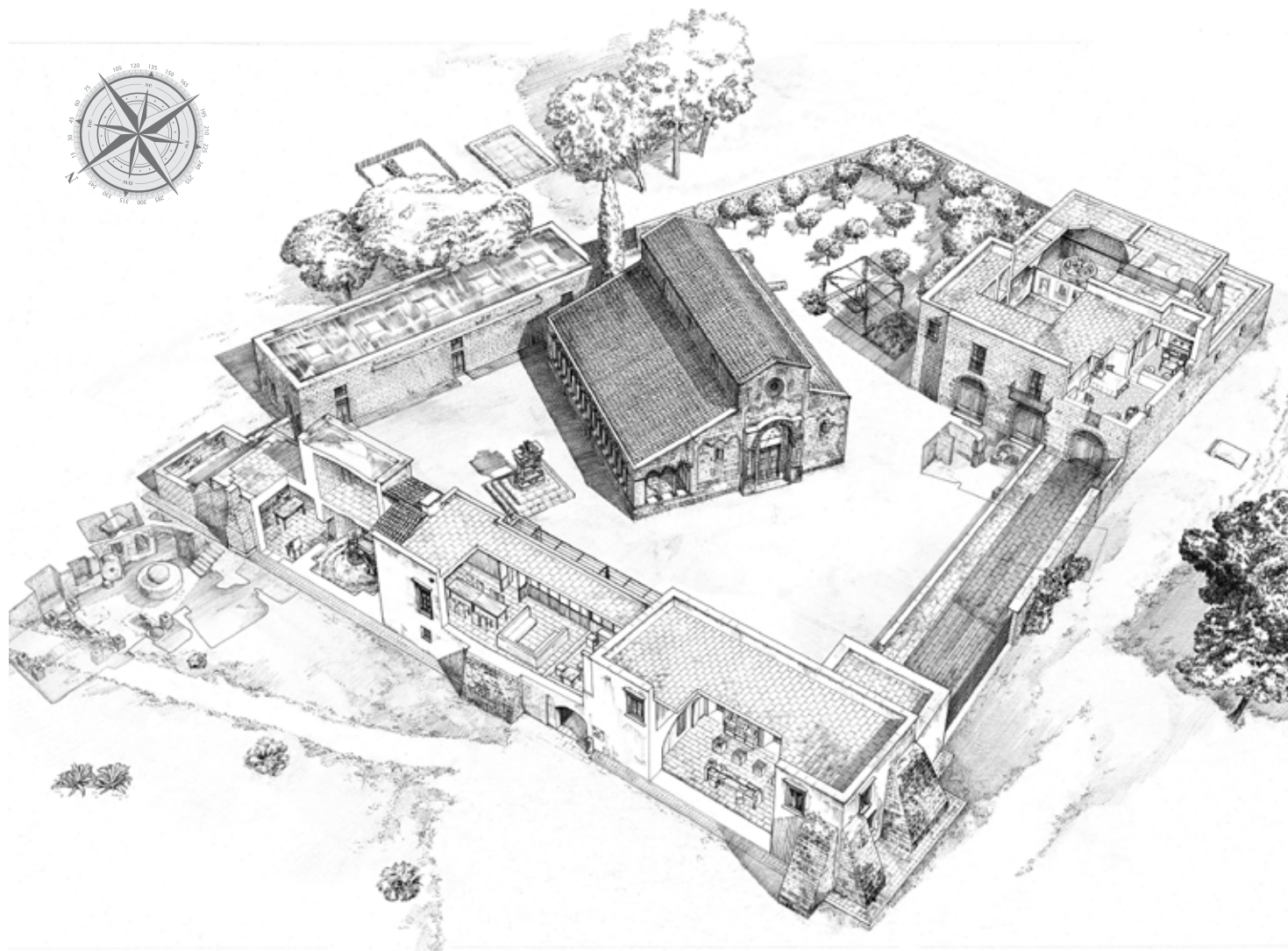


THE ABBEY COMPLEX



Legend has it that the Abbey was founded following a vision that appeared to **Tancred**, King of Sicily, Count of Lecce: he claimed to have seen the Virgin after chasing a fawn into a cave. It is far more likely that the foundation of the complex dates to the early 12th century, when **Bohemond I of Antioch** (1058-1111) – son of the valiant Robert Guiscard, the first Norman to be elevated to the title of Duke of Puglia, Calabria and Sicily – had a coenobium built there for Greek **monks** who were followers of the Rule of St Basil the Great. It is traditionally stated that the monks lived at Cerrate from the mid-12th century – the period in which the sources confirm the presence of a library and a *scriptorium* here. By the time it passed under the control of the **Hospital of the Incurables** in Naples, in 1531, the complex had become

a rich, multi-layered structure. Buildings constructed in different periods are today scattered around the church: the **Monks' House**; the **Farmer's House**, dating from the 19th century; a building erected in the early 16th century, with a single room and a stellar-vaulted ceiling, presumably used as a stable; and the well, made using pietra leccese stone in 1585. The raid by **Turkish pirates** in 1711 caused the entire complex to fall into a state of complete abandonment and decay – a situation that persisted through out the 19th and 20th centuries until the intervention of the Province of Lecce in 1965. In 2012, the complex was entrusted to FAI on a thirty-year concessionary basis with the objective of restoring it and reopening it to the public. The Abbey of Cerrate and the surrounding complex of buildings constitute FAI's first property in the Puglia region.

MONASTERY

A *scriptorium* is documented as having been a part of the Abbey since 1154. As such, the monks were already active at Cerrate in the 12th century, and their cells and a library were very probably located in the oldest part of the long building sited on the northern side of the complex. Recent excavations have, however, uncovered an 8th-century **cemetery**, located to the south.

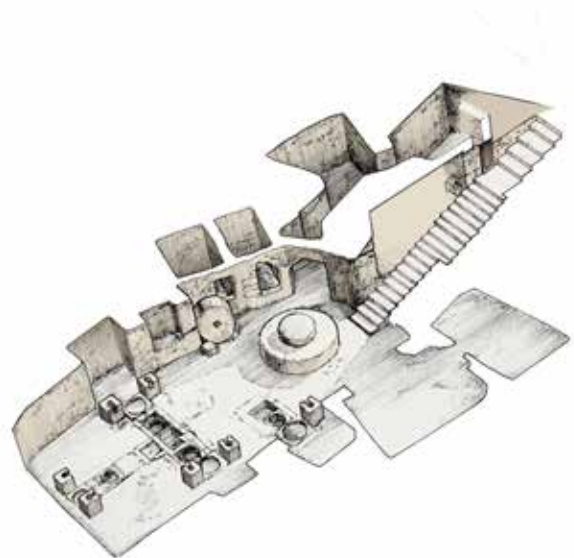
This discovery indicates strongly that Cerrate was a cultural centre long before its written confirmation as such. It was, in fact, an important centre of the Byzantine Rite from the initial centuries of its spread through the Salento area.



UNDERGROUND OLIVE-OIL MILLS

Two ancient underground oil mills (used for the grinding of olives), called “*trappiti*”, are testament to the farm’s high level of productivity.

Excavated out of the rock below the Monk’s House, where the olive-press was located, and under the Farmer’s House, to this day the mills betray the signs of the grindstones that were made to rotate by means of a mule, the wells for the collection of the **oil**, the stone basins and the presses. In these rooms, one can still sense the atmosphere of the activities that were carried out here until a century ago, with the millers both working and living here, illuminated by lamps, the wick bathed in oil.



AUDIT

This is a reproduction of the **platea* of 1692**, which represents the “Abbey of Santa Maria of Cerrate, sited in the appurtenances of the Land of Trepuzzi”. The complex and the territory are described in great detail: the possessions of Cerrate reached all the way to the sea, and the complex had two enclosures, no longer extant, intended to protect the monks’ crops. Also noted are a **cistern** and a column with a cross, as well as the crenellated keep that housed the *scriptorium* and the library. The absence in the drawing of a well which we know was here in 1585 allows us to date the drawing to a time before then.



* an auditing document setting out the possessions of an ecclesiastical body