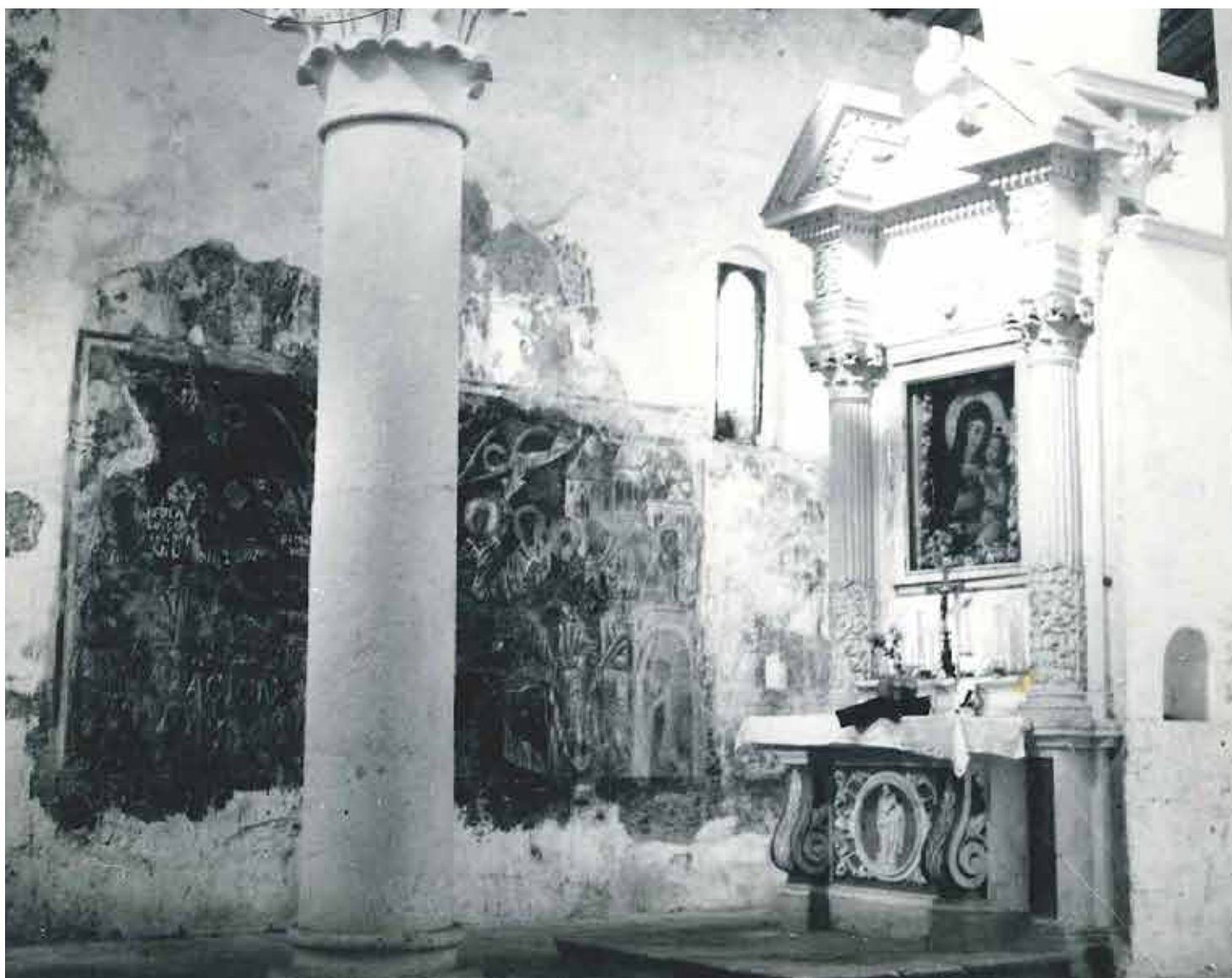


# THE REMOVED FRESCOES / 01



**O**n the southern side of the complex, there is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century building that was once used as the farmer's house and the olive-oil press. The works carried out in the 1970s, directed by Franco Minissi, transformed this space into the Museum of the Popular Arts and Traditions of the Salento Area, which featured reconstructions of domestic spaces and showcased the objects and tools of the rural world. Off to one side, eight frescoed panels that had just been removed from the walls of the church were reattached to the walls of the museum. Through this technique\*, widely deployed in the past but today only used in emergency situations, portions of fresco were removed from the wall surface for the purpose of safeguarding them or, as in the case of Santa Maria, revealing underlying layers.

Following a careful, complex restoration by the ISCR and the restoration laboratory of the San Castromediano Provincial Museum, six of the eight panels are once again in a good state of conservation and have been provisionally relocated in the Farmer's House, where they will remain until research currently under way can confidently confirm their original position inside the church.

\*The technique of *stacco* (detachment) sees the removal of the pictorial film along with a substantial part of the plasterwork; in contrast, the technique of *strappo* (lifting of the paint layer) involves the removal of a thin layer of the paint film, with a thickness of no more than 3 mm. This is also known as the Calicot method.

### **KOIMESIS (DORMITIO VIRGINIS) (14<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)**

The scene, typical of the Byzantine tradition, represents the death of the Virgin. Underneath, in the centre, Mary is laid out on a catafalque covered in damasked fabrics embellished with pearls. Together with the Apostles, three bishops officiate at the funeral: Timothy, Hierotheos and Dionysius the Areopagite. In the middle section, Christ appears in mandorla: he holds the eidolon (soul) of his mother bound like a mummy. A Gothic-style architectural frame serves as a background to the earthly scene. The Apostles rush to bid the Virgin farewell. In the lower right corner, a kneeling figure, identified as Peregrini de Morciano, is represented as the probable client of the fresco. Originally located on the wall of the left aisle, the large Koimesis of the Virgin was realised in the 14<sup>th</sup> century above the series of saints that today appear “mottled”.



### **“TRIPTYCH” (MID-15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)**

The large panel presents three scenes next to each other: the Annunciation, St George and the Dragon, and St Eustace and the Stag. The fresco was created around 1450 on the southern wall of the church, above the current mediaeval puzzle. Within a “Giottesque” architectural frame there appear the archangel Gabriel, on the left, and Mary, on the right, who stand out against a backdrop of Cosmatesque inlays. The atmosphere of a chivalrous carousel animates the two subsequent stories. St George slays the dragon outside the city, against a rocky background that is also evocative of Giotto, in front of a princess clearly influenced by Pisanello. To the right we find the conversion of St Eustace (interpreted in the past as Bohemond, Tancred or Godfrey) to whom, during a stag hunt, the face of Christ appeared between the horns of the animal.



### **PREPARATORY DRAWING (MID-15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)**

These sketches were uncovered during the 1975 restoration, by means of the strappo technique, under the wall that was adorned with the fresco of the Histories of St George and St Eustace.

Before carrying out the paintings inside the church, the anonymous author of the work probably traced out these sketches for the purpose of finding a possible pictorial solution vis-à-vis the themes to be developed or to illustrate roughly the final result.

