

TEUTONIC KNIGHTS AND COMMENDATORY ABBOTS AT TORRE ALEMANNA

texts by Nicola Pergola
illustrations by Pasquale Bufano

Under the patronage of the Municipality of Cerignola



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A project in collaboration with

Parrocchia S. Antonio da Padova
Lions Club "Torre Alemanna" • Cerignola
Centro Studi e Ricerche "Torre Alemanna" • Cerignola
Club per l'Unesco • Cerignola
Pro Loco • Cerignola
Unitre-Università delle Tre Età • Cerignola
Fondazione G. e S. Tatarella
C.D. "Don Puglisi"
I.C. "Battisti-Don Bosco"
I.C. "Di Vittorio-Padre Pio"
I.I.S.S. "Pavoncelli"
I.T.E.T. "Alighieri"
Liceo Classico "Zingarelli"
Scuola sec. I gr. "Pavoncelli"

Project editor: Nicola Pergola

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It should be opportunely remembered here the commitment of Prof. Matteo Stuppiello – founder and president of the “Torre Alemanna” Research Centre – for the safeguarding and enhancement of the town’s cultural heritage. Thanks to his requests, Torre Alemanna and the Piano delle Fosse – for decades exposed to neglect and decay – have been recognized as assets worthy of protection, and subject to monumental restrictions pursuant to law 1089/1939.

Nicola Pergola (Cerignola 1951), formerly an official of the Regione Puglia, was in charge of the Cultural Services Centre of Cerignola. He has published: *400 proverbi cerignolani* (1979), *Cerignola. Quarant'anni di immagini* (1985), *Cerignola. I campi le stagioni* (1988), *Editoria pubblica pugliese: dieci anni di intervento dei Centri Regionali di Servizi Educativi e Culturali* (1992), *Libri di Puglia. La produzione editoriale dei Centri Regionali di Servizi Educativi e Culturali e degli Assessorati alla Cultura e alla P.I. della Regione Puglia* (1999), *La terra il cielo. L'universo del cerignolano in 1500 proverbi dialettali* (1999), *Torre Alemanna. Il ricco feudo di Cavalieri Teutonici e cardinali commendatari* (video 1999), *Libri di Puglia. La produzione editoriale dei Centri Regionali di Servizi Educativi e Culturali e degli Assessorati alla Cultura e alla P.I. della Regione Puglia* (CD-ROM 2000), *Cordialissimi saluti e ringraziamenti. Cartoline da Cerignola* (2001), *Il Piano delle Fosse di Cerignola tra storia e folclore* (2001), *L'apprezzo di Cerignola del 1758* (2004), *Per strada nei campi. Piccolo erbario cerignolano* (2004), *Il canto del cigno: l'ultima produzione editoriale dei Centri Regionali di Servizi Educativi e Culturali della Regione Puglia* (2011), *Arcipreti nullius e vescovi cerignolani* (2012), *La palestra GIL di Cerignola* (2012), *Cerignola: guida turistica* (2013), *Cerignola: storia di una città* (2021).

Pasquale Bufano (Cerignola 1955) – graduated from the magisterium at the State Institute of Art of Urbino, and specialized in Animated Drawing – works in the field of comics and illustration. He has published: *La battaglia di Cerignola* (1987), *Giuseppe Pavoncelli* (1988), *Giuseppe Di Vittorio* (2006), *Don Antonio Palladino: il don Bosco di Cerignola* (2020).

Foreword

The Torre Alemanna complex – the only surviving structure, in Italy, of the Order of the Teutonic Knights – has kept many of its secrets tight for the past eight centuries.

Perhaps we will never know if Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, the *puer Apuliae*, the *stupor mundi*, really donated to the Teutonic Knights – or more simply sold them – the territories where they established the House of Corneto, later known as Torre Alemanna: not a hospital structure for pilgrims and crusaders on their way to the Holy Land, but an agricultural-livestock settlement which, with its flourishing activity, repaid the debts that the other Houses of the Order accumulated.

And maybe we will ask ourselves why – just a handful of years after Bonaventura da Bagnoregio composed his book of meditations *Lignum vitae* in 1260 – precisely in Torre Alemanna, an isolated farmhouse in the countryside, one of the first iconographic representations of the Franciscan theme of the *Tree of Life* appeared on a wall of the room on the ground floor of the tower, probably between the last quarter of the 13th century and the early 14th century.

Perhaps we will never know the identity of the two probable dedicators of the painting, of whom only the head and the gazes reaching towards the cross remain: surely they are kneeling at the foot of the cross; the elder is grey-haired and with his hands joined, as could be seen up to a few years ago.

And what is hiding behind the large shield with the three hammers – which with the other cross-designed shield welcomed workers and visitors who entered the farm – and the half cross inscribed in a circle that decorates a lithic fragment and some ceramics found during the excavation activity? And the five-pointed stone star in the centre of the ribbed vault and those graffitied here and there, or the graffiti depicting the shield with the three hammers, heraldic emblems, the Solomon's knot, and the sequences of seven vertical strokes with a calendar function that suggest the use of the ancient choir as a prison?

Who knows if the commendatory cardinals who took over from the Teutonic Knights were ever here among us: and especially Nicolò Caetani and Pasquale Acquaviva d'Aragona, to whom we owe the 16th-century complex and the subsequent 18th-century restorations (but also the first damage to the frescoes caused by the barrel vault created in the chapel on the ground floor of the tower). Or if rather – as absentee feudal lords – they enjoyed only the fruits of the goods granted to them by the pope, leaving everything to be administered to procurators general.

On the other hand, we will certainly never know who – fifty years after the visit of Haseloff who, at the beginning of the 20th century, came to document and reconstruct the history of Swabian architecture in southern Italy and that of Torre Alemanna – degraded the centuries-old tower housing tanks for the water needs of the nascent rural hamlet of Borgo Libertà.

An unfortunate choice that, with the continuous spills of water, put the very safety of the tower at risk, and unfortunately cancelled forever very large parts of the pictorial cycle on the presbytery walls of the Gothic chapel.

However, the careful and respectful restorations that have taken place over the course of twenty years have restored the complex to its original appearance, and the Ceramics Museum housed today greatly increases its charm. But this singular asset will truly fulfil its social function when it will be able to welcome scholars – but also simple visitors – eager to discover the past of the territory: something for which we hope this small, present contribution of ours will be useful.

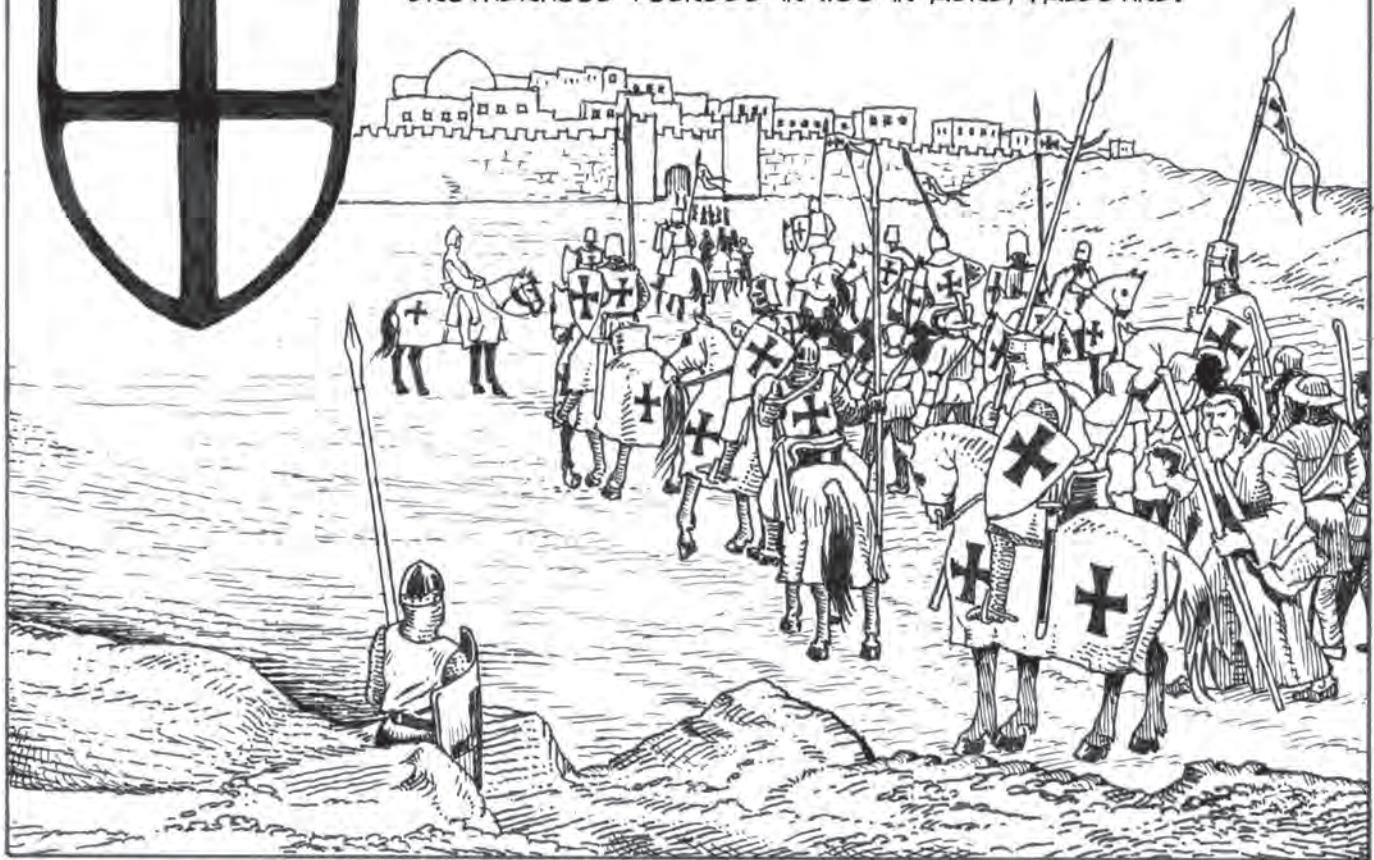
Nicola Pergola

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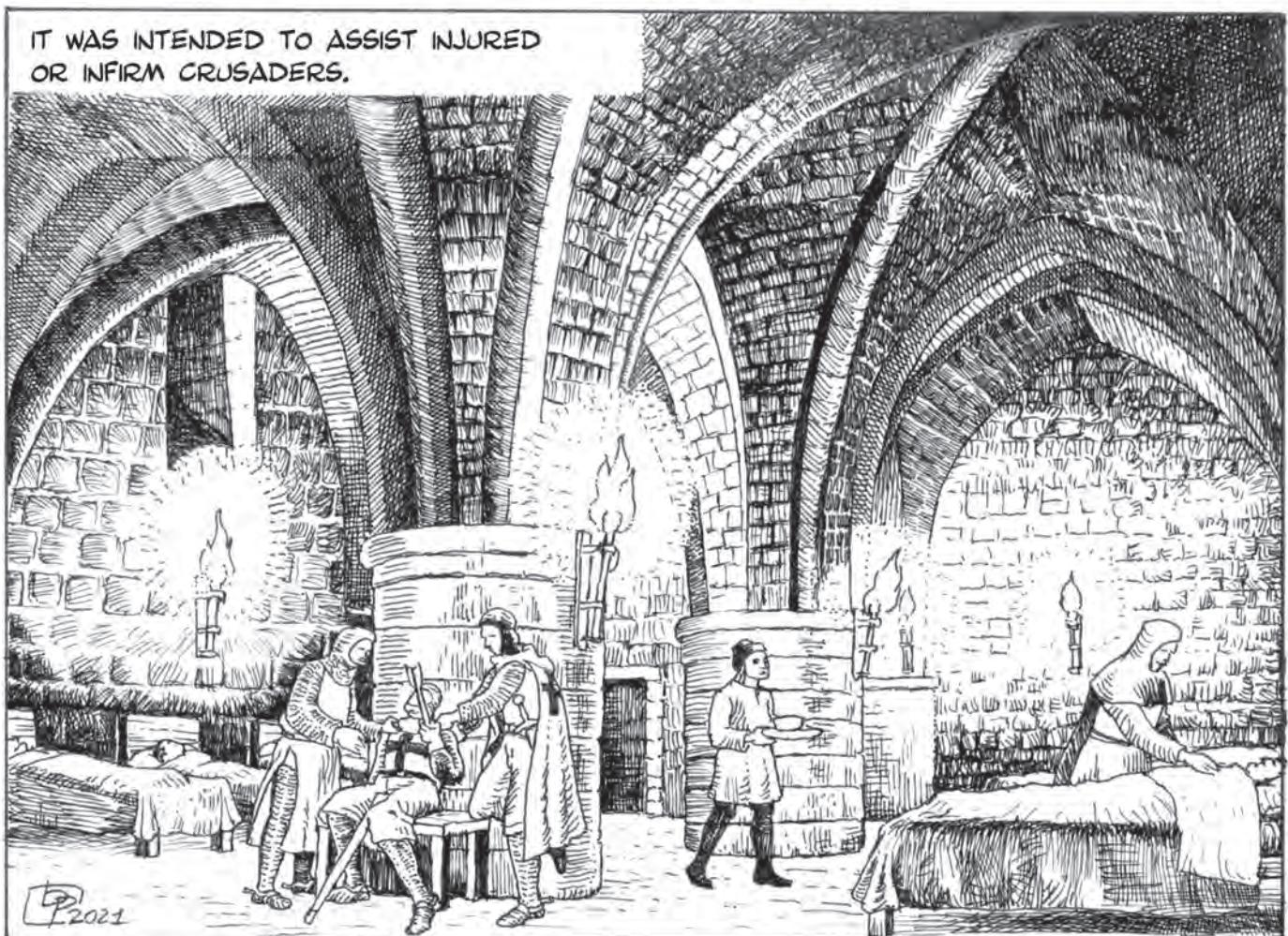
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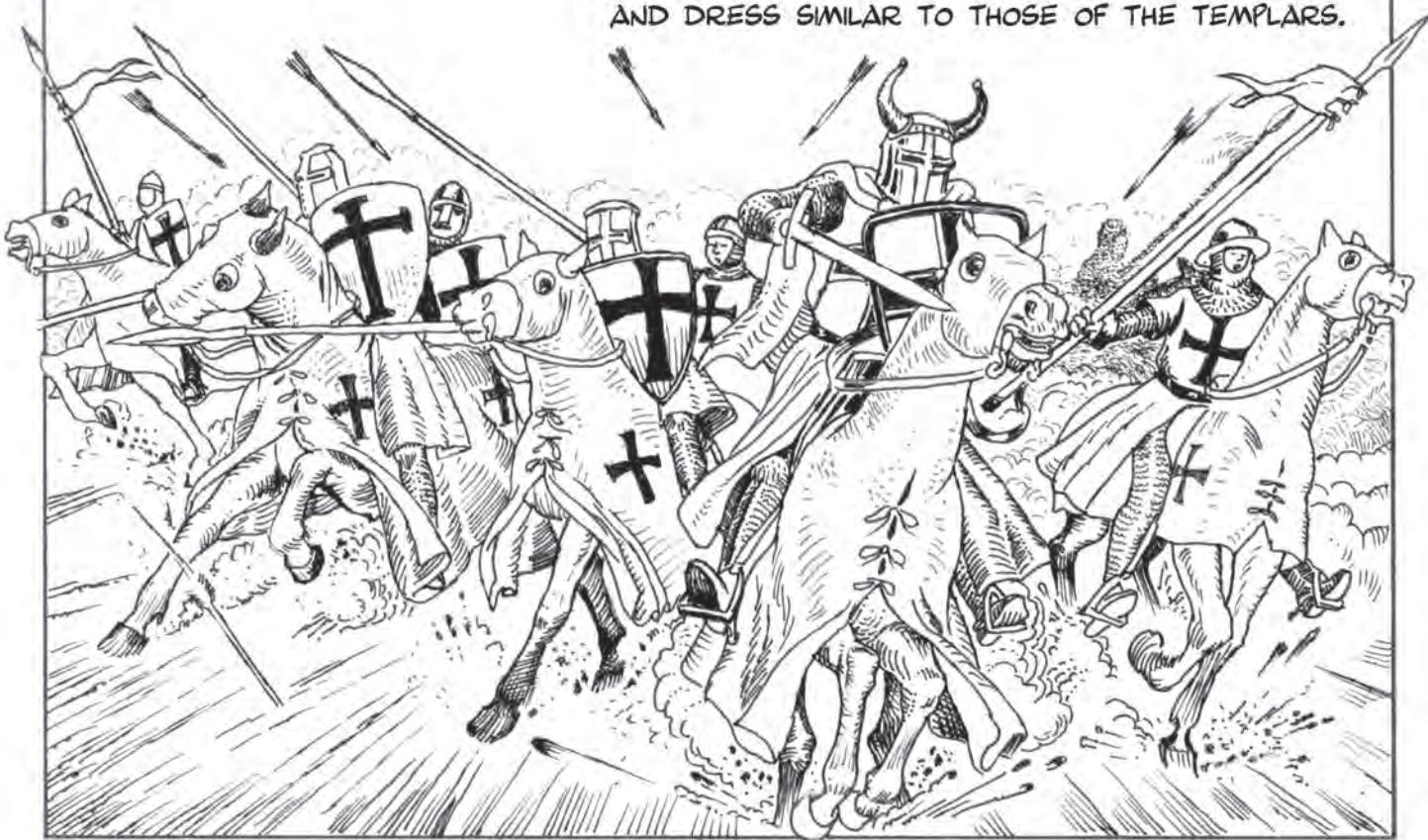
THE TEUTONIC ORDER WAS BORN FROM A GERMAN HOSPITAL BROTHERHOOD FOUNDED IN 1190 IN ACRE, PALESTINE.



IT WAS INTENDED TO ASSIST INJURED OR INFIRM CRUSADERS.



THE BROTHERHOOD WAS TRANSFORMED IN 1198 INTO A RELIGIOUS-MILITARY ORDER, WHICH ADOPTED RULES AND DRESS SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE TEMPLARS.



THE RULE OF THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS WAS APPROVED BY POPE INNOCENT III IN 1199.



KNIGHTS AND CLERICS WORE A WHITE CLOAK WITH A BLACK CROSS (THE TEMPLAR CROSS WAS RED); CONVERSE BROTHERS AND NUNS WORE A DARK CLOAK.



RULED BY A GENERAL CHAPTER, HEADED BY A GRAND MASTER, THE ORDER WAS TERRITORIALLY DIVIDED INTO REGIONS, PROVINCES AND HOUSES.



AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS POWER, IN THE 14TH CENTURY, IT HAD 1,000 KNIGHTS, POSSESSIONS IN PALESTINE, GREECE, SPAIN, SICILY, APULIA, AUSTRIA, GERMANY AND PRUSSIA, AND MOVED ITS HEADQUARTERS TO MARIENBURG IN 1309.



SUPPRESSED IN 1809 BY NAPOLEON BONAPARTE ...



... REFOUNDED IN AUSTRIA IN 1834, AND REFORMED IN 1929, TODAY IT IS A RELIGIOUS ORDER DEDICATED TO PASTORAL ACTIVITIES.



THE OLDEST HOUSE OF THE TEUTONIC ORDER IN THE BALÌA OF APULIA (PROVINCE) WAS THAT OF BRINDISI, THE SEAT OF THE COMMANDATOR. AFTER 1233 THE SEAT WAS BARLETTA, AND AFTER 1335 SAN LEONARDO DI SIPONTO.



THERE WAS A CHURCH WITH AN ADJOINING HOSPITAL - BUILT BY THE AUGUSTINIANS IN THE 12TH CENTURY, AND DECAYED AFTER 1242 - WHICH PASSED TO THE TEUTONIC ORDER IN 1261.



THE HOUSE OF SAN LEONARDO WAS THE
MOST IMPORTANT IN THE BALÌA OF APLIA.
IT PRODUCED CEREALS, WINE AND OIL ...



... AND RAISED PIGS AND WORKING ANIMALS.



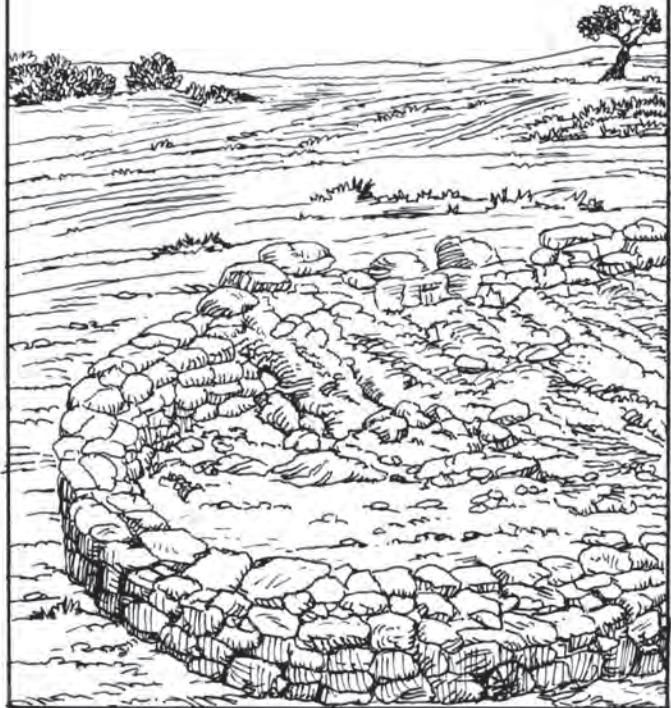
HOWEVER, THE HOUSE OF CORNETO SURPASSED IT:
AN AUTONOMOUS GRANGE BUILT BETWEEN MELFI AND
ASCOLI SATRIANO, WHICH SETTLED IN THE HOMONYMOUS
FARMHOUSE WHICH WAS THEN DESTROYED IN 1349.



JUST A MILE FROM CORNETO, PROBABLY IN THE 13TH CENTURY, TORRE ALEMANNA WAS BORN: WHEN THE EMPEROR FREDERICK II, IN 1216 AND 1231, SOLD - OR DONATED - TO THE GRAND MASTER HERMANN VON SALZA LAND IN THE LOCALITY OF AQUALATA AND BISSELLETUM, BETWEEN ASCOLI SATRIANO AND CERIGNOLA. THE FIRST COMMENDATOR WAS ALGOTIO.



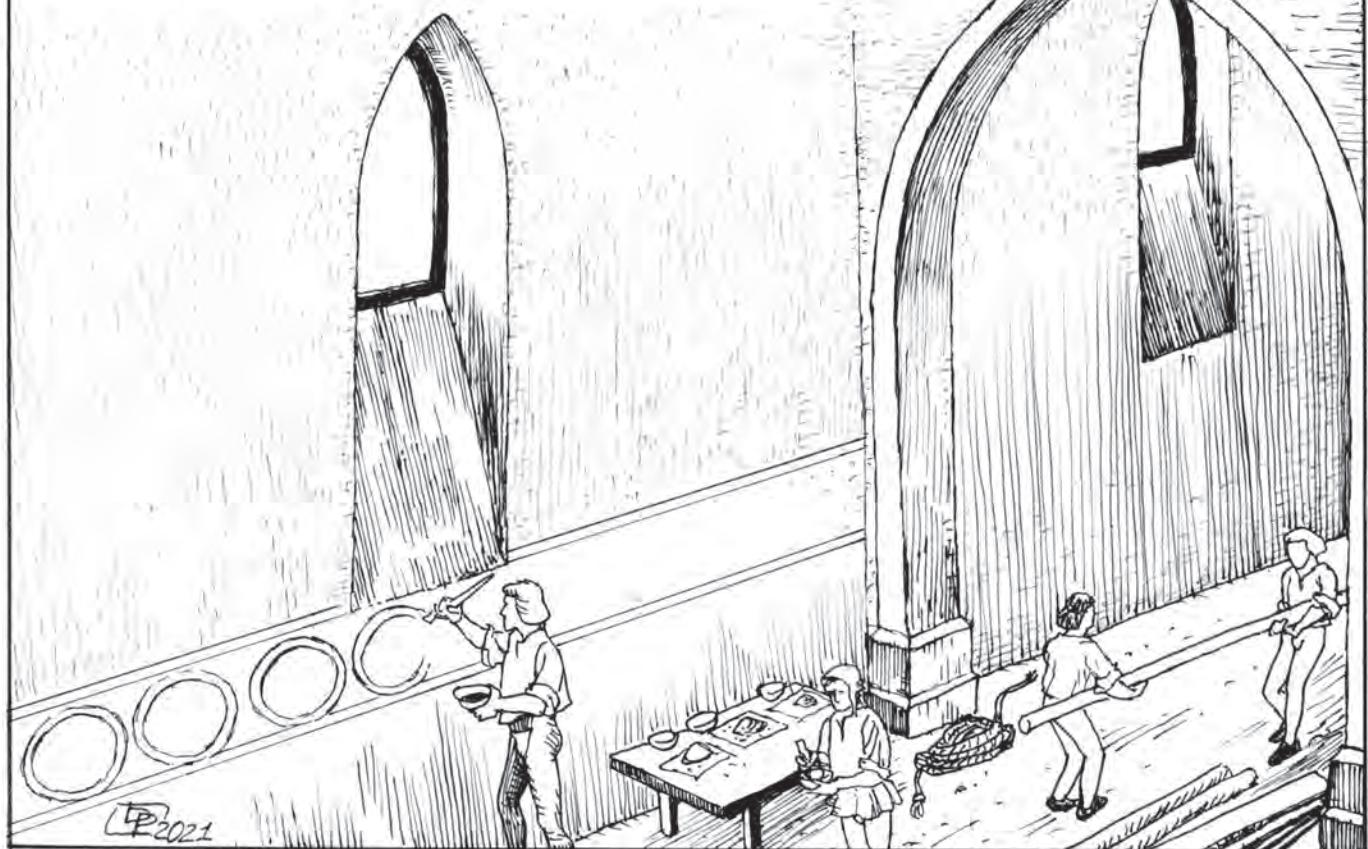
ON THE RUINS OF AN ANCIENT
CHURCH, OF WHICH THE FOUNDATION
OF THE APSE REMAINS ...



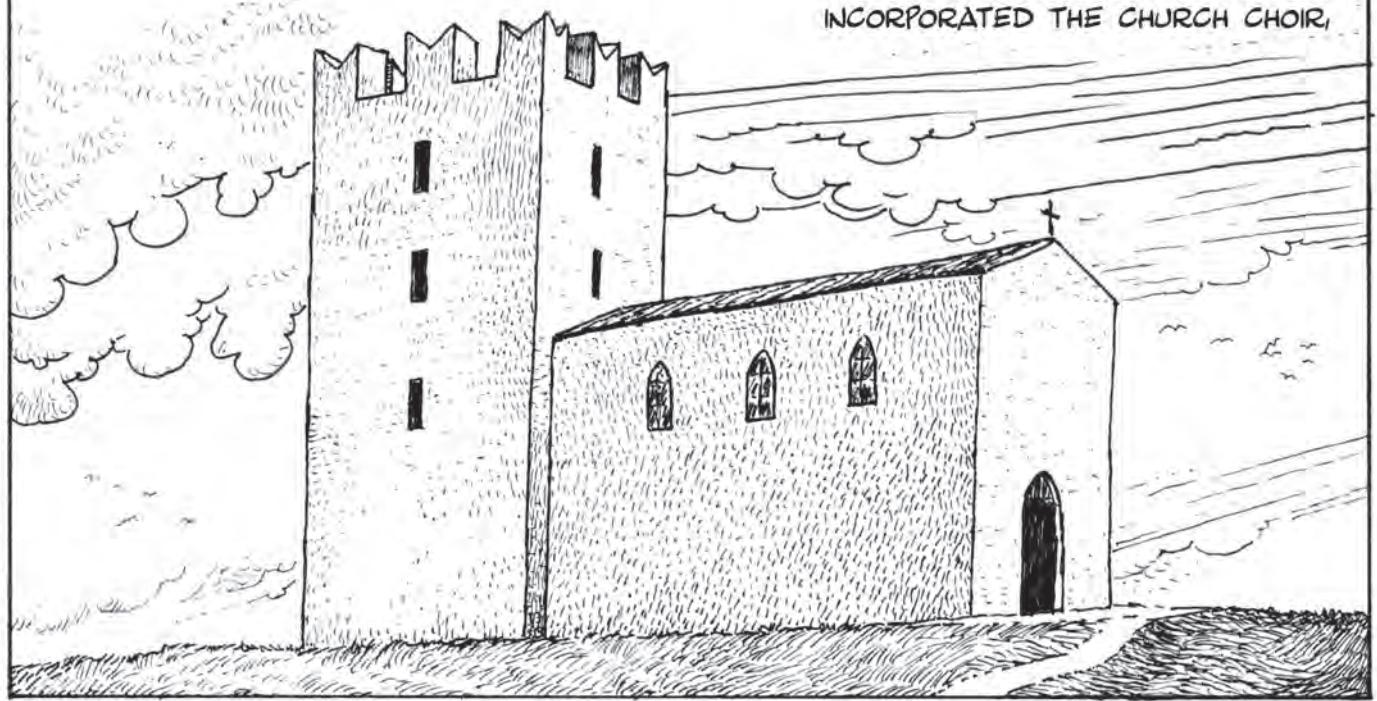
... THE FIRST NUCLEUS OF THE
FUTURE TORRE ALEMANNA WAS BUILT.



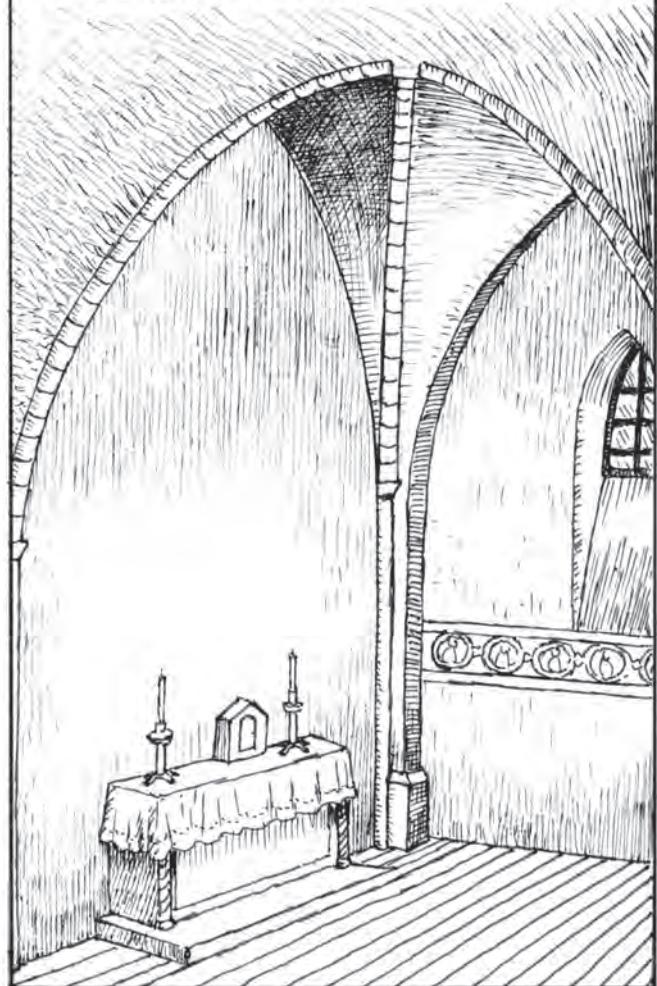
IT WAS A CHURCH WITH A SINGLE NAVE, FRESCOED
IN THE APSE BY THE END OF THE 13TH CENTURY.



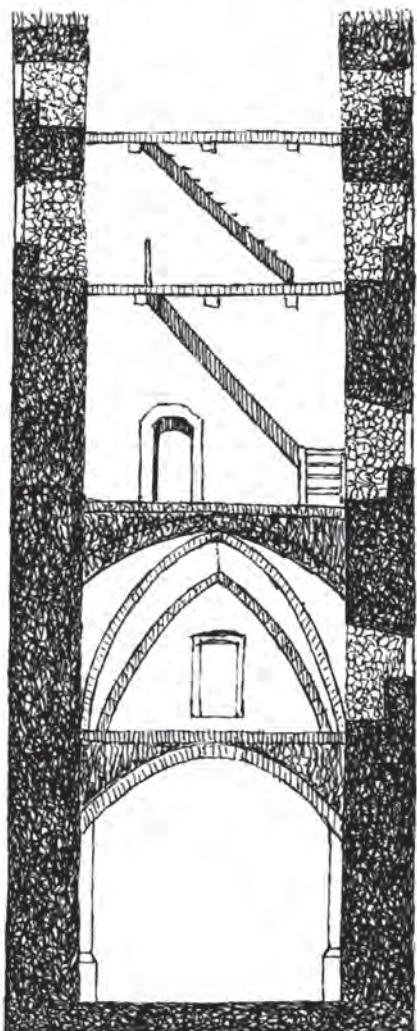
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 14TH CENTURY A CRENELLATED TOWER INCORPORATED THE CHURCH CHOIR,



CREATING A CHAPEL ON THE GROUND FLOOR, WITH A RIBBED CROSS VAULT, AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS ON THE THREE UPPER FLOORS.



IN THE 16TH CENTURY, THEN, A BARREL VAULT DIVIDED THE CHOIR INTO TWO ROOMS.

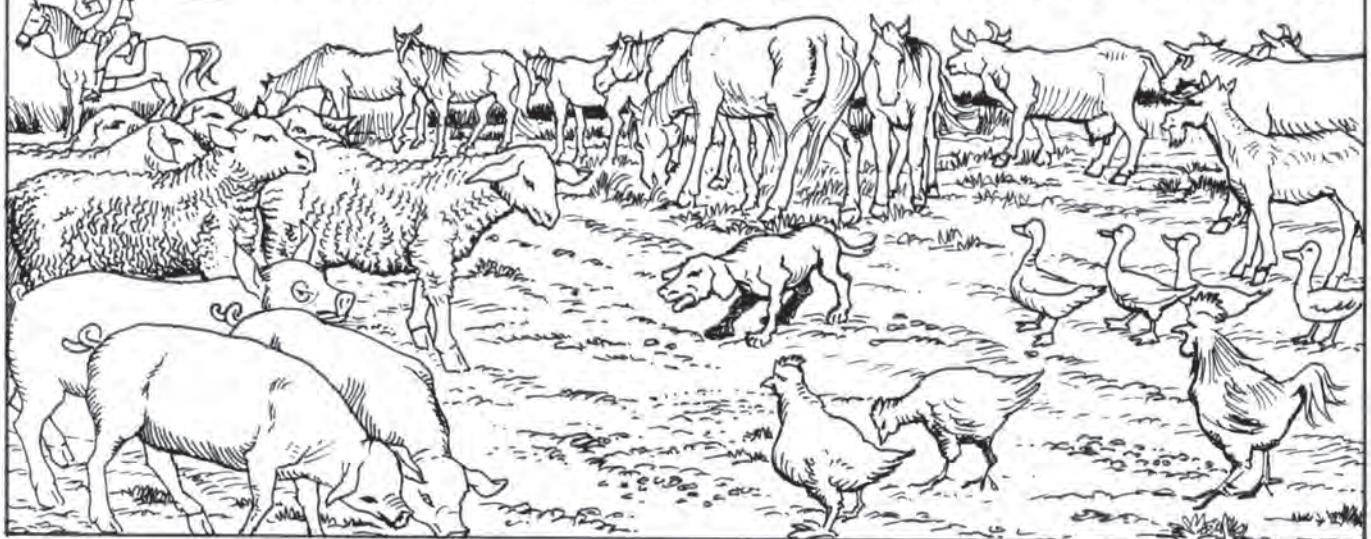


THERE WAS NO CONVENTUAL LIFE IN TORRE ALEMANNA: IN THE 15TH CENTURY THERE WERE ONLY A COMMENDATOR, A CASTELLAN AND A BROTHER.

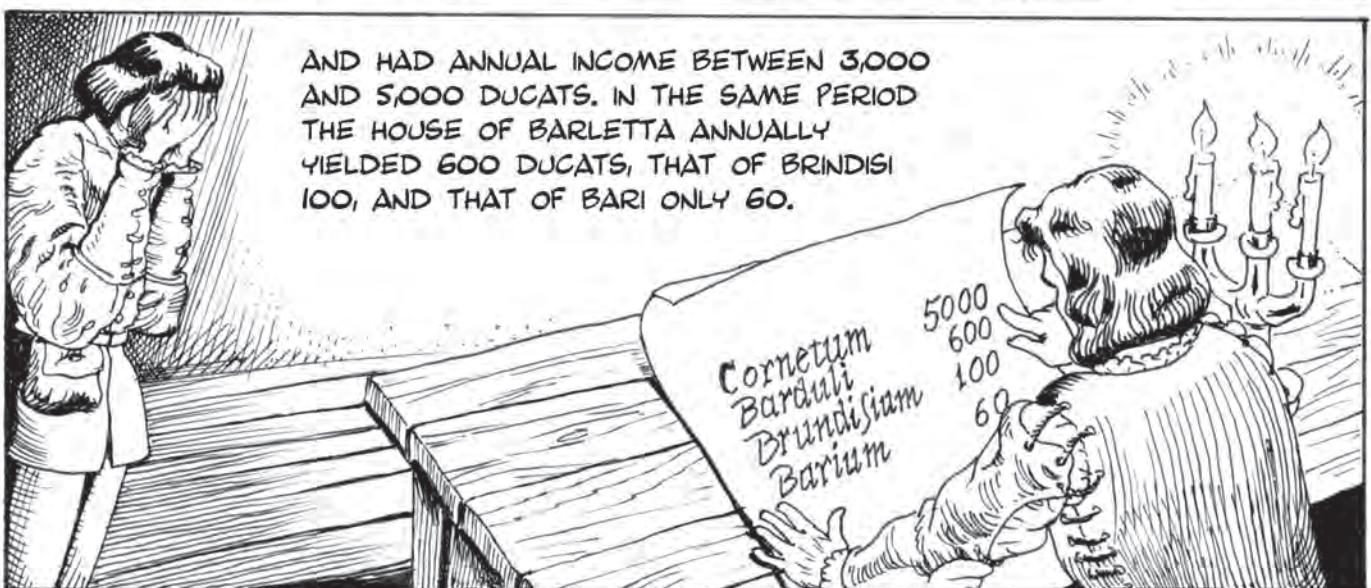


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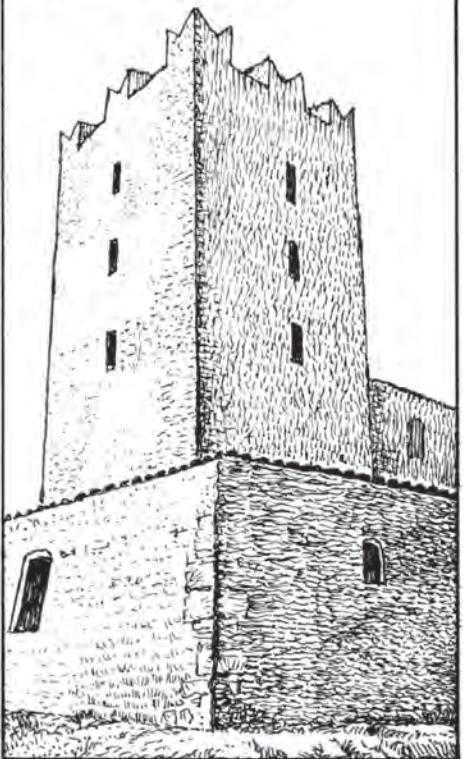
HOWEVER, THERE WAS AN AGRICULTURAL AND LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY, WHICH IN 1448 HAD 387 CALVES, 4,355 SHEEP, 2,025 PIGS AND ABOUT 100 HORSES. IT EMPLOYED 127 PERMANENT WORKERS, PLUS OTHER DAILY WORKERS,



AND HAD ANNUAL INCOME BETWEEN 3,000 AND 5,000 DUCATS. IN THE SAME PERIOD THE HOUSE OF BARLETTA ANNUALLY YIELDED 600 DUCATS, THAT OF BRINDISI 100, AND THAT OF BARI ONLY 60.



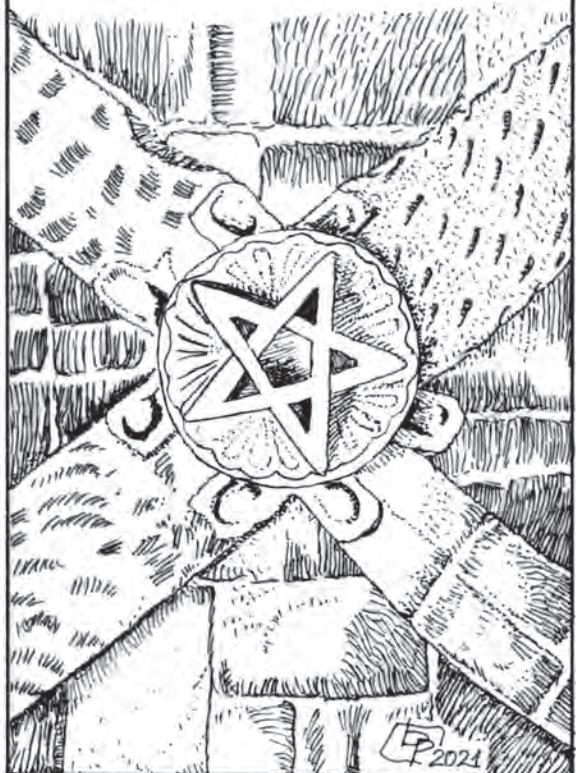
THE TOWER HAS A SQUARE BASE WITH A SIDE OF 10 M, AND IS 24 M HIGH.



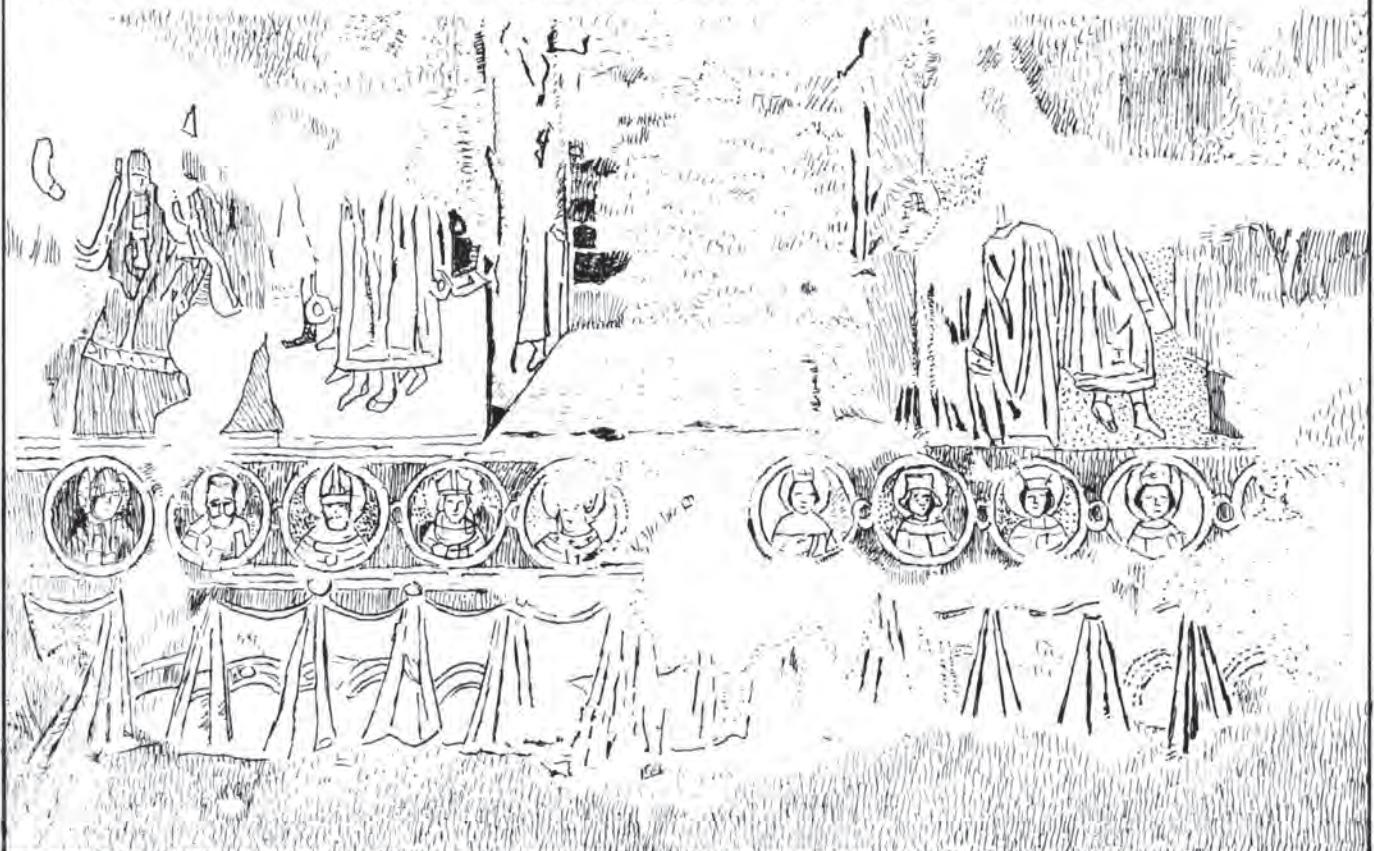
ON THE GROUND FLOOR, FROM THE CAPITALS OF FOUR CORNER,



RIBS BRANCH OFF, ENDING IN A FIVE-POINTED STAR.



THREE WALLS OF THE CHOIR HAVE FRESCOES DAMAGED BY WATER INFILTRATIONS. THE EAST WALL BEARS TRACES OF APOSTLES AND SAINTS; THE ONE TO THE SOUTH, MALE AND FEMALE SAINTS, AND THE EPISODES OF "CHRIST BEFORE PILATE", "THE ASCENT TO CALVARY", "CHRIST MOCKED", "AGONY IN THE GARDEN". ON THE FRESCOES, INSCRIPTIONS IN GOTHIQUE LETTERS ARE PAINTED AND HERALDIC EMBLEMS ARE GRAFFITIED.



THE NORTH WALL SHOWS THE MOST INTERESTING THEME, "THE TREE OF LIFE": A CROSS FROM WHICH BRANCHES THAT BEAR FRUIT AND INSCRIPTIONS BRANCH OFF. AROUND ARE THE THREE MARYS, ST. CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA, THE PROPHET ISAIAH, ST. JOHN, A ROMAN SOLDIER, A HOLY BISHOP.



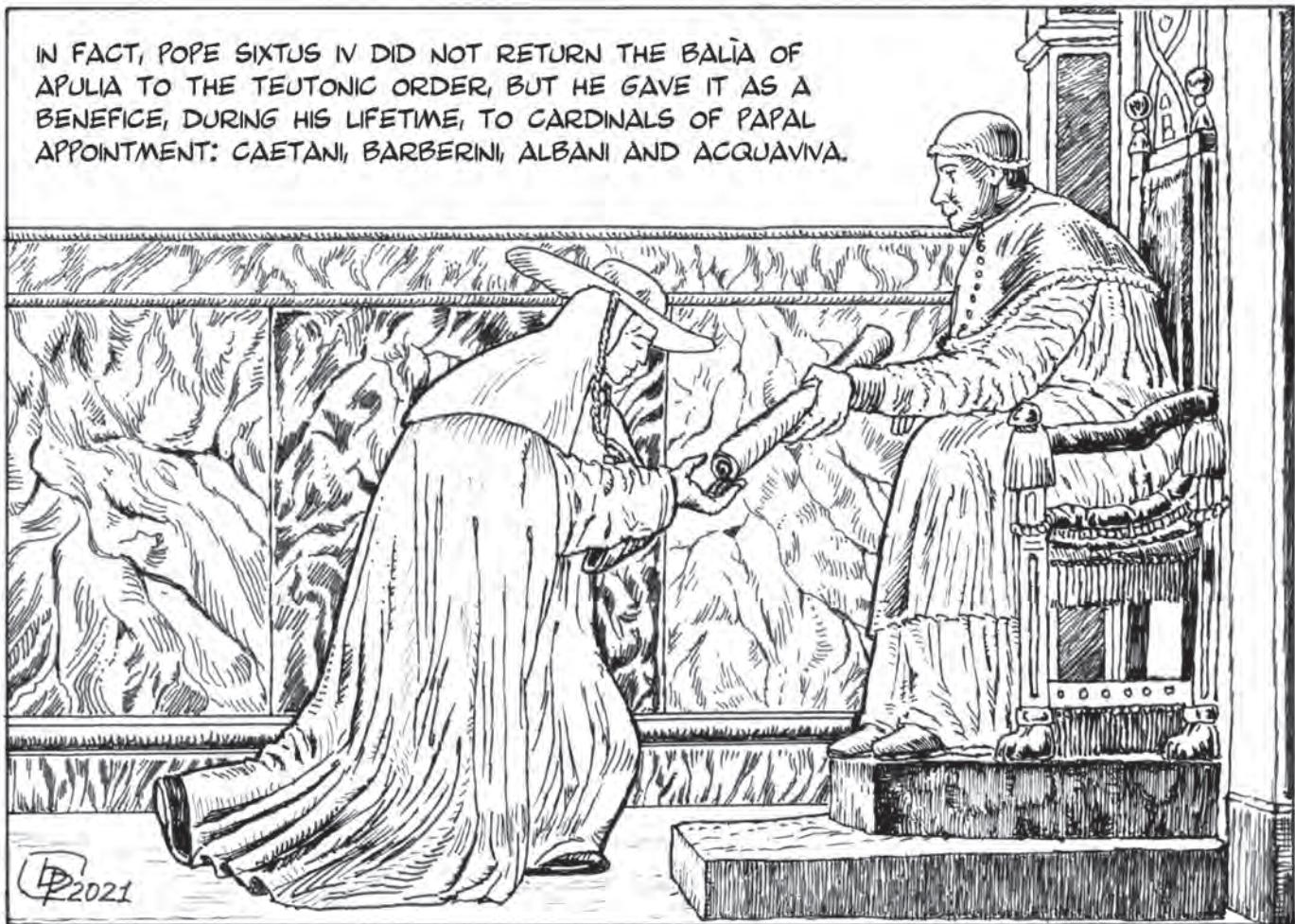
AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS, THE IMAGES OF THE PROBABLE CLIENTS.



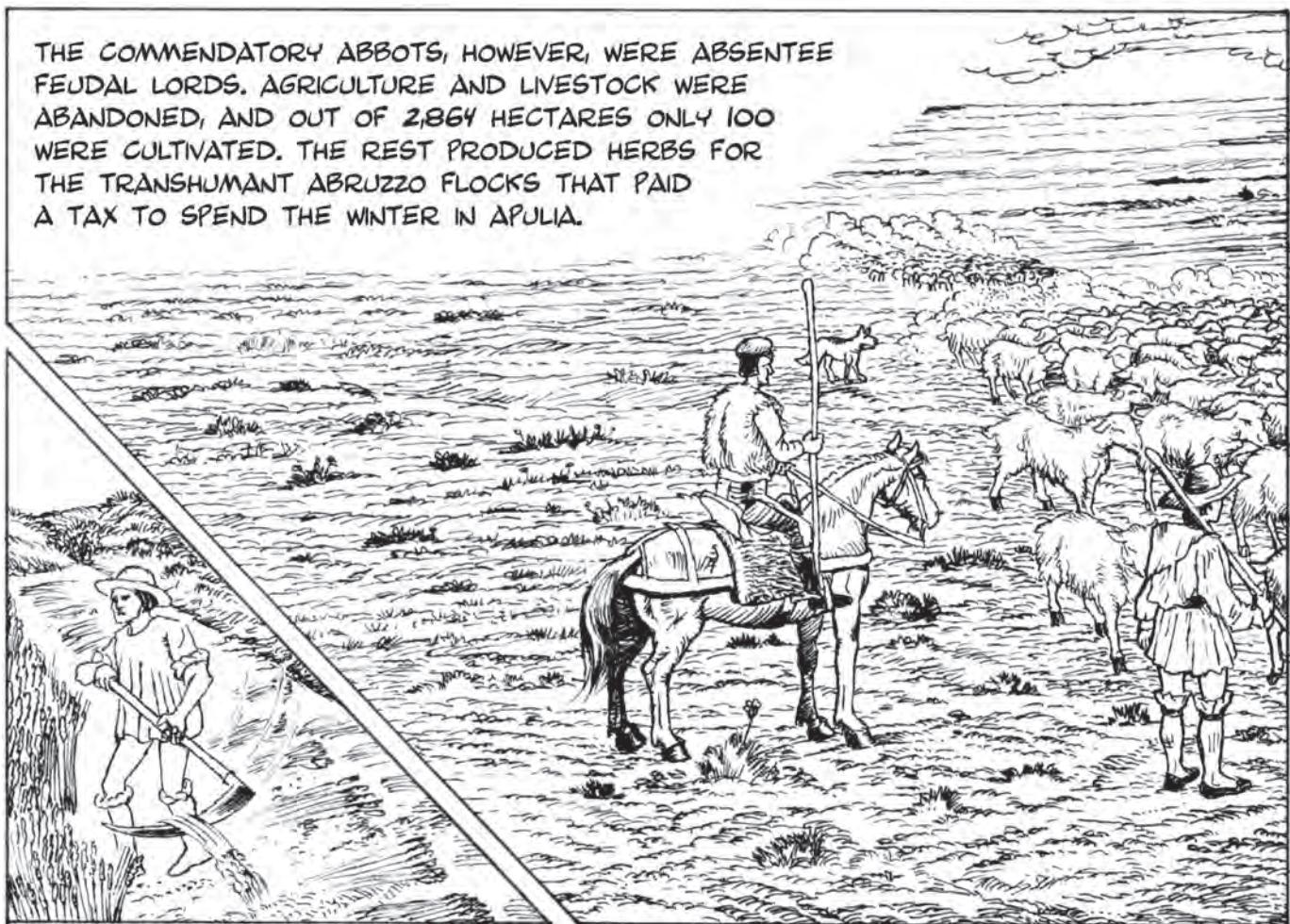
IN 1483 - WITH THE DEATH OF THE PROCURATOR STEFANO GRUBE, WHO HAD REQUESTED AND OBTAINED FROM THE POPE AS A BENEFICE TORRE ALEMANNA - THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS DISAPPEARED FROM THE SCENE.



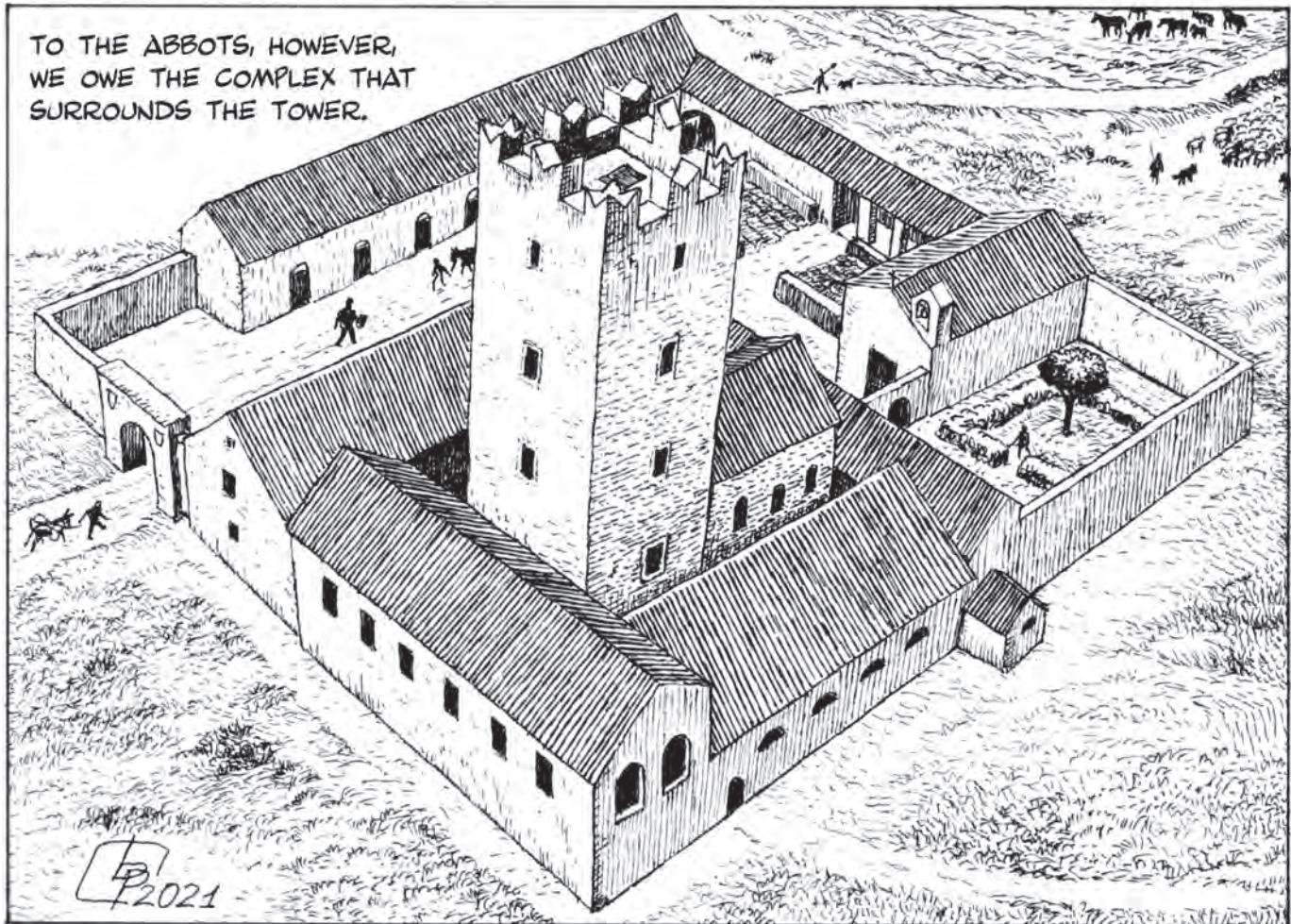
IN FACT, POPE SIXTUS IV DID NOT RETURN THE BALIA OF APULIA TO THE TEUTONIC ORDER, BUT HE GAVE IT AS A BENEFICE, DURING HIS LIFETIME, TO CARDINALS OF PAPAL APPOINTMENT: CAETANI, BARBERINI, ALBANI AND ACQUAVIVA.



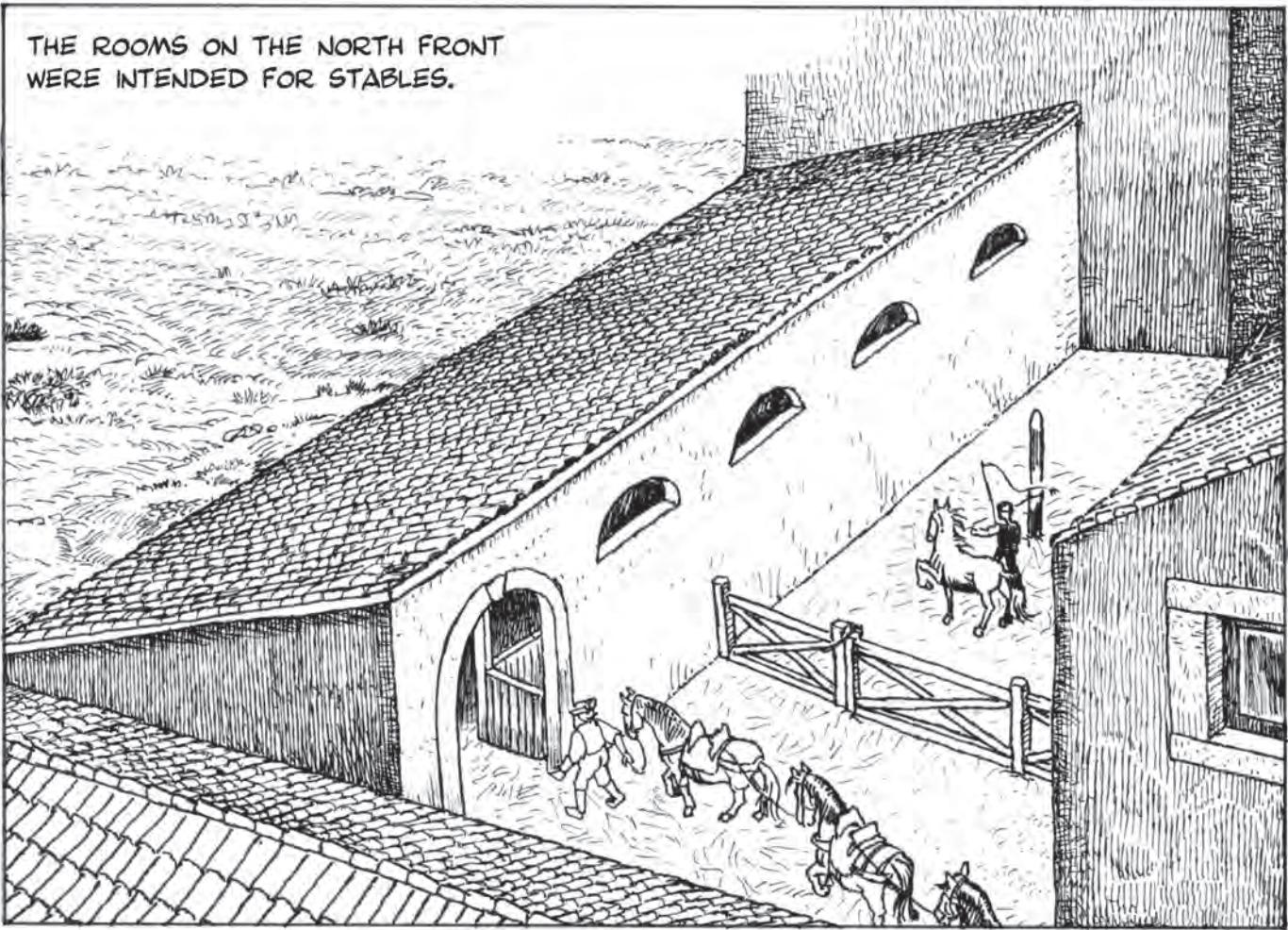
THE COMMENDATORY ABBOTS, HOWEVER, WERE ABSENTEE FEUDAL LORDS. AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK WERE ABANDONED, AND OUT OF 2,864 HECTARES ONLY 100 WERE CULTIVATED. THE REST PRODUCED HERBS FOR THE TRANSHUMANT ABRUZZO FLOCKS THAT PAID A TAX TO SPEND THE WINTER IN APULIA.



TO THE ABBOTS, HOWEVER,
WE OWE THE COMPLEX THAT
SURROUNDS THE TOWER.

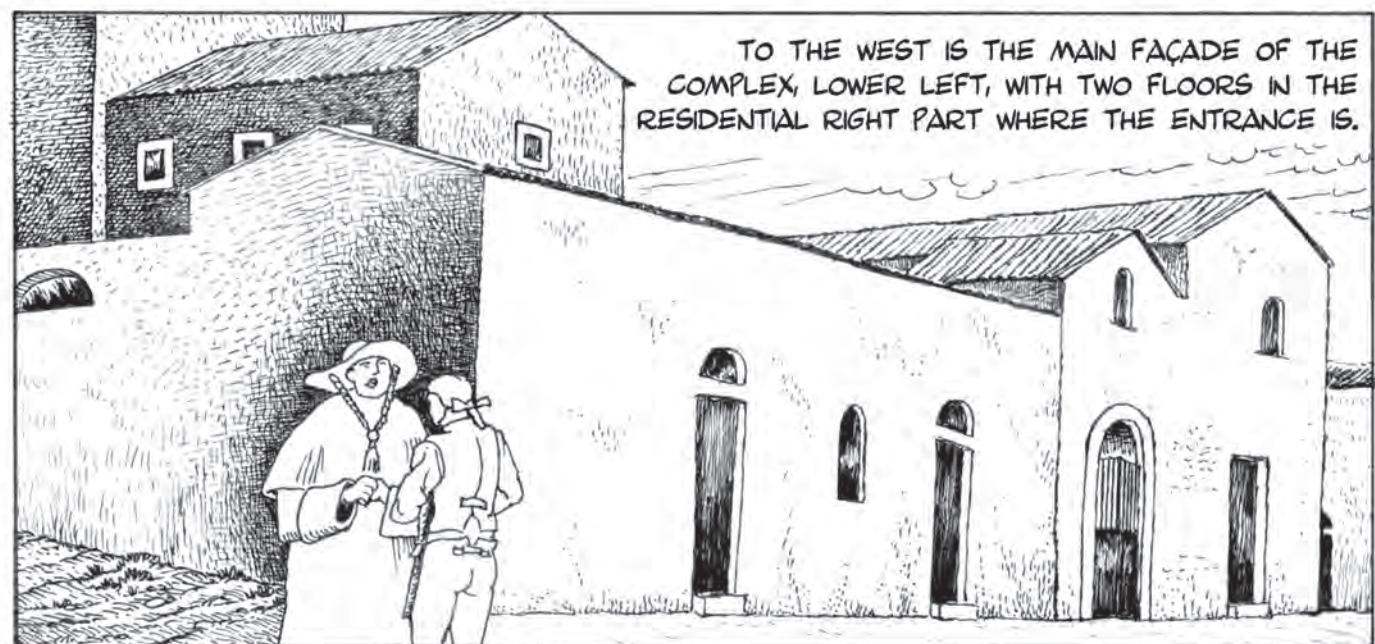
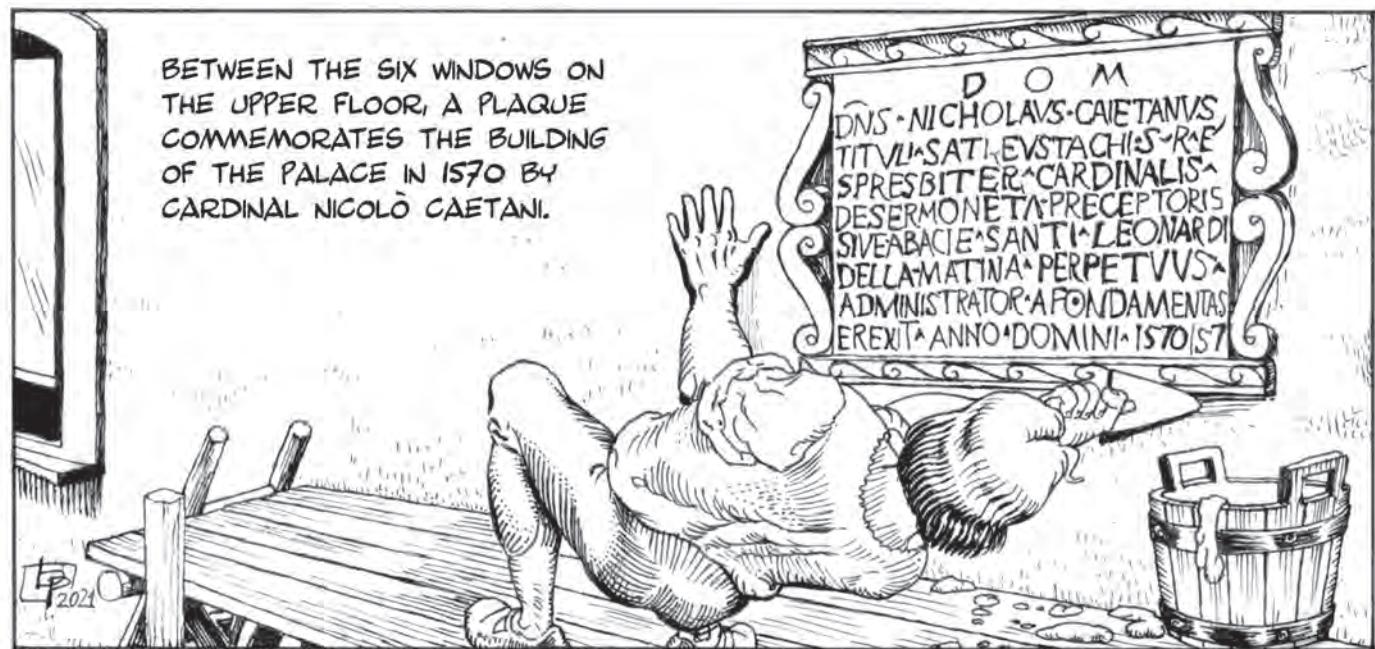


THE ROOMS ON THE NORTH FRONT
WERE INTENDED FOR STABLES.



THE EAST SIDE SHOWS THE REAR PART OF THE ABBOT'S
PALACE AND THE ENTRANCE PORTAL TO THE MEDIEVAL
VILLAGE, WITH AN ARCH BEARING TWO COATS OF ARMS
AND A PLAQUE IN MEMORY OF THE RESTORATIONS
CARRIED OUT IN 1750.





FROM THE 16TH-CENTURY ENTRANCE, AN ENTRANCE HALL LEADS TO THE COURTYARD THAT LEADS TO THE LEFT ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF THE TOWER. ON THE RIGHT INSTEAD ...



... A STONE STAIRCASE LEADS TO A LOGGIA THAT LEADS TO VARIOUS ROOMS.



AMONG THESE THERE IS A HALL WITH A MONUMENTAL FIREPLACE.



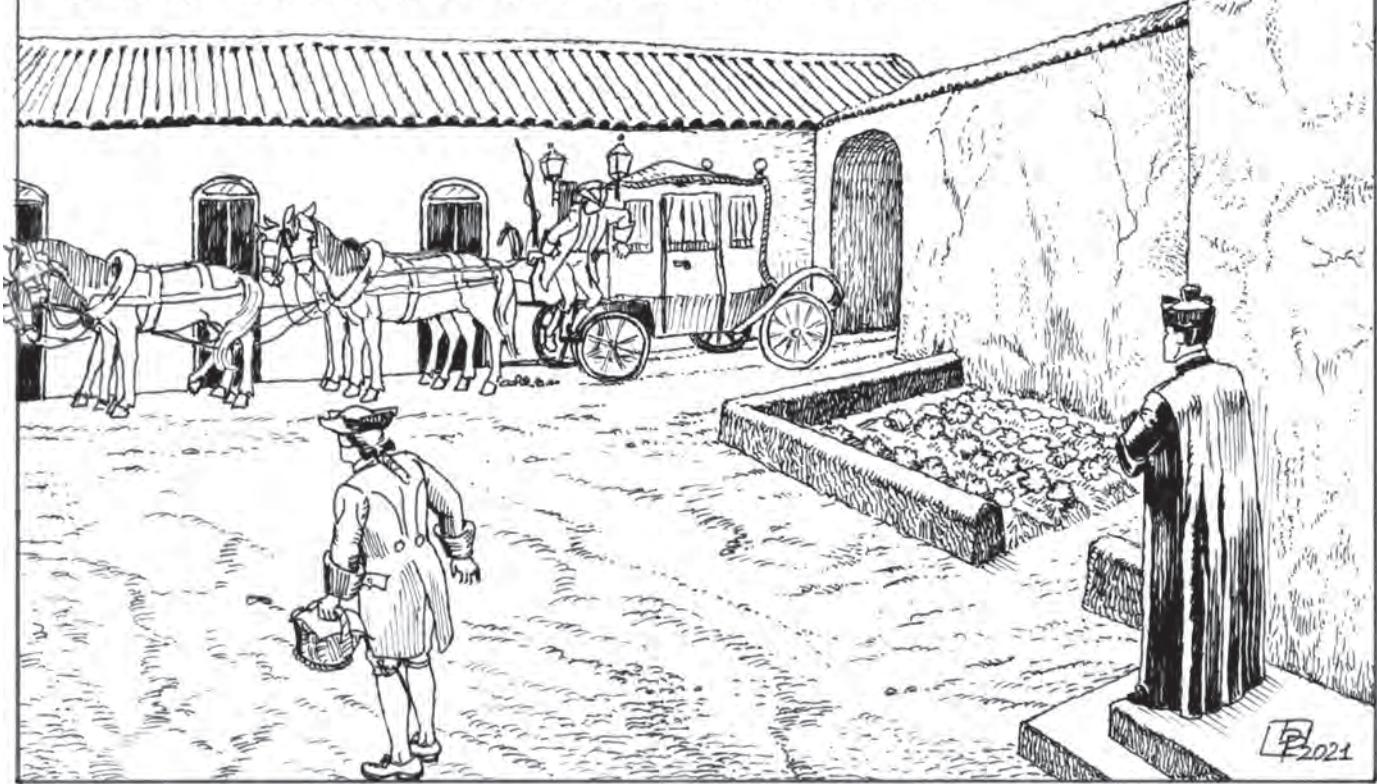
A TERRACOTTA SPIRAL STAIRCASE LEADS TO THE TOP OF THE TOWER.



HERE GUARD WINDOWS HOUSED SEATED SENTRYES.

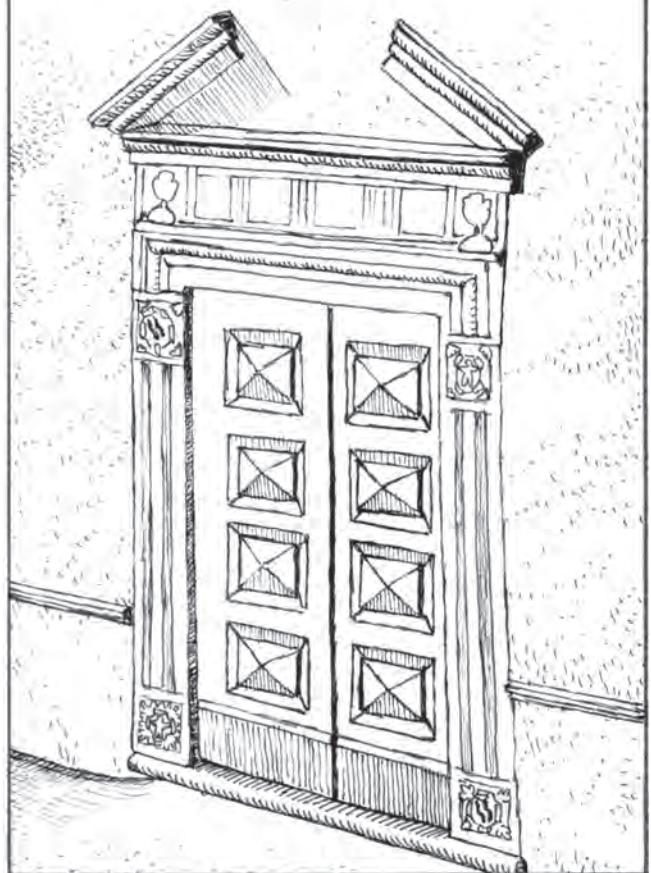


OVERLOOKING THE MAIN FAÇADE OF THE ABBOT'S PALACE IS THE SMALL CHURCH DEDICATED TO SANTA MARIA DEI TEUTONICI, THEN TO THE SACRO CUORE, AND FINALLY TO SANTA MARIA AGAIN.



ERECTED BY CARDINAL NICOLÒ CAETANI,
AS EVIDENCED BY HIS COATS OF ARMS ...

... IT WAS RESTORED ALMOST TWO
CENTURIES LATER BY CARDINAL
PASQUALE ACQUAVIVA D'ARAGONA.



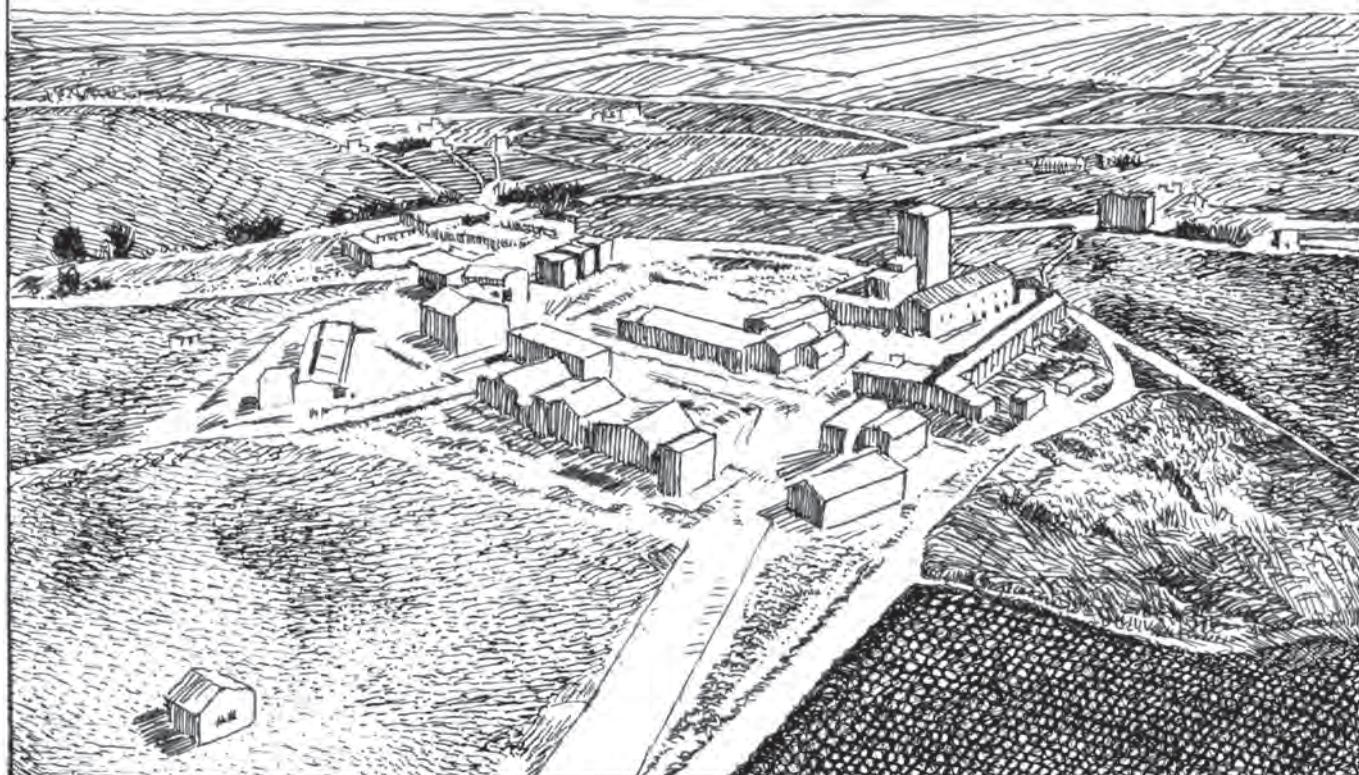
IN 1792 FERDINAND IV OF BOURBON
ACQUIRED THE PATRIMONY OF THE
ABBEY OF SAN LEONARDO DI SIPONTO,
INCLUDING TORRE ALEMANNA ...



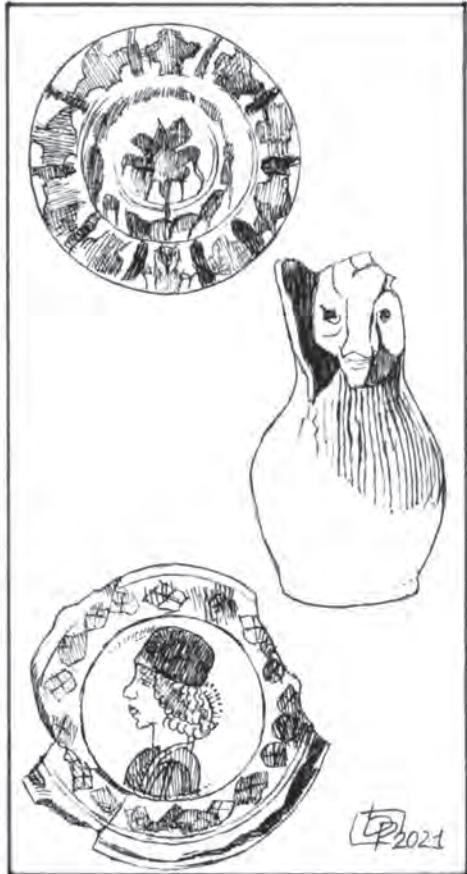
... WHICH CAME TO PRIVATE
INDIVIDUALS IN 1865.



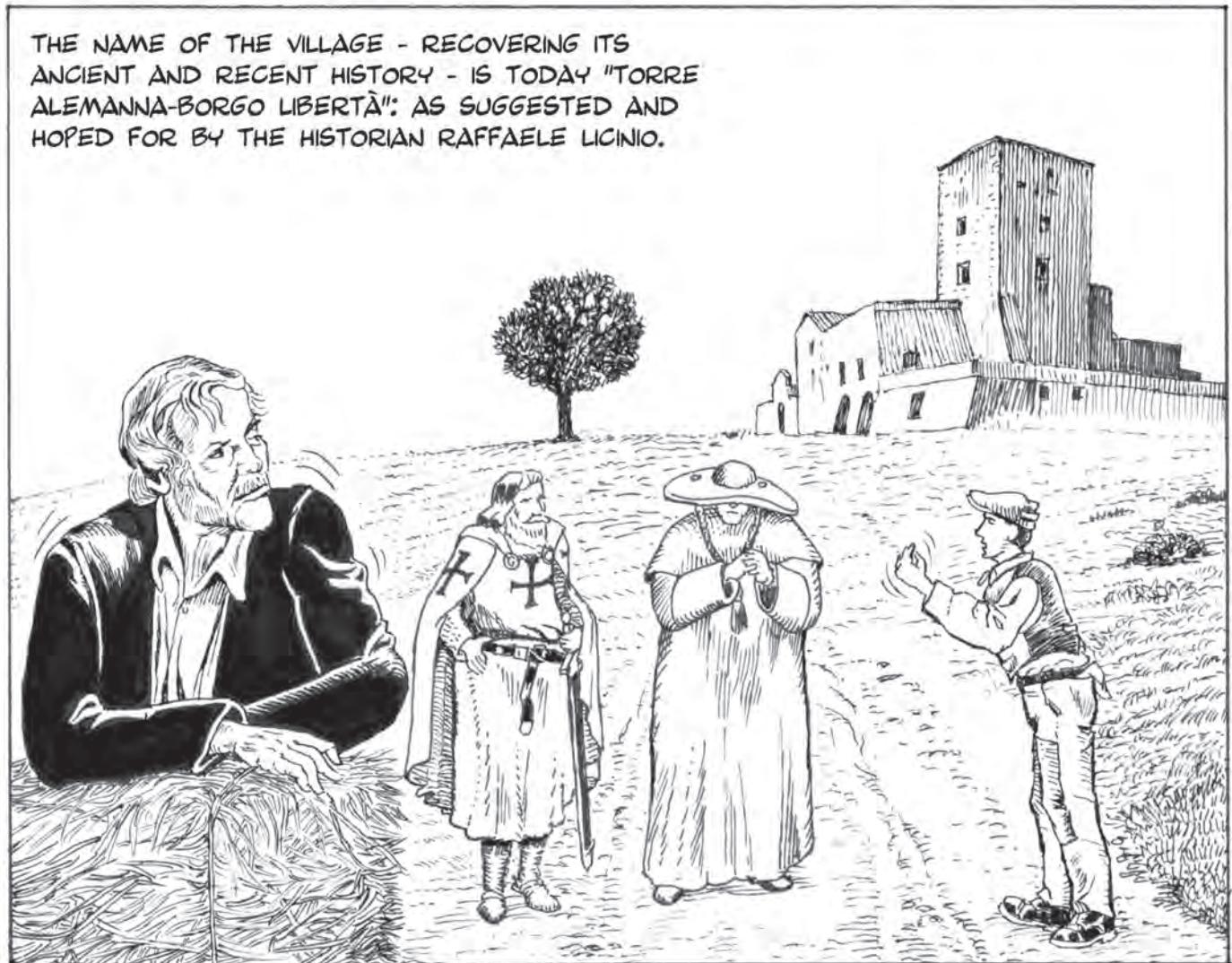
EXPROPRIATED IN 1951 BY THE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
FOR IRRIGATION AND LAND TRANSFORMATION OF APULIA
AND LUCANIA, TORRE ALEMANNA SAW THE BIRTH OF AN
AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE: BORGO LIBERTÀ.



PROTECTED IN 1983 AS A MONUMENTAL ASSET - AT THE REQUEST OF THE "TORRE ALEMANNA" RESEARCH CENTRE - AND RESTORED FROM 1987 TO 2008, THE COMPLEX HOUSES A MUSEUM THAT COLLECTS LOCAL CERAMICS FROM THE 13TH-16TH CENTURIES, WHICH CAME TO LIGHT DURING THE EXCAVATION WORKS.



THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE - RECOVERING ITS ANCIENT AND RECENT HISTORY - IS TODAY "TORRE ALEMANNA-BORGO LIBERTÀ": AS SUGGESTED AND HOPED FOR BY THE HISTORIAN RAFFAELE LICINIO.



Under the patronage of the Municipality of
Città di Cerignola



A project in collaboration with
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