LARINO THE ROMAN VESTIGES AND THE MEDIEVAL VILLAGE

10





CAMERA DI COMMERCIO DEL MOLISE



MODERN CITY PLAN



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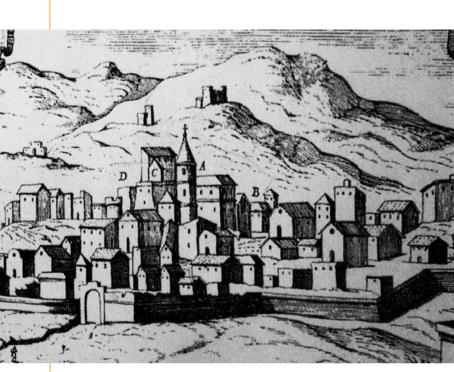
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LARINO

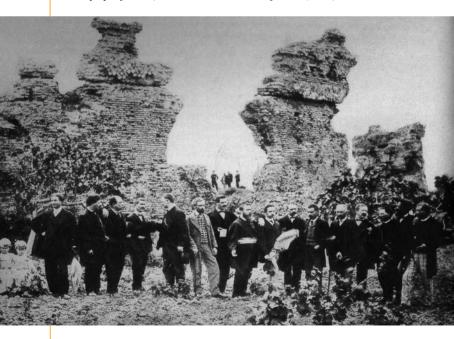
The Roman *vestiges* and the medieval village







On p. 3: Mosaic of the "Lion". Above: G. B. Pacichelli, Larino 1703; below: Ruins of the Larino Amphitheater, image taken from P. Albino, Historical and monumental memories of Sannio and Frentania, 1879. On the side, in the text: Double-sided coins in Larinum; below: Bronze plaque (facade a) with the senatus consultum of Larino (19 AD).



From the origins to the present day

Larino rises among a wonderful vegetation of olive trees and vines. The origin of the city is very controversial and still today

it is the subject of debate. We certainly know that Larino was a citv founded in pre-roman age and inhabited by the Italic population of the Frentani, In fact, scholars identify its foundation at least 500 years before Rome. After the destruction of the city of Frenter, it was rebuilt with the name of Ladinod, also stamped on its local coins: later the name was transformed into the Latin Larinum, which is the place

where the Frentani had the Lares. The city already had a very solid and evolved urban layout in the 4th century BC. After the victory of the Romans in 319 BC, Larinum became a res publica, maintaining its own autonomy from the other Frentane cities.

During the Second Punic War (217-201 BC) it was the scene of battles between Hannibal's army, encamped in the nearby Geryon, and Fabio Massimo, dictator in Larino. Under

Augustus, a Cluentian military colony was transferred there. This Colony apparently gave its name to one of the families of Frentania, the Cluentia. To this family belonged Lucio Cluentio, Larinate, who died. in the battle of Nola in 89 BC. Aulo Cluentio was also born in

> Larino, known for having been defended by Cicero in the famous oration "Pro Cluentio" pronounced in 66 BC. Subsequently, after the fall of the Roman Empire,

the domination of southern Italy by the Lombards (VI-X century AD) influenced the life of Larino which was involved (o incorporated) in the Duchy of Benevento, preserving a certain legal autonomy guaranteed by the presence of a count.

The transfer of the holy relics of San Pardo in 842 AD, is connected with the definitive transfer of the ancient



town from the hill site to the valley. In this new place was possible guarantee a better, defense from Saracen and Hungarian raids, thanks to the high city walls. In the new settlement, under the subsequent influence of the Kingdom of Naples. starting from the thirteenth century AD. Larino recovered all its importance and the presence of a fortress. subsequently used as the residence of the "rulers" of the time, is the testimony combined with the construction of the new Cathedral (consecrated on 31th July 1319). On 26 January, 1564, Bishop Belisario Balduino, on return from the Council of Trent, opened the first diocesan seminary in the Catholic world in Larino. With the administrative reorganization in the Kingdom of Naples (1806), Larino regained a decisive institutional role, becoming the district capital, as well as when. in 1811, it passed from the Capitanata to the new district of Molise. With the abolition of feudalism. building development and economic activity resumed. With the unification of Italy it becomes the Capital of the district of the Lower Molise, with the seat of the Sub-prefecture and the Civil and Criminal Court.



Above: The diocese of Larino in a print dated 1743; below: Panorama of Larino and its medieval historic center; above: The new city on the Piana di San Leonardo.

Opposite page, top: the dedicated epigraph and, below, the amphitheater in all its extension (according to scholars it could accommodate up to 18,000 spectators).



The vestiges of the ancient Larinum

arino was probably founded by the Etruscans long before the birth of Rome. Its name would have been Frenter, a toponym that was later used to appeal the entire Frentania region which, starting from Pescara, reached south to the Fortore river. During the Roman times the townhad a remarkable demographic development: we can assume that the inhabitants exceeded one hundred thousand units. Evidence of this period is still clearin the wonderful amphitheatre, in the mosaics discovered in some areas of the modern city and in the area of the so-called Ara frentana. These are mostly vestiges referable to funerary structures on the road that led to the Roman municipium.



The amphitheater

The structure was brought to light during numerous archaeological campaigns conducted in the last thirty years. It is the most important archaeological monument of the city and is located in the area called Piana S. Leonardo, close to the modern city. The construction dates between 80 and 150 AD, under the emperors of the Flavian dynasty. The date is found in an epigraph that also mentions the wealthy senator from Larino who was responsible for the construction of the amphitheater: Quinto Capito. The building was of medium size: it could accommodate up to 18,000 spectators and was built in a mixed structure, that is, partly made up of raised wall structures and partly dug into the tuff. The amphitheater was intended for gladiator fights and hunting shows, which had become increasingly popular with the public during the imperial age. The building has an elliptical shape, and it has four main doors placed at the ends of the two axes. Of these doors, the main one must have been to the north, the so-called "Gladia-





tors Gate", through which the procession passed before the games and from which the winning gladiators came out. Through The south door ,instead the carcasses of the beasts used in the games were led out, as well as the bodies of the killed gladiators. Well preserved is the arena where the shows took place, which appears slightly rounded in the center and bordered by a channel for the drainage of the water. Here there is a square pit in which a freight elevator was placed for lifting the game scenarios and animal cages. The podium, that is the sector reserved for the nobles, was made up of three steps covered with stone. In its retaining wall there are two doors through which was possible to enter in two small rooms: most likely it is a spoliaria, that is the rooms where the wounded or dead gladiators were brought. Below we find the lower o inferior cavea, that

On this page and the next: Remains of the imposing wall structures of the Larino amphitheater.







is, the six lower tiers, also dug into the tuff.

The remaining part of the elevated structure has been almost completely lost. Only a few ruins remain of the outer walls, the upper orders (cavea media) and the ambulatory, that is the corridor on which the 12 minor entrances opened, through which the multitude (o crowd)entered the areas reserved. Nothing is preserved of the upper cavea, which probably consisted of wooden planks. The seats in the amphitheater, as in the theater, were assigned according to a strict division by social class. The nobles were entitled to the lower levels, closer to the arena, usually covered with marble or stone slabs. The next steps were reserved for the wealthiest families; further on were the poorer citizens up to the top steps, where visibility was reduced. In medieval times, when the amphitheater lost its original function, the area was once again used as a burial place.





The mosaics

A further evidence of the development of the city in Roman times is the discovery of numerous mosaic floors which have come to light several times and in different places.

The mosaic, which was born as an imitation of painting and carpets, was used to decorate public spaces and above all the noble residential building (domus). The mosaic was Made with different materials (stone fragments, glass, semi-precious stones) and composed with tiles combined according to color variations, but with the possibility of very reduced shades compared to painting, it was very resistant and easily washable, therefore it had a dual function both practical and decorative. One of the oldest floors is the one found in the atrium of a large patrician domus (Villa Ellenistica) located in the current c / da Torre Sant'Anna. The mosaic called "del Polipo" placed centrally in the atrium of the villa, must have been the base of an impluvium (basin) that was used to collect rainwater. Built in polychrome pebbles, it presents subjects of a marine character: in the center, an octopus with eight tentacles placed in a radial pattern and, in the four corners, four fish, probably groupers, diagonally, with the mouth turned towards the center. The frame is decorated with vine shoots with leaves and bunches of grapes.

In the same villa ther's another floor mosaic in the shape of an apse. It is assumed that the room was dedicated to the sacrifice in honor of the pagan gods. This two-tone mosaic has a square central field closed by an apse lunette. The decorations are enclosed by three bands of concentric frames. The recurring geometric patterns, in the squares inside these, are: lotus flowers, shamrocks, internal squares with curved sides, thyrsus crosses with double opposing points, anchor crosses, gammate crosses (swastikas) and rosettes.

Other well-known mosaics were found in the last century and are currently kept in the Ducal Palace. They are respectively called: "della Lupa", "del Leone" and "degli Uccelli".

The mosaic "of the She-wolf", found in the "Petteruti Romano" villa, near

Bottom: Mosaic "of the Octopus". On the side, above: The Mosaic of the "She-wolf" and, below, detail of the Mosaic "of the Lion".





the railway station, depicts a shewolf with a brindle coat nursing two twins who grab her breasts to bring them to her mouth. All this takes place under the amazed eyes of two shepherds dressed in cloaks, hats and holding a stick. It features a rich frame with hunters cupids. The mosaic was created with a beautiful faded effect thanks to the mastery of the mosaicists in combining the pieces that make it up.

The "Lion" mosaic has a central square depicting a lion surrounded by a frame decorated with geometric motifs.

The animal is depicted in an aggressive attitude and seems to be emitting a roar: it is turned to the right with the left front paw raised; the right rear one is stationary backwards, while the left one is carried forward, the tail is straight up. Two palms are also visible in the central square and most likely there was a third which unfortunately has been lost. The end has a frame decorated with spiral scrolls, without interruptions, with heart-shaped ivy leaves with the tips turned inwards and outwards alternately.

Compared to the other two, the "Bird" mosaic has serious gaps but some semi-rosette decorations are still visible in the middleof the three sides, from which palmettes rise from which branches with heartshaped leaves start.



Near the current sports field, there is another mosaic called "dei Delfini". It was probably the floor of a colonnaded atrium belonging to a public building or to a patrician domus. The base of a column at the north / west entrance is visible, on the sides of which are two perfectly symmetrical squares: one decorated with black octagons formed by lozenges containing white four-pointed stars: the other with shamrocks and anchor crosses placed in the middle. The perimeter band of the central field, originally quite wide, is made up of flowing waves to the left and a band of alternating swastikas and panels with figurative and decorative subjects. In two of them appear a "skiphos" (a cup for holding the food) and an "arybaltos" (bottle for oils and perfumes), while in the other two there are darting dolphins placed in profile, respectively one on the right and the other to the left. The latest mosaics found are located near the Amphitheater, in the area belonging to a large thermal building. The square-plan environment paved in mosaic depicts marine subjects, a theme very dear to the mosaicists of the Empire, called to decorate the floors of spas or other buildings where the use of water was envisaged. The polychrome mosaic has in a central position a square with geometric motifs (rhombuses, stars with eight lozenges in the center of which there is a four-petal heart flower.

Four dolphins are depicted in the corners of the picture; on one side a dragon made up of green tiles and on the opposite a "sea monster", with a head and upper part of the trunk in the shape of a sheep and a fish body. On the other two sides a bull and a horse, both marine, are depicted in black tiles. Hints to the waves of the sea are obtained with curved lines distributed around the animals. This environment was damaged by the twentieth-century pipeline of the villa built on the same land (Villa Zappone).

The other mosaic room, set against the previous one, also features marine subjects depicting dolphins, horses and rams.

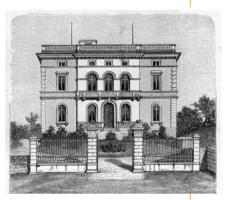
The movement of the water, with which the tanks were filled, made these fantastic figures, which seemed to move among the waves, fascinating and sinuous.



Villa Zappone

In Larino, where in many cases the Learly twentieth (20th) century residential building takes on Liberty characteristics, there are at least two episodes worth mentioning: Villa Zappone and Villa Palma. Villa Zappone was built in the late nineteenth (19th)century and completed in the interior finishes in the first decade of the twentieth (20th) century. In the decorative details, and especially in the arrangement of the interior spaces. typical Liberty solutions dominate. The villa is located near the area of the Roman amphitheater; it was recently purchased by the Italian State and destined for museum functions (intended to be a Museum). More characterized, however, is the appearance of Villa Palma, located in the Novelli district and built between 1908 and 1911 on a project by Eng. Raffaele Battista. It is accessed from a small garden marked by the allusive presence of two tall palm trees, once closed by a beautiful

On the previous page: Detail of the mosaic of Villa Zappone. On this page, from top to bottom: Ink drawing and current photo of the facade of Villa Zappone.



wrought iron gate, removed during the last world war. On the front, towards the consular road, the Liberty decorative samples unfold: stylized interweaving of palm leaves above the windows and balconies, iconic winged animals that face each other in the band under the eaves and whose tails are transformed into patterned arabesques vegetables. The ornamental interventions are by the Larino painter Alfredo Scocchera (1887-1955), who worked for a long time in the region before moving to Milan. The artist has also embellished some rooms on the ground floor with floral and naturalistic motifs, inspired by that Japonism that has marked many of the European Liberty experiences.



PLAN OF THE HISTORIC CENTER



Medieval Larino

The Ara frentana

Tn 1939-40, along the SS. Sannitica halfway between the railway station and the medieval village, at via Gramsci, an area was reserved for a public garden and for the exhibition of archaeological material. Until a few years ago, there was a round altar improperly defined frentano on the spot, from which the name "ara frentana" derives, a term used to indicate all the archaeological collection present on site. The Altar, which features the characters of Hellenistic art, was found in the area of "Torre Sant'Anna" and is currently preserved in the Civic Antiquarium. There are few vestiges (remains) left on the spot belonging to funerary monuments and public buildings from the Roman era. Over the years some (of those) have been stolen and consequently the most important have been brought and kept in the atrium of the Doge's Palace.

On the previous page: Aerial view of the medieval old town of Larino ($^{\odot}$ Google Earth). Above: Ara Frentana; below: Interior and central nave of the fourteenth-century Larino Cathedral.



The Larino Cathedral

B uilt on a pre-existing building, in the heart of the medievaltown, the basilica has an asymmetrical plan evidently determined by pre-existing buildings and the need to conform to the urban layout.

The interior is divided into three naves by five pillars crowned by pointed arches on the right side, four on the left side. The central nave is covered with trusses, while the aisles have ribbed cross vaults. The façade, oblique to the rest of the building, has a horizontal crowning divided into two areas: the lower one houses the only but very rich portal with splayed tympanum; in the upper one there are two mullio-





ned windows on the sides, in the middle a rose window with thirteen rays. The bell tower, located on the right, stands on a pointed arch and was completed in 1523. The decorative parts are mainly concentrated in the facade: spirals, leaves, flowers, twisted motifs and intertwining follow one another in the

portal, in the mullioned windows and in the rose window: here is also concentrated the sculptural decoration in the round (lions and griffins on the portal) or in high relief (heads, fantastic animals). The lunette houses the scene of the Crucifixion. The interior preserves. especially on the right wall, fragments of fourteenth-century frescoes: the most important fresco is made up of S. Orsola and the abduction of the Virgins, while, almost completely illegible, is that of the Annunciation dated to 1532. They can also be admired some bas-reliefs both in stone of uncertain dating and in wood: among those in stone there is a Eucharistic tabernacle and one representing Christ blessing between two angels; among those in wood from the late 1300s (large sacristy) we have the depiction of the Last Supper and the Translation of the body of San Pardo, patron saint of the city, which took place on 26 May 842.

On this page, top: The fresco of the Annunciation inside the Cathedral. Below: The silver bust of San Pardo. On the next page: Facade with portal, rose window and mullioned windows of the fourteenth century Cathedral of Larino.







The church of San Francesco

ocated in front of the Cathedral, it is a typically Baroque-Rococo construction, built in the first half of the 14th century and transformed in the 18th century. The church has a single nave, with a longitudinal plan, with partially plastered stone masonry: the facade is completed by a horizontal crowning. The central dome depicting "The Glory of Paradise" by Paolo Gamba dates back to 1747. Inside the presbytery area is separated from the nave by a carved and inlaid marble balustrade with wrought iron gate, dating back to the middle of 18th century, as well as the holy water stoup to the left of the high altar, also in carved and inlaid marble. The carved and sculpted wooden choir is dominated by the choir, dated 1752, by Modesto Pallante. The side parts are characterized by marble altars with painted gilded stucco backs, with niches for statues, from the eighteenth century. Among the most valuable statues,

On the previous page, from top to bottom: Medieval sculptural friezes adorn the portal of the Cathedral; below: The lunette with the Crucifixion of Jesus. Above: Church of San Francesco and, below, the frescoed vault by Paolo Gamba.



those of Christ Crucified, of S. Rocco by Paolo Saverio Di Zinno, of the Immaculate Conception by Giacomo Colombo, of Saint Joseph with Child, of Saint Anthony of Padua and of Saint Francis of Assisi. The sacred building was recognized as a Monument of National Interest in the 1920s.



The church of Santo Stefano

In the original thirteenth-century plan, the church was arranged towards the east with access to today's Via Marconi. The stone rose window of the original facade is still visible. The current Via Marconi was supposed to be the main axis on which the Duomo was initially also to overlook. This axis moved, precisely in the first decades of the fourteenth century, to correspond to the areas around the castle (Palazzo Ducale).

This probably led to a sudden change in the orientation of the Cathedral which, in order to look onto the new artery, acquired an anticlassical orientation with the apse to the west. The current facade of the church follows the typical models of late Baroque architecture; it is divided into three parts by simple pilasters and is divided into two levels concluded by a mixti linear crowning. The portal is adorned with a rich stone frame. The single nave interior is enriched by the frescoed ceiling.







Santa Maria della Pietà

Located outside the city walls, over the centuries it changed its name very often: authoritative sources document that a church dedicated to San Basilio Magno stood in this place until 1564. Subsequently, in the seventeenth century, the building was consecrated to the Virgin and took the name of Santa Maria del Piano, being located near the Porta di Piano, one of the access to the fortified village. In 1663 the building further changed its name, in Santa Maria della Pietà.

are the churches located in the upper Larino and dedicated to the Holy Martyrs of Larinesi and to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Grace, are considered modern because they were built during the 20th century..

On the previous page, from top to bottom: Rose window, facade and bell tower of the church of Santo Stefano. Below: Facade and bell tower of the church of Santa Maria della Pietà, once located outside the city walls.

The Diocesan Seminary

The Diocesan Seminary of Larino represents one of the most prestigious institutions for being the first in the Christian world. Pope John 23himself, in his youth study published in Bergamo in 1939 and entitled "The beginnings of the Seminary of Bergamo and San Carlo Borromeo", wrote about the Seminary of Larino: "He will live as he can in a few rooms with very low income, but in the meantime a good first arrived ... "

The institution of the seminaries, as is known, was established by the Council of Trent concluded in December 1563. Belisario Balduino Bishop of Larino, who took part in the important assembly, on January 26, 1564 managed to adapt a modest building owned by the Chapter Cathedral, located in the current Vico Morsellino, as the seat of the Seminary.

In 1642, Bishop Caracci erected a new seminary at his own expense, also near the Cathedral, which Bi-



shop Pianetti decided to expand in 1717. This restoration is confirmed by a marble inscription on the facade in Piazza Duomo. The Prelates De Laurentis and Lupoli added to the existing structure an eastern part, joined to the old one through the arch on Via Seminario and a western part, built in front of the Cathedral, also joined by an arch.

Bishop Bernacchia had a large new building built along the Samnite state road (n. 87) in 1939. The same site was enlarged by Bishop Micci in 1961.



Diocesan Historical Archive

The Archive has been declared of considerable historical interest because it consists of documentary material that is very useful for the reconstruction of the religious and political history of a large area between the Lower Molise and the Capitanata, and for the reconstruction of the civil, social and cultural development of the same populations. In the Archive, there is a noteworthy parchment background, consisting of Papal bulls, briefs and letters, which covers the entire second millennium. The oldest document dates back to 1181 and concerns the boundaries of the Diocese of Larino established by Pope Lucius 3rd . The archival material begins to be more full-bodied from the second half of the sixteenth century in conjunction with the dictates sanctioned by the Council of Trent. After the merger of the Dioceses of Termoli and Larino, the respective Archives were also unified and fixed in a single location located at the Episcopio in Larino.

Below: Atrium of the Episcopal Palace. Above: Detail of one of the rooms that house the Diocesan Historical Archives: Side, above: Entrance portal to the Ducal Palace and below: Interior of the Diocesan Museum.

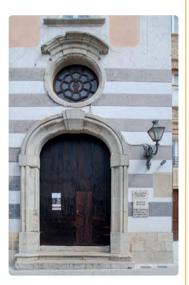


The Diocesan Museum

The structure is located into the complex of Episcopio and extends over three large rooms. A new adjacent wing will soon be available. Currently the Museum also includes the spaces of two sacred buildings located in close proximity on the same square. These are the church of San Francesco and the Cathedral Basilica, both monuments of national interest. To these spaces will be added a third, located just under a hundred meters away which will be used as a museum hall, by the will of the current Bishop Msgr. Gianfranco de Luca. This is the church of Santo Stefano. now awaiting restoration. The three halls of the bishop's palace, located between the ground floor and the upper floor, although still under construction, offer visitors important atworks from the period between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. Particular mention should be made of a polychrome wooden statue of the 14th century, the canvases of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the double-sided display cases containing sacred objects of exceptional artistic value such as reliquaries, monstrances, chalices, pyxes, processional crosses and bishop's apparatus.

The Duke'Palace Palace and Civic Museum

The Duke''s Palace was built between 1100 and 1200 by the will of the wealthy Normans and was the residential bildingof the families who ruled Larino and as a prison in which bandits and other criminals were locked up. Its location was considered strategic, as it was built between the "Porta di Piano" and the "Porta da Basso", which until the mid-nineteenth century were the only entrances to the town of Frentana. The Palace retained its fortress structure until the mid-seventeenth







On this page, above: General view of the Doge's Palace. Below: Interior of the Duke''sPalace.

century and there were two entrances. Both led to an internal courtyard which gave access to a cellar for storing wine, and to a noble floor where several frescoed rooms were located. In the mid-nineteenth century it was purchased by the Decurionate of the Municipality of Larino. From its construction until today the Palace has undergone numerous changes, with the destruction of its old parts and the construction of new ones. The building consists of several floors and at its access, after a long staircase, it has a atrium with porches on all four sides on which rests a loggia with large pointed arches. On the first floor is the Civic Museum where numerous finds from the Roman period are collected, including several precious mosaics from the imperial age. In one of the countless rooms that compose it, there is a fresco from the beginning of the century (quale century?) depicting the wing on a blue field, symbol of the city, with medallions on the four sides with effigies of characters from the Risorgimento period. The room is finished with Liberty motifs. The corridor of the inner courtyard contains a series of ancient inscriptions and artifacts.



The fountains

Since ancient times, Larino had large water collection basins, in fact when the Bishop Della Rocca had the summer seminary built, aqueducts and a large reservoir dug under the current Piazza del Pretorio were brought to light.

Fountain of Basso

The name recalls one of the medieval gates of the city.

It was built towards the end of the 1700s and is made up of covered basins and an adjacent drinking trough. Its position at the foot of the historic settlement makes it an obligatory stop on the alternative route to reach the city. The road that connects the medieval village to the water source is completely paved with gneiss alternating with flints: hence the dialectal name of "a slciat"("the pavement")

"New" Fountain

Before 1879 there was only one fountain located on the Colle delle Fosse, outside the ancient Porta del Piano. In the same year the waters of the Vignola district were channeled

Above: The "Nuova" spring built by Vittorio Romanelli in 1879 and, below, the "Basso" spring.



into the city to form a system composed of source-drinking-troughwashhouse.

The construction of this fountain, built on a project by Vittorio Romanelli from Arezzo in 1879 and located in the heart of the ancient village, was a relief for the population who, was blessed with the "water in the house". Many photos prove the people who crowded the fountain with tubs and animals, because it was considered a point of reference for every citizen of the time.





Fountain of "San Pardo"

The construction of this fountain is related to an episode in the life of the Patron Saint from which it takes its name. It is said that San Pardo showed his benevolence by making water gush from the ground, to quench the exhausted oxen that pulled the cart on which his relics were placed from Lucera. The current form dates back to 1773. The fountain, which is located at an altitude of 2.60 m below fstreet level, has experienced ups and downs in the past centuries and was completely restored in 1984.definitively restored in 1984.

Above: The source of "San Pardo" and, below, the church and convent of the Capuchins of Larino

The Convent of the Capuchins

It was founded in 1535 by Fr. Paolo da Sestino at the wish of Msgr. Morsellino, born in Larino and bishop of Guardalfiera, at the expense of Adriano Morsellino, brother of the same prelate. The convent building was flanked by an old pre-existing church dedicated to the Cross. In this sacred building we find the Madonna della Pietà, a painting attributed to Antonio Solario, known as the "Zingaro", who worked in the first half of the 15th century. The main altar is adorned with a Nativity which could be attributed to Francesco Tolentino (16th century). Inside the convent there is an oil painting signed by a certain Crescentius in1743.



Info and Useful Numbers

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- 6 Agnone, the museum and the Pontifical Foundry of Marinelli Bells
- 7 The National Museum of Palaeolithic of Isernia
- 8 The churches, the castle and the historical centre of Campobasso
- 9 The churches, the museums and the caste of Venafro
- 10 The Roman vestiges and the medieval village of Larino

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