

wounded Art *saved Art*

Churches and artistic heritage
80 years after the bombing
of Prato

**8 MARCH
28 JULY
2024**

*Exhibition curated by
Diocesan Museums of Prato
and the CDSE Foundation*



The exhibition tells the incredible story of the **safety** and destruction of the churches and the **artistic heritage of Prato** during the Second World War. Thanks to evocative period photos, partly unpublished, original documents and objects of sacred art, still wounded by the bombings, the epic lived by churches and masterpieces of art between 1940 and 1945 will be rebuilt.

The race against time to save the symbolic works of the city, first of all the pulpit of Donatello, is accompanied by the narration of the **heavy devastation** that struck the heritage of the historic center of Prato, in particular **between February 16 and March 7, 1944**, when San Bartolomeo was bombed in Piazza Mercatale, Sant'Agostino and Santa Maria del Giglio.

A particular section of the exhibition is dedicated to the vicissitudes of rural churches on the slopes of Calvana and in **Val di Bisenzio**, which precisely because of its proximity to military targets such as the Direttissima and, in the Alta Valle, the Gothic Line, suffered heavy damage or risked destruction. Jewels such as the ancient parish church of Santa Maria a Filettole or San Michele a Poggiole di Vernio were completely destroyed, while the memories of the parish priests of Montepiano and Cavarzano allow to reconstruct the epic lived by churches and communities of the villages on the Gothic Line.



TIMELINE - WAR AND ARTISTIC HERITAGE IN ITALY

1939

September 1 Nazi Germany invades Poland, initiating World War II.

1940

June 10 Italy enters the war alongside Germany.

On 11 June 1940 the procedures for securing the Italian artistic heritage began. The works of the main museums are moved into buildings outside the urban centers: the Medici villa of Poggio a Caiano is among the first deposits identified. Turrets of timber, sand bags and roofs of eternit cover the main monuments of the Italian historical centers.

1942

With the intensification of the bombings in Italy, the superintendences have the obligation to move all the mobile works of art from the cities to new country houses, with the identification of dozens of new shelters. The wooden scaffolding is replaced by reinforced concrete and brick walls to avoid the danger of fires.

1943

Italy becomes a front of war. July 10, the Allies landed in Sicily. 25 July the Badoglio government is established following the arrest of Mussolini. September 8, the Armistice is announced; the 9th the Committee of National Liberation is born; the German army invades Florence on September 11. 23 September the Republic of Salò is established.

On 4 August the church of Santa Chiara in Naples hit by bombs burned; ten days later Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan was devastated. On 25 September, Allied bombing began in Florence and nearby cities.

1944

June 4 Rome is liberated. August 3 and 4, the mines of the retreating German army destroyed the bridges of Florence and the medieval fabric of the city. August 11 Florence is liberated by the Tuscan Committee of National Liberation.

On 11 March, Allied bombing destroyed the church of Padua with frescoes by Mantegna; between January and March, violent bombings devastated the historic center of Arezzo, Pistoia and Prato. On 27 July an allied grenade hit the monumental cemetery of Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa, causing a terrible fire.

Between the end of June and the end of August 1944 many Tuscan warehouses, such as the villa of Poggio a Caiano, were looted and requisitioned by the German army.

1945

April 25, the day on which the Committee of National Liberation Alta Italia (CLNAI) proclaims the general insurrection in all the territories still occupied by the Nazi-Fascists, ideally marks the end of World War II in Italy.

Already in April, the Tuscan Superintendences, for months in liberated territory, begin to relocate in the city museums the coffers of the works housed in the stores.

In July, the works stolen by the German army, found in South Tyrol, are returned to the Allies. They will be brought back to Florence, through the Direttissima, with a solemn ceremony on 22 July 1945.

ART AND WAR IN PRATO: THE PROTAGONISTS

The people who will have the responsibility of protecting the works of Prato are some of **the most famous names in the history of the preservation of artistic heritage in war**, such as the Superintendent at the Galleries Giovanni Poggi and Ugo Procacci, responsible for the Department of Restoration of the Superintendence, who would work together with Giuseppe Marchini in close contact with Angiolo Badiani, Royal Honorary Inspector in Prato, and Leonetto Tintori, artist and restorer from Prato. Hundreds of papers kept in the Historical Archives of the Florentine Galleries, at the Uffizi, and in the personal fund of Badiani, at the Roncioniana Library of Prato, document **years of intense daily work** dedicated with great dedication to the salvation of Prato's artistic heritage.

Giovanni Poggi

He began his career as a civil servant of Antiquities and Fine Arts just graduated: in 1907 he was already director of the National Museum of the Bargello, in 1910 he assumed the direction of the Uffizi Gallery, In 1912 he drew up the general catalogue of the objects of art of the Kingdom for the Tuscan provinces and in December 1913 he delivered to the Italian carabinieri the stolen canvas of the Mona Lisa. In 1925 he became Superintendent of Medieval and Modern Art for Tuscany (with the exception of Siena and Grosseto): at the outbreak of the Second World War Poggi becomes the key man to coordinate operations to secure much of the Tuscan heritage. After the war, he established important diplomatic relations with American institutions to raise funds for the reconstruction of Florence. Retired since 1949 due to age limits, he was appointed by the City of Florence to supervise the Monuments and Institutes of its competence.

Giuseppe Marchini

He graduated in Humanities at the University of Florence and joined the Ministry of Education in 1950, becoming Superintendent of the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche. During the war, he collaborated with the Superintendence for the protection of the artistic heritage of the city. Councillor of the Società Pratese di Storia Patria and member of the editorial staff of the Archivio Storico Pratese, offers essential contributions to the history of art in Prato. In 1966 he was appointed Deputy Superintendent at the Gallerie di Firenze, helping Ugo Procacci in the emergency of the flood. Fundamental are the monographs, such as the one dedicated to the Cathedral, where one identifies for the first time an architectural "school" flourished in Prato in the Romanesque era, in addition to his contribution to the construction and opening, in 1967, of the Museum of the Opera del Duomo in Prato.

Ugo Procacci

Art historian, official of the Florentine Superintendence and principal collaborator of Poggi during all the complex phases of the world war, he founded in 1932 the pioneering Cabinet of Restoration of the Soprintendenza delle Belle Arti of Florence, first modern restoration laboratory in Italy. From 1958 to 1964 he was Superintendent of the Monuments of Florence, Arezzo and Pistoia (which later became Architectural and Environmental Heritage); from 1962 to 1970, year of retirement, Superintendent of the Florentine Galleries (then the Historical and Artistic Heritage) facing the great emergency of the Florentine flood of 1966. After his retirement he devoted himself to university teaching in Florence.

3. ART AND WAR IN PRATO: THE PROTAGONISTS

Leonetto Tintori

A versatile artist and internationally renowned restorer, he trained at the "Scuola d'Arti e Mestieri Leonardo" where he met the woman who would become his future wife, Elena Berruti, his work and life partner.

He is one of the protagonists of the so-called "School of Prato" (together with Arrigo Del Rigo, Gino Brogi and Quinto Martini) and here he discovers his attraction for the study of restoration techniques. As a restorer he works in prestigious places, both in Italy and abroad. Among the masterpieces he restored include frescoes by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel, paintings by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo, the Crucifixion of Masaccio in S. Maria Novella, frescoes by Giotto in the Bardi and Peruzzi Chapels in Santa Croce, the paintings of the Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento. During the Second World War his intervention was providential in restoring works damaged by bombing, both in Pisa inside the monumental Camposanto, and in Prato at the Tabernacle of Filippino Lippi. The latter, located in Via Santa Margherita, near Piazza Mercatale, was reduced to tiny fragments, which he promptly recovered under fire still in progress. In 1985 he bought a house in Vainella, near Figline, turning it into an art school. The structure, then donated to the Municipality of Prato, still today is an important center of study and documentation on the techniques of wall painting.

Angiolo Badiani

Born in Prato, he graduated in Law in Pisa, then practicing law. Among the many positions is the presidency of the Province of Florence from 1929 to 1934. For his historical and cultural interests he plays important roles in many institutions of the city of Prato: founder with Giulio Giani of the Società Pratese di Storia Patria, president of the local section of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club) of the Misericordia, of the Red Cross and from 1935 until his death, also of the Cassa di Risparmio di Prato. During the war he was honorary inspector of monuments in Prato and will take care, in collaboration with the Superintendence, of the security of the artistic heritage. The papers of Angiolo Badiani, together with those of his father Giuseppe, are kept at the Roncioniana Library where they arrived after his death.

Mgr. Eugenio Fantaccini the "Vicar of Prato"

Born in Coiano, from a very young age he had a vocation for the priesthood, but by the will of his father he entered the Episcopal Seminary of Pistoia only after completing his military service. After his first pastoral assignments, in Coiano, he was assigned to the parish of S. Maria dell'Umiltà in Chiesanuova where he promoted services for the community. In addition, throughout the period of World War I he organized an office for the search of missing soldiers and prisoners, taking care of the families of the recalled to the front. From 1922 he became Vicar General of the Diocese of Prato and for over thirty years he was a point of reference for the community. During the years of World War II, especially since 1943, Mgr. Fantaccini will be, also for the forced absence of Bishop Debernardi, the only authority of the Church concretely close to the population affected by the destruction of the war. He will be personally involved in the evacuation of civilians, food supplies, canteens and dormitories, opening the monasteries of San Vincenzo, San Clemente and San Niccolò to the persecuted of every idea and religion. His constant relationship with Angiolo Badiani was fundamental for the safeguarding of the works of art of the city churches. Very important also its role at the end of the conflict for the reconstruction of the city. He died in 1959 and from 1960 his mortal remains rest in a chapel in the basilica of San Vincenzo and Santa Caterina.

THE PROTECTION OF THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE OF FLORENCE AND PRATO 1940-42

As soon as Italy entered the war, the Superintendences began the great maneuvers for the **removal of the works of art of churches and museums in the country villas**, considered at that time safer than the cities. The most important refuge communicated by the Ministry of National Education to the Superintendence of the Florentine Galleries already on January 8, 1940 is the Medici **villa of Poggio a Caiano**, to which are added later in the year the Praetorian Palace of Scarperia, of Poppi and the convent of Camaldoli. In June 1940 he began a massive move from Florence to Poggio a Caiano, which would have led to the emptying of the Florentine Galleries and the parallel creation of a concentration of masterpieces, in one place, unprecedented.

In the summer of 1940 also in Prato begin the procedures to secure the heritage, although the war still seems far from the Italian territory and the various city institutions have many doubts about the move of the works out of the historic center, especially for those who are the object of veneration of the city.

Already in June 1940 the authorities of Prato proposed to the Superintendence the central **convent of San Francesco** as a possible safe, despite a little 'perplexity by Inspector Badiani on the proximity of the convent to the 'Fortress', or the Emperor's Castle, home of the fascist militia. Even the Episcopal Curia of Prato suggests additional locations in order not to see their works emigrate to the Medici villa, such as the chapter hall of the Monastery of St. Vincent.

Finally, in the last days of August 1940 we arrive at the dismantling and the first removal of paintings, which take different paths: on August 27, a twenty-five of works from the Municipal Gallery are placed in the hall of the Convent of San Francesco, in addition to some works of the Cathedral as the fresco detached with *Blessed Iacopone from Todi* by Paolo Uccello. Eleven masterpieces instead take the way of Poggio a Caiano: the most precious works of the Municipal Gallery, such as the *Nativity* and the *Pala del Ceppo* by Filippo Lippi, along with *The Funeral of Saint Jerome* by Filippo Lippi, preserved in the Duomo, and the *Presentation at the Temple*, coming from the church of the Holy Spirit, will share the safe stay in the Medici villa with the paintings of the Uffizi such as Botticelli's *Primavera*.

In the meantime, the Superintendence of Monuments removed the ancient stained glass windows of the Cathedral to place them in the chapel of St. Stephen, below the old Sacristy.

THE EVOLUTION OF WAR AND THE EMERGENCY TIME 1943-44

The inadequacy of the protection operations carried out up to that moment has been clear since the **autumn of 1942**, when the aerial bombardment of the Italian historical centres intensified. For the defense of the monumental works is therefore decided to replace all the protections in timber and sand bags with masonry structures, while for mobile works of art it becomes necessary to implement a sudden action of total removal and sorting in new shelters outside the cities, as punctually ordered by a ministerial circular of 3 November 1942.

For the works of Prato is identified in the course of 1943 as another refuge in the countryside the villa of the Baron in Montemurlo. The property of the great mansion was the Coppedé family; Mino Ottavio Banti, son of the painter Macchiaiolo Cristiano Banti and usufructuary of the villa, becomes the ideal personality to act as guardian of the masterpieces of the churches of Prato. In the first days of February 1944, just before the bombings that would have destroyed these churches, the Villa del Barone houses the works of San Bartolomeo, Sant'Agostino, Santa Maria del Giglio. On 4 March 1944 the villa in Banti saw the paintings of San Domenico, San Sebastiano, della Misericordia and Santa Margherita arrive: deliveries, under the constant danger of bombing, lasted throughout April.

A memorandum of those months drawn up by Procacci with a long list of actions to be taken in the imminence tells us the emergency of the moment, and awareness, between 1943 and 1944, to live a **real fight against time** to protect a largely unarmed heritage in the face of a war that was being fought more and more in the house: *Collect ceramics and glass in the shelter of San Francesco and the Museum, putting them forward in crates - Bring to the Baron of the sawdust to put under the windows - See of the shelter of the pulpit of Donatello (and warn Venè) - See if the large chalks of Bartolini must be taken away or not - See what you do for the lunettes of the museum - Pick up as soon as possible the Madonna and Sant'Anna which is close to the station and the picture of St. Margaret.*

THE EVOLUTION OF WAR AND THE EMERGENCY TIME 1943-44

At the same time, the Superintendence of Monuments is working to identify places of storage inside the Cathedral, such as the **Cappella dei Battuti of Santo Stefano, the Vaults and the Crypt**, to protect valuable architectural elements and immovable works of the city, like the **internal pulpit of the Cathedral**. During the summer of 1943 the panels sculpted by Antonio Rossellino, Mino da Fiesole and Pasquino da Montepulciano were enclosed in a brick armour, as was happening at the same time in Pistoia for works such as the pulpit of Giovanni Pisano in Sant'Andrea.

It is some wonder that despite the acceleration in the protection of works of art, in January 1943 the question of the preservation of the frescoes by Filippo Lippi in the Duomo is still not addressed, to the point that even Gian Giulio Rucellai, president of the Provincial Tourist Board, is interested with Badiani to take measures. Probably the work of protection of the frescoes of Lippi, now considered among the top of the Italian pictorial production of the fifteenth century, would have involved a waste of money, materials and workers not justifiable at that time of the war, while cycles such as that of Piero della Francesca in Arezzo or Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita in Florence had been protected by a brick armour for some time.

At the beginning of 1944 the **Tabernacle of Filippino Lippi** on the song of Piazza Mercatale was still without walls, although the first air alarms that were transformed had begun, from September 1943, one after the other, in heavy bombardments on the railway line Direttissima and the historic center.

Future air raids on Prato, especially those from January to March 1944, would completely destroy the Tabernacle of Filippino Lippi, the churches of San Bartolomeo in Piazza Mercatale, Santa Maria Assunta in Filettole, San Giuseppe in Viale Montegrappa. Sant'Agostino, Santa Maria del Giglio, Santa Maria del Buonconsiglio, Santa Chiara in San Rocco, San Michele a Canneto, San Leonardo in Collina, San Pietro a Iolo and Santa Maria Maddalena a Tavola will be severely damaged.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SAN BARTOLOMEO IN PIAZZA MERCATALE

On **February 16 1944**, at 11:55 a.m., an air raid **completely destroyed** the church of San Bartolomeo, along with all the annexed parish buildings, leaving only a part of the rectory and one of the parish cinema. Even the chapels and half of the ancient Renaissance cloister with frescoes from the sixteenth century are razed to the ground.

After 47 days of research, on April 3, 1944, the Blessed Sacrament **is recovered under five meters of rubble**, preserved intact in a silver case enclosed in a metal box, built previously for this purpose. The bell tower, built in 1796 to a design by the architect Giuseppe Valentini, remains standing but completely damaged at the base, with great danger for the population.

Most of the valuables are safe: in his time the archive, the library, the brand new cinema machine, was transported to the countryside between difficulties and unspeakable sacrifices, but above all a few days before the bombing had been brought the works of art to the **villa del Barone** in Montemurlo.

In the report to the Superintendence drawn up the same day by Inspector Badiani, who also returns on 17 February to the place of destruction together with Ugo Procacci, it is noted with some apprehension the presence of works of art that had been hidden in the lower room of the bell tower, a danger of collapse. *It is a Giotto crucifix and two gold backgrounds from some triptych of which the central part has been lost -writes Badiani-. They were to be transported to the Poggio a Caiano, but the painter Tintori, having not had a vehicle for the said transport, while the other paintings of the Church were brought to Montemurlo, He believed well to hide them in the lower room of the bell tower protected by large walls waiting to be transferred to their temporary destination.*

On **15 November 1947** Giuseppe Debernardi, bishop of Pistoia and Prato, announced a competition open to architects and engineers of Tuscany, for the construction of the new church of San Bartolomeo *that must meet the needs of a parish of 5000 souls*. Among the seventeen projects presented, the architect Ivo Lambertini from Florence was unanimously chosen.

Reconstruction work began on 9 August 1952 (the foundation stone was laid on 19 October 1952), and ended in 1958. On **16 February 1958**, exactly twelve years after the destruction of San Bartolomeo, the new church was solemnly consecrated by the bishop of Prato, Pietro Fiordelli.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA OF FILETTOLE

The destruction of the thousand-year-old church of Filettole is one of the **greatest wounds** inflicted on Prato's artistic and ecclesiastical heritage. The church, with a single nave with three apses, was one of the most interesting and ancient examples of Romanesque in the countryside of Prato; the building was well preserved until the First World War and had been restored in the years following 1935.

On February 8, 1944 an Allied bombing razed the church and the bell tower of Santa Maria Assunta di Filettole. Bombs fall in the middle of the nave and the bell tower falls inside the church. It is the same raid that destroys shortly after also most of the factory village of La Briglia.

From the questionnaire sent by the Diocese of Prato to the various parish priests, it is recorded that all the furniture, the sacred vestments, the liturgical books of the parish of Filettole are completely devastated as a result of the raid. Destroyed also three of the four bells present, the organ, and a fourteenth-century fresco in the attic above the presbytery. Miracolato is only the fifteenth-century baptismal font.

The church was rebuilt on a project by the architect Silvestro Bardazzi and **inaugurated on 8 April 1958**: it resumes the volume of the ancient church proposing its structure, with some simplifications, and the materials partially recovered from the rubble. Today the ancient church remains the marble baptismal font, with a hexagonal plan, and the wooden Crucifix of 1470 by Fra' Romualdo da Candeli and painted by Neri di Bicci, present in the Sacristy.

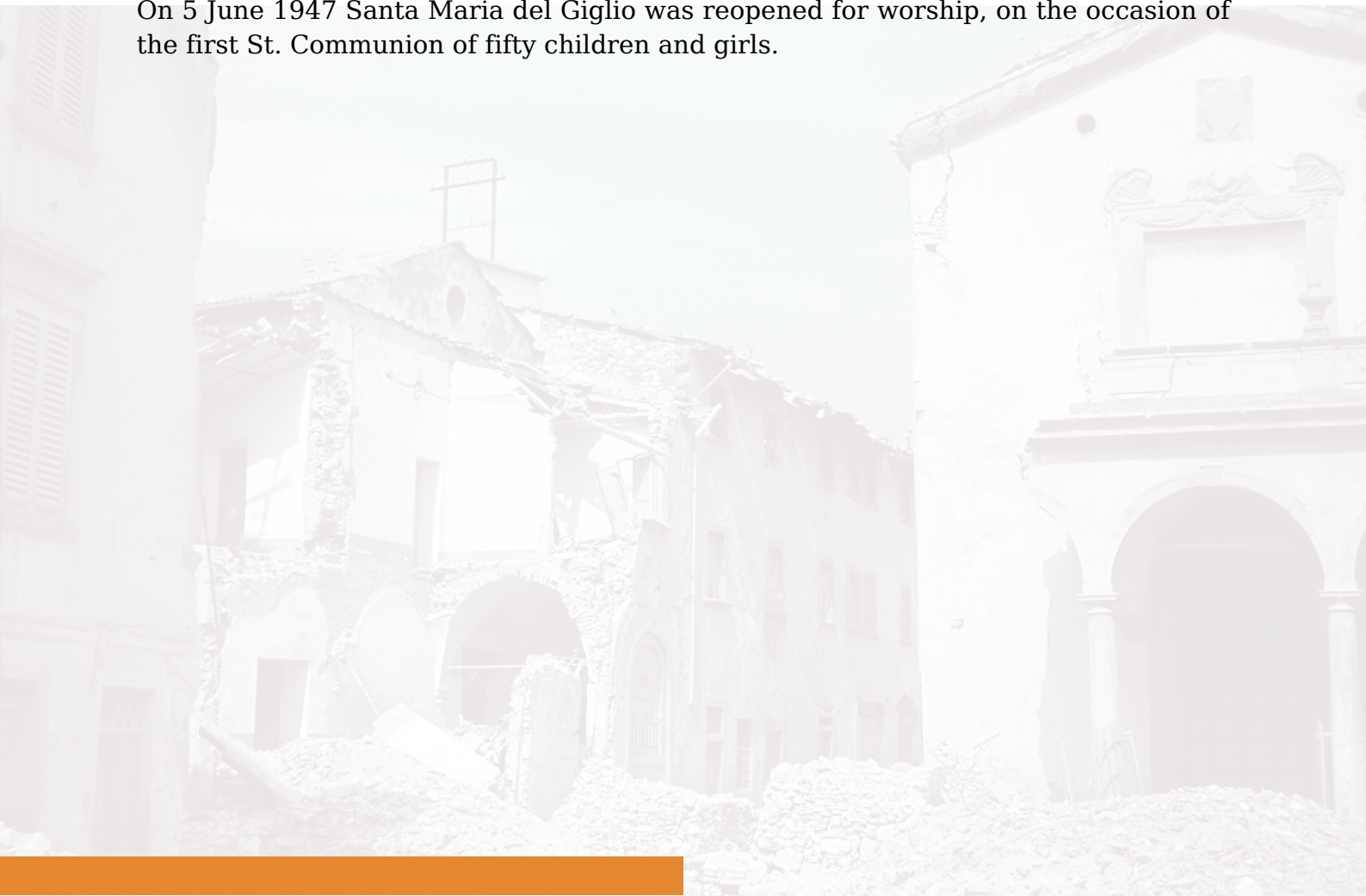


THE DEVASTATION OF SANTA MARIA DEL GIGLIO IN SQUARE SAN MARCO

With the incursion of **16 February 1944**, the church of Santa Maria del Giglio, with the destruction of numerous wooden furnishings and furnishings, was severely damaged and completely uncovered. **The bombs knock down an arch of the facade porch**, part of the midday wall, overwhelming an altar leaning against it.

Inspector Badiani immediately arrived on the spot, and in the report sent to the Superintendence recorded live the effects of the bombing: *I saw that in the church of Santa Maria del Giglio the high altar with the image in veneration remained intact and it also seems to me that the church can lend itself to a restoration. As you know, the church is owned by the municipality and, in addition to being dear to the citizens for reasons of religious sentiment, it also contains in its basement the ossuary of the ancient cemetery existing in the area. The altar containing the canvas by Cosimo Rosselli depicting the Crucifix with Saints, which was not removed in time, has been demolished with much of the wall. I recommended to some masons that I found on the spot, intent on work of removal, to operate with caution to see if, even in shreds, you could recover the canvas. The altar had a very protruding tympanum and it could be that the canvas, even if crushed under the stones, could be recovered.*

On 5 June 1947 Santa Maria del Giglio was reopened for worship, on the occasion of the first St. Communion of fifty children and girls.

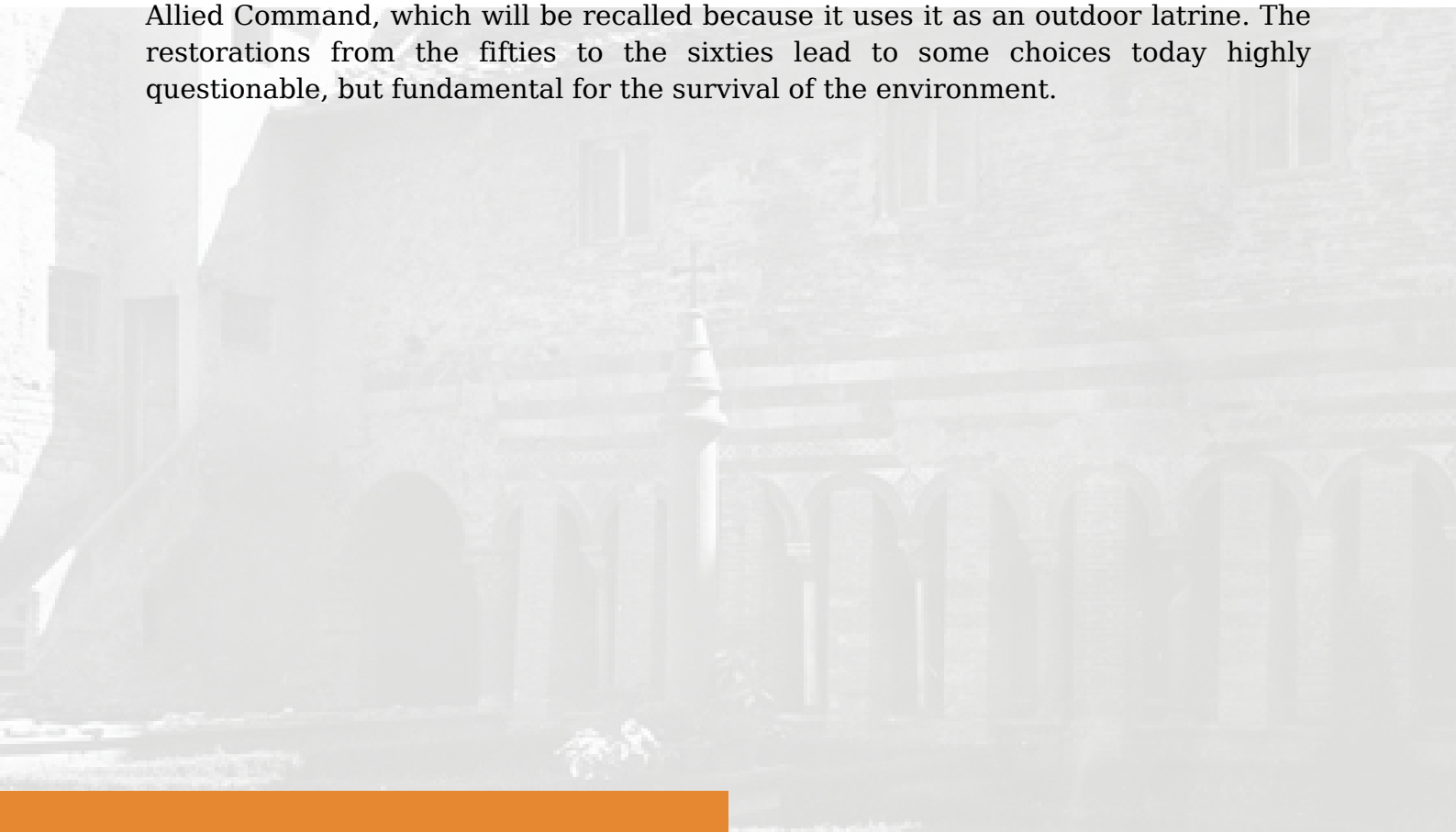


THE CLOISTER DURING THE WORLD WAR II

The events of the cloister during the Second World War are intertwined with the stories of the Bishop's Palace, the Cathedral and the salvation of the population itself. The related documentation shows the desire, since the twenties, for a **restoration necessary** to the preservation of architecture reduced, for decades, to a place of degradation and neglect. The outbreak of the war considerably slowed down the project of the architect Ardelio Colzi who was forced to suspend the works due to the lack of materials and the urgency of the national situation.

At the same time we remember in the exchanges of letters between the Badiani Inspector, the Chapter and the Municipality, episodes happened inside the cloister, such as the vegetable plantation, from 1943, or even the breeding of farmyard animals that are indispensable, for the canons of the Cathedral, in times of severe hardship. All this will be poorly tolerated by Badiani, who constantly tries to restore decorum in the cloister recalling the past cemetery function, underlined by the ancient cross placed on the column in the thirties and lost in the restoration of the fifties. The situation of grave danger due to the static of the building, frequented "abusively" by those who could use the air raid shelter set up in the Cappella dei Battuti of Saint Stephen and in the Antiquarium, leads to the request, May 20, 1944, of 1730 bricks of very particular measures (32x15x8cm) useful to create reinforcements between the columns, seen as fundamental also for the safeguard during the bombing.

From 1945 in the Bishop's Palace, and consequently also in the cloister, there is the Allied Command, which will be recalled because it uses it as an outdoor latrine. The restorations from the fifties to the sixties lead to some choices today highly questionable, but fundamental for the survival of the environment.



THE CHURCH OF SAINT AUGUSTINE AND THE DEVASTATION OF 7 MARCH

The air raid of 7 March 1944 hit in full the church of Sant'Agostino and the apse of the fourteenth century, with ruin of the vault of the main chapel and serious damage to the side chapels.

The bombing also destroyed most of the wooden stalls made by the artist from Prato Domenico di Simone del Riccio in 1466 and numerous sacred furnishings and walls. According to the chronicles reported by the parish priest, *five more bombs fall on the plot attached to the rectory, ruining the walls and the plantations*. Some candlesticks, along with the best frontal are requisitioned during the period of the German invasion. Fortunately, the works of art present in Sant'Agostino had been taken in advance by the Superintendence and secured at the Baron's villa in early February 1944.

On March 7, the oratory of San Ludovico (or Madonna del Buonconsiglio) in Via Garibaldi was also damaged: a bomb hit the house in front of the Oratory, with the consequent destruction of the roof in the building and the facade wall of the religious building, over 3 altars and the major with balustrade and organ. Fortunately all the originals of the Della Robbia sculptures were saved by the Superintendence.

On the same day the raid devastated Mercatale Square, with the ruin of most of the arcades that flanked it in the southern part and the crushing of the Tabernacle of Filippino Lippi, miraculously recomposed and saved by the restorer Leonetto Tintori and now preserved in the Museum of Palazzo Pretorio.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SAN GIUSEPPE AND OTHER DAMAGE TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL PATRIMONY

The 17 January 1944 for Prato is one of the worst days. From 12.25 to 13.20 hundreds of bombs fall on the train station, also hitting the Pietà, Santa Cristina, La Castellina, Canneto, Donald Duck, Viale Vittorio Veneto.

The oratory of San Rocco in via Santa Chiara is damaged, but above all it is razed to the ground, together with the Oratory and the Sacristy, the church of San Giuseppe, inaugurated on 4 May 1941; just a part of a side wall remains, later demolished. The choir, wardrobes, benches, windows, and other furnishings were also completely destroyed. Because of the frequent bombings and the proximity to the railway station, in December 1943 the Carmelite Sisters of Santa Teresa, who resided here, were forced to leave the house and until March 1944 are housed at the Institute of San Niccolò in Prato.

Many others will be the destruction of buildings and places of worship in Prato due to the Allied bombing or the mines of the retreating German army.

If Santa Maria della Pietà suffered damage already with the raid of 11 November 1943, the church of San Bartolomeo in Coiano is damaged due to the bombing of February 1944, with the destruction of the roof and the 10 windows that will be totally broken.

Even the ancient church of Santa Cristina in Pimonte, with frescoes from the second half of the fourteenth century, is damaged by raids in early 1944, while the damage to the parish church of San Pietro a Figline occurs mainly with cannonade at the end of August 1944, causing *the broken canopy and the stained glass windows of ancient style partly broken*.

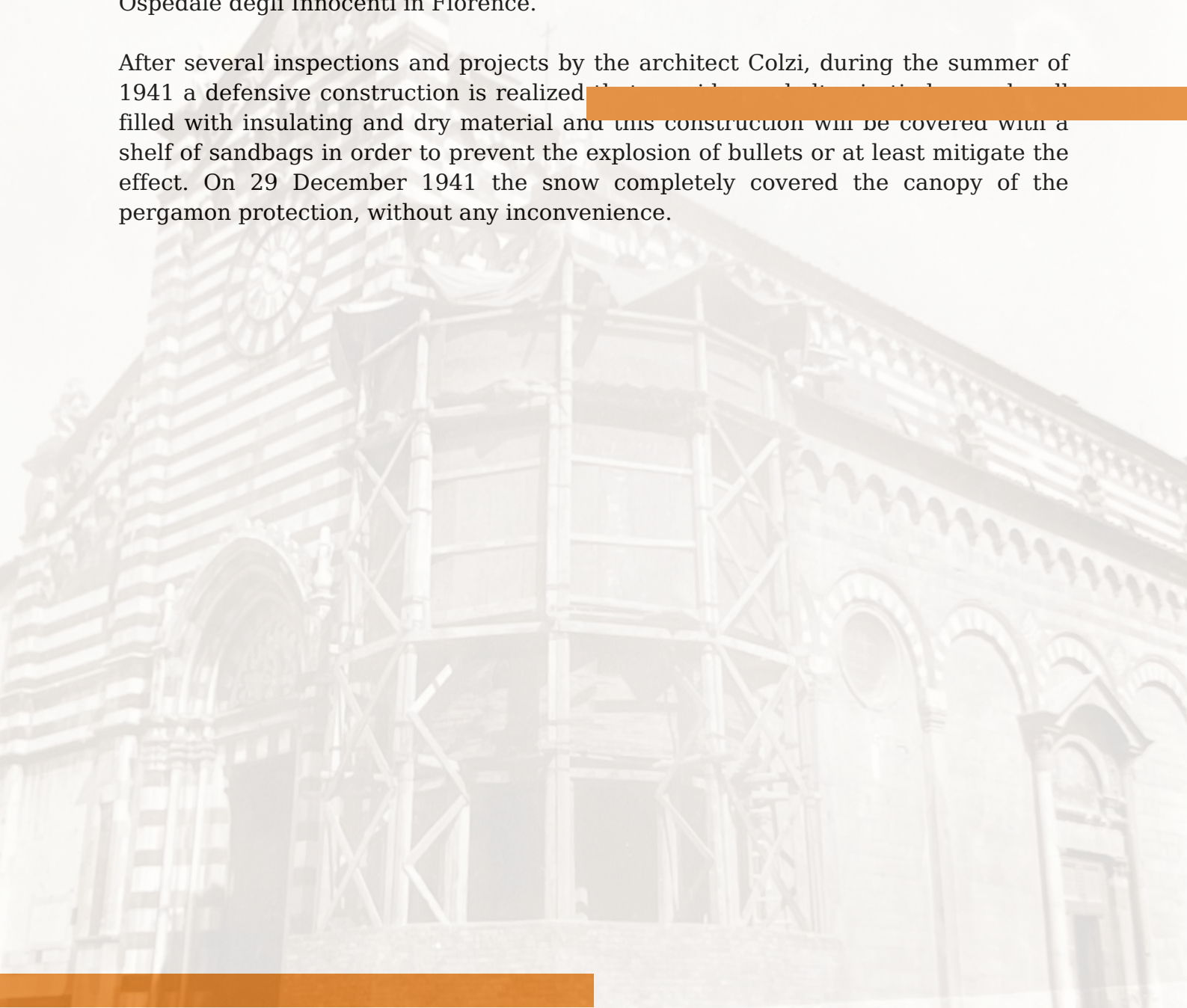
The facade, the roof and the glass of the Romanesque church of San Pietro a Iolo are instead damaged by the cannonade of 4 September during the German retreat; similar fate has Sant'Andrea a Iolo, ruined almost completely because of the mines made to shine by the Germans less than 50 meters away from the church, with the consequent demolition, at least in part, of the facade.

THE CATHEDRAL AND THE PULPIT OF DONATELLO DURING THE WAR

The parchment of Donatello and Michelozzo, jewel city placed on the right corner of the facade of the Cathedral with still, in 1940, the original reliefs that today are preserved in the Museum, is the work of art in Prato to which were dedicated more efforts to protect from war offenses.

As early as September 1940, Inspector Badiani urged the Superintendence of Monuments to take measures and allocate funds, since the Cathedral Chapter could not afford expenses for the preservation of the pulpit. Badiani returned to raise the question also in February 1941, where he hoped for similar protection -useful exclusively for indirect offenses- to that adopted for the tondi robbiani at the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence.

After several inspections and projects by the architect Colzi, during the summer of 1941 a defensive construction is realized. The pulpit is covered with a structure filled with insulating and dry material and this construction will be covered with a shelf of sandbags in order to prevent the explosion of bullets or at least mitigate the effect. On 29 December 1941 the snow completely covered the canopy of the pergamon protection, without any inconvenience.

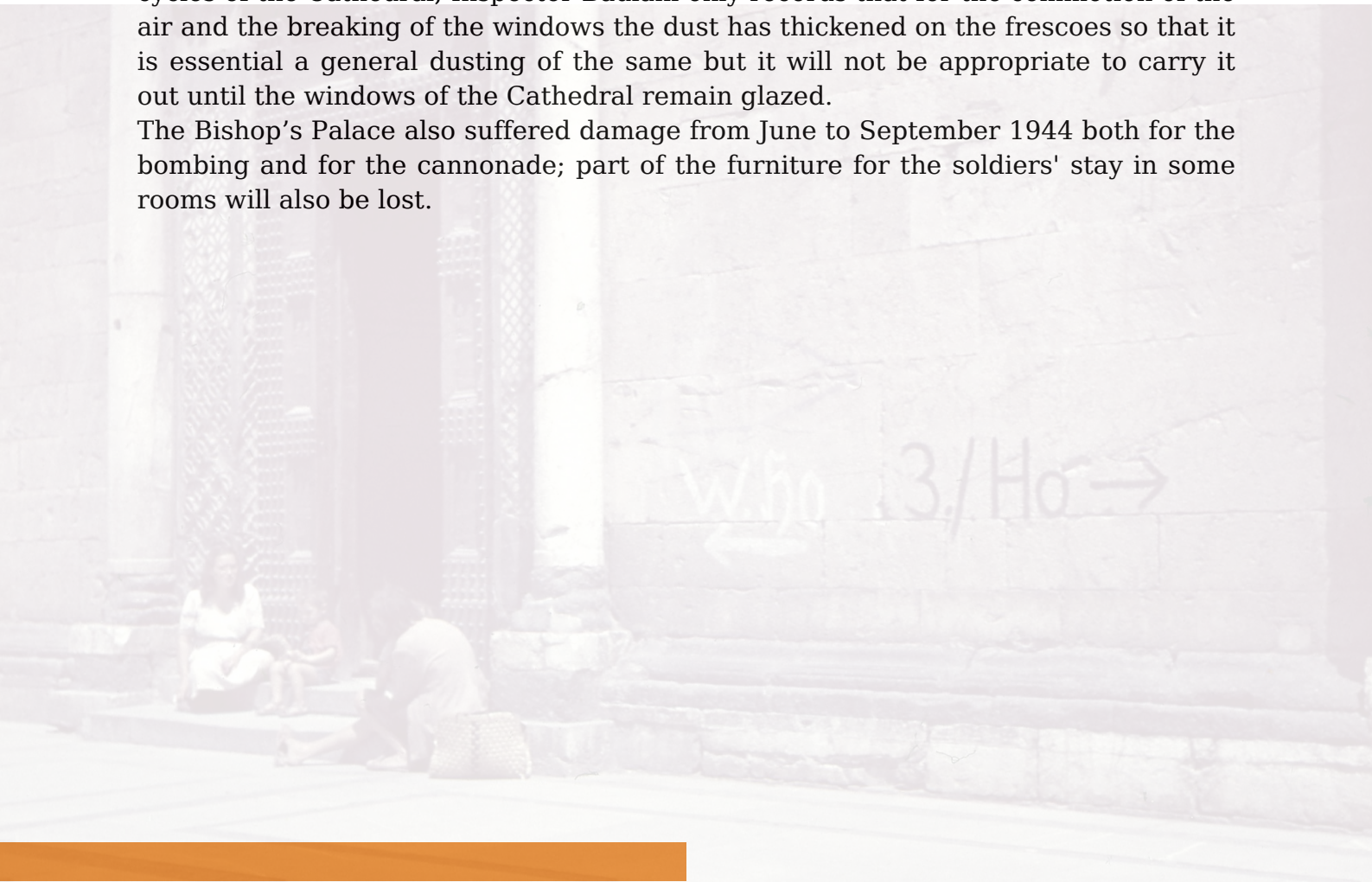


THE CATHEDRAL AND THE PULPIT OF DONATELLO DURING THE WAR

With the evolution of the war, in the summer of 1943 the most pressing concern for the preservation of heritage is precisely the protection of the panels of Donatello's Pergamon, that the Superintendence would have liked to disassemble and pack safely at the Baron's villa in Montemurlo. In this case the complaints of civil and religious authorities in the city are so strong that Giovanni Poggi and Ugo Procacci of the Florentine Superintendence must find a compromise with Inspector Badiani. The pulpit will be dismantled by the specialized workers of the Regio Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence. However, the tiles were protected inside the vault of the Cathedral, where the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Pisano had also been placed. The latter, initially destined by the Florentine Superintendence to the villa of Poggio a Caiano where the works of the highest artistic value of the museums of Prato and Florence are housed, given its devotional importance is decided not to move it away from the city of Prato.

The bombing of 7 March 1944 also caused wounds to the Cathedral, with damage to the roof and the nineteenth-century stained glass windows that had not been removed. A stone thrown from the explosion of a bomb in via Garibaldi about 50 meters from the apse damages the eaves frame. Incredibly safe are the frescoed cycles of the Cathedral; Inspector Badiani only records that for the commotion of the air and the breaking of the windows the dust has thickened on the frescoes so that it is essential a general dusting of the same but it will not be appropriate to carry it out until the windows of the Cathedral remain glazed.

The Bishop's Palace also suffered damage from June to September 1944 both for the bombing and for the cannonade; part of the furniture for the soldiers' stay in some rooms will also be lost.



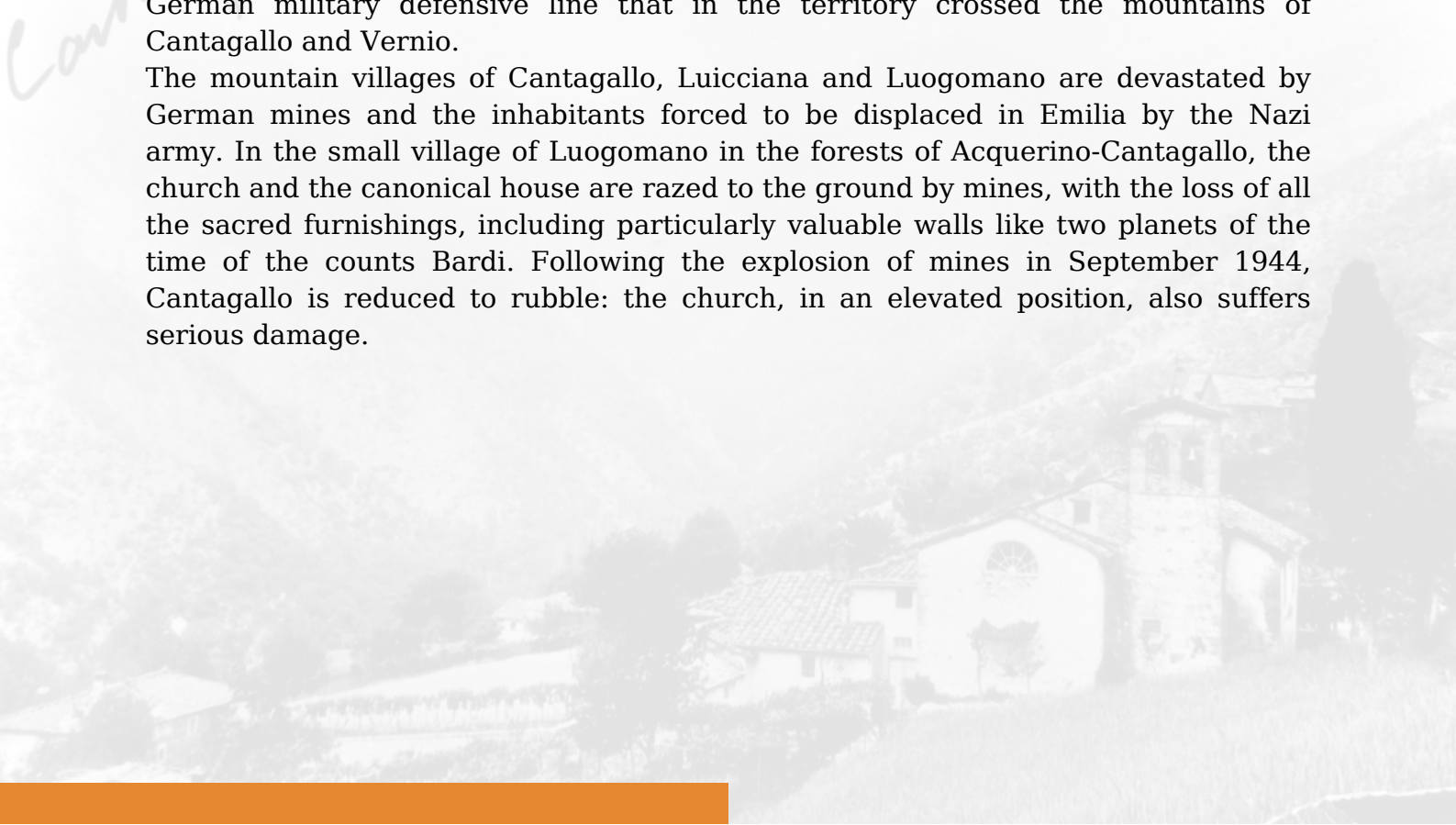
THE DAMAGE TO CHURCHES OF THE VAL DI BISENZIO

The rural churches between Monteferrato and Calvana, initially considered safe and far from the war, were actually marked by bombing, also for their proximity as the crow flies with the Direttissima. Entire communities of Prato and the villages of the valley are scattered in the villages of Faltignano, Savignano, Sofignano, Parmigno (where the frescoes of Antonio di Miniato are still preserved), once much more populated, and in Schignano, Migliana, places of action of the partisan brigades.

During the war the wonderful altarpiece of the Master of the Nativity of Castello, exposed in this room, was still in the church of Faltignano, without protection, and in March 1944 Badiani reports that there is no need to worry as a place far from interesting works war. Faltignano is incredibly saved from the very close bombings that destroy the surrounding villages, both from those of 8 February that hit Filettole and La Briglia, and from those of late June 1944 that devastate, among others, San Leonardo in Collina. If the church and the rectory of San Leonardo are severely damaged by the bombings of 28-29-30 June, with the destruction of almost all the sacred furnishings and the devastated cemetery, a similar fate touches San Biagio a Cavagliano in Calvana, destroyed by bombing and the retreat of the German army, with breakdowns to the church, the bell tower and the rectory.

The communities and churches of the Alta Val di Bisenzio are affected more than others by the passage of the war, also for the presence of the Gothic Line, the last German military defensive line that in the territory crossed the mountains of Cantagallo and Vernio.

The mountain villages of Cantagallo, Luicciana and Luogomano are devastated by German mines and the inhabitants forced to be displaced in Emilia by the Nazi army. In the small village of Luogomano in the forests of Acquerino-Cantagallo, the church and the canonical house are razed to the ground by mines, with the loss of all the sacred furnishings, including particularly valuable walls like two planets of the time of the counts Bardi. Following the explosion of mines in September 1944, Cantagallo is reduced to rubble: the church, in an elevated position, also suffers serious damage.



THE DAMAGE TO CHURCHES OF THE VAL DI BISENZIO

The ancient parish church of Sant'Ippolito di Vernio suffers damage to the roofs, to the room of the organ attached to the choir and to the glasses because of the cannons; except the sacred furnishings that had been secured by the pastor. Cavarzano, one of the epicentres of the front passage and the construction of the Gothic Line, does not suffer serious damage except to the church for two cannonades. The precious memories of Don Guglielmo Calcagnini, preserved in the Diocesan Archives of Prato, tell a direct story of the emergency of those days and the destruction of the ecclesiastical heritage of Vernio.

Mercatale and San Quirico di Vernio are devastated by bombing and cannonade between May and September 1944. After the air raids of 3-4 June Mercatale is reduced to a heap of rubble, without sources, bridges, church, from where many sacred furnishings are stolen. In the village of San Quirico three cannons hit the bell tower, the church choir, the sacristy. A bomb falls in front of the eighteenth-century oratory of San Niccolò di Bari in the complex of the ancient Casone de' Bardi: the building is safe, even if in his report Inspector Badiani reports that the external double staircase with parapets and sandstone pillars is all collapsed and missing of various elements. He says the Germans were tying your horses and tearing the rope and tearing the pillars.

Montepiano, home to a German command and very close to the hill where the Battle of Torricella took place in September 1944, is severely damaged. The Romanesque jewel of the Badia is incredibly safe, while the new church on the main street, inaugurated in 1941, is hit by various cannon shells, and reduced to a skeleton.

The most significant destruction concerns the church of San Michele in Poggiole di Vernio, located at the entrance of the great gallery of the Bologna-Florence Direttissima, razed along with the rectory and the surrounding buildings by German mines. Already damaged by the Allied bombing of June 1944, San Michele was blown up on August 23: the parish priest Calcagnini of Cavarzano reports that They could not even raise the 2 bells because the parish priest could not find the men to do this operation. I remember that they went (rolled) at the bottom of the farm. I could not know if falling into the farm below broke, I will know. But the work of devastation did not end here. Forty houses were destined for destruction. This morning 24 (August) They started by blowing up the house of the farmer of the Church, ancient house.

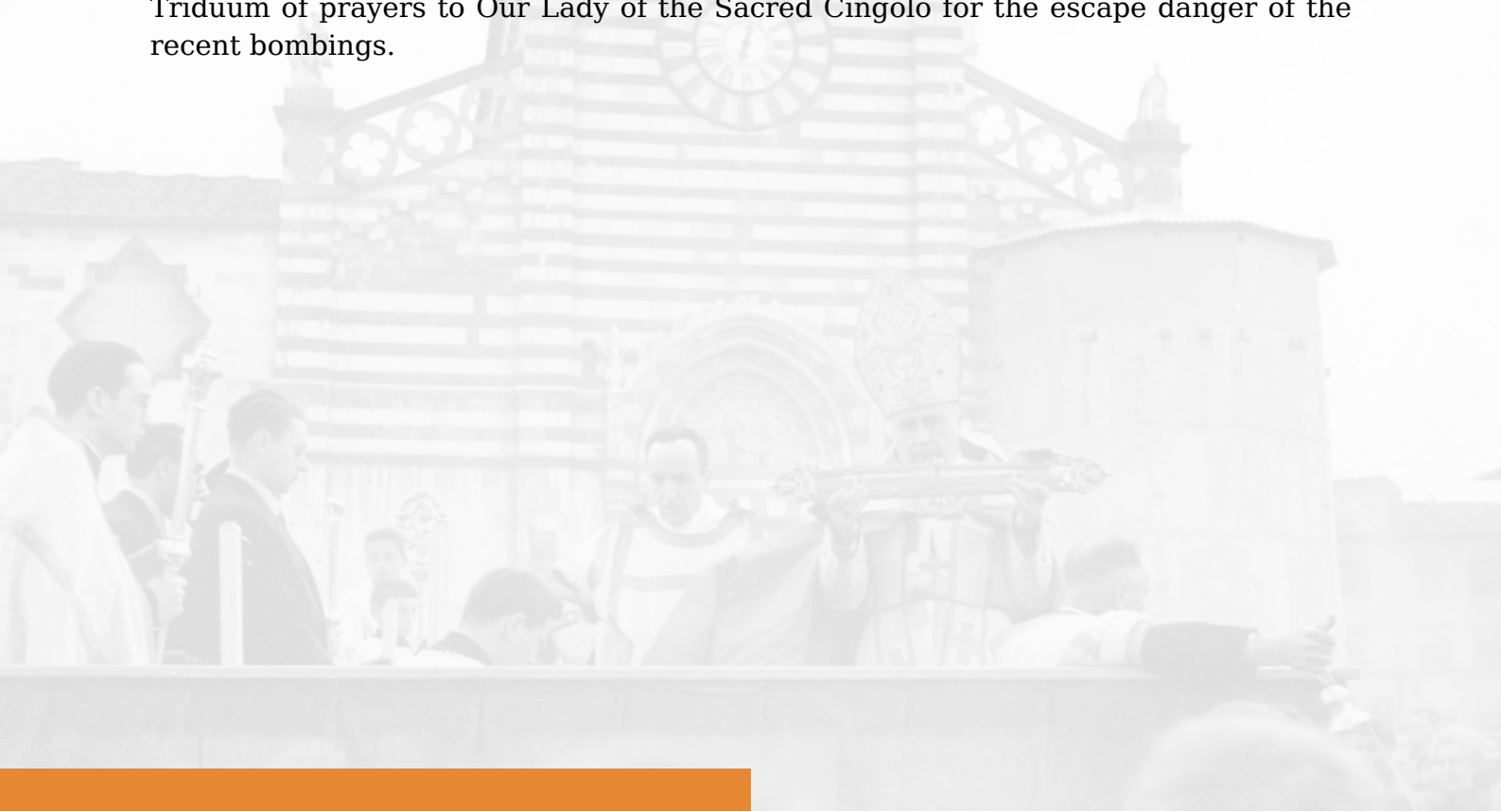
Fortunately the table of the high altar of Poggiole, important work of Jacopo Chimenti from Empoli with the Annunciation, Saint Michael, Saint Francis and Count Bardi (1585) had been brought for safety in the church of San Quirico, and despite the damage to the latter the shovel is saved. Today it is kept at San Michele a Sasseta.

MEASURES TO PROTECT THE SACRED GIRDLE

The altar of the Madonna della Cintola in the Cathedral has always been the stronghold of the devotion of the city and as such remained during the Second World War. The importance of the works that constitute it became, from July 1940, the subject of an exchange of letters between the Superintendent and the Chapter of the Cathedral that has as its theme the safety of both the works of art and the relic.

If you initially opt to leave everything in its place, the date of the change of course is 19 July 1943 when Bishop Giuseppe Debernardi, the mayor Pietro Zipoli, the canons Diego Sarti and Giovanni Nesi, along with the director of the Cassa di Risparmio e Depositi di Prato, Gastone Lenzi and witnesses Tommaso Gatti and Antonio Passi, deposit the relic, the seventeenth-century case in rock crystal, the silver chest and all the wooden case with the system of opening the three keys in the "Treasure" of the Cassa di Risparmio e Depositi di Prato. The event is assured by the seals that are affixed on the case in the presence of all witnesses and by the notarial deed for the occasion. The Madonna with Child by Giovanni Pisano is instead placed, together with the reliefs of the pulpit, in the crypt of the Cathedral.

The fact is indicative of the perception of a real danger for air attacks that could endanger the preservation of the relic itself and its equipment. Despite this measure, ostensions continued to be officiated, as witnessed by the minutes of 14 August, 7 September, 19 November and 24 December 1943 authorizing some members of the Chapter to take the relic from the "Treasury" for the celebrations. The document of 19 November is interesting where the commissioner prefect Tommaso Fracassini is invited to participate in the celebration of a Mass in the Triduum of prayers to Our Lady of the Sacred Cingolo for the escape danger of the recent bombings.



IN CATHEDRAL

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT IN THE INTERNAL PULPIT DURING THE WORLD WAR II

In the summer of 1943, when the danger of bombing on Prato became more and more real, it was decided to protect also the internal pulpit of the Cathedral.

The panels sculpted by Antonio Rossellino, Mino da Fiesole and Pasquino da Montepulciano are enclosed within a brick armour, as was happening at the same time in Pistoia for works such as the pulpit of Giovanni Pisano in Sant'Andrea.

