



THE FLOWERS OF MATERA

THE CRYPT OF ORIGINAL SIN

In the plain below Matera, along the face of a rupestrian valley, is set the cave of the Cripta del Peccato Originale (Crypt of Original Sin), known as the Grotta dei Cento Santi (Cave of One Hundred Saints). It has since been completely decorated with mural paintings dating back to the end of the 8th century up to the beginning of the 9th century A.D. It features a Benedictine rupestrian coenoby of the Longobard age, a hypogeum where the monks and the shepherds used to pray, and preserves a rich painting cycle of the Benedictine school of Benevento that, after years of abandonment, has been brought back to life thanks to a special restoration work promoted by the Distretto Culturale dell'Habitat Rupestre della Basilicata. This cave houses the most surprising example in the history of southern art, dating back to 500 years before Giotto, a work of art unique of its kind because of its particular expressive value and the rare themes representing events of the Old and New Testaments. In fact the paintings feature an authentic illustrated Bible made for the believers of the time, according to the Early Christian iconography. What links the sequence of the paintings is an extraordinary floral pattern: bushes of flowers and red corollas that give the crypt a magical living atmosphere. It also extends to the three apses with the images of the Apostles, the Archangels and the Virgin Queen between two Saints. The Crypt of the Flowers of Matera has been defined as the "Cappella Sistina" (Sistin Chapel) of the rupestrian mural painting.