

# TERMOLI

THE SWABIAN CASTLE AND THE OLD VILLAGE

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CAMERA DI COMMERCIO  
DEL MOLISE





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# TERMOLI

## The Swabian Castle and the Old Village



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## HISTORICAL-ARTISTIC ITINERARY

### Get to know the City

Arriving in Termoli from the Molise inland is an almost mystical experience for those who, accustomed to horizons enclosed by mountains and stone houses, are mesmerized by the scenery of the *wild Adriatic*, *the whiteness of the marina* and the houses. It is a "physiognomy" not typical Molise, but of a coastal land, like all coastal lands: a little vague and a little distracted, a bit lazy and a little dynamic, disrupted and at the same time animated by the sun. An air that tickles the eyes, that replenishes and gives a sense of a time that today seems out of reach, but that here seems to rest.

The port is the place for departures for the Tremiti Islands, the enchanting Diomedee. Pertaining to the province of Foggia, they are actually Molise on a soul-deep level, because every Molisan feels like an offshoot of the few kilometers of coastline, marked by names such as Montenero di Bisaccia and Petacciato (in their marinas), Campomarino and of course Termoli. Termoli, one would say, is the gateway to Molise: from the sea, towards the Adriatic and the Balkan lands (from which, in the course of the sixteenth century, people from Albania and Croatia also came, settling in the current municipalities of Molise where the language spoken by the founding fathers is still observed and preserved); of the earth: in the direction of the cities of the North, thanks to the railway that crosses it, makes it an important crossroad between Puglia and Abruzzo.

The iconographic image of the City is that of the Old Village which is embedded in a rocky cliff, labyrinthine and fascinating in its labyrinths once inhabited by fishermen. The entrance is near the Castle under whose mighty size is the "Belvedere of the photographers", a delightful balcony on the beach of Sant'Antonio. A few side steps to the keep and an access stairway lead into *another* world and still a throbbing of life.



*On this page: Piazza in front of the Castle and entrance to the Village. On the previous page, above: Boats and fishing boats moored on the beach of Sant'Antonio (Photo Romeo Musa, 1929). Below: Overall aerial view of the Old Village of Termoli.*

## THE SWABIAN CASTLE

### The towers and the keep

The Castle was built at the time of Frederick II of Swabia on a pre-existing Norman tower used as a "military post on the marina", as the epigraph that was once lost during the demolition of one of the towers of the buttresses. The epigraph bore written that Frederick II had the fortress built in 1247, seven years after the sack led by the Venetians on the Molise coast. According to some scholars, its construction dates back to the second half of the 6th century AD, when the City became part of the Duchy of Benevento, but there



are no archaeological remains. During the Norman domination, Termoli was equipped with a port which assumed a certain strategic importance and which was subsequently strengthened in the Angevin period. Placed close to the sea, it was to represent perhaps the last outpost of Apulia (if we consider the etymological term at the origin of the name Termoli), but also play the role of military fortress and sighting with respect to barbarian invasions and pirate raids.



*Above: Miniatura (miniature painting) of Frederick II. In the center: Wall of defense of the Village and, in the background, the Castle. Below: Bracket of the keep. On page 7: Angular towers and view of the Castle.*





The castle of Termoli, better called "Tower of the castle", appears today as a fortified bastion stretching towards the Adriatic, enclosed by a wall with an opening at the entrance from the mainland and defended by a lookout tower of the XIII century. The square tower with corbel crowning rises on the northwest edge of the ancient City walls, on a truncated pyramidal rampart, ending at the corners with four small cylindrical lookout towers. In later ages the Castle partially lost its role as an essen-

tially military work, when, having established the Spanish dominion and reduced the internal and external dangers, the Adriatic coast recorded a period of relative calm and therefore of progressive disposal of the war works. The walls were overlaid with decorations, windows were opened and loopholes extended. The feudal families of Termoli were the di Capua, the d'Angiò, the Durazzo, the Gambatesa, the Pappacoda, the Pignatelli and the Cattaneo.



### The interior of the Castle

To access it today it is necessary to enter from the inner part of the ancient Borgo (Village). On the stairs that lead to the first terrace, two supporting shelves are still visible. The lower part had the function of a warehouse and organized deposit in the tunnel, for defense; the upper part was used for storage and housing. Like other Swabian constructions, the entrance to the tower was protected by an external retractable ladder and also by the bretèche or brattice. The defensive vocation is also evident from the provision of tanks and warehouses, which can be occupied, only partially, by any attackers. The loopholes appear modified: today they look like windows with that let air and light; in the past they had to be niches destined to host militias defending the Castle. The vents of the slits could accommodate both men with bows

and crossbows and, thanks to subsequent adaptations, soldiers with firearms. The castle gradually lost its military function and, during the period of Spanish domination, underwent transformations. During the Bourbon period, the building was used as a prison and in 1902 it was declared a National Monument. In 1909 the Navy, constructing a building of negative architectural impact, built a meteorological station there. Recent restorations have unearthed traces of hydraulic systems, service tunnels and other architectural elements with military functions. Currently some rooms are used for conferences, cultural events and as a Municipal Art Gallery.

*On this page, below: Religious writings made in the prison cells on the lower level of the Castle. On the next page: Entrance, rooms, stairs and marine equipment present within the Castle of Frederick.*





## THE OLD VILLAGE

### The fortified walls

Built between the 10th and 11th centuries and reorganized by Frederick II of Swabia in the 13th century, it had, in addition to the Castle, six sighting towers. Of these towers remain the tower located at the entrance of the Old Village and the ruins of Torre Tornola, while some pieces of circular masonry are found in the building adjacent to the port. The ruins of Torre Tornala were the subject of archaeological investigation and restoration in 1981. The City walls are also characterized by the presence of "trabucchi", ancient wooden buildings that connect the mainland to the sea and allow fishing without boats. They are the synthesis of the marine and the peasant element. The inhabited area has suffered numerous attacks from the sea (Turkish assaults in 842 and 1566) and earthquakes (in 1117, 1125 and 1456), with consequent destruction and reconstruction, therefore it is the result of different interventions following one after another over the centuries.



*On this page, above: Lookout tower at the entrance to the Village. Below: Access door to the Village from the so-called "Belvedere della Torretta". On the opposite page: View of the Trabucco, an ancient wooden building used by the Termolesi to fish without using boats.*







The recovery plan, started in the 1990s, provided for the restoration. The urban system is based on a main axis that leads to Piazza Duomo and side streets, according to a herringbone pattern. The road that runs almost entirely along the wall within which the Village was built, is named after Frederick II of Swabia.

*On this page, to the side: View of the trabucco from the top of the defensive wall. Below: A characteristically restored Termolese fisherman's house. On the opposite page: Daily life in the Village.*

### **In the heart of the Village**

The entrance to the Old Village is triumphal. Immersed in the scents of cooked fish (different locations in the area) and the heady one of salt in the air, a tower - which now houses the Termolese Historical Archive - opens up to a spectacular view of the harbor (Belvedere alla Torretta) and introduces a door that offers a new sense of magic. The small square that appears filled with flowers on the balconies and vines around the portals; inns and restaurants that overlook the maze of







stone-paved streets, people walking in Largo Giannelli, which faces the other symbol of Termoli, the Cathedral of San Basso, and next to it, the eighteenth-century church of Sant'Anna, in ancient "Congrega della Morte" (House of Death). Among the most suggestive alleys, we point out the Vico II Castello, one of the narrowest in Europe, called «la rejecèlle» by the Termolese people. Peering through the intertwining of the alleys it is easy to frame evocative glimpses of the sea, as well as

from the wall facing north and the beach of Sant'Antonio you can enjoy the spectacular view of the Adriatic. The view continues from here to infinity up to Punta Penna, in the Abruzzo region, and when the haze subsides, one can observe the majesty of the summit of Majella, which remains covered with snow for most of the year.

*On this page, on the side: Alleys and views of the Old Village. Below: The slow flow of days and florescence in the atrium of a home. Beside: Glimpses of life and the sea.*





### The Cathedral of San Basso

The Cathedral is an authentic jewel of Romanesque art, located in the heart of the medieval Village. The temple is among the most important monuments of Molise. Facing east, it has a maximum height of 22.5 meters, is 18 meters wide and 34 meters long and rests on a base 1.75 meters high. On the stylobate (floor of the temple), towards the left, runs the writing SCE. MARIE (Santa Maria) to which the Cathedral was dedicated. The front door can be accessed by going up nine external steps. Built between the 12th and 13th centuries, it is attributed to Alfano da Termoli. The building stands on an existing plant dating

back to the 11th century, of which the apses are visible (at the level of the crypt) and pieces of the mosaic floor. The church of the 11th century, in its time, stood on one of the pre-existing early medieval buildings, attested by the recent finds of a necropolis. Tradition has it that in ancient times there was a temple dedicated to Castor and Pollux, not yet witnessed at an archaeological level.

*On this page: The facade, the rose window, the entrance portal to the Cathedral, "among the most important monuments of Molise". On the opposite page: Statue of San Basso and most probably that of San Sebastiano (whose face is missing). To follow: Artistic friezes on the sides of the façade and, below, side wall with access door (walled) and apse with artistic friezes.*



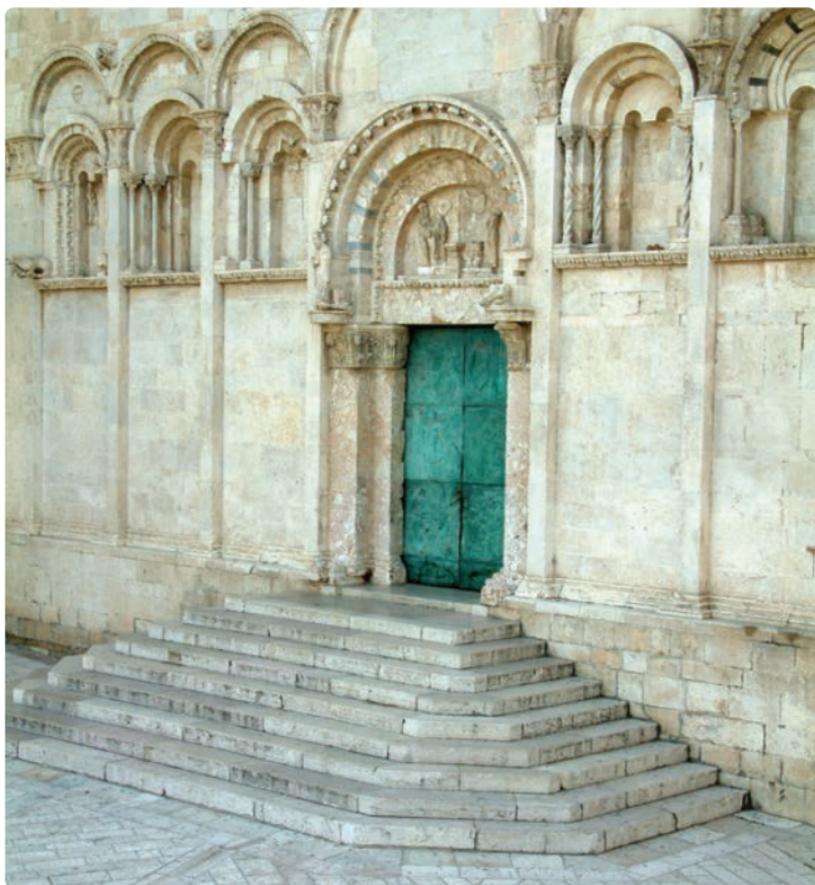


### The artistic façade

In the façade, there are seven arches with underlying pilaster strips (vertical pillar in a wall), capitals (top-most member of a column) and remains of a rich sculptural ornamentation. Shredded in the 18th century to obtain baroque stuccos and of which the *Annunciation* can be recognized in the first mullioned window and the *Presentation at the temple* in the lunette of the portal; or destroyed by the Turks in 1566, or simply corroded by winds and strong temperature changes. An inscription in the first mullioned window on the right mentions Stazio, son of the Grimaldis (Ravellesi), financiers of the works. The hanging shelves bear inscriptions on the Grimaldi and d’Afflitto family, financiers of the statues of San Basso and

San Timoteo (missing statue). On the wall, fabric is an intervention for reconstruction that took place after the earthquake of 1456. The left side of the Church has twelve blind arches on pilasters, in one of which there is a walled door. The exterior has Islamic and Pisan elements that testify to the presence of active shipyards made up of traveling artisans. To the right of the City's Cathedral is the eighteenth-century church of Sant’Anna, formerly “Congrega della Morte”. From 1980 until 1982 the restorations carried out by the Superintendency secured and restored what remained of its façade.

*Below: Entrance portal with lunette. On the next page: The other six lunettes or arches of the façade with underlying pilasters, capitals and remains of a rich sculptural ornamentation.*







### The interior

There are three naves ending in three apses. The Church has a trussed roof in the central nave and a cross vault in the two side aisles. On the left side, entering the Church, there is the Chapel of the SS. Sacrament. The extension of the chapel gives rise to the bell tower, which in turn constitutes the route to reach the Sacristy. The presbytery is raised in respect to the area reserved for the faithful and is reached by a staircase.

### The Crypt

In the Crypt, discovered in 1936, one can see the apses of a pre-existing church and houses the bodies of San Basso and San Timoteo. Capitals, frames and sculptural fragments are preserved. On one side of the Crypt is a mosaic depicting a

*On this page, from top to bottom: Overall view from inside the Cathedral and, below, the apses of the Crypt. Beside, above: Endotaffio (graffiti-like inscriptions) present in the tomb of San Basso. Reliquary of San Timoteo and a sarcophagus that preserved the body of San Basso.*





bull and a snake that, intertwining, form a cross. The two animals recall the victory of Christianity over Paganism; behind are the tombs of the bishops Giannelli, Bisceglie, Bernacca and of the D'Agostino termolese; on the left is the sarcophagus of San Basso, which according to tradition was brought on August 4, 575 to Termoli, discovered by Bishop Giannelli in 1761, as recalled by the tombstone above. Going up the presbyteral stairway, near the altar, to the left, is where the the urn is kept which guards the remains of San Basso, built on August 19th, 1929 near the access to the Sacristy, where brick cross vaults can be seen.





### The mosaic floor

Unearthed during restoration work in the 30s of the 20th century. Two mosaics were discovered: one in the left apse of the ancient church; the other in the central nave. The first mosaic depicts a geometric checked pattern, which frames the figures of a group of animals presented in a close together in a vital weave. The second, visually larger, contains more animal figures (a mermaid, a lion that swallows a tiny animal, and a winged quadruped). The installation of the mosaic

dates back to the second half of the 11th century. The technique of the mosaics is that of the *opus lessellacum*, which had different performers, since the first mosaic is made with small and precise *tesserae* (small piece of stone, glass or ceramic), while the second is made up of larger and sparse *tesserae*, thus highlighting an overall, brief, construction.

*On this page: The two floor mosaics of the Crypt. On the opposite page: Some moments of the Procession of San Basso leaving the Cathedral and the port.*



## FEAST OF SAN BASSO AND PROCESSION TO THE SEA

### Prodromes of the Feast

Already a few days before August 3rd, the pier is animated by the frenetic activities of fishermen. They all seem excited and have an almost *creative* air, engaged as they are in the ordinary and extraordinary cleaning of their trawlers and in the important work of decorating and embellishing. They carry armchairs, chairs, tables and lots of colorful flags, which will be used to "dress up" the fishing boat, make it cheerful, colorful and hospitable for the day dedicated to the protector of fishermen: San Basso.

### The legend of the Saint

Inspired by the history and the legend of the Saint, stories of the people overcrowd and intertwine. We do not know a certain date for the beginning of the *Procession at sea*, but there are photographs showing the statue of the Saint on board the "paranze", sailing boats used for fishing, which departed from the beach of Sant'Antonio, before the construction of the port. Tradition has it that, they are not to honor a

statue of the traditional wooden or plaster, but rather a "broomstick" fully dressed with episcopal clothes, nevertheless propitiatory of abundant fishing, favorable winds and protector of the fishermen's life at sea.



### The draw of the fishing vessel

The icon of San Basso, in July, is donated to all the owners before the draw carried out in the Cathedral square. In the presence of the authorities and a crowd, the names of the three boats destined to transport the statue of San Basso, the authorities and the band are extracted from a transparent urn. The boat that will have the privilege of hosting the Saint will be the one taken immediately after the ticket with the inscription "W SAN BASSO"; then, to follow, the one that will host the authorities and the musical band.

### The Procession to the sea

The devotion dictates that the celebrations, in honor of the Saint, are divided into two days. On August 3rd, at 8.00 am, mass is celebrated in the Cathedral crowded with faithful. At the end of the celebration a pyrotechnic bang starts the procession of the statue, carried on the shoulder by the crew of the trawler, along the streets of the Old Village up to the port, where the same statue is embarked on the selected trawler to begin the procession by sea. Winding towards the north coast, where off the Bishop of the Diocese of Termoli-Larino throws laurel wreaths



ath into the sea in memory of those who lost their lives at sea. The procession at sea continues also on the southern coast and then returns to the port. The statue of the Saint remains on board to be worshiped by the faithful until 7.00 pm, later transferred on the shoulders of seafarers, passing through the Old Village to the Fish Market, where the faithful will watch over it all night.

*On this page, from top to bottom: The statue positioned on the fishing boat. Below: The procession of boats accompanying the statue at sea for the blessing.*





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### Return to the Cathedral

At 06.00 on August 4th S.E. the Bishop celebrates a Holy Mass on the square in front of the Fish Market, which concludes the permanence of the statue of the Saint in the marine environments. After the celebration, in procession, the statue of the Saint, accompanied by the band and the faithful, is returned to its rightful place in the Cathedral. At 18.00, in Piazza Duomo, the Pontifical is celebrated and then the last procession, the one with the most participants, with the following, in addition to the many faithful, groups of associations present in the City.

### The Castle on fire

Every year, on the evening of August 15th, wonderful fireworks ignite the Castle and the fortified wall, so as to recall the assault suffered by the Turks in the Middle Ages. The unique event is much appreciated by tourists who flock to the Sant'Antonio beach and the Cristoforo Colombo waterfront to enjoy the show.

*Above: The spectacular trail of fire that ignites the Castle and the fortified wall of the Old Village. Below: The sunset colors set fire to the fishing boats anchored in the harbor.*



## TOURISM



Comune di Termoli

### The port and the Fish Festival

The port of Termoli, built in the late 30s of the twentieth century, was and is the landing and embarkation for the many activities related to navigation. Fishing boats, recreational boats, maritime connections with the Tremiti Islands and with the other shores of the Adriatic and ships for freight transport pass through this mirror of the sea every day. In recent years parking in front of the dock is also used for recreational events. The most famous and important is undoubtedly the traditional Fish Festival, which takes place usually on the last Sunday of August.

### The beach

Termoli is also the Molisan city that can boast the greatest number of activities related to tourism, bathing and leisure: beaches, hotels, residences, B&Bs and restaurants connect the whole urban layout of the city. In particular, in the Old Village and in the nearby beach of Sant'Antonio, which boasts 10 km of sandy shore, characterized by fine and soft sand with shallow waters ideal for families with children but also for invigorating walks on the shore.

*Above: The Fish Festival, in the port parking lot, attracts thousands of gourmets who love fish fry. Below: View of the Sant'Antonio beach in the summer.*



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## Project DISCOVERING MOLISE

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- 2 MAB Unesco reserve "Alto Molise"
- 3 The Swabian Castle and the old village of Termoli
- 4 The archaeological Area of Altilia/Sepino
- 5 The monumental complex of San Vincenzo al Volturno
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