



the  
Footsteps  
of Clare

The Spirit's Holy Manner of Working

St. Francis often referred to the “*Spirit's holy manner of working.*” That means that he was always looking to, searching for, and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in his life.

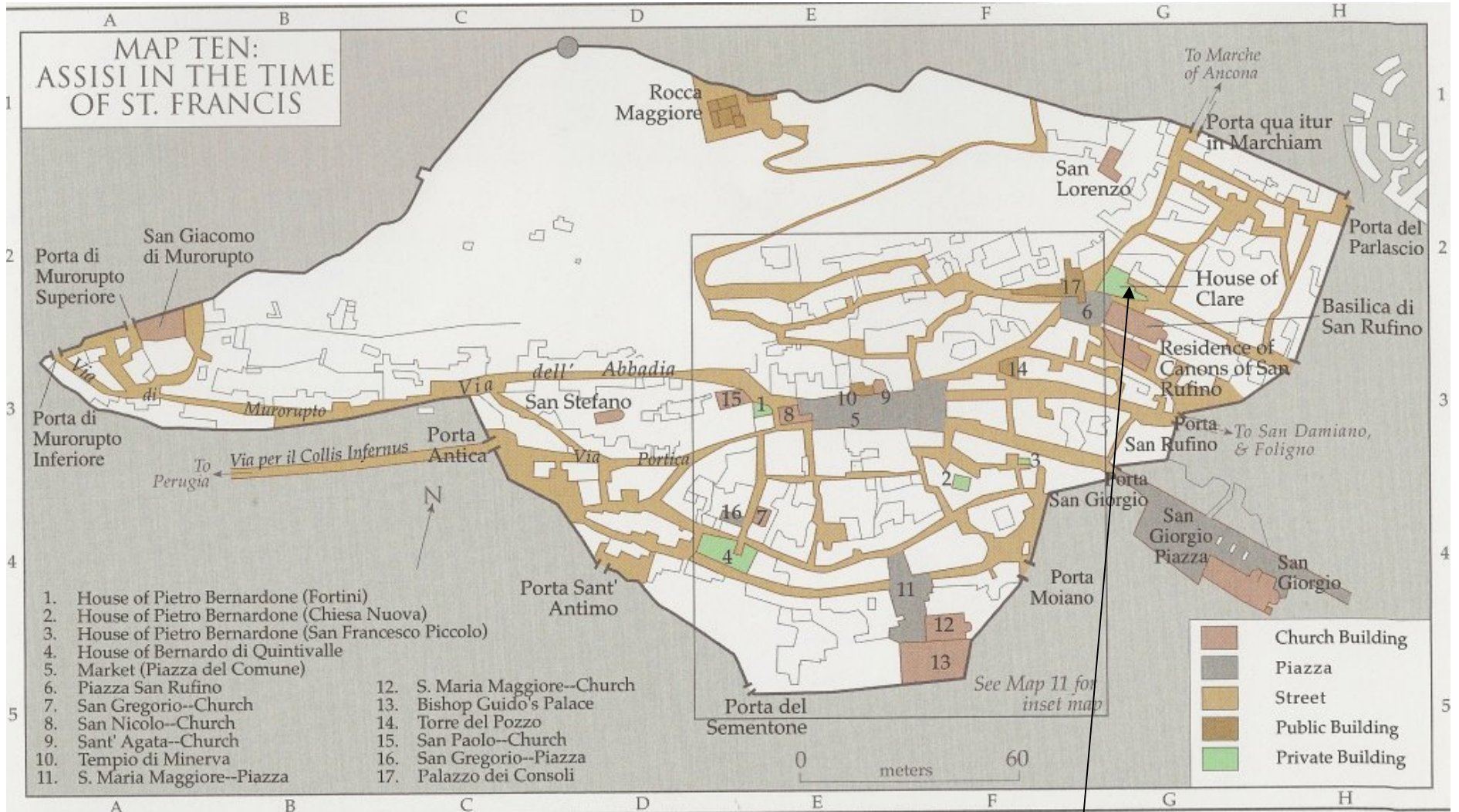
As you begin to experience the journey of Clare, try to see the ‘*Spirit's holy manner of working*’ in Clare's life.

Clare was born in 1192 or 1193. Her family was knightly and both her mother and father trace their ancestry to Charlemagne and King Pepin – the first Holy Roman Emperor. Her family was one of just twenty ruling families in Assisi known as the Majors. They were allied with the German emperor.

Clare's childhood home would have been a tower construction similar to one of these:



# 1. Birth Home of St. Clare



Location of the Birth Home of St. Clare



Location of the Birth Home of St. Clare from Google Earth



Location of the Birth Home of St. Clare

The women in Clare's childhood were very influential on her Christian life. Her mother, Ortolana, was very devout; she had made pilgrimages to Rome, Monte Sant'Angelo in Apulia, Compostela, and the Holy Land. In Clare's childhood home, the women lived in a religious community based on prayer, works of mercy, and service to the poor.



Medieval noble  
men and women  
dressed like this



# The Birth Home of St. Clare

Clare's birth home was in the area next to the cathedral of Assisi, San Rufino. Nothing remains of the original home. Today there stands a building housing some nuns who serve as sacristans in San Rufino.



A sign on the wall says that Clare grew up in this spot.



Clare's faith was initiated through the baptism she received in the baptismal font in the cathedral of San Rufino, adjacent to her house.

Here Clare, Francis, all their followers from Assisi were baptized.



As a child, Clare lived as a penitent: she performed acts of asceticism, prayer, acts of charity, especially giving to the poor. “Although their household was one of the largest in the city and great sums were spent there, she nevertheless saved the food they were given to eat, put it aside, and gave it to the poor. While she was still in her father’s house, she wore a rough garment under her other clothes. He also said she fasted, prayed, and did other pious deeds, as he had seen, and that it was believed she had been inspired by the Holy Spirit from the beginning.” Act of Canonization, 20.

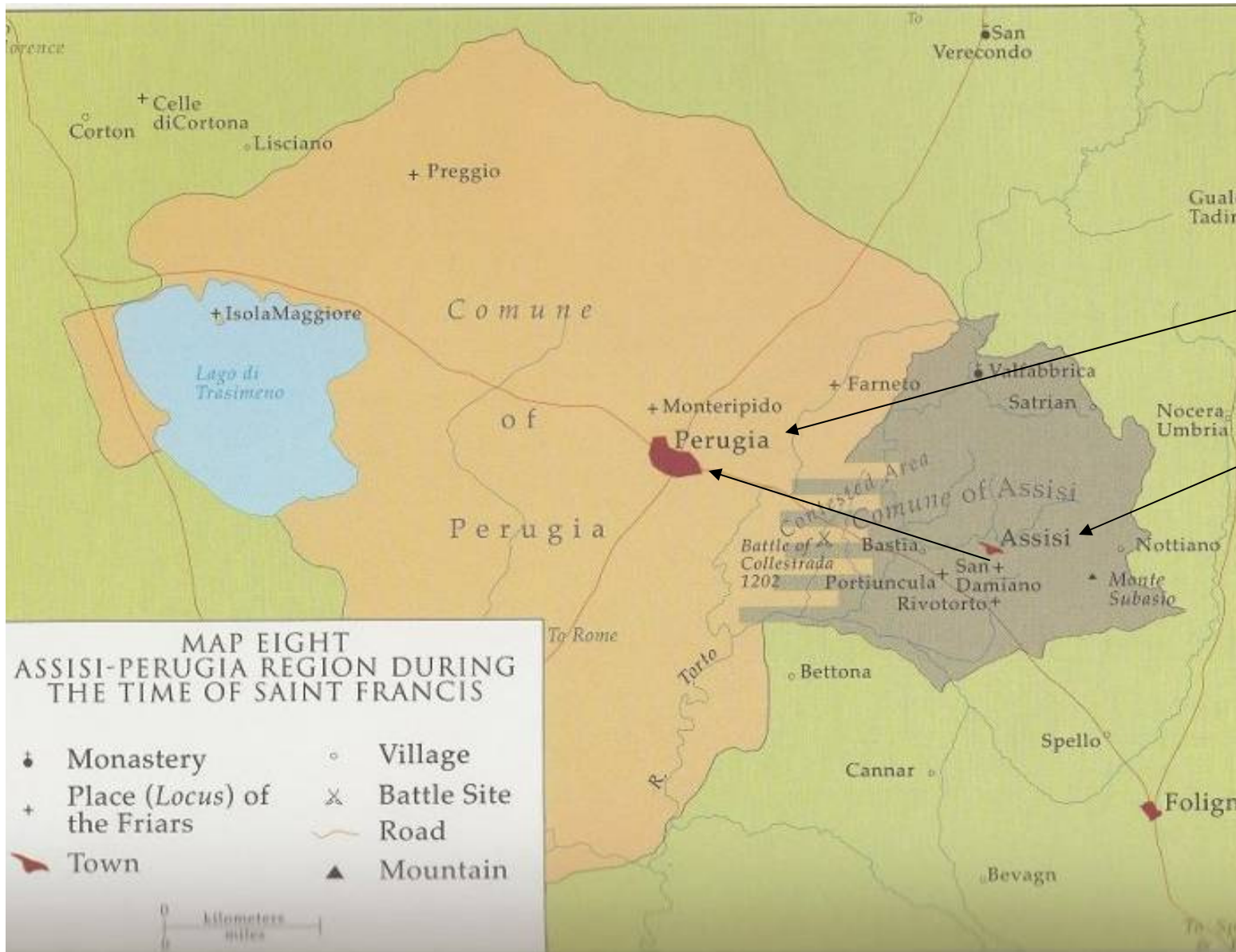
**“Lady Clare loved the poor very much and all the citizens held her in great veneration because of her good manner of life.”**

*Process of Canonization: 1, 3*



- As a young girl, it was necessary for Clare's family to flee from their home in Assisi. After the Minors (merchants) rose up in 1198 in a civil war, they exiled the Majors – the nobility – and destroyed many of their palaces and castles. Clare lived in Perugia with her family in exile.
- *“As the war flared up, all of Clare's family took refuge in Perugia, where her uncle Montaldo had taken citizenship, according to the terms imposed on the knights who had committed themselves to fight against Assisi. The wrath of the people over this move exploded in an attack on the family house on the Piazza San Rufino, and it was severely damaged. In Perugia, Clare lived in the house of a girl who would become one of her first companions: Benvenuta.”* (from “Francis of Assisi” by Arnaldo Fortini)

# 2. From Assisi to Perugia



Perugia

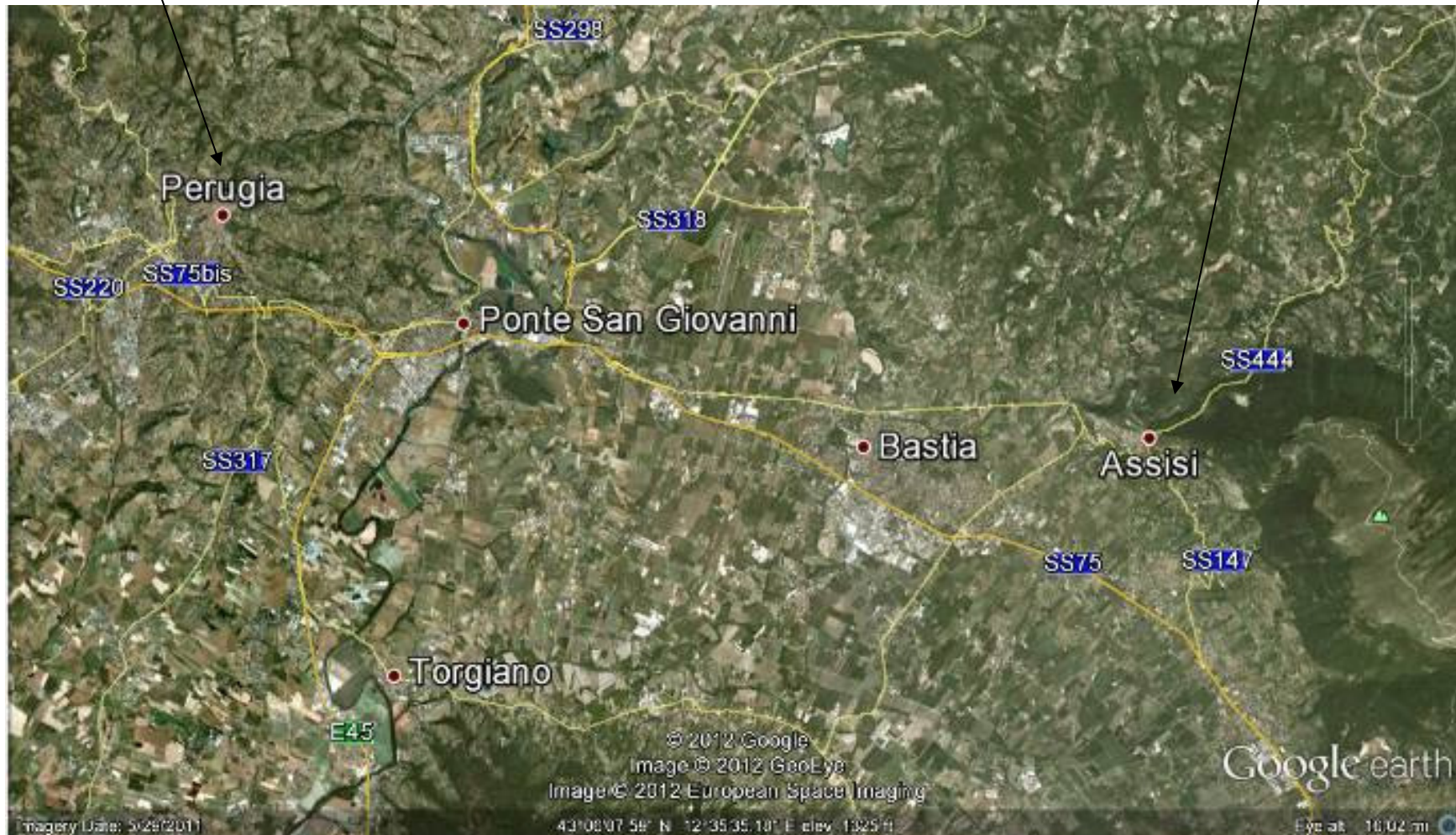
Assisi



## 2. From Assisi to Perugia

Perugia

Assisi



# Perugia today



# 3. Back to Assisi – the Cathedral of San Rufino

Clare's family stayed in Perugia for roughly three years, then returned back to their family home in Assisi next to San Rufino.



- Clare came to know Francis either by hearing him speak in the San Rufino cathedral next to her house. Or perhaps it was through a cousin of hers named Rufino who had joined Francis as a friar who introduced them to each another. Or perhaps, it was Francis who sought her out. It seems that Francis was enthusiastic to embrace a female follower; this would fulfill his prophecy at San Damiano when he proclaimed that one day, women would be praying in that church for the Order and the Church.
- In fact, this is what Clare's own sister, Beatrice, said. During the acts of canonization, she said: "*Francis went many times to preach to her so that the virgin Clare acquiesced to his preaching, renounced the world and all earthly things, and went to serve God as soon as she was able.*"
- Sister Amata also told of Francis's influence on Clare:  
*She (Amata) knew Clare's manner of life and had heard how she had been converted: through the exhortation and preaching of Saint Francis, she had assumed religious life, even though before she entered she was considered holy by all who knew her because of the many graces and virtues the Lord had given her, as it was known about her through her reputation.*

So after meeting Francis over a period of time, the decision was reached: Clare would leave her family home. On Palm Sunday, 1212 the Bishop gave olive branches to the faithful, and personally placed the branch in her hand, acknowledging her choice. That night the 18-year-old girl would secretly escape her home with its privileges of wealth and power to become the first woman to follow Francis with only one privilege: Poverty.

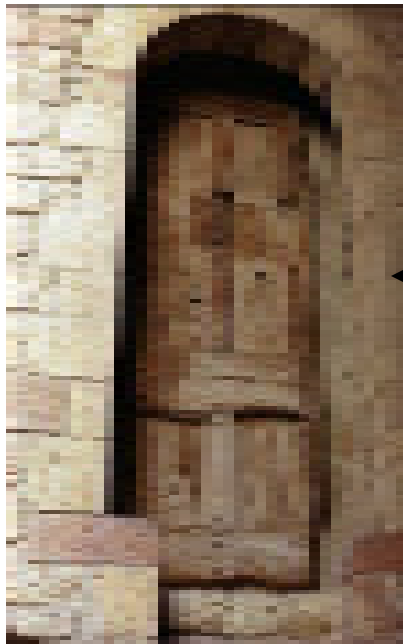
The Legend of Clare states:

*“Father Francis told her that on the day of the feast of Palm Sunday, she should go, dressed and adorned, together with the crowd of people, to receive a palm, and on the following night, she should turn her worldly joy into mourning the Lord’s Passion. Therefore, when Sunday came, the young girl, thoroughly radiant with festive splendor among the crowd of women, entered the church with the others. Then something occurred that was a fitting omen: as the others were going to receive the palms, while Clare remained immobile in her place out of shyness, the Bishop, coming down the steps, came to her and placed a palm in her hands. On that night, preparing to obey the command of the saint, she embarked upon her long desired flight with a virtuous companion.”*



Arnaldo Fortini describes Clare's departure:

*“Clare could not endanger herself by using the customary door to the house, opening onto the piazza, where the cross-bow archer keeps watch. Better to try the other door, the one opened only in days of battle, so now closed and barred with great beams and a heavy stone column. ‘Those doors,’ said Sister Cristiana who then lived in the same house, ‘could scarcely be moved by many men; and she alone, with the help of Jesus Christ, moved them and opened the exit. And the following morning, when many people saw that door open, they marveled how a young girl could have done it....’”*



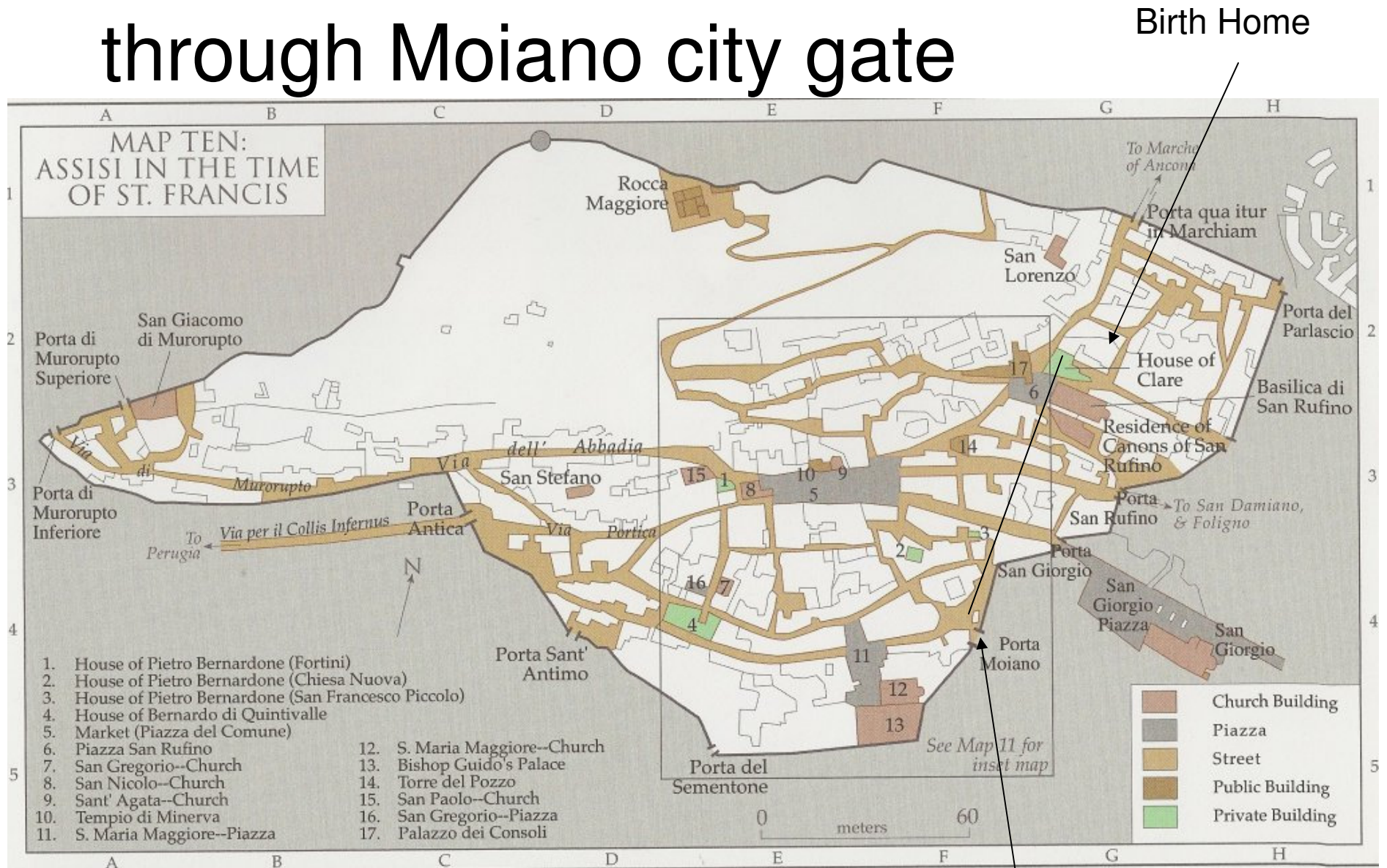
Here is one such door described by Fortini;  
They are also known as the “doors of the dead.”

*“Clare finds herself on Via Parlascio. A figure wrapped in a mantle detached itself from the corner of the piazza. It is Pacifica, Guelfuccio’s daughter, who is going to accompany Clare to the Portiuncula. They pass the Moiano gate...”*  
Fortini cont’d.

**Porta  
Moiano  
Today  
(*Moiano  
Gate*)**



# Clare's leaves Assisi through Moiano city gate



Birth Home

Porta Moiano





Porta Moiano

Birth Home



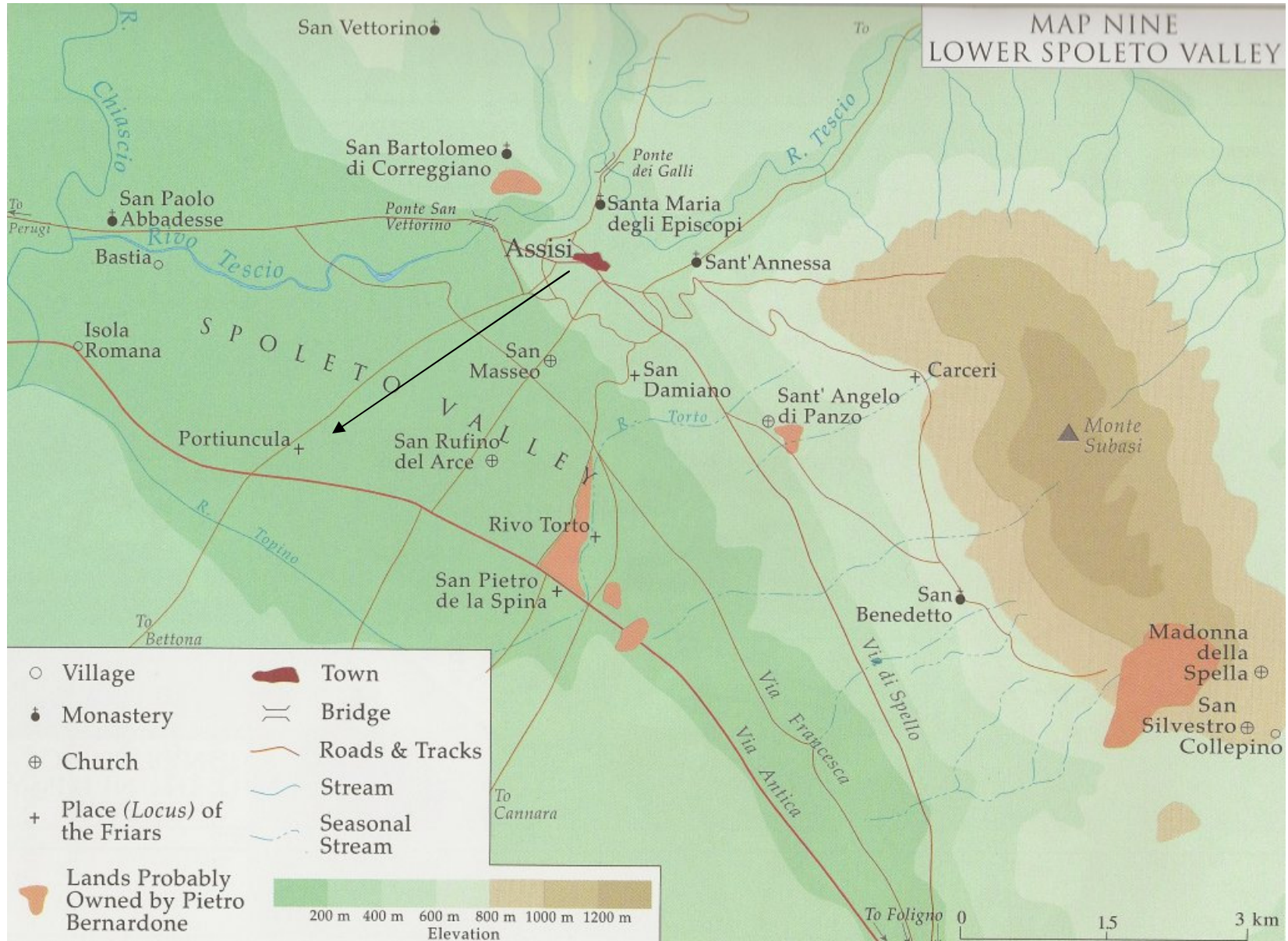
Moiano

Birth Home

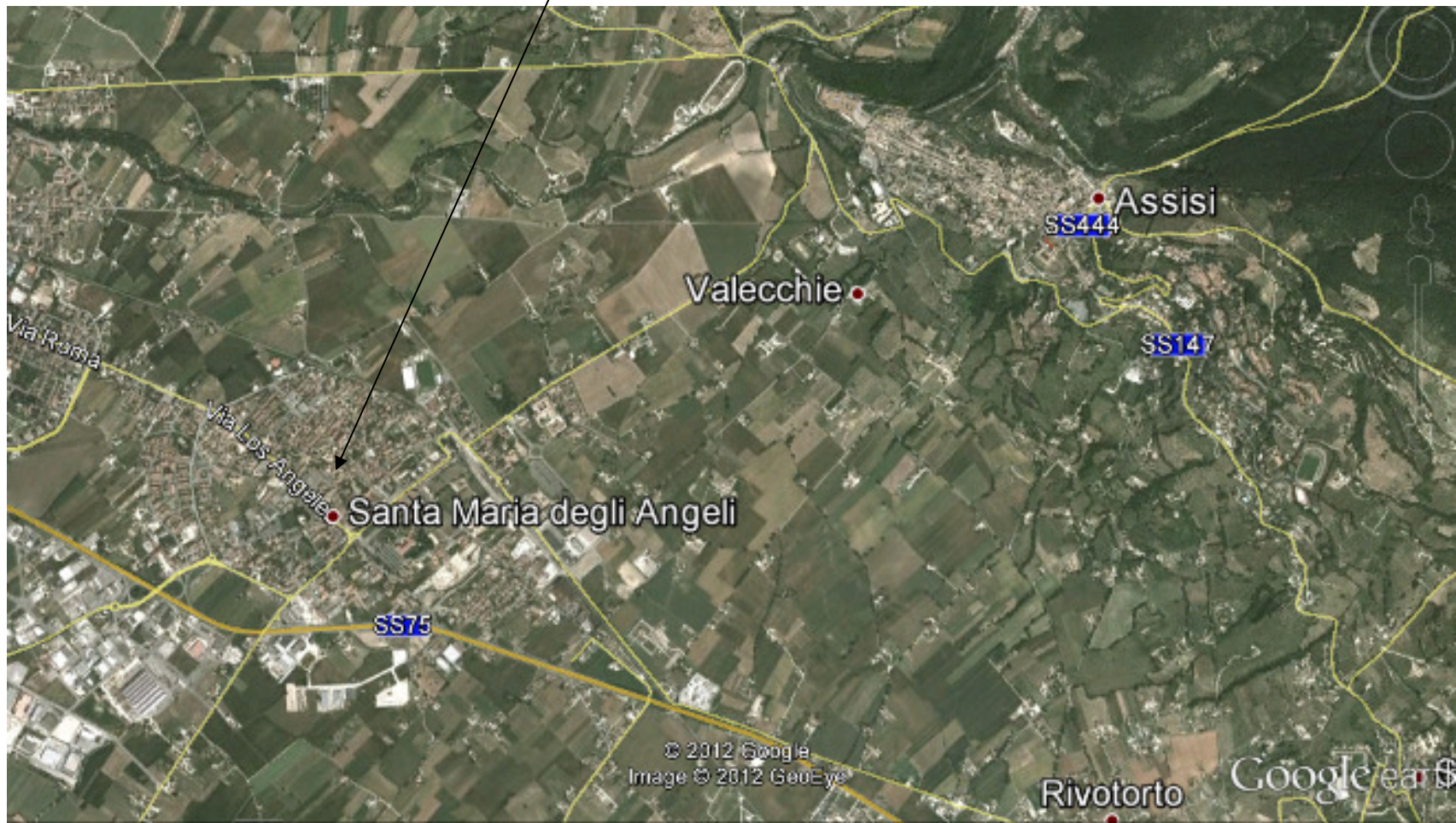
*“They then go down by the road through familiar fields: Sant’Anastasio, Fonte Galletta, Valecchie, Ospedaletto. From there the road runs straight across the plain. Finally, they see the men of penitence coming with lighted torches to meet their new sister. Two by two they walk, everyone, torn by emotion, silent.” Fortini cont’d*



# 5. From Assisi to the Portiuncula



# The Portiuncula – Saint Mary of the Angels



- In the Portiuncula, Clare met Francis and the brothers. At the altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Francis personally tonsured her by shearing her long blonde hair and covering her head with a veil – the symbol of her consecration to God. As Francis had done before, she exchanged her fine clothes for the penitential habit.
- From the Legend of St. Clare:  
*“And so she ran to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, leaving behind her home, city, and relatives. There the brothers, who were observing sacred vigils before the little altar of God, received the virgin Clare with torches. There, immediately after rejecting the filth of Babylon, she gave the world a ‘bill of divorce.’ There, her hair shorn by the hands of the brothers, she put aside every kind of fine dress. ... Was it not fitting that an Order of flowering virginity be awakened in the evening or in any other place than in this place of her the first and most worthy of all, who alone is Mother and Virgin!”*

# Francis tonsured Clare in the Portiuncula



In Clare's day, the Portiuncula would have looked like this:

This is a  
Benedictine  
chapel still used  
today for Mass





Over the centuries, the Portiuncula has been embellished and today it looks like this



The  
façade of  
St. Mary  
of the  
Angels



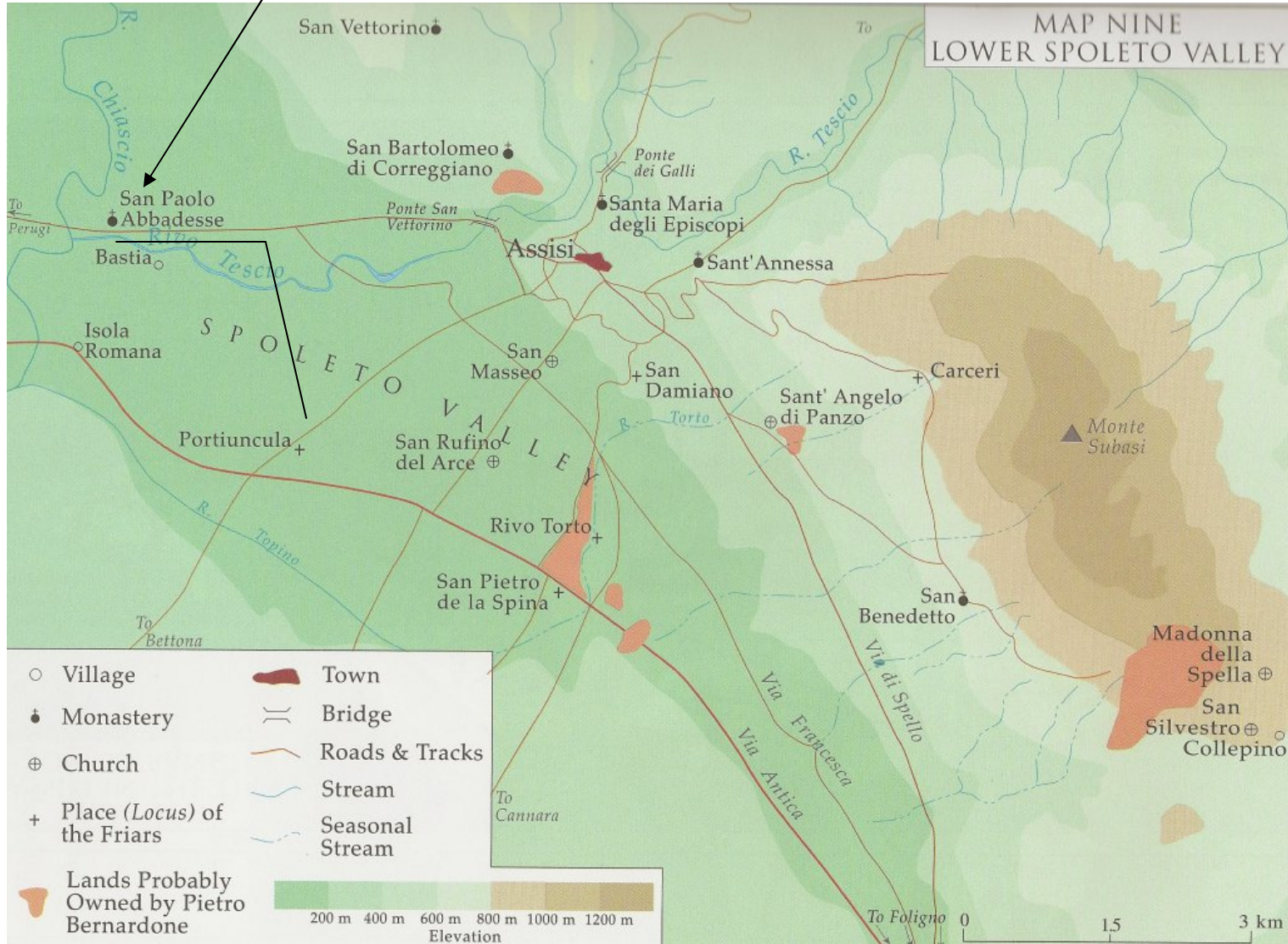
# St. Mary of the Angels at a distance



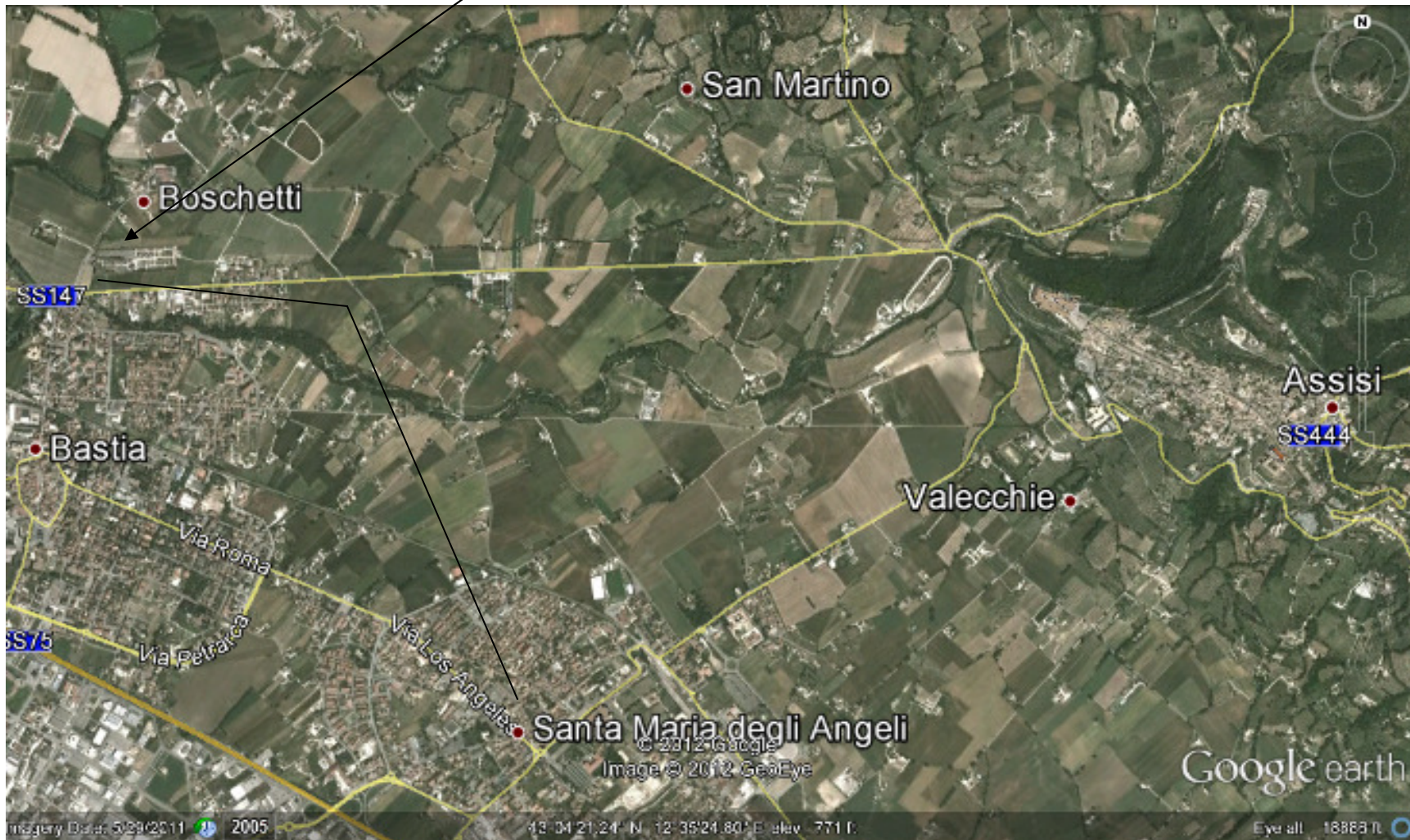
On the same night, the brothers accompanied Clare to the Benedictine monastery (convent) of San Paolo delle Abbadesse. There she would be safe from any attempts from her father or family to bring her back home.

The monastery and church of San Paolo delle Abbadesse was located near Bastia, about two miles from Assisi, where the Tescio and Chiascio rivers met.

# 6. From the Portiuncula to S. Paolo delle Abbadesse



# 6. San Paolo delle Abbadesse



- There were numerous papal privileges granted to the Benedictine nuns of San Paolo. One was a Papal interdict in force prohibiting outsiders from entering the cloister. This granted the convent broad rights of asylum and forbade the use of violence under the pain of excommunication. To remove a consecrated nun by force from San Paolo would have incurred excommunication. Therefore, in San Paolo, St. Clare was safe from any violent reaction on the part of her family. And, indeed, when Clare's brothers and cousins came, she had to simply lift the veil from her head and reveal her tonsure. The men had no choice but to leave her.
- From the Legend of St. Clare:  
*“But after the news reached Clare’s relatives, they condemned with a broken heart the deed and proposal of the virgin and, banding together as one, they ran to the place, attempting to obtain what they could not. They employed violent force, poisonous advice, and flattering promises, trying to persuade her to give up such a worthless deed that was unbecoming to her class and without precedence in her family. But, taking hold of the altar cloths, she bared her tonsured head, maintaining that she would in no way be torn away from the service of Christ. With the increasing violence of her relatives, her spirit grew and her love- provoked by injuries- provided strength. So for many days, even though she endured an obstacle in the way of the Lord and her own relatives opposed her proposal of holiness, her spirit did not crumble and her fervor did not diminish. Instead, amid words and deeds of hatred, she molded her spirit anew in hope until her relatives, turning back, were quiet.”*

# The church of San Paolo delle Abbadesse (Saint Paul of the Abbesses)

Today the church that once served the Benedictine monastery for women is a chapel that serves a cemetery in Bastiola between Assisi and Bastia.





- It is likely that Clare's brief stay in the powerful Benedictine convent reinforced her desire to live the religious life according to poverty in the manner of Francis. San Paolo was one of the most prominent convents in the Assisi diocese and had great financial security. It was made up primarily of noble women who entered the convent with their titles, dowries and even servants. These high-born or noble nuns were called *choristi* – as they prayed the chorus, or liturgy of the hours in Latin. On the other hand, those from “lowborn” families entered as *conversi*, and performed most of the manual labor, since they could not read. There was little interaction between the two groups.
- Thus, true to Franciscan poverty, Clare radically departed from this tradition by giving away her possessions before entering. Thus, she renounced her birthright, arriving not as a noblewoman but as a servant! Even though she had the right to enter as a *chorista*, she chose to arrive as a servant – as a *conversa*. This is likely one reason her family was so upset.
- And this is also likely why she did not stay in the Benedictine convent, even though the Benedictine order was widespread in her era. She wanted to live as a *Franciscan*; she did not want to exchange the wealth and security of her *father's* house for wealth and security of a *religious* house. To function properly, the Benedictine monasteries required land ownership, dowries, rents, and servants. Ruling over it all was the powerful Abbess. Clare, instead, desired to rely only on the providence of God – not the security of the institutional monastery. As a Franciscan woman, she wanted to embrace poverty, servant leadership, and the elimination of dowries. According to her vision, no one would enjoy a privileged status – the only privilege in her religious life would be poverty.

## Departure to Panzo

So after a short time – perhaps a few days or weeks – Clare left the Benedictine monastery of San Paolo and went briefly to another place called Sant’Angelo in Panzo on the slopes of Mt. Subasio.

From the Process of Canonization: 12th Witness

*“Then St. Francis, Brother Philip, and Brother Bernard took her to the church of Sant’Angelo in Panzo, where she stayed for a little time, and then to the church of San Damiano where the Lord gave her more sisters for her direction.”*



# Sant'Angelo in Panzo

The Carceri



Sant'Angelo in Panzo is located about one mile below the Carceri hermitage following the *fosso* (ravine) towards Rivotorto.

Panzo had been one of the main sources of water to Assisi since Roman times, and had once provided water directly to the temple of Minerva in the center of Assisi.

When Clare arrived in Panzo, it is believed that there was a community of penitential women who were not under a Benedictine rule – or any rule. They were living, perhaps as Beguines – a community of religious women who did not live strictly the cloister (or enclosure), and perhaps engaged in charitable works of mercy, maybe serving the sick in an adjoining hospital.

Historically, the community of Panzo passed over to some Benedictine nuns. Then, in recent centuries, the property was bought by a noble Assisian family whose heirs still own it today.

In Panzo, Clare's sister, Catherine, joined her. Clare's uncles and cousins came for her, too, but because of her intercessory prayers, they could not lift her. This is considered Clare's first miracle. Because of her suffering, Clare changed her name from Catherine to Agnes.

It is relatively easy to surmise that Clare went to the Benedictine convent of San Paolo only for protection and would have never had any intention of becoming a Benedictine nun in a powerful and wealthy monastery. However, we do not know why Clare left Panzo. Perhaps, it was too far from Assisi; perhaps the life of the Beguines was not what she was looking for either.

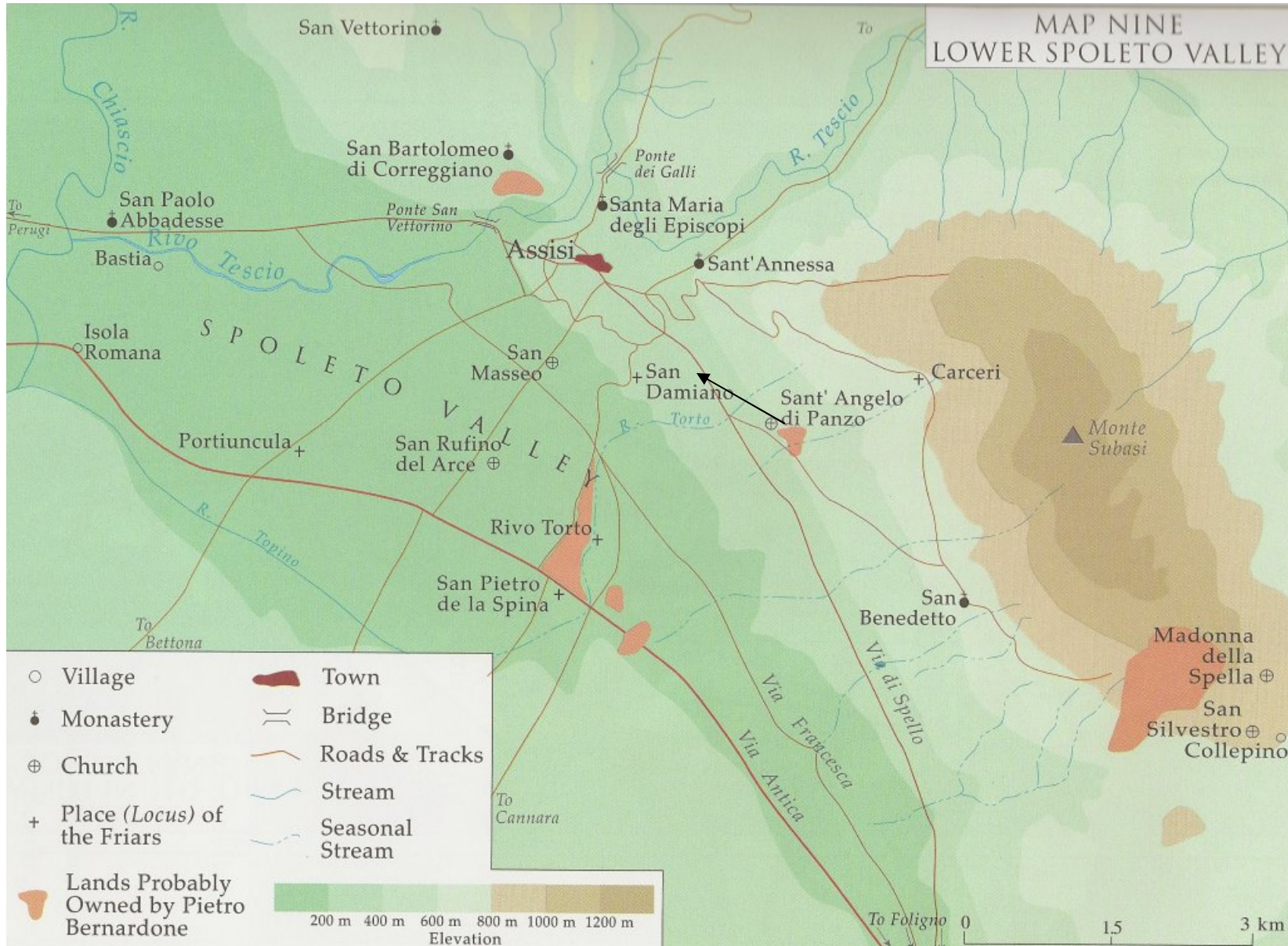
The Legend of St. Clare says only: *“After a few days, she went to the church of San Angelo in Panzo, where her mind was not completely at peace, so that, at the advice of St. Francis, she moved to San Damiano.”*

# Sant'Angelo in Panzo today





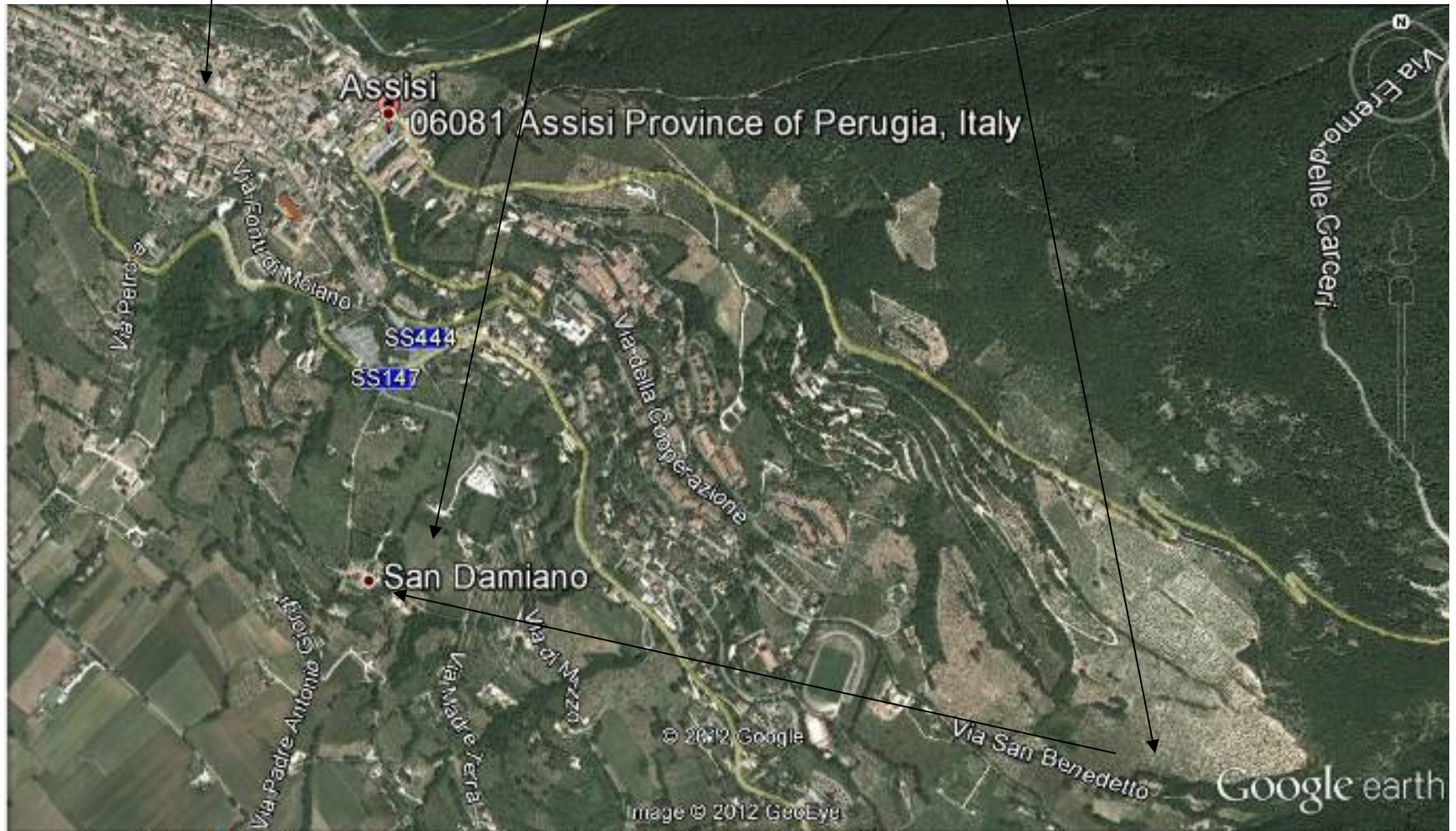
# 8. From Panzo to San Damiano



**Assisi**

**San Damiano**

**Panzo**



# San Damiano



# San Damiano today



Clare's primary intention was to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in poverty and humility – like Francis. It seems that San Damiano was the perfect place where she could do that. Clare would live in San Damiano for 40 years where over 40 sisters would join her, including her mother and her other sister.

Clare wrote in a letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague:  
*“What a great and praiseworthy exchange to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven for the goods of earth, to receive the hundredfold in place of one, and to possess a blessed eternal life!”*

Chapel of San  
Damiano.  
This is where  
the crucifix  
spooke to  
Francis telling  
him to rebuild  
God's house.



# Choir stalls where Clare and the sisters prayed at San Damiano



# Refectory where Clare and the sisters ate in San Damiano





As Francis had earlier rebuilt San Damiano with rocks and mortar, Clare and the sisters would become living stones who would spiritually edify not only that particular church, but the universal Church. From the cloister, the women would live a Franciscan life centered on fraternity, mutuality, prayer, and evangelization.

They would devote themselves to the interior, contemplative life, but without overlooking the world outside. Their lives would reflect, as in a mirror, the Gospel perfection in the spirit of the *Vita Evangelica* that was so much sought out in her time.

Dormitory of San Damiano  
where Clare and the sisters slept and  
where Clare died on August 11, 1253



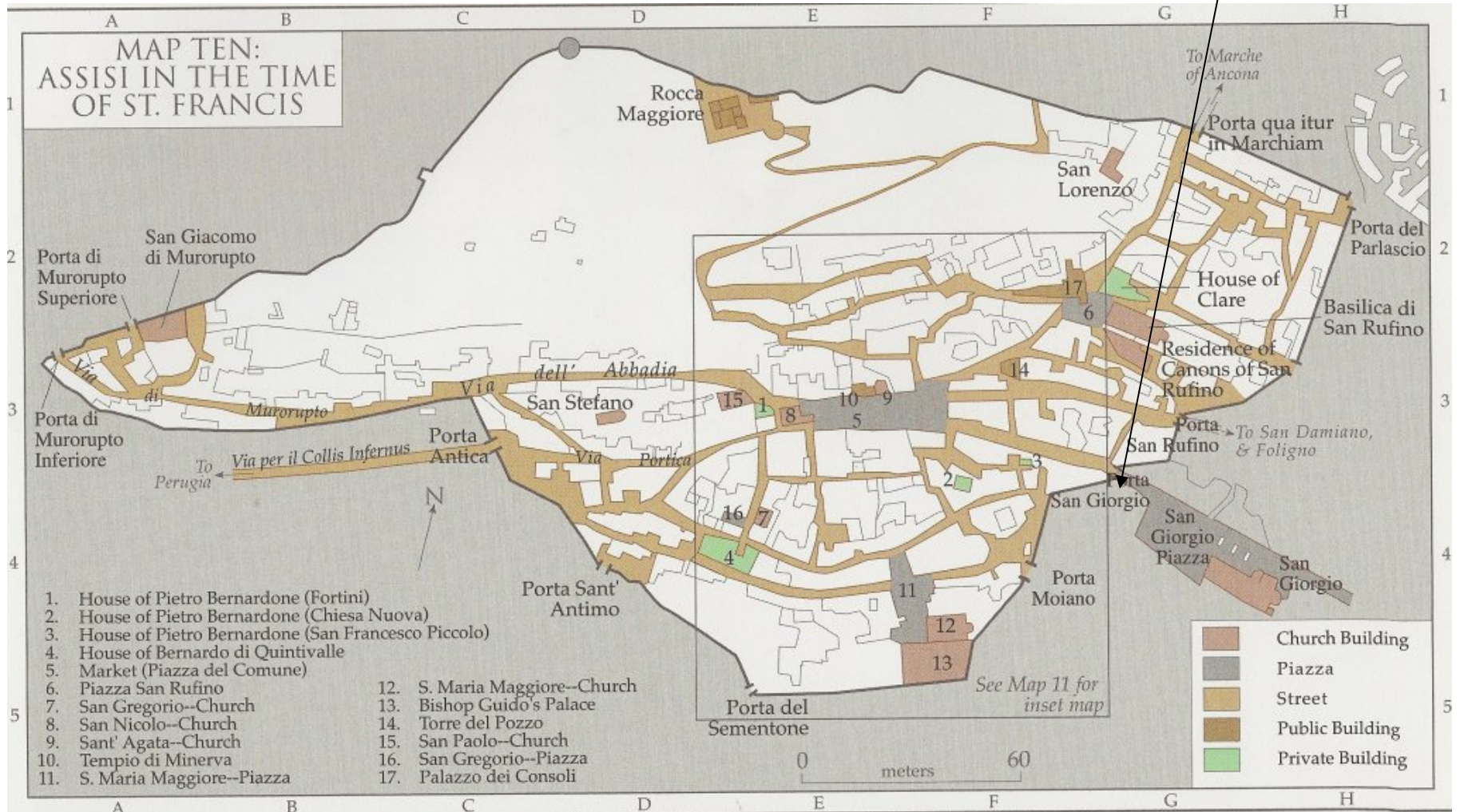
Spot where  
Clare died.

After Clare died, her body was brought near the Assisi city walls for protection to a church called San Giorgio (St. George). This was the same church where Francis had learned to read and write as a boy, and where his body had been lain for roughly two years while his basilica was being built. Pope Innocent IV presided over her funeral at San Damiano which concluded with a processional carrying Clare's body to the crypt at San Giorgio.

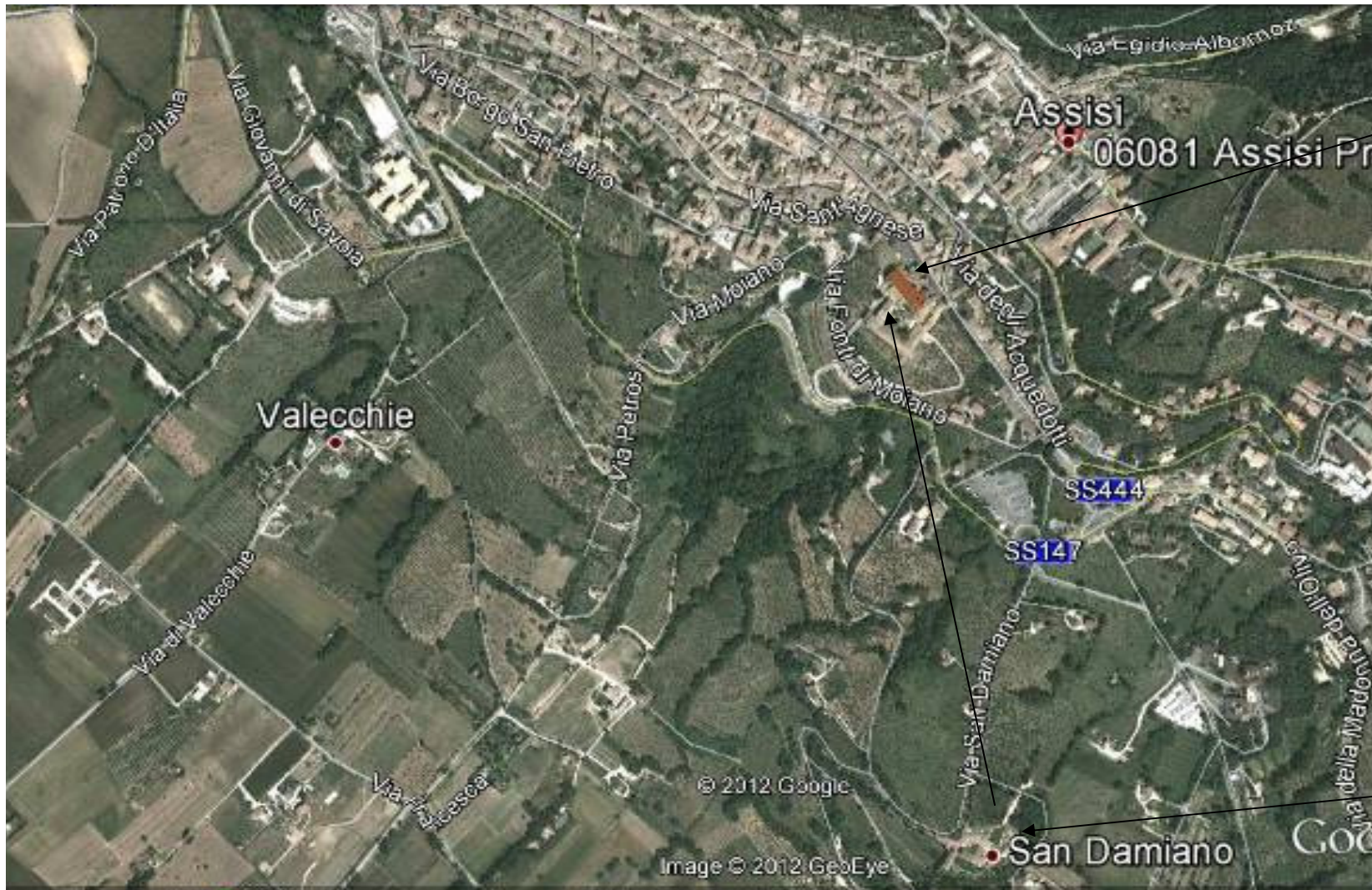
From the Legend of St. Clare:

*“[After Clare’s death], the Cardinal priests then gathered with devout respect for the holy funeral and completed the customary rites over the body of the virgin. Finally, because they did not judge it safe or fitting to leave such a precious trust so far from the citizens, they carried it with hymns and songs of praise, the sound of trumpets and solemn rejoicing, and brought it honorably to San Giorgio.”*

# 9. From S. Damiano to S. Giorgio



# From S. Damiano to S. Giorgio



Basilica  
of  
Saint  
Clare

San  
Damiano

The longtime friend and Cardinal Protector of the Poor Ladies, Cardinal Raynaldus, was elected to the papacy when Innocent IV died on December 12, 1254. He took the name Alexander IV and within a year canonized Clare on August 15, 1255. Clare's feast day was assigned August 12, because the 11th was already the feast day of the first bishop and patron of Assisi, San Rufino.

Alexander IV arranged for the property of San Giorgio to be given up by the canons for the basilica of St. Clare to be built. He decreed in 1259 that the few sisters still at San Damiano be united in one monastery with those of San Giorgio under one abbess. In 1260 their monastery was built, and the San Giorgio chapel was reconstructed into the sisters' prayer choir.

# Basilica of St. Clare today



Ancient  
Church of  
Saint  
George



Remains of St. Clare in crypt below the main altar. Her remains were excavated in 1250 and put on display as they are today.





# Relics of St. Clare



When we look at the journey of Clare, we see her move from the privileged upper parts of Assisi to the lower, more humble parts. Why did she want to lower herself? Because, like Francis, she sought to imitate Christ. And she found him in poverty.

Philippians 2: 6-11

*“Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, and took the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!”*

What must it have taken for Clare to leave the upper parts of Assisi where the nobility lived to the lower parts of Assisi outside the city gates where the poor lived?

How have you sought to “lower yourself” in response to the Gospel and in response to the example of St. Clare?

With Clare as our example and guide, let us, too, try to seek out humility, simplicity, and poverty.

St. Clare, “Pray for us.”

