

# THE DIOCESAN BENEDICTINE MUSEUM

The **Museum** is located in the **abbatial palace**, to the south of the church, connected to it, at n. 3, via Marconi, inside the buildings of the **ancient monastery**. A part of this Museum preserves some **beautiful works of art** that come from the churches of the Archdiocese of Modena-Nonantola. The head of the Museum is the "**Abbey Treasure**": here we can find unique medieval works of art, like the **stauero-case containing the wood of the Holy Cross** ① (X cent.), the **stauero-case of Double Cross** with Saint Elena and Constantine ② (XI cent.), the **silver arm relic with the relic of the arm of Saint Sylvester Pope** ③ (1372), the **silver coffer with the skull relics of the Saints Senesius and Theopompus** ④ (XII cent.), the **ivory relic chest** (XII cent.), the **astylar cross**, gift of the abbot Angelico Fantì of Morimondo (XVI cent.), and **exceptional tissues dated VIII century**, coming from the imperial factory of Constantinople ⑤. Then, the **ancient manuscripts**, handmade by the monks in the scriptorium: the manuscript called **Acta Sanctorum** (X-XII cent.), that binds together a few texts dealing with the Saints worshipped in Nonantola, the **Gradual or Cantatorium** ⑦ (XI cent.), one of the most ancient musical manuscripts with the typical Nonantola notation, and the **Gospel known as "of the Countess Mathilda of Canossa"** ⑧ (XI cent.), that contains 10 large miniatures with episodes from the life of Christ and make it one of the most precious Medieval manuscripts in the world. A part of the Museum shows the **famous parchments**: the principal two are a **donation of Mathilda of Canossa**, dated 1108, with her characteristic signum, and the **parchment of Charlemagne** of the year 798, bearing the well-known monogram K of the founder of the Holy Roman Empire ⑨. From the abbey church we can see marvelous paintings, as the **polyptych by Michele di Matteo Lambertini** ⑩ (1460), on a golden background with the Crucifixion and Madonna enthroned with Child, surrounded by Saints: John the Evangelist, Michael, Peter, Paul, Lucy and Anselm on the top, and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin, Sylvester, Hadrian III, Benedict and Scholastica on the bottom. A **canvas of Ludovico Carracci** shows the Saint Carlo Borromeo baptizing an infant during the plague ⑪ (1613-1616).



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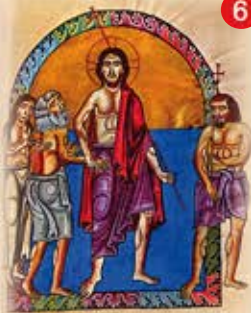


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# THE ABBEY CHURCH OF NONANTOLA AND ITS GREAT MONASTIC CENTRE

The Abbey was founded in 752 by Saint Anselm, Benedictine monk, brother-in-law with Aistulf, Longboard King. During the Middle Ages, it became one of the most important monasteries in Europe.

**THE FAÇADE AND THE ROMANESQUE PORTAL: THE ORIGIN OF THIS PLACE**  
The **façade of the church**, rebuilt at the beginning of the twentieth century, shows a sloping roof remarkable for the elevation of the central nave; whereas the ornamental arches and the corbels, that follow the line of the roof and run across the three naves horizontally, recall the **Romanesque architectural structure** which the lapse of time and historical events have erased. The **beautiful portal** is decorated with two iconographic cycles: on the left, the **crucial moments in the sacred history of the abbey of Nonantola** and on the right the **Nativity of Christ**. The **lunette**, a noteworthy example of fine Romanesque sculpture, has been attributed to **Willigelmo**, the great artist of the Duomo in Modena and to his school which flourished at the end of the XI century. It contains an enthroned Christ figure, flanked by two angels and the symbols of the four Evangelists.



**INSIDE THE BASILICA: A PLACE FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER**  
Inside the basilica presents a **three-partite structure** with a central nave and two lateral aisles separated by two rows of columns typical of Romanesque churches and the allure of a softly-lighted atmosphere that invites visitors to meditation and prayer. To the left of the entrance you can admire an **octagonal baptistery**. The inside of the baptismal font has been obtained by re-utilizing a Roman fountain, set on a column, which has been re-utilized as well. Along the left aisle there is the **monumental sepulcher of the Bishop Natale Bruni**, built by the sculptor Giuseppe Graziosi (1879-1942) and the **statue of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux**. Along the right aisle, of enormous interest is the **fresco ascribed to the school of the Erri**. It is composed of three levels: on top there is a Crucifixion, in the middle there is an Annunciation, at the bottom a line of seven Saints (Martin, Gregory the Great, John the Evangelist, James, Sylvester pope, Anthony abbot and George). There is another **fresco with Madonna with Child**. The central nave ends with the **elevated presbytery** which is reached by going up a large central stairway and two smaller side stairs. Up the stairs, you can notice the **organ** on the right, a work of Domenico Traeri (1743). The **main altar** is dedicated to the patron saint of the abbey, Saint Sylvester I pope and inside its vault rest his remains. It is the work of the sculptor **Silla de' Longhi**, who carried it out from 1568 to 1572, decorating it with eight white Carrara marble slabs that narrate the story of the life of the Saint.

**THE CRYPT: A FOREST OF STONE**  
Sixty-four are the columns that fill, like the trees of a forest, the **crypt**, one of the largest Romanesque churches in Italy. Interred in the sixteenth century, because of frequent infiltrations of water, it has been restored to its present splendour by the renovation begun in 1913. Today it is the **most evocative part** of the whole abbey. The elegant, slim columns support brick arches, while the visitor's attention is attracted to the more antique capitals, with different forms and structure. In the **main altar** are preserved the **relics of the Saints venerated in Nonantola**: Saint Anselm, Saint Hadrian III, the martyr Saints Senesius and Theopompus, and the virgin Saints Anseride and Fosca.

**THE APSES**  
Going to the abbatial garden, we can visit the **three original apses** of the Benedictine abbey. Built with red bricks, their surface is modulated by elegant corbels underneath the roof and as markers at floor level and it is subdivided by wider, full arches (3 in the lateral apses and 5 in the central apse) supported by pilaster strips to the foundations. Quite noteworthy is the fluting decoration of the minor apses as well as the mullioned windows above in the presbytery and below in the crypt.

