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RELICS AND RELIQUARIES

"If one loves a person, after their death one also honours that which remains of them, not just the body, or parts of it, but also external things, such as clothes and other similar things."
 So St Thomas Aquinas wrote in the XIII century in the Summa Theologiae a propos of the custom, derived from the cult of the martyrs, of preserving and venerating the relics of saints, a characteristic of the Christian religion.

Evidence for the veneration of the mortal remains of those who had witnessed to the faith with their lives is seen in the fact that from its very beginning the Church wanted to place the altars destined for celebration of the Eucharist directly above the graves of martyrs. In later times it became the custom to move the remains from the site of the martyrdom to a more secure site of worship, while the desire of every sanctuary to possess relics gave rise to the practice of dividing and distributing the remains.

The cult of relics was not immune from abuse which brought about the emanation of severe rules, above all governing the selling of relics and the need to be vigilant concerning their authenticity. It was Pope Innocent XI (1676-1689) who founded the Institute for the authentication of relics, later improved by Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758).

In the early years the sacred remains were kept in sober silver containers enclosed within altars, but already in the pre-Romanesque period the surprising renaissance of sumptuary art determined the realisation of extraordinarily valuable containers where the richness and splendour of the materials had the aim of rendering visible the spiritual value of the content. The presence of particularly venerated reliquaries guaranteed the fame of a church and from this a steady flow of pilgrims and the receipt of generous contributions. Relics and reliquaries were, besides, often strictly tied to temporal power, emblematic signs of prestige and symbols of the favour of God and his saints.

Relics have also determined the shape of their container not only by characterising them symbolically, but taking a shape which alludes to the content, a response to the desire of the faithful to "see" or "imagine" the object of their devotion. This is the origin of the "speaking" or anthropomorphic reliquaries, which from the end of the Medieval period were regarded as true sculptures, often of surprising expressivity so as to involve the faithful emotionally, the value of the object exalting the spiritual and religious values of the reliquary.

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PRECIOUS SCULPTURES

SACRED GOLD AND SILVER IN LAZIO FROM THE 13TH TO THE 18TH CENTURIES

This exhibition presents for the first time a wide selection of sacred gold and silver objects from all Lazio. There are examples from the XIII to the XVIII centuries and they form part of the heritage of the ecclesiastical authorities: an exceptionally refined production which today has been little studied. Even if considered "minor art", they have the value of being real sculptures. The link between the plastic arts and goldsmith's work is in the title of the exhibition which defines them as "precious" in that they use metals such as silver, bronze and gilded copper.

The museums spread throughout Lazio offer a rich panorama on the subject as witnessed by the reliquary busts, chalices, paxes, and processional crosses and the micro-sculpture which decorates the liturgical articles. Notwithstanding numerous dispersals over the course of the centuries, these objects can still be found on the altars of churches or jealously guarded in sacristies and the diocesan and civic museums of towns and villages well off the tourist track. Their liturgical function is accompanied by a devotional value still strongly felt by the local populations.

The great variety of works in the exhibition reflects the different artistic tendencies trends which inspired the local silversmiths' workshops, thanks also to the cultural influences of foreign craftsmen. The contribution of the Siennese artistic style is very evident in the Viterbo area between the Medieval period and the Renaissance, while works from the Sabine area show the influence of Abruzzo and Ascolano craftsmen. In southern Lazio, after the great period of the 1300s and 1400s, the Baroque and Rococo periods see the eclectic Neapolitan culture flourishing alongside the work of the very best Roman silversmiths which always predominated throughout the region.

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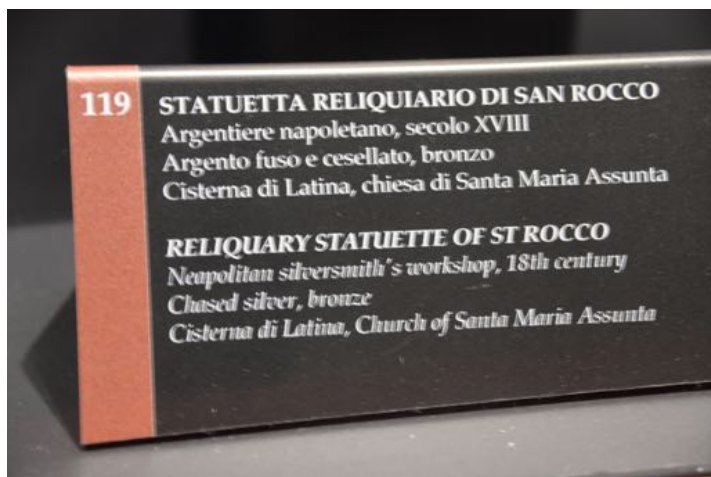
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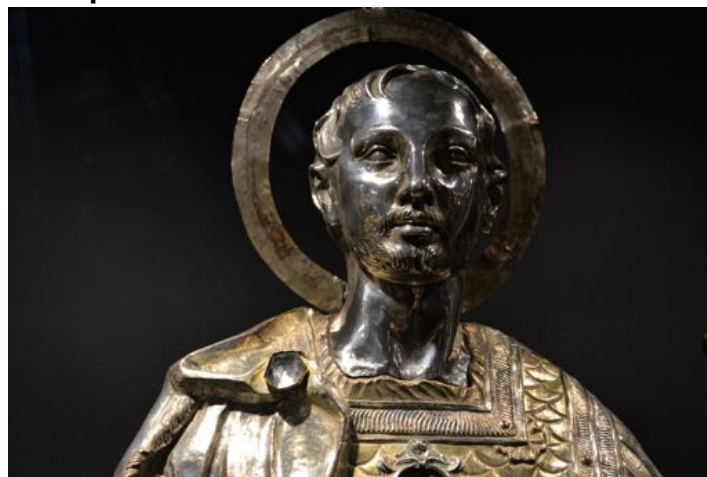
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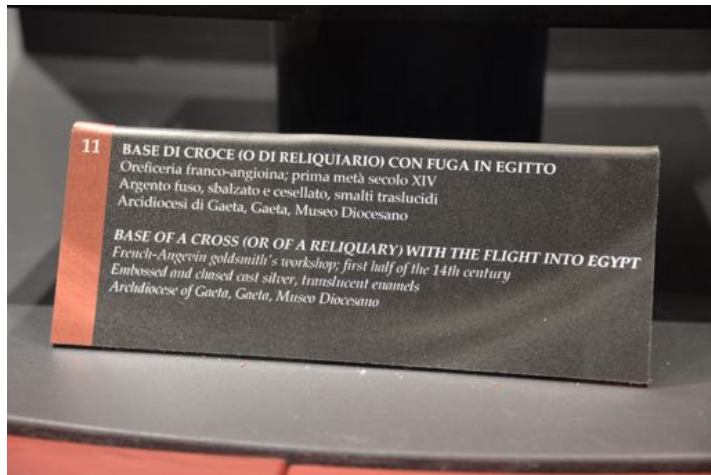
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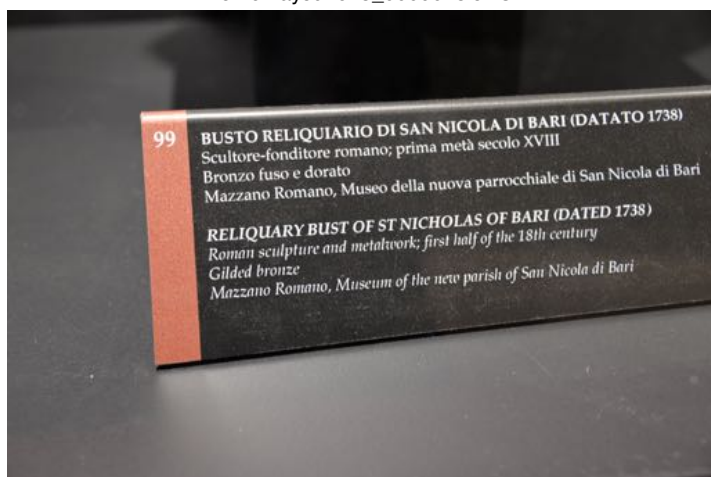
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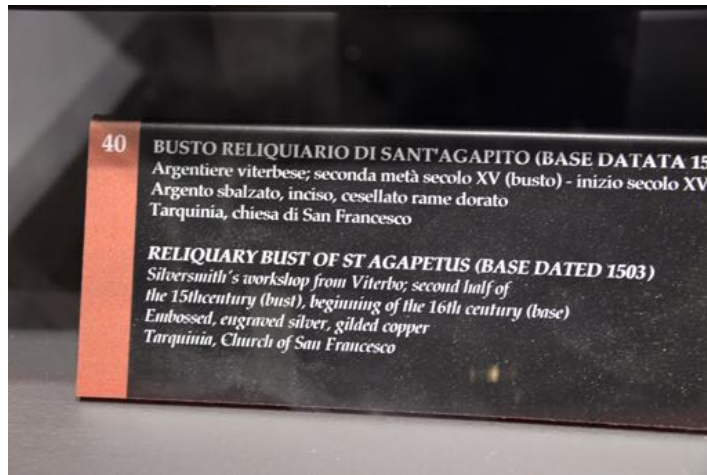
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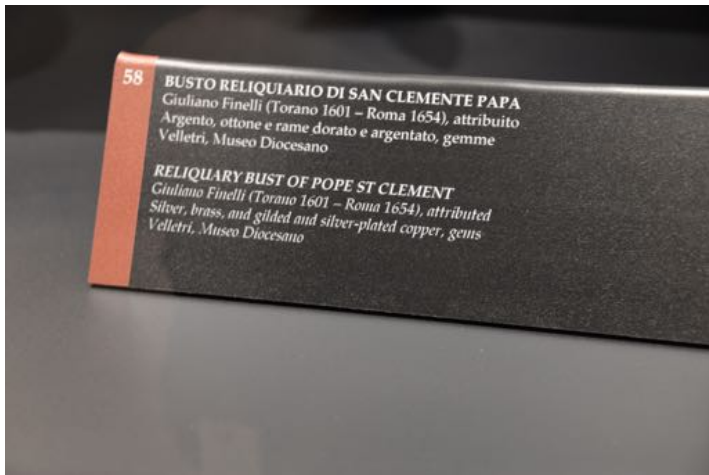
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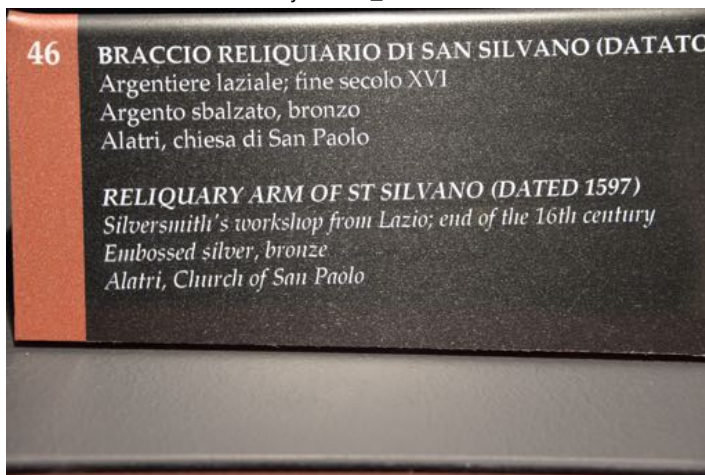
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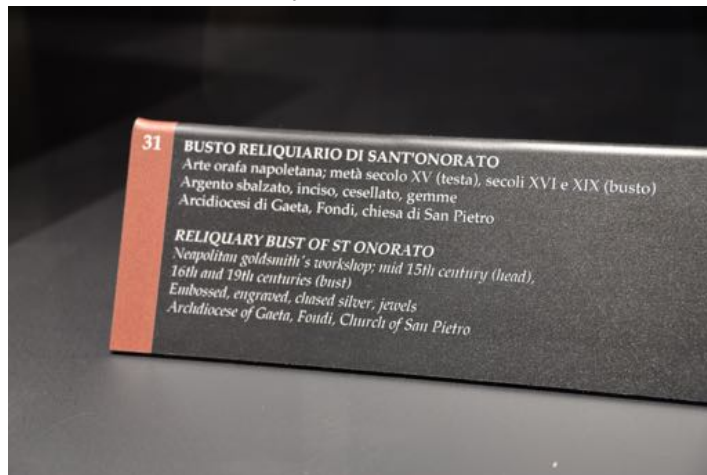
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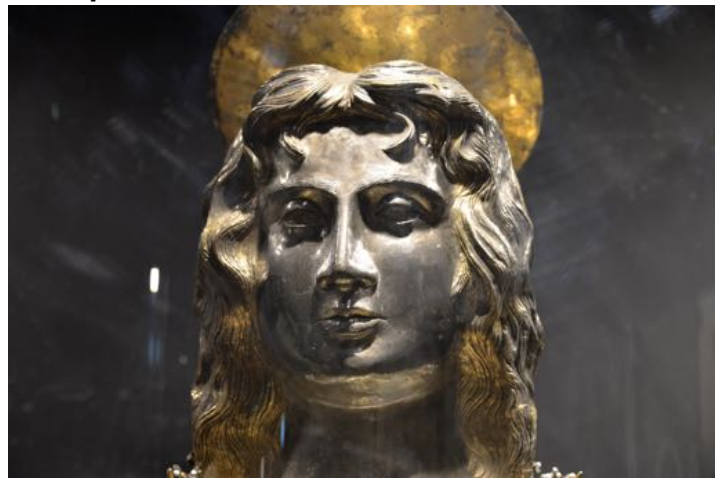
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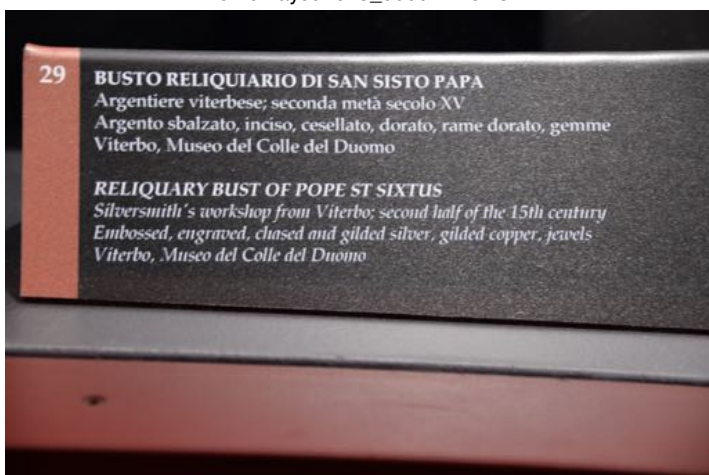
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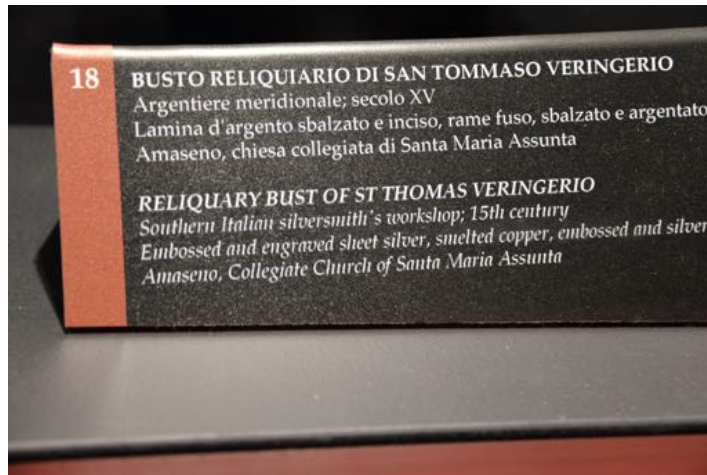
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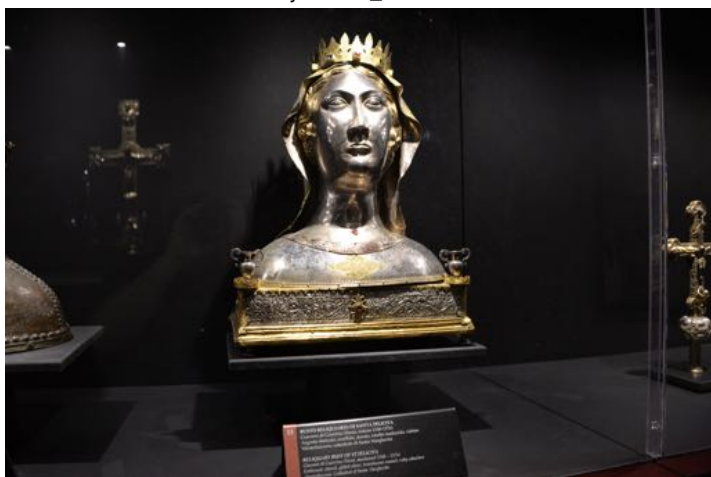
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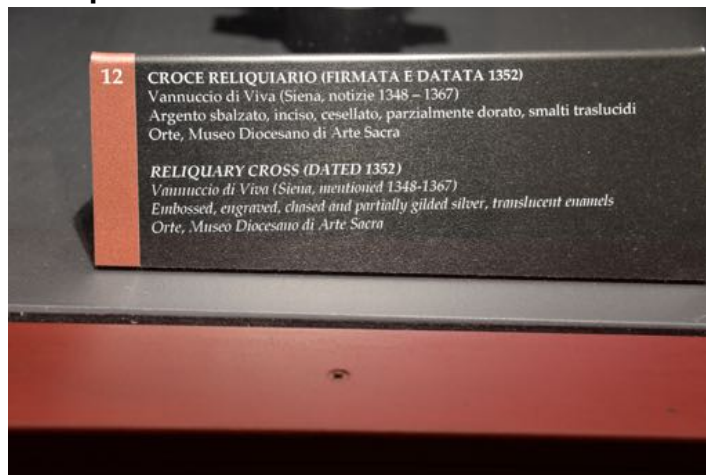
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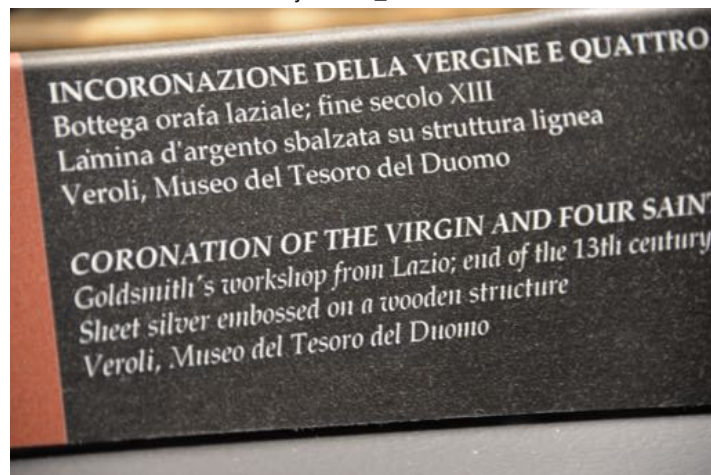
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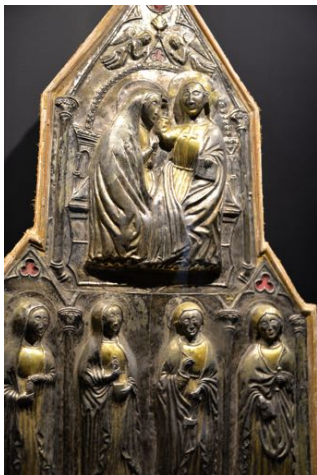
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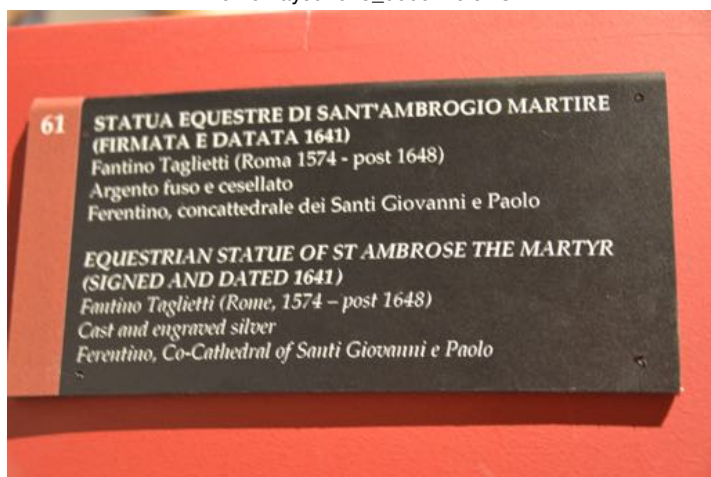
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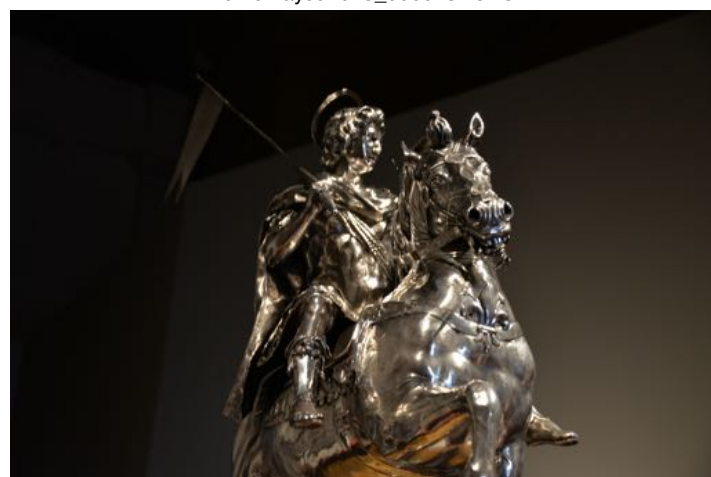
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