Storia, monumenti e tradizioni dell'antico borgo

MONTEGUALTIERI





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THE TOWER OF MONTEGUALTIERI

Description and history

Located in the village of Montegualtieri, a hamlet of Cermignano (Teramo), this tower that dominates the surrounding landscape is unique in its kind for its characteristic triangular plant. Probably built in the 13th century as part of a complex defensive system, the tower served primarily as a lookout post. ment and territorial control, exploiting its strategic position to monitor the territory and communicate with other similar structures.

Origins and Historical Context

The Montegualtieri Tower stands on a hill 260 metres above sea level, along the southern side of the Vomano Valley. Its strategic position on





a promontory overlooking a wide bend in the river made this site ideal for the construction of a defensive structure. The tower is what remains of a larger fortified system that surrounded the village of Montegualtieri, characterized by an ovoid plan.

The first documentary traces of a fortified settlement in the area date back to the 8th century, when the court of Mortula, bordering the castle of Mons (the ancient name of Montegualtieri), is mentioned in the acts of San Vincenzo in Volturno. During the 13th century, under Norman rule, there was a renewal of the fortifications in Abruzzo, the period in which the tower is believed to have actually been built. Over the centuries, the tower and the village of Montegualtieri changed hands between various owners, including important noble families such as the Acquaviva and the De Sterlich

Evolution and Properties

The name Montegualtieri probably derives fromWalter of Acquaviva, a member of the Acquaviva family of Atri, who in the 14th century improved the defensive system of his fiefs. Historical documents frequently mention the tower and the associated castle, indicating its strategic and military importance. In 1160, the register of William I mentions that Berardo di

Scorrano obtained the castles of Monte and Mortula. Later, in 1239, Emperor Frederick II entrusted some Lombard prisoners to the barons of Abruzzo, including a certain Gualtiero del Monte, whose name may have inspired the naming of the tower. Ownership of the tower passed to the De Sterlich family in the 16th century, who retained possession until 1976, the year of the death of the Marquis Diego de Sterlich Aliprandi. Defensive and Strategic Role

The Montegualtieri Tower was an integral part of an optical communications network, together with the towers of Castelbasso, Castellalto and Morro d'Oro. This network allowed an effectivecontrol of the territory, ensuring the safety of communication routes and facilitating defense against possible attacks. From the tower you can enjoy a panoramic view that extends





from the Adriatic coast to the Gran Sasso mountain range, underlining its strategic importance.

The elevated position of the tower allowed for the early detection of potential threats and the coordination of defenses. Ancient communication routes such asthe Salaria Caeciliaand the road that connected Ascoli Piceno, Teramo and Penne, fundamental for commercial exchanges and military movements, making Montegualtieri a hub vital in the defensive system of Abruzzo.

Architecture Structure and Materials

The Montegualtieri Tower is a rare example of a medieval triangular tower, a design probably chosen to economize construction by reducing the number of walls needed. About 18 meters high, the tower stands slender and austere, with three



sides measuring approximately 10 metres each at the base. The masonry is made of quarried stone, mainly local sandstone, worked to obtain regular bricks. These bricks were also used for the external enclosure, although there are some remakes with irregular gravel and pebbles. The structure extends from the embankment consolidated by a sloping wall against the ground, with one wall facing towards the village and the other two faces facing the Vomano river and the valley.

Architectural Details

Access to the tower is via an external staircase, also in sandstone, which leads to the only entrance located in the wall facing west. The three faces of the tower are equipped with smallwolf's mouth windows, measuring 20x80





cm, and ofloopholesof 20x60 cm. Currently the tower does not have intermediate floors, however, stumps of wooden beams still protrude from the internal walls, suggesting the main framework of the floors. These floors would have vertically divided the internal space of the tower, creating multiple functional levelsfor defensive and residential activities. The presence of the loopholes reinforces the hypothesis that intermediate floors existed. as they would have provided the necessary plans for the positioning of the archers. Putt holes are also visible in all the walls of the structure. revealing the various typical medieval construction techniques through the use of wooden scaffolding for the construction of the keep. The upper part of the tower widens with the archers' machicolations, surmounted by a protective parapet. Each side ends with fourswallowtailed Ghibelline battlements, characteristic of medieval fortifications.

The interior of the tower is mostly empty, with a metal staircase providing access to the upper part. The retaining wall



The external structure is reinforced by four buttresses and presents natural stratifications emerging along the part facing the Vomano valley. On the opposite side, a stepped walkway leads to the space in front of the tower.

The Wall Structures inside the enclosure

The Montegualtieri Tower is not just an imposing structure

medieval defensive, but also the heart of acomplex fortified system.

The wall structures and rooms found within the tower enclosure offer a fascinating insight into the defensive and support functions of this medieval stronghold. Although the lack of detailed documentary sources poses some limitations, the analysis of the existing structures allows us to better understand the orga-





nization and daily life inside the tower. Wall remains of probable granaries, guard rooms and an oven highlight meticulous preparation for defence and subsistence, underlining the strategic importance of Montegualtieri in the historical context of Abruzzo. These structures had mainly logistical and military support functions.The granaries they guaranteed a food reserve, theguard rooms provided accommodation for the soldiers, and the ovenallowed the production

tion of fresh food. This organization was essential to the survival and operational efficiency of the garrison. The conservation and study of the tower's internal wall structures are essential for a complete understanding of medieval daily life and defensive strategies. Further archaeological research could provide more detailed information, helping to preserve this historical heritage for future generations.

Cultural Meaning

Today, the Montegualtieri Tower is included in the touristreligious itinerary called



born "Valley of the Abbeys". This route enhances the historical and religious heritage of the region, attracting visitors and scholars interested in medieval history. The tower has become a symbol of Montegualtieri and Cermignano, representing the identity and historical memory of the local community. Interest in the tower is kept alive thanks to the efforts of the Promonte Association. which on 18 May 2024 finally obtained the reopening of the monument to the public and is committed daily to

to ensure its usability. Visiting the Tower and the village of Montegualtieri means discovering a unique piece of history, it means immersing yourself in the medieval atmosphere and enjoying a panoramic view stretching from the mountains to the sea. This extraordinary example of defensive architecture offers an unmissable opportunity to explore a suggestive and historical corner of Abruzzo. In addition to being an important stop for history and architecture enthusiasts, the tower also offers a fascinating glimpse





on life and defensive strategies of the Middle Ages, making the visit an educational and engaging experience.

Keeper of Secrets: The Tower of Montegualtieri.

From the Montegualtieri Tower, the panorama opens up like a living painting, a symphony of colors and shapes that embraces the entire heart of Abruzzo, and the soul gets lost. The setting sun paints the Gran Sasso with golden hues, while its imposing peaks rise majestically into the evening sky. The shadows

The long lines of the mountains stretch like fingers on the earth, marking the passage of time in a solemn silence. The river valley winds through hills and woods. dotted with the ancient villages of Villa Vomano and Forcella, where the stone houses cling to the earth as witnesses of centuries of history. Further away, the village of Caprafico stands like a bulwark against time. Canzano and Castelbasso stand out against the sky, silent witnesses of past eras, while Castelnuovo Vomano rests serenely among the green valleys that open to the infinite sky. Cermignano and Scorrano are tinged with red at sunset, while Atri, queen of the hills, captures the

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gaze with its austere beauty. Guardia Vomano silently watches over the countryside that extends to the Vomano Plain, where Notaresco and Morro d'Oro overlook the distant sea. Roseto degli Abruzzi and Scerne dance on the shores of the Adriatic, their golden beaches shining under the light of the crescent moon, while the sea sings its eternal melody. And in the golden light of the sunset, the Tower stands like a senti-

immortal tinella, witness of the centuries that dance among its ancient stones. Here, where the past merges with the present in an eternal embrace, every morning is an awakening of memory and every evening a song to the time that passes slowly. Guardian of secrets, the Tower of Montegualtieri gently embraces the heart of those who dare to climb its stone steps, offering refuge to those who seek the intact beauty of the simple greatness of life.



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THE OLD SOURCE A heritage of history and community



The old source

The Fonte Vecchia of Montegualtieri represents an important testimony of therural lifeof a time. This structure, built of local stone, not only provided drinking water to the villagers, but also served as awash houseAnd watering holefor animals. Today, the fountain remains a symbol of the community and daily practices of past generations.

Historical and Social Significance

Wash houses and fountains such as the Fonte Vecchia of Montegualtieri played a crucial role in the daily life of rural communities. They wereplaces of work and socialisation, where women gathered to wash clothes, exchange confidences and tell stories. The washhouse, therefore, was not just a place



functional, but also a point of social aggregation.

The Use of Water in Rural Communities

In the past, the presence of public or private fountains was very widespread, often integrated with watering points for animals and public wash houses for washing clothes. The fountains were normally located within inhabited areas, along the roads, and constituted a common good linked to the a dream of the community, as well as a meeting and aggregation point. With the construction of the first aqueducts, many fountains were gradually abandoned. In several cases, they were demolished for road widening or removed due to obsolescence, while others were preserved as historical elements still in use.

Description

To learn more about the functions, construction materials and



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to distinguish the various restoration interventions that led to the current form of the fountain, a technical and topographical survey would be necessary detailed. To the moment, sources are missing precise historical data, and what is known about the source has been passed down from generation to generation. The maintenance of the source is currently managed by the generosity of volunteers from the Promonte association, who are committed

to preserve this important heritage for future generations. The Fonte Vecchia is built mainly of local stone, using construction techniques that demonstrate considerable skill in working and positioning the stones with the use of little mortar. This type of construction does not suggest an exact dating, however, the engraving of the date "1861" on a rectangular stone positioned above the main metal spout, gives us an indication of the period of construction or of a significant renovation. This year, which coincides with the unification of Italy, could reflect a period of renewed interest in



community infrastructure. The images today show a well preserved structure,

with a main basin fed by a spout. The worn stone and moss encrustations evidence continuous use and constant interaction with the water. Visible repairs and modifications indicate that the source has been maintained and adapted over the years to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Source Type

The Old Fountain of Montegualtieri is an example of multifunctional sourceIt has typical characteristics of a public fountain, a wash house and a drinking trough for animals:

• Public SourceThe main basin fed by a water spout provided drinking water to the inhabitants.

• Wash house: The external tanks allowed the





women washing clothes, making the fountain an important social meeting point.

• Watering hole: An internal basin covered with a barrel vault, fed by the "overflow" of the aqueduct, was used to water the animals, mainly sheep and cattle which could most likely put their heads through two quadrangular niches.

Function and Maintenance

The function of the Old Fountain was well structuredta. The basins and channels were designed to maximize the efficiency of water use, managing the flow effectively forminimize waste. Even today, water flows through the source, feeding the various functional areas. Around the middle of the No-



20th century, with the advent of the "economic boom" and the introduction of washing machines, the fountain was used less and less by the inhabitants of the area. However, before this decline, the maintenance of the fountain was an important activity to ensure its functionality. Families had designated days to use the washhouse,

and after each use, the tub

was thoroughly cleaned.

Importance Cultural and Current

Today, the Fonte Vecchia of Montegualtieri is considered ahistorical monument. Although it is no longer used on a daily basis, it remains a symbol of the hard work and sacrifice of past generations. The Promonte association keeps the tradition of this place alive as a community meeting point.



THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA A treasure of history and devotion



The church of Santa Maria

A little away from the small town of Montegualtieri, there is the Church of Santa Maria, aarchitectural jewel of seventeenthcentury design. This church, with its simple but fascinating portal with a flat architrave framed in brick, represents an important testimony of religious devotion and local history.

Characteristics Architectural

The façade of the Church of Santa Maria is characterised by a sober wooden portal, flanked by two oval windows surrounded by bricks. A central rose window, near the tympanum, overlooks the portal. The gabled roof and the bell gable, which unfortunately has no bells



na, are placed laterally above the tympanum and made entirely of exposed bricks, giving it a particular architectural shape. At the top of the roof, a small brick column supports a metal cross with a weather vane, a detail that reflects the attention to detail typical of buildings of the time. The facade also retains traces of whitish and blue plaster, which testify to the ancient chromatic beauty of the building.

Current Status

Unusable, deconsecrated and dilapidated. The roof has largely collapsed and the walls are dangerously out of plumb. Traces of consolidation work that was just started but did not have time to be completed are visible. This state of abandonment does not, however, hide the intrinsic beauty and historical value of the structure. Until twenty years ago, inside the single nave,





niches with frescoes, furniture and ancient books, probably dating back to theuse of the church during various historical periods, at least until the second half of the 19th century. These elements enriched the interior, offering a fascinating insight into the history and religious culture of the place.

The Crypt and the Ancient Inhumations

Outside the perimeter of the church, close to the left wall, there is the arched opening of thelateral cryptof which the foundation walls are preserved tion. According to tradition, in this crypt there are still visible traces of ancient inhumations, a practice permitted by the Council of Braga in 563. This crypt represents an additional element of interest for history and archaeology enthusiasts, offering a glimpse into the funerary practices of the past.

The Importance of the Church in the Local Context

The Church of Santa Maria is not only a historical monument, but also areligious symbol of the communityof Montegualtieri. Located in an area isolated from the rest of the town, this church reflects the faith and devotion of past generations. Its presence testifies to the importance of religion in the daily life of the inhabitants and the central role that churches had as places of meeting and prayer.

THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

A Heritage of Faith and Architecture

Located near the medieval triangular tower, the Church of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist represents an important testimony of the religious and architectural heritage of the area. The structure, originating from the sixteenth century, has undergone numerous interventions over the centuries





Renovation An**d**hodnization, while maintaining its historical charm intact.

Characteristics Architectural

The church of San Giovanni stands out for itssalient facade, which has a tripartite division with two lower lateral slopes coinciding with the roof and a higher central sail-shaped band, pierced by four trapezoidal openings. The main entrance

The main entrance is preceded by a marble staircase, giving a sense of grandeur and solemnity to the entrance. The facade today presents asandstone claddingwhich blends well with the nearby remains of the tower and gives a sense of strength and durability. The masonry is made of wellworked and regularly arranged stones, which give a neat and clean appearance to the structure. The portal is simple and rectangular, made of dark wood and surrounded by a light stone frame, which creates a visual contrast with the slightly darker stone of the facade. Above the portal there is a fi-



square window, also framed in light stone. This window allows natural light to enter the church, illuminating the interior. According to the 1933 diocesan questionnaire, The entrance architrave bears the date 1515 engraved on it, probably indicating the year of foundation of the church. On the left side of the facade stands abell towerin stone, which is distinguished by its severe lines and its height. The bell tower has two arched openings in which the bells are housed. The structure is topped by a hipped roof, which offers protection to the bells and adds a distinctive architectural touch.

Plant and Structure

The plan of the church is single rectangular classroom, with







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the internal space is marked by three frames, probably in reinforced concrete, which divide the hall into four bays. These frames support a flat internal ceiling that hides the gabled roof covered with tiles and counter-tiles. The foundations are of the continuous type in masonry, while the original structure in load-bearing masonry was reinforced by reinforced concrete frames during the various renovation works. Interiors and Decorations

The interior of the Church of San Giovanni Evangelista has a single nave with a square apse. The walls of the apse are decorated with a modern fresco depicting religious symbols, including the tower of Montegualtieri. Among the works of art present, the large oil painting on canvas "The Adoration of the Shepherds" by the artist from Teramo Franco Tommarelli.

Conclusion

The Church of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist in Montegualtieri is a mo-



monument of great historical and cultural value, which has kept alive the tradition and devotion of the local community throughout the centuries. Its architectural features, the restoration works and the richness of the interior make this church a place of great interest for anyone wishing to delve deeper into the history and sacred art of Montegualtieri.





MONTEGUALTIERI A Medieval Treasure in the Vomano Valley



Montegualtieri, with its medieval village and majestic triangular tower, representsa fascinating historical destination in the Vomano Valley. Despite the damage caused by geological events, the village maintains its charm intact and continues to attract visitors eager to immerse themselves in the its unique atmosphere and its rich history.

A Suggestive Path

Arriving near the fortress, visitors are greeted by the imposing sight of the triangular tower, distinctive symbol of Montegualtieri. Skirting theancient walls and continuing along the wide road that enters the ancient building, you cross the restored castle entrances. This path leads to aPanoramic terracebuilt under the arches of the



terminal part of the church of San Giovanni Evangelista, from which you can admire a spectacular bird's eye view of the Vomano valley. The terrace offers a privileged observation point to appreciate the natural beauty of the valley and the strategic position of the village.

The Medieval Village

The interior of the village still retains itsimplant-

to medieval, enclosed like a shell around the tower area. The heart of the village is dominated by the various feudal fortifications, which testify to the strategic and defensive importance of the place over the centuries. A narrow main street cuts the village in two, connecting the upper part of the hill with the main square below the tower and the eastern edge of the building. Along this street overlooks



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the stairways and doors of the small, pretty, simply decorated twostorey houses that make up the majority of the residential fabric.

The Lower Mountain: The Hidden Part of the Village

One of the lesser known, but equally fascinating, areas of Montegualtieri is "The Lower Mountain". Located on the northern hillside of the village, this neighborhood is characterized by ancient hilltop dwellings.The ancient houses, built in sandstone like the tower, are a testimony to the phenomenon of fortification. a historical process, which took placebetween the High and Low Middle Ages, where communities gathered around a castle for defensive purposes, forming fortified settlements. In the past, it is very likely that there were access portals to the castle and keep area, but it is equally likely that the remains were incorporated into modern residential structures.

In one of the houses of Monte di Sotto, agafio. It is an architectural element of Lombard origin, often found in medieval and Renaissance houses.A sort of balcony, loggia, balcony or projection made of wood that protrudes from the facade of a building. This space The exterior is closed by grates or other types of protection, creating a sort of covered veranda. The gafio represents, together with the tower and the old fountain, another peculiar note of the village.

A Village to Explore

A stroll through the narrow streets of the village is an unmissable experience for those who visit

Montegualtieri. Every corner of the village tells a story, from the stairways that lead to the small two-story houses, to the remains of the feudal fortifications. The visit can be completed by exploring the fortress and the tower and walking around the remains of the city walls, which offer further testimony to the rich history of the village.



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Thanks and regards

I would like to thank Dr. Marino Cardelli, "Il Pretuziano", for having supervised the creation of this precious informative booklet onvillage and on the Castleof Montegualtieri (13th century), of which the majestic and elegant church has reached us almost intactTriangular tower. The booklet is based on careful historical research and offers the visitor a first and easy information tool on the monumental complex.

I also thank him for having carried out this work almost free of charge, as a contribution to the dissemination and promotion of the village - where he and his family originate started in recent weeks by the Promonte association in collaboration with the Mayor of Cermignano, Dr. Febo Di Berardo, and with the Regional Commissioner for the management of the tower, Dr. Igino Sorbino. In this regard I would like to express my gratitude to Simona





Cardinals for the generosity and perseverance with which she committed herself within the Regional Administration to achieve the result of opening the tower and the archaeological area of the castle to the public.

Promonte, active since 23 February 2018 as a nonprofit association, was reconstituted in October 2023 as a third sector body pursuant to Legislative Decree 3.7.2017, n. 117, with the main objective of recovery, conservation and enhancement of the village of Montequaltieri and its Tower, as well as the history, values, uses, customs, traditions, language and culture of the place. This is a long-term work that will be carried out with the involvement not only of the members and their families but also of the local population. The aim is to contribute to raising the levels of active citizenship, cohesion and social protection, promoting participation, inclusion and full development of the person.

Thanks also go of course to the entire group of people who promoted the establishment of Promonte and are committed with generosity and dedication to the realization of the initiatives that we are organizing to ensure a good start to our activities.

Charles Matriciani President Promonte





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