

Additional information about the History of Monticelli.

In the autumn of 41 BC Octavianus Augustus attacked and besieged Perugia, where the troops of Marcus Antonius had withdrawn. The headquarters of Augustus were on the hill of Montefreddo, a clearly visible hill at a distance of about 2.5 km. from Monticelli. Thus the valley east of Monticelli was occupied by Roman legions for 6 months. Marcus Antonius preferred to remain in Egypt with Cleopatra and he left alone his brother Lucius Antonius, his roman wife Fulvia, his generals Ventidius Bassus and Asinius Pollio. Perugia was conquered by Octavianus Augustus after a 6 months siege. Many members of the Etruscan ruling class of Perugia were executed on the Ides of March of the year 40 B.C. Sometimes love and passion may also change the course of history or at least the destiny of couples.

At Monticelli there are two material traces of antiquity (objects from Etruscan and Roman times that were discovered on the property). The first one is an Etruscan phallic symbol dating from the third or fourth century BC. It was found in the 1930's at the bottom of the hill. The second is a 50x70 cm large piece of so-called "cocciopesto", a sort of cement mixed with pieces of broken red terracotta vases. It is dated from the fourth or fifth century AD, the last centuries of the Western Roman Empire. Cocciopesto is absolutely waterproof and the Romans manufactured it for use in wells and water reservoirs. Towards the end of the Roman empire the manufacturing technique was lost. Therefore its presence in Monticelli clearly testifies that people were living there at or before that time.

Beside the towers lies a small chapel which, according to the Ministry of Culture, dates from the year 1100, even though it could be substantially

older. The chapel was originally the apse of a much larger no longer existing church. In 1720-29 the church was still standing as shown by official maps of the tax office of the Papal State. They also show how large the church was. The apse was probably saved because of the beautiful frescoes on its walls. It is difficult to understand, even if Monticelli belonged to a rich and powerful Benedictine monastery, why such a big church with such beautiful and delicate frescoes should be built in such an isolated place and so close to the nearby hamlets of Castiglione della Valle and S. Biagio della Valle, which had and still have churches of similar size.

A possible explanation for this apparent puzzle may be related to the system of roads connecting Rome to the north in antiquity. Since Roman times the via Cassia had been the main road connecting Rome to Florence. It was closed from 1054 to roughly 1780 because in 1054 the city of Orvieto built a 16 meter dam on the river Chiana and flooded the valley as well as about 90 Km. of the via Cassia. Therefore many popes, armies and pilgrims travelling between Rome and the north, passed through Monticelli. Clearly the road through the Contado di Porta Eburnea was not the only alternative route linking Rome to Florence and the north of Italy, but it was important. This also explains why in the Middle Ages in a short stretch of 16 km. north and south of Monticelli there were seven hotels for travelers and hospitals, mostly run by religious orders. It may also explain why the church of Monticelli was so large and so well endowed with beautiful frescoes. The Benedictines of Monticelli have been probably running for centuries a restaurant and a lodge besides praying and cultivating the land around it. Finally it explains why in the chapel there is baldachin for papal visits which was

brought back from the National Gallery of Perugia only after an alarm system was installed.

Although the Autostrada del Sole runs parallel to the via Cassia through the Tuscan Val di Chiana, according to the original plan of the 1950's it was meant to pass on the west of Monticelli, right below the hill. Fortunately Mr.Fanfani, a powerful politician from Tuscany and many times Prime Minister of Italy, forced the government to change the original plans of the Autostrada and to move it to Tuscany, about 20 km. west.

Some historians argue that the person who bought Monticelli from the Benedictines in 1470 was Count Cesi of Acquasparta, a small city in the south of Umbria. He had been appointed governor of Umbria by the pope. In the late 16th century this same family was assigned the title of "Princes of Monticelli". However, we have not yet found definite proof that the pope meant this Monticelli, which is a rather common name in Italy (also the villa of President Jefferson in Virginia is also called Monticello and around Perugia there are four villas or hamlets called Monticelli). The last names of the counts that owned Monticelli from about the middle of the 17th century onwards are: Aureli, Alfani, Sereni and Fasola Bologna.

During WWII the allied forces reached Monticelli in June 1944. The Germans had a truck and tank repair shop and a deposit of vehicles in Castiglione della Valle, just 800 meters north. For this reason they put up a strong resistance from the hill of Monticelli and along the river Caina. They succeeded in stopping the allied advance for two weeks.

Then they blew up the bridge on the river Caina. Several buildings of the hamlet of Monticelli suffered heavy damage and several British soldiers died.

As a result of war destruction, decades of neglect and the progressive deterioration of the buildings, Monticelli then became a simple farm, home for about 150 peasants and their families, storage for agricultural products, mainly wine and tobacco, and staples for pigs and cows. However, by the 1980's it had become an abandoned ruin.