

A Short historical outline

“This land of mine, with its entire vicariate, has her origins in the ancient ruins of Suasa, the royal city of the Senonians”. This is how the local historian Francesco Seta opens his discourse about the origins of Mondavio, in a speech published in the long gone 1632 by the Academic Palustro Infecondo. During the Roman Age, the territory was part of the *“Municipium Suasa”* (Regio IV Umbriae). During the Middle Ages, Mondavio belonged to the Pentapolis of Ravenna. Later on, it seems that the territory where the town was to be built, was conceded as a feudal plot of land by the Emperor Henry IV to the Ubaldini(1196). It then came to be part of the Church State. After being appointed as an administrative center with the jurisdiction of twenty-four castles, the city underwent by cession the domination of the Malatesta, of Alessandro Piccolomini, of Giovanni della Rovere(son-in-law of the great Federico of Montefeltro), of Lorenzo de’ Medici, of the city of Fano and again of the della Rovere family until 1631, the year of the definitive transfer of the Dukedom of Urbino to the Holy See. The Vicariate of Mondavio, being an intersecting point between the territory of Urbino and Senigallia, was to become the welding point between the noble family of the Montefeltro and the della Rovere. Apparently decentralized, Mondavio becomes in the following years a key center for an ingenious system of fortifications, an administrative center of culture and commerce, the center of a vast vicariate overlooking the numerous castles that fell under her jurisdiction. Even today, the town, enclosed as it is within its ancient wall boundaries, protected by a mighty fortress, maintains the vestige of a glorious past in the palaces and in the churches.

Art and monuments

The *“Rocca”* was designed by the Senese architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini, his patron being Giovanni della Rovere, Federico da Montefeltro’s son-in-law. The fortress was built between 1482 and 1492. The *“Rocca”* is a marvellous and unique document of the innovatory genius of Martini, who reformed fifteenth century techniques applied to the construction of military fortresses. He took into consideration the new structures that were required after the invention of gunpowder. We learn from an essay on architecture written by Giorgio Martini that the *“Rocca”* consist of... *“A tall and massive watchtower situated in the market place, which is a protection against the enemy assaults, and next to it, the lord’s chamber (never built), an oval shape watchtower in the middle of which runs the street with a draw bridge and an extension-walling on each side, an octagonal tower (of which each wall is irregular and of a spiral shape). It is here that the chamber of the Castellano(the guardian) may be found. All these constructions are then enclosed within a circle shaped as a pentagon. The whole complex is planned in such a way that...the “Rocca” should represent the main limb of the city body, just as the head is the principal member of the body”.* Among the thousands of other fortresses, Martini’s *“Rocca”* is to be considered the greatest monument of Italy’s fortification art (Corrado Maltese) or the most elevated witness to the diligence of its designer (Marco Dezzi Bardeschi). Therefore, it is relevant to note, even if just passing, that one of the most peculiar aspects of the *“Rocca”* in Mondavio is the majestic relief that one can notice in its extraordinary geometrical virtuosity, although many of his designs had never been realized, but only graphically proposed in his Tractate. Here, in the city of Mondavio, we stand before an extraordinary architectonic poem, built as a bastion for war-machines, but which, as we know, has never fired or received any bombards. We are amazed before the free inventiveness of such obvious ingeniousness! The architectonic pretext was that of offering little hope to the deadly blows of the bombards, rather than contrasting them with thick walls. Here in Mondavio, in the massive tower of the castle guardian Francesco had realized in a very unique way for Renaissance architecture (civil, military or religious) those very same geometric structures which *“design cannot reproduce”*, which would be studied analytically two centuries later by Descartes(1596-1650), and later graphically represented by the count Gaspard Monge(1746-1818). Indeed, in Martini’s Tractate, we may find analogical references to the invention of Mondavio, especially with regard to

the helicoids surfaces of the castle guardian's tower: we find the references interspersed, here and there, on papers that illustrate some machines designed to lift water or in some details of fireplaces, or even more explicitly, within two pages of Saluzziano's codex, where helmets shields of various shapes are designed with remarkable graphic mastery, showing the flexing, the spatial shades and outlines of the surfaces.

THE TOWNHALL AND THE COUNCIL-HALL, facing the principal square of the town, preserve in the council chamber the coat of arms of some of the neighbouring communes that were once castles of the Vicariate. one can also admire the frescos on the ceilings and the "Madonna con Bambino" by Carlo da Camerino (1410-1420).

on its side: **THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS**, that according to tradition was erected in the XVIII century, after a visit of Saint Francis of Assisi to Mondavio. it was restored in the XVIII century and preserves significant artistic works by valid artists, from the regions of Le Marche and Umbria. among these we mention:

- the wooden cross, preciously ornamented (XVIII cent.);
- a painting representing the Trinitarian monks (XVI cent. , in the apse);
- an altar-piece dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (G. Presutti, 1535);
- a Madonna with Child, XVIII cent.;
- the urn with Martyr St. Lucio's remains;
- the choir stalls made of walnut, XVI cent.;
- the organ, built in the first half of the XVIII cent.

Along the side of the Church, there is an ample Cloister, which dates back to the first decades of the XVI cent., belonging to the Friar Minor Conventuals' monastery.

APOLLO'S THEATRE - the building is crumbling on the outside structure (it can not be visited); it goes back to the first half of the XVII cent., the ceiling being covered with frescos and with three stage orders and a mobile parquet.

THE FAMOUS COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO E PATERNIANO: the first construction originates in the year 1444, a time when the two rectories of the same names were united; the second dates back to the year 1563, carries out on the plan of the architect Bartolomeo Genga; even today it is possible to admire its façade; in it were kept valuable works of art, such as the stucco work of the Nativity by Brandani. The Church was elevated to the status of an illustrious Collegiate in 1741, and on this occasion it was decided to enlarge the building by incorporating the adjacent watchtower as the central apse of the Church and by adding the lateral chapels. Entering from the left side:

- The Madonna of Lourdes Chapel of St. Ann's Brotherhood, which preserves precious oil paintings by an anonymous artist.
- Mondavio's Community Chapel with the painting of the Patron Saints, the Virgin, Mondavio, the Archangel St. Michael and St. Eleutorio, a work by Sebastiano Ceccarini, XVII cent.
- The choir stalls, made of walnut (XVII cent.).
- A painting in the apse: the Virgin of the Assumption with St. John the Evangelist and St. Caterina XVI cent., attributed to Giulio Romano (and perhaps unduly retouched); on both sides, paintings of the Barocci school.
- Chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament: painting by Giuseppe Bottani of the Guardian Angel (XVII cent.).
- Chapel of the Risen Jesus with a wooden statue from the cypress tree, of the workmanship.
- A three-pitched organ constructed by Angelo Albertini in the year 1775.

- The steeple: foundation stone laid on October 20, 1754; installation of the cross: September 27, 1762. Height: 82 feet.

THE CAPUCHIN MONASTERY: situated on the periphery of the town, it is an excellent testimony to the XVI cent. Architecture of the Franciscan Capuchin monks. The Church is dedicated to the Holy Spirit; an epigraph, which has now disappeared, bore the foundation date of 1577 at the time of Pope Gregory XIII and Francesco Maria II, Duke of Urbino.

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA QUERCIA: situated not too far from the historical centre, this building is a splendid testimony to the '700 period; it arises over a former construction of the '300 period, with beautiful frescos by Giuliano Presotti of Fano in 1523.

REGINA DELLA PACE (Queen of Peace) SANCTUARY: at about four kilometers from the town, along the Cesanense road, is situated the country ward of S. Michele al Fiume. The development of the center takes place at the beginning of the XX cent., focused around an ancient village chapel, which is then rebuilt (1922) and erected as Diocesan Sanctuary of Mary in 1967 with the decree of His Excellency Monsignor Costanzo Micci, a local native. Inside of the sanctuary, one may admire a triptych depicting the Queen of Peace, with San Michele and San Tommaso on the two sides, by Biagio Biagetti (1947). The new arrangement of the presbytery is the work of P. Vitali.

SANT'ANDREA DI SUASA CASTLE rises on the hillside at 265 metres above the sea-level, parallel to the Cesano valley, some 10 kilometres from Mondavio. The town preserves the ancient medieval structure, surrounded as it is by high walls and with only once arched entrance. The citadel was planned and realized by the Benedictine monks and accommodated some of the surrounding peoples that lived and worked under their direction and protection. The earliest documents go back to the year 1193. The Church was built in 1612 and re-structured in 1772 and is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. The Church preserves valuable artistic works, among which an oil painting dedicated to the Virgin, by G. Guiducci of 1887.

THE HISTORICAL MEMORIAL MUSEUM

To visit this living history museum means living out a distance past which is fascinating.

- The torture chamber: equipped with deadly instruments that remind the visitor through the power of imagination of how cruel and inhuman the "Rocca" prisons could be.
- The bakery hall: while the Captain of the guard is having a snack, the baker is busy cooking the bread.
- The dining-hall: a wild boar shooting party has just returned and Duke Giovanni della Rovere takes his seat at the table with all the court.
- The top floor: from this bird's-eye vantage point the visitor may wander over a vast scenery that extends from the mountains to the sea.

Entirely organized within the Pro Loco Association, this Museum is intended to be a stenographic reconstruction of the way in which life took place inside the majestic "Rocca" an extraordinary example of unique military construction belonging to the early Renaissance.

THE ARMOURY OF MONDAVIO'S 'ROCCA'

An early Italian Renaissance construction, as the great military architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini had intended it to be, it was equipped with a formidable military apparatus for both active and passive defence. The Rocca's armament mainly consisted of the artilleries and the individual equipments of the army corps at its defence. The actual composition of the Armoury is a reflection, generally speaking, of what very likely was the selection of the period's collective and individual weapons. In fact, medium caliber artilleries, such as bombards, are exhibited, but also semi-portable artilleries, such as the small springalds and the positioning harquebuses can be found there.

Among the white weapons, exemplars of fixed weapons, some of which are even more important, are noticeable, such as "ronconi", "corsesche", halberds, partisans, spits, breach and fortress spikes and pikes. Swords, daggers, together with bludgeons of various kind, complete the typology of offensive weapons.

Among the defensive white weapons, or armour, a vast typology of helmets completes the ancient equipment for the defence of the man of war. "Beaver helmets" and cavalryman, "bacinetti" and "morioni", "taschetti"

for harquebusiers, these are all a testimony to the technological diversification of the main defensive strand. The various type of armory serve as a standard for comparison in relation to the changing military requirements, and in relation to the evolution of the artilleries.

Even the single parts of the armour will be the object of the visitor's study, as well as the horse and cavalryman accessories (stirrups, spurs, bits). The iconographic sources the early stage of armament in the 'Rocca', which is now made more precious with authentic finds.

Manifestations

THE ARCHERS' GROUP. The Archers' group can be understood against the wider concerns of re-evaluating more fully the traditions and the history of the town. It is by no chance that it becomes the inspiring motive and the culminating moment of the historical retrospective view: the "wild boar hunt" is all based on the dispute of the three quarters: land-village rural area; these constitute and characterize Mondavio's Archers' group. This group, which originated as an initiative of the Pro Loco Association, is fully in harmony with the particular social-cultural features of ancient Mondavio. The town was at one time a real military and controlling center of the southern area below the Dukedom of Urbino – the Vicariate of Mondavio took pride in its monumental "Rocca".

The archers perform an instinctive shot, without the support of a roker arm or of a view-finder, thus reflecting what used to be genuine medieval archery; the weapon itself is based on the designs of the time. The range-distance of the target varies from 30 to 40 meters, depending of the natural environment.

The archery consists of 9/15 archers, 5/9 drums, 2/4 clarinos and 1 standard-bearer. The Archery group is available for any historical display and they secure a charming and choreographic spectacle of remarkable skillfulness.

A HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE VIEW WITH A MEDIEVAL PUBLIC DINNER: "The Wild Boar Hunt" – Mondavio, August 15.

In the year 1474, Giovanni della Rovere, one of Pope Sixtus IV's nephews, was appointed as Lord of Senigallia and over the Vicariate of Mondavio. The concession of these territories had taken place in order to treat on an equal basis the parties involved in the marriage that would unite the noble houses of the Montefeltro with the Della Rovere. Giovanna, whose father Federico had been made Duke that same years, was to marry the seventeen year old nephew of the Pope. The concession of the Vicariate of Mondavio was especially significant, because its territory united the Seigniorship of Senigallia with the Dukedom of Urbino. The historical evoking of the event brings us back to the sumptuous procession that advanced from Urbino to take official hold of the new estates of the Della Rovere house; the procession runs through again those same stages that marked what was a real ceremony.

Giovanni, who was at this time accompanied by his father-in-law the Duke Federico, and by the major exponents of the Urbinate court, arrived in Mondavio. During the last stretch of the route, some of the main representatives of the Mondaviese community went out to meet him, while at the principal gate of the city, the civic authorities were waiting to welcome him and to submit to him the contractual clauses which had to be signed by the new lord as a proof of benevolence towards his subjects.

The civic ceremony was followed by the entry into the Cathedral to thank God. They had to proceed through the rows of cheering people. After the Church service, the community offered a spectacle to the new lord of their old traditions: sport competitions, involving the strength and skill of the local youth. The spectacle was followed by a public dinner and a dancing party, in which the citizens participated both in their homes and on the city square. Mondavio celebrates this joyful every year on August 15, because the city owes the construction of the magnificent 'Rocca' to Giovanni della Rovere. The festive programme starts at 5 p.m. and ends at midnight