

AMANDOLA

Altitude: 1895 m

Population: 4000

Location

The territory of Amandola, which covers the eastern fringes of the Sibillini mountain chain, is between the districts of Sarnano and Montefortino, reaching up to the crest of the Sibillini chain and opening out to embrace the upper Tenna valley, which descends across a series of hills, down to 300m. A town located between the hills, foothills and mountains and a natural base from which to begin excursions into the Monti Sibillini.

Origins of the name

The name Amandola according to tradition, derives from the almond tree (mandorlo) that at one time flourished on the summit of Castel Leone, one of three castles that, along with Marrabbione and Agello, went on to form the town. A poetic name, inspired by the tree Amandula, an enormous, ancient and legendary almond tree, born out of the metamorphosis of the beautiful

Fillide, daughter of Licurgo, king of Sparta, who believing herself to have been betrayed and abandoned by her husband Demofonte, son of Teseo, left Troia, and fled to Greece to find refuge, at the lofty Castel Leone. Here she hung herself, transforming into a leafless almond tree that would stay without foliage for as long as she was without love. But when Demofonte learned of his wife's grief, he arrived at the tree and emotionally embraced the trunk, which then began to leaf luxuriously.

Historical Interest

From the IX to III centuries B.C. the area was an important seat for the Picene civilization as proven by some important archaeological finds. Under Emperor Augusto the Tenna Valley became part of a complex economic and social programme of centurization which oversaw the division and assignment of the colonizers. Important artefacts, from the neolithic period and especially the Roman era, include the Dinos, a bronze vase on three legs from the V century B.C. and the "Termine augusteo" (a type of boundary stone). After the fall of the Roman Empire came the Lombards, and in the same period the Benedictines, preceded perhaps by types of monastic hermitages, which introduced new agricultural technology and above all they worked and reclaimed the land. In 1248 a free town was born from the union of the fiefs of Agello, Castel Leone and Marrabbione, which had decided to free themselves from the yoke of the feudal lords - the De Falleroni and the Giberti. In 1336 the first statutes were created. However the life of the town was often threatened by the expansionist interests of various families including the Varano, the Malatesta and the Sforza families. From the 1300s to the 1600s the weaving and wool dyeing industry blossomed.

In the 1500s brigands became a common phenomenon, one which also returned in later periods. At the beginning of the 1800s the French occupation which had begun with the invasion of the Napoleonic forces in 1798, ended, and the papal government was restored. In 1836 Amandola was elevated to "city" status by Pope Gregorio XVI.

Itinerary

Leave from the piazza Risorgimento where the town hall is found (1); from the slim 19th century portico, steps lead down to the church of S. Agostino (2) (sanctuary of the Blessed Antonio) built in the XIV century. The original construction is no longer visible today because of the various changes the building has undergone over the centuries, above all the enlargement under the priory of Antonio Migliorati, constructed to the glory of the Blessed Antonio in 1759. The doorway of the church, nicely set in the red eighteenth century facade, is gothic with Venetian style decorations. The belltower dates from 1468 and is by Mario Pietro Lombardo, with gothic mullioned windows, and finished with octagonal spires. The characteristic stained glass of 1905, was realised by K. Bayer of Munich. In the apse is the Miracles of the Blessed painted by the Camerino painter Orazio Orazi. The crystal case containing the body of the Blessed Antonio was recently moved into the new chapel which also houses a terracotta Pietà from the XV century. From the piazza walk up via Indipendenza to the top of the hill and the church of S. Francesco (3) semi-gothic in style. The belltower dominates the adjacent convent, first mentioned in 1265 and which was officially consecrated in 1352. Through the wide romanesque-gothic doorway from the 1400s, inside the single nave baroque style church, an apse opens out from which stands out a Romanesque wooden figure of Christ dating from the late 1200s, placed above the main altar. Beside this is the chapel of the belltower which hosts a majestic series of frescos from the Umbria/Marche school of art of the 1400s, featuring the Annunciation. On the right hand side of the church of S. Francesco is the small chapel of San Sebastiano or of Santo Rosario whose facade is adorned with two fourteenth century archaic little statues of San Gabriele and of the Madonna.

Within the regularly dimensioned building is a majestic gold-leaf frame around a fresco, sculpted by the master Scipione Parisse of Matelica in 1656, one of the best examples of symmetry, thanks to the high level of experience of the local artists, a worthy surround to the valuable fresco of "La Madonna del Latte" by the painter Stefano Falchetti of San Ginesio, from the XV century. These great works are given a suitable contrast by the splendid multi-coloured wooden balustrade by Giuseppe and Filippo Benattendi of Amandola. To the left of the church is the entrance to the cloister of S. Francesco (4) which hosts the rich historic archives including thousands of parchments, and which is also home to the Anthropogeographic museum of the Monti Sibillini National Park. Carry on up via Roma, where the most ancient buildings of the old town are found, including the historic theatre "La Fenice" (5), which has sixteenth century origins.

The large tower of the mayor (6), from the 1400s and which, along with Cassero Maggiore, is the last evidence of a much larger construction and the sign of a major military power, protects piazza Umberto Ist, also known as the piazza Alta (7), which is surrounded by walls and was once the centre of everyday life in Amandola. In this same piazza is the former town hall. There is a splendid viewpoint (8) over the eastern slopes of the Monti Sibillini from where one can admire the whole mountain chain: from Monte Vettore to Monte Castel Manardo. Walking down the steps of via Castel Leone, to the left there is a fifteenth century house (9) with dovecot, home to an ancient dyeing mill. At the end of the steps turn right and walk down to the S. Giacomo Gate (10) which took its name from the little church, that at the time was next to it and which was knocked down in 1836 and rebuilt with the same materials in 1863. The pointed arch, with defensive ghibellin turrets **piombante tra beccatelli (held by brackets?)** and two crests from the XV century.

The upper part is baroque and contains a clock that initially was located on the tower of the church of Sant'Agostino. Proceed along via G. Marconi, turn right arriving at the convent of San Bernardino also known as the convent of the Cappuccini (11), built in 1540

and sited on Marrabbione hill. The entire architectural structure responds to a need for great strength; inside two sixteenth century oil paintings can be admired, one situated in the first chapel, depicting the Virgin and Baby overlooking S. Francesco and Maria Maddalena, the other depicting the Madonna and Child between the saints Giuseppe and Anna. Here there was also another oil painting by Pietro of Cortona which was stolen by the French and is now in the Brera Museum in Milan. From here one can easily return to the departure point.