

## **ARQUATA DEL TRONTO**

**Altitude:** 777

**Population:** 1400

### **Location**

The only town in Europe found in two national parks (that of the Monti Sibillini to the north and that of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga to the south) which meet in the valley of the River Tronto.

### **Origins of the name**

It would seem the name derives from Arx (the fortification of the town), a fortified place which underlines the original defensive priorities of the settlement.

### **Historical Interest**

According to some historians the first settlement was founded during the Sabine civilization, while others claim Roman origins, however, and identify the town with the ancient Surpicanum, placed between the two Statio of the Peutingerian table, Ad Martis and Ad Aquas (today called Amatrice and Acquasanta Terme).

The first references to Arquata date from the XI century. In 1099 Abbot Berardo III of Farfa certified the acquisition of all its land. In 1255 Arquata was suddenly gifted to Ascoli Piceno, giving it considerable autonomy and relative independence up until 1429, when Pope Martino V surrendered the town and entire district to Norcia, which up until that time had been in dispute with Ascoli. After various events spanning the whole of the XIV century, in 1491, it was definitively assigned by Pope Innocenzo VIII to Norcia, of which it remained part until the fall of the Napoleonic Empire (1832) when the restored papal government took away Arquata from Umbria and incorporated it once more into Ascoli Piceno.

### **Itinerary**

Set off from Borgo, thus named because it was the habitation below the castle, where all types of people resided (artisans and peasant farmers) who worked in the service of the local lords. Here we find the church of

San Francesco (1), part of a small monastery (2) which from 1866 was destined for residential use. The original building was erected in the middle of the XIII century, but underwent continual modification and enlargement up to the end of the 1500s. The restoration in 1980 revealed two bas-reliefs, under the plaster of the facade, made from pre-Romanesque stone and now found high on the entrance wall. Inside, worth noting are the Extractum ab originali of the Sacra Sindone (1645), a painted wooden crucifix from the 1400s, a wooden altar from the 1600s, on which is the portrait of San Carlo Borromeo, and a painting from 1527, depicting the Madonna and Saints, attributed to the school of Cola d'Amatrice. Leave the church, go along the old via Salaria and turn left along a narrow street which quickly becomes a path; the path reaches the Camartina brook (3), where once across a little wooden bridge it carries on through vegetation until arriving at the church of San Salvatore (4), the original building of which was probably realised in the 1200s and then completely rebuilt in 1931, following its collapse in 1915. Today the church is only opened during celebrations of the patron saint.

Carry on until reaching the old Salaria road, following it for around 100 metres towards Arquata until meeting, on the left, what remains of the Sant' Agata Gate (5) where in

ancient times the duties were paid. Back on the old Salaria road carry on for around another 150 metres, then take the little lane that climbs steeply to the right, to get to the foot of the fortification (6) which is surrounded by a small park and was built on the heights to the north-west of the town centre.

The restored building is made up of impressive perimeter walls from which climbs the impressive keep (24 m.) and, to the south, a polygonal guelph turreted tower (the fortress can be visited by appointment, made at one of the national park's Casa del Parco information centres). From the top of the highest tower is a sensation of dominating all the surrounding territory, making evident the monitoring role it has had over the course of the centuries. The internal courtyard, which is these days covered, is now used as a multi-role venue for social and cultural events.

There is a fine view of Monte Vettore (7).

From the fortification walk down towards the town until meeting, to the right, the church of the Annunziata (8) within which one can admire a painted wooden crucifix from the 1200s. Opposite the church is a fine pointed arch from the 1400s constructed from large blocks of local stone. Carry on to the piazza where, next to the town hall (9), is the civic tower (10) with a bell from the 1400s. From here head down the steps to the left of the town hall, onto the old Salaria road, arriving once more at the Borgo.