

## CESSAPALOMBO (MC)

### Location

Cessapalombo is found in the valley of the Fiastrone river. This part of the valley makes up part of a deep and untamed ravine scoured out by the river between Mt. Fiegni and Mt. Corvo.

### Origins of the name

Created by the fusion of two words, it is held that the first part of the name is derived from *Caesa*, that is from *silva caesa* (selva tagliata; felled forest), while the second part comes from the toponym *Palumbus*, (colombo selvatico; wild dove) or according to others, more probably, from a widely used local name.

### Historical interest

The historical origins of the town are not completely clear, though it is thought a human habitation was formed in the area around 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. The Castello di Montalto (13<sup>th</sup> century), of which only the structure remains today, was built in a previously wooded area by Cardinal Fieschi. In the centuries that followed it became the property of the noble Da Varano family. Rodolfo II restored the castle, probably adding the defensive fortifications. The Castello di Montalto, along with that of Coldipietra, represented the last stronghold of the Da Varano family, who constantly fought with the Brunforte family of Colonnalta, the Magalotti of Fiastra and the other nobles of the surrounding lands.

### Itinerary

The suggested route passes through the town itself and its various hamlets. In the square of Vittorio Emanuele (1) is the Church of Sant'Andrea (2). Rebuilt after the second world war, inside is a pleasing wooden statue of the Virgin and Child called the "Madonna dell'Impollata" of unknown author (maybe of Marche origin and perhaps dating from the 1400s).

Next on the route is the hamlet of Montalto where the ruins of the castle of the same name are found (3). A short distance away is the ancient parish church of San Benedetto (4) which conserves delightful frescos by Giovanni Andrea de Magistris: the Mysteries of the Rosary (1526), situated outside a nook in the left wall, the Madonna and Child and S. Antonio Abate (1544). There are also two frescos inside the church, one behind the altar of San Girolamo and the other of San Benedetto. Also in the hamlet of Montalto is Palazzo Simonelli (4), home to the Charcoal Museum. In fact in this area the ancient tradition of charcoal burning is still practised today. The charcoal "pit" is constructed by arranging logs of wood on the ground in special "piazzas" or squares. Then for a week or two the burning process is closely monitored to ensure it is slow and constant, continually adjusting the amount of air which enters, so that the internal environment is poor in oxygen but not completely deprived of it.

In the centre of Villa di Montalto is the Church of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (5) behind the altar of which can be admired a "Mater Misericordiae con cavalieri", by Girolamo di Giovanni, from the 1400s.

Also interesting is a visit to Monastero, where in an isolated position below the hamlet the Abbey of S. Salvatore (6) is located, said to have been founded in 1009 by San Romualdo. All that remains of the primitive church is the central nave and part of the extremely beautiful crypt, in which of particular interest are the capitals of the small columns that support the vaulted ceiling. Also of interest is a fresco of the Madonna and Child, dating from 1289-1330, and of considerable artistic merit. Also conserved here is a copper gilded Stations of the Cross, a 13<sup>th</sup> century bell, a small 14<sup>th</sup> century ciborium and two 16<sup>th</sup> century frescoed altars.