

NORCIA

Altitude: 604 m

Population: 5000

Location

Norcia lies in a wide basin, once the bottom of a pliocenic lake, emptied probably due to the opening of the Biselli passage.

Origins of the name

The name comes from Northia, goddess of fortune, worshipped by the Etruscans.

Historical Interest

Founded around 1400 B.C., in the Roman era it was first a prefecture and then a municipality. Under the triumvirates, the Nursini opposed the resistance to Ottaviano, allying themselves to Antonio. Christianity arrived with the evangelist S. Feliciano, bishop of Foligno (around 250 A.D.). Later it was devastated by the Goths and invaded by the Saracens and the Lombards. In 962 the town was gifted by Ottone I to Pope Giovanni XII. The dependency to nearby Spoleto was recognised in 1201, by means of submission to a people's consul.

The new council, increasingly the natural enemy of the ducal city, in successive waves began to conquer the territory around Vigi, il Corno and la Salaria and at its height of expansion reached the Valle Castoriana, the Valle Oblita and on the opposite slope, Riofreddo, Mevale, Arquata and Accumoli. In the 1400s, a period of relative prosperity based on commerce and industry,

hostilities were renewed with Spoleto, Ascoli Piceno and Cascia. In 1569 the Mountain Prefecture was created, with its seat of power at the Castellina Palace. Finally, on 18 September 1860, a plebiscite sanctioned its union to the Kingdom of Italy.

(manca qualcosa forse?) was mentioned by Virgil about the Nursine troops conducted against Enea on behalf of Turno; Roman general Q. Sertorio was born here (72 B.C.) , as were the mother of emperor Vespasiano, Vespasia Polla and the poet Giovanni Battista Lalli (1572-1637). In 1480 S. Scolastica and S. Benedetto were born, the later being proclaimed Europe's patron saint in 1964 by Pope Paolo VI.

Itinerary

The departure point is from the piazza S. Benedetto (1), in ancient times known as the piazza Grande, in the centre of which is the statue of S. Benedetto, by Francesco Prinzi (1880). The town's most important historical buildings are found here, including the basilica of S. Benedetto (2), built on the same site as the house where the saint was born in the XIV century. On the right wall, in 1570, a portico was constructed known as the portico delle misure (3) to create a covered grain market. Today the "misure" or marks are still visible in the stone, made by metal spatulas hung from the wall, called "rasiere". To the left is found the town hall (4) dating from the XIII century. Opposite is the Castellina (5) which was realised from a design by Vignola in the XVI century, and was the residence of the apostolic governors, and in the final years of the XVI century, it became the seat of power for the Mountain Prefecture. The building is square, with angular steeply sloped ramparts slanted at the base. A cordon runs around the entire building, above which open windows which until 1861, were encased with strong iron grills. To the sides of the door are two lions of the beuronense school(the beginning of the XX century) which, until the

1950s decorated the crypt of San Benedetto. The building is also home to the Diocese Civic Museum, which houses works from the XIII and the XVIII centuries, religious artefacts and an exhibition documenting the precious ecclesiastical heritage of the town.

Next to the Castellina is the cathedral of S. Maria Argentea (6), rebuilt from 1560. The church has a simple white stone footing supporting a gabled facade, enlivened by an elegant and slightly overhanging doorway, surmounted by a tympanum and a circular window with symmetrically placed windows and recesses to either side. Returning to the piazza take via Mazzini, to the right of the Church of San Benedetto, then Via Roma which leads to the

Palace of the Cavalieri di Malta (7), home to the civic peasant farmer museum and the church of S. Filippo, (XVIII century) called the Madonna Addolorata (8) because inside is a painting of the Virgin Mary, highly venerated by the people of Norcia. On the right of the church of San Filippo, walking up the Via Mattia Amadio, is the church of S. Agostino (9) from the XIV century. There is a beautiful gothic doorway in the facade, in whose bezel are represented S. Nicola of Tolentino with a dove on his shoulder, the Madonna and Child blessing and S. Agostino, the doctor of the church. Between these last two figures the restorer has recently uncovered and restored three miniscule heads possibly alluding to the Trinity.

Continuing along via Anicia the route arrives at the little piazza of Capolaterra where the oratorium of S. Agostino the lesser is found(10), with a splendid wooden ceiling, in gold leaf and painted at the beginning of the 1600s and also the church of the Crucifix (11). Further on is the church of S. Antonio (12) connected to the Benedictine monastery of the same name. Heading down via delle Vergini we find the ruined church of S. Maria della Pace (13) and further on the San Giovanni Gate (14); proceeding along via Umberto the route meets the little temple (15), a small stone building, six metres high and square in structure, with two open central arches. The archways are decorated with subtle reliefs, foliage, animals and symbols of passion. Inside are traces of a fresco of the Madonna and Child. Architect of the building, which was constructed in 1354, was Vanni della Tuccia. The temple is the most original building in Norcia, certainly the most homogenous and the best conserved. Further on is the church of San Giovanni (16) largely rebuilt as a result of earthquakes in the XVIII century. Going along via Gioberti and heading to the right the route reaches corso Sartorio, the street which leads to the Romana Gate(17), the main entrance to the town, built by Mollaioli; carry on and turn right along via Dante, until arriving at piazza Garibaldi where the church of S. Rita (18) is found, originally named church of the Misericordia. The small facade, complete with sloping curves, was built from stone from other buildings destroyed in seismic events during the XVIII century. At the centre of the piazza is a cast iron 19th century water font which replaced the medieval stone font which originally gave the piazza and the neighbourhood its name (Fontesecca). On the opposite side of the piazza is the former church of San Francesco (19). The existing building resulted from a reconstruction completed by Francescani Conventuali around 1385. Inside along the single nave are frescos from the XVI century. To the side of the church was seated one of the very first Umbrian and Italian Monti di Pietà (pawn banks)(20), already active in 1466, and founded at the initiative of the Franciscans who, with their preaching, denounced the evils of the money-lenders. The building has a stone doorway with a painted bezel (Pietà) and the words "Granaro del Monte della Pietà, 1585" (a reference to the restoration not the foundation). Proceeding along Via Marconi, the route soon arrives at the piazza Vittorio Veneto, with the war memorial to the fallen soldier (1923). On the right hand side of the piazza is the civic theatre (21). Already in 1612 some citizens were producing plays, but at that time there only existed a tiny

theatrical structure connected to the Palazzo dei Consoli. Various restoration works were carried out until 1834, when Domenico Mollaioli built a horseshoe shaped theatre, with three lines of boxes, a gallery and a stage. The cost was met by the town council and 50 shareholders, equal to the number of boxes. A serious fire in the winter of 1952 completely destroyed the inside of the theatre, leaving only the facade intact. In 1996 the theatre re-opened to the public. Proceeding along Corso Sertorio the route arrives back at the departure point.