

MONTALTO CASTLE

One Thousand Years of History



PAOLA CODA NUNZIANTE

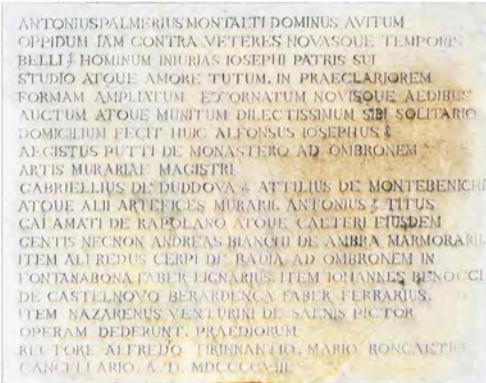
Index

Foreword	1
The Land of the Berardenga	4
The Berardenghi, Founders and Early Lords of Montalto	6
The Battle of Montalto	8
War, Peace and the Black Plague	10
A Castle in Ruins	12
A Return to War	14
The Palmieri Family Takes Over	16
Restoration Efforts	18
The “Sala d’Armi”	22
The Church of St. Martin	26
The 20 th Century	30

The different stonework in the upper part of the tower shows the extent of reconstruction work in subsequent centuries.



Foreword



In a plaque under the entrance archway of Montalto Castle, Antonio Palmieri, last of the Palmieri family who had been lords of Montalto since the 1500s, tells us of his family's efforts to preserve the Castle "with care and love" against the ravages of time, of war and of man. Ever since we acquired the castle from our cousin Sobilia Palmieri (Princess Carafa di Roccella, Antonio's daughter), and made it our home, we too have endeavored to preserve and restore it with similar care and love.

Part of preserving the castle means ensuring that its history and legacy live on. So we are delighted to share this proud estate with our guests—people who choose to spend their vacation in a beautiful setting steeped in a rich history, people who welcome the simple life and relish the opportunity to discover both the famous and lesser-known treasures of this incredible part of Italy. We welcome the opportunity to invite such visitors into our home, to show them our collection of ancient weapons and to recount the castle's epic legends. We also love getting to know our guests; many have become our lasting friends.

This book summarizes the long history of the castle, from the times of the Longobards and Franks, through the Medieval and Renaissance times that saw battles, ruin and reconstruction, to its present-day life as a country villa. So many merchants, pilgrims and armies (both allied and enemy) traveled along the fertile valley of the Ambra river, and all of them shaped both the castle itself and its surrounding area, leaving a lasting impact on the land we now call home.

In this day and age, marked by swift changes and modern conveniences, it might seem nostalgic to revisit a past that goes back more than 1,000 years. But we feel that the walls that form our castle can't be fully appreciated without an understanding of the labor and love that went into building them, and of the numerous generations that lived within them over the centuries, inhabiting and maintaining the property, helping to shape the history and culture of the land.

We hope that our castle, and the past history it holds in every stone, will reinforce your interest in this area of Tuscany. By understanding what once took place on these very grounds, we hope that you will find a new appreciation for one of the most beautiful spots on earth.

Giovanni and Diana Coda Nunziantie
Castello di Montalto, A.D. 2012



The Land of the Berardenga



The tranquil woods, peaceful fields and serene setting surrounding Montalto make it hard to imagine the Castle's turbulent past. Yet the geography, history and volatility of the region dictated that a fortress be built here.

As far back as the Romans, the area now known as the Berardenga was crossed by a network of roads that were vital to commerce and travel between regions. The *via Cassia* (Cassian Way) connected Rome to Florence and continued as far as present-day Genoa; it was a major commerce route, and passed only 5 kilometers from where Montalto would eventually be built. Another important road crossed the Cassia at the location of present-day Castelnuovo Berardenga. This road connected Siena to Arezzo, passing less than a kilometer from Montalto, along the current Ambra river. The nearby Ombrone river flowed wider and deeper than today and was also a well-trafficked commerce route. Whoever controlled this travel network would have a definite economic advantage, which gave this area great value—worth fighting for.

Moreover, this territory was on the border between Siena and Arezzo, and not only blocked Arezzo's access to the Mediterranean, but was also at the center of disputes of a religious nature between the two cities. Many parishes were rich not only in souls but also in land holdings, farm crops, and donations of riches by wealthy patrons. Even before the famous rivalry between Siena and Florence that would cause such devastation

to the Berardenga area, for several centuries the bishops of Siena and Arezzo contended for the ownership of various parishes and churches in this area. (To this day, Montalto resides within the province of Siena but is in the parish of Arezzo.)

Thus a settlement was born, later enlarged and fortified. Montalto's tower appears to have been constructed by the Longobards in the 6th or 7th century A.D., but the main part of the castle was erected at the end of the first millennium by early descendants of Winigis, the first Salic Count of Siena under the Franks in the 9th century, and his son Berard from whom the Berardenga land takes its name.

The typical *castrum* (castle-fortress) of the 11th and 12th centuries generally included the lord's manor house, but also more modest houses for workmen and farmers, and various storehouses to ensure survival in case of a siege. It was surrounded by defensive walls and crowned by one or more towers to watch for enemies, and usually rose on an elevated position that was easily defensible.

The earliest existing documents regarding Montalto castle itself are from the 11th century¹, and imply that Montalto was already a well-established community at that time. A census document from 1202² shows over 40 families living in its *corte* (which included not only the castle but the land belonging to it as well).





A fresco in the second floor hallway shows the coat of arms of "Giovanni Palmieri, Knight of Caesar, Palatine Count, first lord of Montalto, 15 June 1546."



A wooden shield in the entry hall depicts the coats of arms of a number of noble families, with the Palmieri in the center. At its crown is the Palmieri motto: "Iustus ut palma florebit" (the just man shall flourish like a palm).



The coat of arms of the "Counts Berardeschi, Lords of Montalto, 11th to 14th Centuries."



Del Testa



Venturi Guelfi



Colombini



Nuti



Falconetti



Palmieri

The entry hall is decorated with geometric motifs and the coats of arms of various families related to the Palmieris.

Read more:

The book is available at Montalto's reception

or online at [Blurb](#)