

HISTORY

■ Monterchi's position at the confluence of two rivers - the Cerfone and the Padonchia, both tributaries of the Tiber - at the mouth of a narrow valley defined by a system of parallel hill systems has led it to being populated since ancient times. Archaeological finds of fragments of pottery and mosaics indicate the presence of both the Etruscans and the Romans. The region was also important due to one of antiquity's most significant communication paths, the *Arretium-Tifernum Tiberinum* (Arezzo-Città di Castello) road. In the VII century the *castrum Montis Herculis* was, together with Citerna and Celle, a Lombard outpost of which remain the ruins of old towers and a pair of churches dedicated to St. Martino and St. Michele Arcangelo.

■ At times Monterchi was subject to Città di Castello, at times to Arezzo, until the Tarlati family of Pietramala consolidated its power. The Tarlati remained in control until 1440, when, following the Battle of Anghiari, the entire region of the Valtiberina was conquered by the Florentines. This became the most prosperous period in Monterchi's history, for in addition to important architectural works (city walls, fortifications, buildings), there was a great increase in agricultural and commercial activities (the planting of woad and silk). Moreover, numerous corporations and confraternities of craftsmen and clerics were founded. In 1785 the town was ordered to construct a cemetery outside the city centre and to redefine its controversial borders with the Papal State: both were located in the area surrounding Santa Maria a Momentana, where Piero della Francesca had painted the *Madonna del Parto* fresco.

■ Following its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy (12 March 1860), the most important act of construction was the Arezzo-Fossato di Vico railway (destroyed in the Second World War), which was instrumental in the movement of people and merchandise.

■ In 1917 a violent earthquake caused enormous damage and numerous deaths. The Second World War also subjected Monterchi to loss and destruction: recovery was slow and differed from that in neighbouring cities and towns where industrial development had brought progress but also significant changes to the environment.

Today Monterchi can rightly be considered the last authentic piece of Tuscany where the relationship between human beings and the environment still retains a harmonic dimension.



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MONTERCHI
ART CULTURE LANDSCAPE



ORIGINS The name *Mons Herculis* reveals the existence of an area dedicated to the cult of the hero who, according to Greek mythology, taken up first by the Etruscans and then the Romans, liberated the population of Lerna by killing the hydra, the monster of the swamps. The hill is flanked by another hill called Montaione, Monte di Giunone (Juno's Hill), the protector of women in labour, and the river that runs through the valley, the Cerfone, whose name recalls the Umbrian-Etruscan god of Cerfio/a, an androgynous fertility figure.

LA MADONNA DEL PARTO A masterpiece of Renaissance art painted by Piero della Francesca in the middle of the fifteenth-century. Originally completed for a church at the border between Monterchi and Citerna called Santa Maria a Momentana, a location known since antiquity for its fertility-related traditions and rituals, the artwork was restored at the beginning of the 1990s and relocated for the occasion to the town's former primary school: the place, subsequently transformed into a museum, where it can still be found today.

SURROUNDINGS Monterchi is the ideal place for excursions by foot, by bicycle, or on horseback. Departing from the Parco Fluviale, located in the lower part of the town, you pass easily from the Cerfone valley to that of Padonchia and then back up to the ridge of St. Lorenzo e Borgacciano, which offers an incredible view of the woods, valleys, castles, churches, and distant mountains. Moreover, the town is also a stop on the *Cammini di Francesco in Toscana*, a trail which every year welcomes a great number of pilgrims and fans of slow tourism.



HISTORIC CENTRE The urban layout of Monterchi is a beautiful example of a medieval town that developed around its castle. Do not miss Piazza Umberto I, the site of the Palazzo Comunale, destroyed in the earthquake of 1917 and reconstructed in 1939 according to plans by Michelucci; the seventeenth-century Palazzo Marzocchi; the archpriesthood; and the Church of St. Simeone Profeta, the town's patron saint. The current town tower, reconstructed after the earthquake of 1917, honours the 92 citizens of Monterchi who died during the First World War.

THE MUSEUM OF SCALES Inaugurated in 2012 in Palazzo Massi, it hosts a good 150 examples of lever scales, balances, and weights documenting six hundred years of history. The examples on display come from the collection of Velio Ortolani, who, attracted by systems of measurement and the extraordinary beauty of the ironwork combined with the perfection of the technical elements, forms, and decorations of suggestive aesthetic value, amassed a great number of these instruments over the course of fifty years.

EVENTS AND CUISINE Some of the most important events of the year are the *Monterchi Festival*, a summer music festival featuring jazz and classical music; the *Sagra della Polenta* (the polenta festival) during the third weekend of September; the *Presepe vivente* (living nativity scene) which takes place during Christmas; and, last but not least, the traditional *Fiera di S. Antonio* (festival of St. Antonio) the weekend of the 17th of January. The area is also renowned for its olive oil, cold cuts, cheeses, mushrooms, truffles, and chestnuts.