



1:80000 scale. Map created on Inkatlas.com. Copyright OpenStreetMap contributors (openstreetmap.org), OpenTopoMap (CC-BY-SA), 2021.

The numbering of the church refers to the **General Map of the Romanesque Hills Route**.

#### How to get to and visit

##### the church of Madonna della Neve:

Strada Provinciale 20, Cocconato (AT).

GPS Coordinates: Lat. 45.083497 | Long 8.055055

Open the first Sunday of each month in the period from April to October, supervised by the volunteers. Opening in the morning from 10.00 to 13.00; afternoon from 15.00 to 18.00.

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#### Local attractions in and around Cocconato:

- Church of Santa Maria della Consolazione;
- Palazzo Comunale, Gothic civil building;
- Church of SS. Trinità, Church of Santa Caterina;
- Church of San Michele, Tonengo;
- Church of San Giorgio, Aramengo.

#### Local events and shows:

- Ancient Fair of San Marco, April, Cocconato;
- Cocco... Cheese, May, Cocconato;
- Calici di stelle, August, Cocconato;
- Cocco... Wine, first weekend of September, Cocconato;
- Festa patronale, second weekend of September, Cocconato;
- Fiera Medievale, third Saturday of September, Cocconato;
- Historic Donkey Palio, 4th Sun. of September, Cocconato;
- The Borgo and its Nativity Scenes, December, Cocconato.



Social Promotion  
Association

#### Information point and contacts:

Albugnano (AT), Abbey of Vezzolano

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www.vezzolano.it

Facebook: turismo InCollina

Instagram: reteromanicadicollina



#### The Romanesque Hills Route

promotes knowledge and use of the romanese heritage of the local areas between the river Po and Monferrato.

With the collaboration of:



With the support of:

Municipalities and Parishes of Albugnano, Andezeno, Aramengo, Berzano di San Pietro, Brusasco, Buttigliera d'Asti, Casalborgone, Castagneto Po, Castell'Alfero, Castelnuovo don Bosco, Cavagnolo, Cerreto d'Asti, Cocconato, Cortazzone, Lauriano, Marentino, Mombello di Torino, Montafia, Montechiaro d'Asti, Montiglio Monferrato, Portacomaro, San Sebastiano da Po, Tigliole, Tonengo.

Texts and photos by Associazione InCollina © 2020

Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)



# Church of Madonna della Neve

Cocconato

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Abbeys and churches between  
the river Po and Monferrato



### Description of the local area

The church of Madonna della Neve (also known as della Pieve) stands on a hill between Cocconato and Montiglio, about 1 kilometre east of the town. The hillside, which is nowadays mainly used for vine growing, lies between the Versa Valley and the Marcellina Valley, where a large number of finds and material from the Roman era have been uncovered, ever since the 19th century. The historical importance of the site was reaffirmed in the middle ages by the passage of a road which partly retraced the Roman road between Hasta Pompeia (Asti) and Industria (Monteu da Po).



### Historical details

The first documentary evidence of the ancient church is from 1250, recording the formation of the parish church of (plebs Cochonati) belonging to the diocese of Vercelli. In 1474 it passed to the diocese of Casale, which consisted largely of parishes of Monferrato separated from that of Vercelli. From the late 16th century onwards it gradually lost its importance and, following a destiny common to other parishes, it expired and left room for the church situated at the top of the town, near the castle. At the end of the 1600s the church, named Madonna della Neve, was rebuilt, even though the site had been stripped of materials to be recycled in building the parish church.

The features of the new construction, with a single nave and two side chapels, can be seen from a plan in the municipal land registry of 1790, which also reveals that the road from Cocconato to Tuffo passed to the south of the church at that time. Over the following centuries, with thorough rebuilding work, the church took on its current appearance, with the side chapels demolished and the building of a small bell tower in bricks (1832). Further major restoration work on the interior was carried out in 1989; in 2017 structural reinforcement was completed to stop slippage of the clay soil the church stands on.

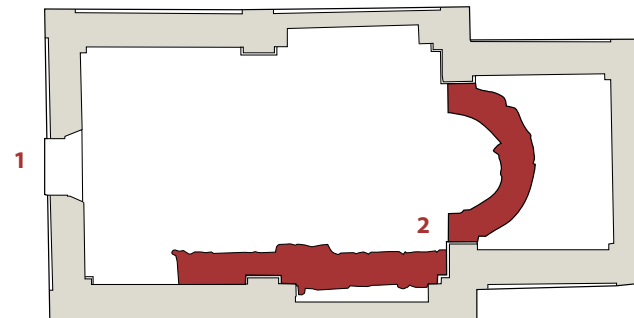
### Description

A lot of information about the ancient parish church was gathered from the archaeological dig that was carried out inside the building during renovation and rebuilding in 1989. The large number of alterations the building has undergone over the centuries have left its Romanesque origins almost completely invisible and they were revealed only after excavations, from which it has emerged that the original church may date back to the Xth century. Elements typical of the high middle ages were found, including column drums and a cubic capital, which is the only decorative element currently still in the church and used as the base of the altar. The capital is decorated on four faces, three of which are clearly legible: each face is covered with plain motifs made with a clear graffiti sign (roundels with intertwined circles, rosettes and leafy bands). The full decoration of the capital and the discovery, supported by surveys, of a small semi-circular apse, lead to the hypothesis that the building had three naves, terminating in apses, and the one that was found was that of a side nave.

Outside the Romanesque absidal wall, but on the inside of the perimeter of the modern building, the hollows of two tombs were identified, proving the existence of a cemetery on the surrounding land. The load-bearing walls are in brick and sandstone, completely plastered over in recent times. The side walls of the hall are separated into two vaults by a half pilaster joining into a flat cornice at the top. The presbytery area is narrower and has a lower roof than that of the hall; both roofs have two pitches with Piedmontese style roof tiles.

**1. The façade**, XIXth century, has a tympanum above it, hiding the roof and a low bell tower in brickwork on its right side. There are three windows, one to each side of the central door and one above the door.

**2. The interior** has been completely remodelled: what remains visible from the seventeenth century layout are the elegant barrel vaults with lunettes, both in the hall (west side) and in the presbytery. During the work completed in 1989, a collapsed section of vaulting was reconstructed and the work on the floor involved excavations that brought to light a part of the Romanesque foundations.



Plan of the church of Madonna della Neve made during archaeological excavations (arch. survey M. Cappellino, 1989); Romanesque walls in red.



The three plastered brick altars were eliminated, together with the stucco frame of the altarpiece of the largest altar, which had all been badly damaged by penetrating damp.

As mentioned, the only remaining Romanesque feature is the graffiti decorated capital currently forming the base of the altar.

Other finds originating from the ancient parish church can be seen in the centre of Cocconato, particularly in the walls of the present parish church and the retaining wall on its north side, for which hewn blocks of local sandstone were recycled, as well as a monolithic arch with a single window, typical of the Romanesque apses.

### Interesting fact

In 1800, a Chappe semaphore telegraph station was installed on the mediaeval tower that was the only remaining part of the castle of the Counts Radicati, at the wish of Napoleon, who wanted to connect Paris with Milan and Venice. Between Turin and Milan the most suitable points for this purpose were identified in the Monferrato hills. From the tower of the Madama Cristina palace in the centre of Turin, the signals were transmitted to the station on Superga and from there to Albugnano and on to Cocconato, about 6km away as the crow flies. This semaphore telegraph was used for communications between Italy and France from 1809 to 1814.