



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 San Lorenzo:

C/o the cemetery, Montiglio Monferrato (AT).

GPS coordinates: Lat. 45.0623423 | Long. 8.1050185

Open the first Sunday of each month in the period from April to October, supervised by the volunteers.

On request on other days.

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Info Comune: www.comune.montigliomonferrato.at.it

Local attractions in and around Montiglio Monferrato:

- Castle of Montiglio Monferrato;
- Church of Santi sebastiano e Fabiano, Scandeluzza;
- Castle of Colcavagno;
- Church of Santi Vittore e Corona, Colcavagno;
- Church of Santi Pietro e Giorgio, Piovà Massaia;
- Church of Santi Nazario e Celso, Montechiaro d'Asti
- Castle of Piea.

Local events and shows:

- Regional Festival of the Truffle, October, Montiglio Monf.;
- Patron Saint's festival of San Lorenzo, August, Montiglio Monferrato;
- Moncirco, from October to April, Montiglio Monferrato.



Information points and contacts:

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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, Cortazzo, Lauriano, Marentino, Mombello di Torino, Montafia, Montechiaro d'Asti, Montiglio Monferrato, Portacomaro, San Sebastiano da Po, Tigliole, Tonengo.

Texts and photos by Associazione InCollina © 2018

Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)

Rev03, July 2022



Church of San Lorenzo

Montiglio Monferrato

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Abbeys and churches between the river Po and Monferrato

Description of the local area

The church stands at the end of the tree-lined entrance road to the cemetery area, in the hills (260 m.a.s.l.) about 600 metres south-east of Montiglio, on the western face of the Versa valley.



Historical details

The church of San Lorenzo was first mentioned in a list of pieve churches in the Vercelli area in the Xth century. In the mid-1300s, its plebeian jurisdiction covered a dozen churches in the area. At the end of the 1400s it passed from the diocese of Vercelli to the new diocese of Casale. In 1577 the church seemed to have become just a cemetery church and no longer suitable for parish functions and a new church was built for that. Over the two following centuries the building underwent restoration work, which changed its architectural features to a greater extent than many other romanesque churches in the Monferrato area. In particular, documents from the last decades of the 1700s show evidence of repeated spells of neglect followed by rebuilding, during which the architectural features of the original building were altered quite noticeably.

A plan ante-dating the work done from 1788-96 (a copy of which is kept in the official Superintendency archives) shows the cemetery with the church with three apses and three large naves. At the end of the 1800s, the church had a neo-classical façade, which was demolished and replaced with the present-day one during major restoration work carried out between 1952 and 1959.

Description

As a result of the radical transformations undergone over the centuries, the building today features a single nave (15.5 m long and 8 m wide), flanked by six semi-hexagonal chapels, each with a single opening, and, in the presbytery area, two rectangular rooms protruding from the church perimeter; in the centre, on the east side, there is a semi-circular apse, separated into three areas by two pilasters.

1. The **entrance**, placed on the west face is in line with the hall. At



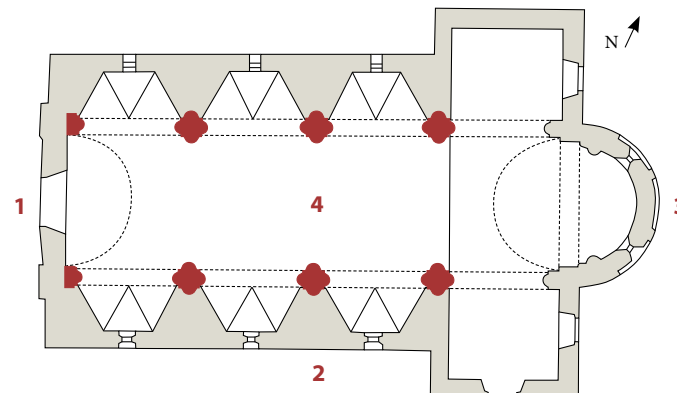
the centre of the **façade**, which features protruding tiers, there is a rose window, above the durmast door. There is a second entrance on the south side of the rectangular room.

The structure of the walls consists of blocks of dressed stone, which was also used for the side chapels, while in the apse there are alternating bands of stone and rows of bricks. The side walls carry the marks of headstones, which were once fixed to the masonry. More ancient building elements can still be made out in the texture of the wall masonry. The roof, with Piedmontese curved tiles laid on a timber frame, is gabled with pavilion over the nave, a single pitch on the side chapels, three pitches on the rectangular rooms and a semi-dome on the apse.

The external decorations are quite modest on the north side, but more elaborate **on the south (2)**, consisting of a crown of hanging arches interwoven with corbels sculpted in various fashion, surmounted by a cornice decorated with vegetation themes.

3. The crown on the **apse** consists of two bands of bricks and stone, enclosing a diamond shaped decoration alternating in terracotta and stone, above which there is a billet style cornice, a motif which recurs inside the building as well.

4. The **central nave** is covered by a barrel vault ceiling in bricks, the vaults over the side chapels are in three segments, again in bricks, there is a wooden ceiling over the side rooms and the apse has a semi-dome vaulted ceiling in exposed bricks. The features



that immediately catch the eye of the visitors as they enter the church, however, are the **cruciform pillars, capitals and arches of the central nave**, the only authentic part of the romanesque building, "realm of harmony in diversity". The row of pillars on the north side features half-columns towards the central nave, while the row on the south has wide, flat pilasters. The bases of the pillars on the north have a rounded shape, while those on the south are parallelepiped shaped. Looking at the last but one pillar on the right, where part of the wall cladding between the chapels has been removed, evidence can be seen of the original basilica layout of the church, with three naves. The decoration can be seen on the side of the capital facing the old side nave, which has now been replaced by the chapels; the original wall structure covered with blocks of stone can also be seen.



The capitals, which are of a high standard of modelling and decoration, are full of subjects that recur in mediaeval symbolism, a direct means of communication to the faithful: serpents, demonic monsters, tempting mermaids with twin tails and, placed over the central capitals, images of the lamb and the chimera, symbols of good and evil; these sculptures, which are probably more ancient, were perhaps originally located on the façade.

The vegetation and geometrical decorations that complete the symbolic ones are reminiscent of the other romanesque churches in the area, especially the abbey of Santa Fede di Cavagnolo.

The floor is in concrete and the recently constructed altar in stone on a brick pedestal.

Interesting fact

The stone used together with the terracotta in building the church is the so-called "Pietra da Cantoni", a particular, locally found, marl-limestone rock, which is soft and easy to work with when freshly quarried, but hardens over time in contact with the air. Since this area was covered by the sea millions of years ago, it is not uncommon to find fossil remains from extremely remote geological eras inside the stones.