

COLOMBARO

It rises on the inner moraine circle of the Sebino amphitheatre, close to the slopes of Monte Alto.

The toponym, derived from 'colombarium', may mean the building where pigeons nest. The custom of breeding pigeons, practised since Roman times, remained in use until at least the 18th century. The building of columbarium towers was widespread, especially in the Middle Ages when their use was usually reserved for the nobility and ecclesiastics.

The origins date back to the early Middle Ages as evidenced by the ruins of the small oratory dedicated to St. Michael (a saint venerated by the Lombards after their conversion to Christianity), located on the slopes of Monte Alto, and the 9th-century sculptures found in Santa Maria in Zenighe.

The historic town planning has an agricultural character and developed in contrade (buildings along roads) and scattered farmsteads. An exception is the locality of Castello (Cortivo), due to the presence of a compact nucleus of buildings among which one can recognise a tower and a group of houses that were part of the medieval 'castrum'. Numerous buildings have retained an evocative appearance, both for the quality of their walls, all made of exposed stone, and for their curtain-like layout.

The castle is not, however, the only fortified settlement in Colombaro as on the slopes of Monte Alto, above the ancient core, are the ruins of an ancient fortress mentioned in 13th century documents. In contrada Casalini, on the other hand, stands an isolated tower with tiny openings (13th century) that was part of a small fortified enclosure probably belonging to the powerful Oldofredi family of Iseana. To the north of the village, near the district of Zenighe, is the old parish church of Santa Maria, whose present form derives from the rebuilding of an older church in the second half of the 15th century. The architecture is sober and typical of rural churches of the time: a rectangular presbytery with a cross vault and a hall marked by transverse pointed arches that directly support the roof structure.

In the first decades of the 18th century, the new parish church was built in a central position in relation to the scattered settlement, on the site where an older church dedicated to St Victor once stood. The new parish church also inherited the dedication to St Mary of the Assumption. Other subsidiary churches are the church of San Rocco (15th century), now converted into a residence, the small church of Sant'Afra (15th-18th century), a private oratory belonging to the Barboglio family, and the church of Santa Rita, built at the end of the 20th century by private initiative. In an intermediate position, between the centre of Colombaro to the south and Zenighe to the north, is Palazzo Ragnoli, formerly Lana.

The residence, with its severe 17th and 18th century appearance, was built on pre-existing 15th and 16th century buildings and preserves the vast walled brolo that surrounded the estate. Attached to the palace is the 17th-century Church of the Madonna di Tirano.