

# The Dovadola Fortress

Going up Val Montone, about eight kilometres from Castrocaro, you will find Dovadola and its imposing fortress. It is on the Strada Statale 67 Tosco Romagnola.

As for the origin of the name of this pleasant town on the slopes of the Apennines, many historians agree that it comes from Duo Vadora (plural of the Latin vadum), which in medieval Latin meant “two fords”. This refers to the peculiar position of the town, which is situated in a bend of the Montone river.

In Dovadola there are two bridges over the stream: the Badia Bridge and the Annunziata Bridge. Recently, these two bridges were joined by a third, also in the Badia area, built in 1925 when the current Viale Zauli was created.

This area has been inhabited since the Neolithic period, as confirmed by archaeological findings. Even though no precise documentation exists to date, it is believed that Etruscan and Gaul settlements alternated over the centuries until the arrival of the Romans.

Of the eleven fortresses that were built there, only eight have been preserved. The strategic position of the town, midway between Romagna and Tuscany, made it often the target of attacks, military crossings and battles.

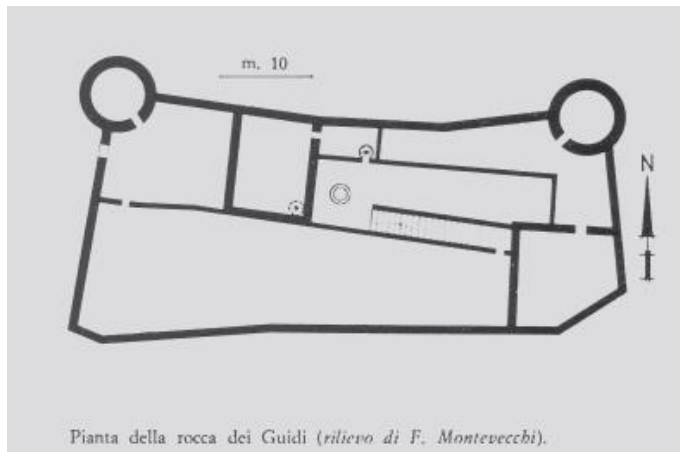


## History of the Rocca dei Conti Guidi

The first certain information about the existence of the fortress, which many believe was built on the foundations of a pre-existing Lombard fortress, dates back to 1021, the year in which Dovadola, along with other surrounding lands and castles, came under the control of the Church of Ravenna.

Some documents show that in 1116 it was the property of the Cistercian monks of the Abbey of Sant'Andrea, who then gave it as a fief to the Traversari family of Ravenna.

In the 12th century it was taken over by the Guidi family, who were forced to return it to the Traversari family after the defeat of Guido Guerra III of Modigliana by the Florentines, following the peace treaty signed on 15 December 1192.



Pianta della rocca dei Guidi (rilievo di F. Montevocchi).

Only a few years later, the Guidi family regained possession of it, although the struggle for control continued for another three decades, until the Traversari finally renounced all rights on 9 February 1225.

For their loyalty to the imperial cause, on 29 November 1220, in Monterosi di Sutri, the Guidi received a diploma from Frederick II of Swabia, attesting to the power of the family, which owned about two hundred castles.

As the birth year of the Guidi dynasty, scholars assume 1225. The foundation act was the division of Marcovaldo's possessions from those of his brothers Guido (who was put in charge of the Bagno branch), Tegrimo (Modigliana branch), Aghinolfo (Romena branch) and Ruggero.

Marcovaldo soon abandoned the Ghibelline side to support the Guelph cause, starting a tradition that would see the Guidi counts of Dovadola remain in power in these lands, distinguishing them from all the rest of the family, both due to their membership of the Guelph party, as mentioned above, and for the positions they held in the Republics of Florence and Siena. Marcovaldo's political choice proved to be particularly far-sighted and allowed the Guidi family to maintain control of the feud for over two centuries.

In order to defend the territories, the head of the family himself ordered the construction of a system of important interconnected fortifications that protected Dovadola with walls and bastions.

Marcovaldo died in 1229 at a young age. He was succeeded by his sons Guido Guerra and Ruggero, who were among the greatest defenders of the Guelphs in Romagna and Tuscany. In 1248 Pope Innocent IV appointed Guido Guerra captain general of the Papal States, a title with which he is said to have taken part in the insignificant Seventh Crusade ordered by Louis IX of France between 1249 and 1250.

Guido Guerra was one of the century's greatest captains and distinguished himself at the Battle of Montaperti, fought on 4 September 1260 between Ghibelline troops led by Siena and Guelph troops led by Florence.

In 1265 he became royal vicar of Tuscany. The 14th-century Florentine historian Filippo Villani described him as "a man of great spirit, who always wished and thought of great things; gallant and warlike; very ready in deeds of arms; scornful of danger and almost too careful...".

Dante Alighieri, a political opponent of Guido Guerra, placed him in the Inferno in Canto XVI, which takes place in the third circle of the seventh circle, where the violent against God,

nature and art are punished under a rain of fire: "These, the footsteps of whom thou seest me tread, / All that naked and naked goes, / was of greater degree than thou believest: / A grandson was of the good Gualdrada; / Guido "War" was named, and in his life / he did with much wisdom and with the sword."

Guido Guerra left earthly life in October 1272, without having fathered any sons. He was thus succeeded in the command of Dovadola by his nephew Guido Selvatico, son of his brother Ruggero, who died in 1268.

In 1276, in order to encourage the Guelphs to return to Forlì, Guido Selvatico was sent by the Florentines to fight against Guglielmo Ordelauffi and Paganino Orgogliosi. Later he was podestà in Siena and Prato.

On 11 June 1289, with 3,000 infantrymen and 400 lances, he fought in the Battle of Campaldino on the side of the Guelphs, mainly Florentines and Sienese, against the Ghibellines (Aretines) and the White Guelphs, under whose banner Dante Alighieri himself fought in that memorable battle.

Ten years later, on 19 October 1299, Guido Selvatico ceded certain rights to the castles of Dovadola, Montacuto, Demisigliolo, Castel Ruggeri, Rovedola and others in exchange for half of the castles of Tredozio, Collina, Monte Bovaro and the monastery of San Benedetto in Alpe.

In 1300 he joined the Black Guelphs and fought for their cause for six years. Giovanni Boccaccio, in his 'Trattatello in laude di Dante', describes how, between 1314 and 1316, just before the supreme poet retired to Ravenna, Guido Selvatico entertained him at his court. This is evidenced by Alighieri's detailed descriptions of these places in Romagna, especially in Canto V and XVI of the *Inferno*.

Guido Selvatico died in 1316, and left four children. Ruggero, also a friend of Dante, was the first to inherit his father's estate.

Ruggero had already been elected Podestà of Florence in 1304. As supreme captain, he clashed with Castruccio Castracani.

During his reign, however, relations with Florence, to whom the Guidi di Dovadola had always offered to serve, began to break down.

After Ruggero's death in September 1332, three of his eleven sons took over the leadership of Dovadola: Marcovaldo, Carlo and Francesco.

In 1340 Marcovaldo joined the rebellion of the "magnates" and was declared a rebel. After being sentenced to the confiscation and destruction of all his possessions, Portico was conquered by the Florentines, who occupied all the Guidi properties in Tuscany and Romagna.

When Marcovaldo pleaded for reconciliation, a commission was sent to him, ordering him to return many of the confiscated lands in order to commemorate how faithfully his ancestors had served the Florentine Republic.

Marcovaldo died in 1348, struck by the Black Death that ravaged Europe and reduced its population by more than a third.

Once in power, Carlo assumed the leadership of the Guelphs of Romagna and became the Ordelauffi's number one enemy.

The fighting between the two families continued until May 10, 1351, when Ludovico Ordelauffi besieged the castle of Dovadola. The fierce defense of the Guidi led Ludovico to call for reinforcements, which were led by his mother, Marzia degli Ubaldini, known as Cia.

It is thanks to the intervention of this extraordinary woman, granddaughter of Maghinardo Pagani da Susinana, that the Ordelauffi overcame the resistance and took the fortress on May 26. Charles was taken prisoner and transferred to Forli, where he was released soon after, thanks to the intercession of the Florentine Republic. He was killed in the battle of Savignano on August 18, 1355, fighting against the Ordelauffi at the side of Cardinal Egidio Albornoz, who had been sent to Romagna to regain control of the rebellious lands of central Italy from the papacy.

In 1358, after Albornoz had defeated Francesco Ordelauffi, the castle of Dovadola returned to the Guidi, under the command of Francesco, brother of Carlo and Marcovaldo II.

According to the census of the ecclesiastical estates made in 1371 by Cardinal Anglico de Grimoard, Dovadola belonged to Count Francesco and was equipped with 120 hearths and a powerful fortress.

In 1378, Francis welcomed the writer Giovanni Fiorentino to the castle, following the tradition established by his ancestors, who had given refuge to none other than Dante Alighieri. With the support of the papal legate, Francis incited Portico and the ancient possessions of the Upper Valdarno to rebel against Florence. Therefore, on three different occasions, armed troops were sent from Tuscany to dissuade the Guidi from their hostile intentions. The agreement reached between the Church State and Florence then convinced Francis to relinquish possession of these lands forever.

After his death in 1386, the castle passed into the hands of his son Malatesta, known as the Tyrant: "A corrupt and cruel man, cowardly and insane, he tried to regain Portico; but the Florentines, with their infamous arts, forced him to cede Dovadola to them as well" (Don Pompeo Nadiani, 1912).

And Dovadola had always been among the targets of the expansionist aims of the Lily Republic, so in 1405 Malatesta, tired and indebted from the constant attacks to which he was subjected, decided to donate it to the Florentines along with his other possessions. After ceding full jurisdiction over all the territories, he retired to the fiefdom of Tredozio. His death in 1407 marked the end of the two hundred year reign of the Guidi.

The decline of the glorious lineage marked the step from feudal to lordly times. His sons Carlo and Guelfo tried unsuccessfully to retake Dovadola, which, in 1424, was conquered by the Visconti army, led by Angelo della Pergola. The Lords of Milan offered the castle to the Church, which held it until, in 1433, it was conquered again by the Ordelauffi, who ceded it to Guelfo Guidi.

In 1434 Dovadola was sacked by troops commanded by Baldaccio di Citerna, captain of the Republic of Florence, at war with the Ordelauffi.

In 1438 the Florentines returned to besiege Dovadola, and to Guelfo's aid Guidantonio Manfredi then ran from Faenza with his army.

The following year Charles was killed and Guelph was driven into exile. "After more than two centuries, the star of the Guidi in Dovadola waned, and almost simultaneously also of their relatives in the other castles of Romagna and Tuscany." (Don Pompeo Nadiani, 1912). Dovadola became part of Florence's dominions and was governed by a podestà, while the defense of the fortress was entrusted to a castellan.

In 1467 it was besieged by Bartolomeo Colleoni. Colleoni was on the side of the Venetians in the war with the Florentine Republic. The town and the castle fell and were again plundered and set on fire. The archives of memories and documents deposited in the Rocca and the Comune were destroyed in the fire.

Machiavelli, in his *Istorie fiorentine* (lib. VII), briefly described this event as follows: "(...) As the Florentines were not yet in order, they plowed the village of Dovadola".

From that moment on, there was no stopping the decline of the fortress. On March 22, 1661, the earthquake that shook all of Romagna seriously damaged the fortress. Part of the walls and towers collapsed.

Until 1859, Dovadola was part of the Grand Duchy of Florence, ruled first by the Medici and then by the Lorraine Hapsburgs. During the Napoleonic occupation, it suffered the same fate as the other territories conquered by the French, although it continued to be part of the Grand Duchy.

In May 1811, by a special decree, the Department of the Arno was established, which united Dovadola with Bagno, Verghereto, Galeata, Santa Sofia, Premilcuore, Portico, Rocca San Casciano, Castrocaro, Terra del Sole and the district of Modigliana. This grouping, however, was short-lived, as the fall of Bonaparte and the Congress of Vienna favored the restoration of the pre-Poleonic order.

The chronicles of 1814 tell of an episode in which a band of robbers from Faenza, armed to the teeth, entered the town and committed all sorts of nefarious acts.

In 1855, Dovadola was struck by a cholera epidemic which, more victims than anywhere else.

From 1861, the year of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, Dovadola belonged to the Province of Florence until 1923, when it came under the jurisdiction of the Province of Forlì.

## Architecture and structure of the Dovadola Fortress

The small group of buildings known as the "Murata" was the first to be built, surrounded by a wall and defended by the fortress on the mountain side. Still preserved is the entrance gate, surmounted by the 19th century Clock Tower, which in its lower part was probably adapted to the original defensive tower of the unique castle gate, although it was then modified several times over the centuries.

At the beginning of Florentine domination, the walls were extended to include the houses built near the fortress.

The shape of the perimeter remained almost unchanged until March 27, 1838, when some buildings were demolished to make way for today's Matteotti street, which was to serve as a provincial road.

In 1925, due to increasing traffic, the rocky part at the foot of the fortress was cut away to create the current Zauli Avenue from Montepaolo. This operation separated the fortress from the rest of the inhabited village and fatally altered its structure.

The fortress of Dovadola, a fine example of medieval military architecture, stands on a spur of pudding rock overlooking the town center. Originally consisting of an isolated tower, it was later transformed by the Guidi family into a fortified palace. It represents the fortified core of a vast defensive system that included a series of other fortifications, including: Castel Ruggero, Montacuto, San Rufillo, San Martino in Avello, Montemaggiore, Domigiolo, Colmano, Rovedola and Casole. It also included the Torre delle Colombaie and the Torre delle Casacce, which served as lookout points.

As already written about the Castrocaro Fortress, the Dovadola Fortress seems to be perfectly integrated into the rocky physiognomy on which it was built, so that it seems to be an integral part of the landscape, a conviction that is strengthened by the rich vegetation that surrounds it.

The fortress is made up of three levels, or rather three blocks, stacked on top of each other and connected by forced corridors that lead to the main entrance, which was equipped with a drawbridge, of which the tracks of the mechanical lifting beams can still be seen at the top of the keep. In case of siege or loss of position, these passages were intended to allow the evacuation of the areas no longer under control and the retreat to the interior of the keep.

The entrance, reached via the bridge, is surmounted by the coat of arms of the Blanc Tassinari family. It leads to the inner courtyard, surrounded by the defensive curtains, which culminate in the northwest corner in a circular bastion of two levels, one of which is underground.

On the side of the entrance and in the northern curtain wall were two embrasures.



On the right is the entrance to the terracing, which is bordered by the southern curtain wall, at the ends of which are two polygonal bastions, and on the lintel of which is still visible a Latin phrase that is difficult to read.

Inside the keep, 30 meters high, there are six overlapping rooms, two of which are underground.

The fourth and fifth rooms from the bottom served as the residence of the castellan and were equipped with a monumental fireplace surmounted by a cornice, a basin carved from a single block of sandstone and a niche surrounded by slabs of pietra serena. Three of the walls have windows, while on the south side there is a round portal in shaped ashlar with traces of a coat of arms and at the base undecipherable Gothic characters with the date 1339.

On the top floor of the keep, a ladder leads to the top of the tower, which originally had merlons, now replaced by a wall, under which the old corbels are still visible. From the top of the tower, which rises 47 meters above street level, there is a wide view of the Montone valley.



Although the neglect of the past centuries has damaged the fortress in many places, of all the fortifications that belonged to the Conti Guidi it is the one in the best state of preservation, with some structures intact, such as the curtains, the ramparts and the keep.

Already at the beginning of the 20th century, the scholar Don Pompeo Nadiani called for the restoration and enhancement of the Rocca dei Conti Guidi. It is common duty not to ignore the progressive degradation of ancient buildings and do as much as possible to save them, because they represent a unique testimony of a bygone era, distant in centuries, but our ancestors and we are beholden to them since they are part of our history, our culture, and the evolution of our civilization.

The ongoing restoration of the building has affected the most important parts of the complex, including the high watchtower. The restoration of the section of the castle facing the village, overlooking the SS 67, has been put on hold.