



# Piagnaro Castle

PONTREMOLI

**Location:** Piagnaro Castle is located on the hilltop which dominates Pontremoli towards the north.

**Type of castle:** The castle and the structures were intended for military use.

**Construction period:** 11th century with later demolitions and renovations

**First appearance in historical sources:** The first quote that refers to Pontremoli is in Sigerico's travel itinerary. In 1110 AD, during his descent towards Rome, the Emperor Henry V had to conquer Pontremoli, which was equipped with high towers that blocked his passage; "Expugnavit oppidum quod Pons Tremulus vocatur, altissimis turribus munitum".

**Strategic role:** The fortress had defensive and road control functions. It was also used to garrison military troops. Frederick II, in a letter addressed to his son King Enzo, describes Pontremoli as the only possible gate offering access to Tuscany.









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**Further in use:** In the 20th century, the upper floors of the fortress were turned into schools and apartments for civilians, whereas the ground floors hosted the prison, where we can still see the first rudimental restrooms.

**Current condition:** At the present time, the castle has been completely restored. Some of the rooms which have been renovated are used as a guest house, while the others are part of the museum.

**Viewing:** Nowadays the Castle hosts the museum Museo delle Statue Stele Augusto Cesare Ambrosi, which is open to the public. [www.statuestele.org](http://www.statuestele.org)

**History:** Piagnaro Castle was built around 1000 AD and it constitutes an integral part of the defensive system of the town, together with the walls and the defensive towers. The name “Piagnaro” derives from the word “piagne”, i.e. sandstone sheets used within the Lunigiana area to construct the roof parts of residential buildings.

At the beginning of the 12th century, Pontremoli became a free medieval commune, even though it was influenced by the Malaspina and the neighbouring communes of Parma and Piacenza. At the beginning of the 13th century, Pontremoli lost its independence and Emperor Henry VII gave it to the Fieschi.

Since then, Pontremoli and its castle have been under the rule of several lords, until they became the property of the Spanish monarchs – together with other territories in Lunigiana – for about a century (1550-1650); after that, the area was given to the Republic of Genoa, and after only three years to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. This was a long period of economic stability, and this led to the impressive development of the town’s baroque style

**Structure:** The castle was characterized by continual demolitions and renovations. Nowadays it has a stone portal topped by the coat of arms of the Medici and followed by further gates leading to the central rooms, which nowadays host the museum, and to the courtyard, where there is an ancient well. In the courtyard there is a stairway which leads to a terrace, from where the whole valley can be admired, and this is the point where the oldest part of the castle begins. It consists of a 20m tall, semi-elliptical fortified tower and a door situated 10m from the ground – which was probably entered by means of a wooden stair –. Its construction, which occurred when Piccinino became lord of Pontremoli in the 15th century, was first mentioned in the Relatione of Antonio Cesena di Varese Ligure in 1558.

This door leads to several rooms which in the past hosted governors and military troops.