

The pieve and bell tower of San Martino of Negrar

Historical documents also record events in the history of the *pieve* of Negrar from the end of the tenth century, but the church, dedicated to San Martino, was rebuilt in the Romanesque period (twelfth century) and again entirely reconstructed in 1809, to the design of the architect Giuseppe Mazza. All that remains of the original church is the twelfth century bell tower.

All we now have of the ancient *pieve* of San Martino of Negrar is therefore its bell tower, though this is the most imposing in the whole area. The whole structure is in tuff with stripes of red brick on each face, as we find in the bell tower of San Zeno in Verona, and also divided three by three pilaster strips that are themselves broken up three times by arches decorated by a toothed strip. The belfry has a mullioned window on each side.

A curious epigraph dating from 1166 and carved into the bell tower tells of how some of the local citizens acquired, with the mediation of the bishop, the rights to tithes previously invested in the feudatories. The fact was considered of such importance that they thought it worth recording on the bell tower of the *pieve* itself.

The inscription occupies the whole width of the bell tower's south face in fact refers to a complex contract that took effect in a number of stages by which the archpriest and the clergyman of the church of San Martino redeemed, with a not insignificant sum, an annual income that had been due for some time, in money and in wine, to certain citizens of Verona.

It is also well worth noting that the inscription on the bell tower of the church of Negrar is a very fine example of medieval writing. There are 64 lines of writing in Roman capitals, with of course elements of uncial and Caroline writing that can still be clearly seen despite erosion of the volcanic tuff by atmospheric agents.

One final curiosity: among the charges to be paid by the clergy of Negrar to free them from these feudal dues, are listed nine bushels of wine, amounting to no less than twenty-seven quintals or 2.7 tonnes, a clear indication that even then the cultivation of the vine was, even if not wholly intensive, already widespread in the valley of Negrar.