



WANDERING THROUGH VILLAGES AND HAMLETS



Those who want to follow the roads of this territory, allowing themselves to be seduced by the villages, by the green wooded slopes and the brown bushy ones, by the wide open fields, will meet a land full of history and tradition, of art and ancient handicraft skills that the creativity and the work of man has deeply marked since the most distant past.

Traces of neolithic and villanovan settlements, and everywhere the extremely civilised Etruscan. And then the transit of Germanic populations of which something remains in certain place names, the blooming of the Communes, the Pisan and Florentine dominations, and the frequent appellative "marittimo" (Rosignano, Casale, Campiglia) to remind us of what Maremma was and the centuries-old task of keeping water away from the land.

But the true attraction of these places is that their deep roots have the breath of today. In the architecture of the villages and the hamlets, in the peasant culture that survives even though integrated with the new industrial one, you can feel that over the years very few past memories have been lost.

An integral part of this memory is the wine that the Etruscans considered to be sacred, that is almost a divinity of the places; and every heath has its own "lare". Every village cultivates and makes wine to "invent" or retrace its own wine: the one that is identified the most with the imagination of the places.

It is for this reason that wine accompanies us from one village to another, blending flavours and scents, commenting on the itinerary of this land that changes appearance from one road to the next, from mountains to plain, from bush to the coastal pinewood.

Our itinerary covers the territory of the eight inland municipalities: from Montescudaio, Guardistallo and Casale Marittimo in the province of Pisa, to Bibbona, Castagneto Carducci, Sassetta, Suvereto and Campiglia in the province of Livorno. Then on the coast, Rosignano, Cecina, San Vincenzo and Piombino.



We are starting this ideal journey through the land of the Etruscans and of wine from Rosignano Marittimo. It was a castle loyal to Pisa that authorised its fortification in 1371. Despite a rough restoration of the Castle that houses the Civic Archeological Museum it is still highly evocative with its Romanesque church.

From the Castle there is a wide-open view: to the north the coast and the hills of Castiglioncello, to the west the small plain that holds the most densely-inhabited area and the industrial plant of Solvay and the sea. Here in Castiglioncello we can recognise the light and the places of Macchiaiolo painting: the names of Diego Martelli, Cabianca, Fattori mark the roads of the village. Then there is the Medici Tower of the sixteenth century, the sea, the cliffs, with the cool green pinewood behind.

Leaving Vada (in Latin literally shallow water, ford) that was the port of Volterra in the late Etrusco-Roman age; abandoned at the end of the sixteenth century, when overcome by marshland and malaria, later to be recovered with the reclaiming of Maremma, we proceed along the coast and the Aurelia road.

Past the bridge over the Cecina river which is the northern limit of the Pisan Maremma, we are in Cecina right away. It is a modern town, born with the reclaiming of the surroundings, today an agricultural, commercial and industrial centre. Worthy of note are the Civic Museum in the Guerrazzi villa and the archeological excavation still in progress in the San Vincenzino district of a Roman villa and its imposing cistern. In Marina di Cecina the hardy pinewood protects the hinterland and the crops from the salt and strong winds off the sea.

We leave Cecina and go towards the Pisan municipality of Montescudaio. Situated on a hill like every Maremman village of ancient origin and with a name that reminds us of the strategic military function of the village throughout the ages, Montescudaio has ancient origins, documented by archaeological remains that prove the existence of human settlements of villanovan times.

It became a commune in 1405. It is endowed with a panorama of rare beauty: behind there is the succession of hills towards Volterra, to the front an open view of the sea. Around it are the hills leading to the Cecina plain, woods, olive groves and vineyards. Taking the road of the "tre comuni" southward, in a few kilometres we reach Guardistallo.



Various remains, now in the Arcaeological Museum of Florence, tell of settlements going back to the neolithic age and an Etruscan presence is also certain. Its name comes from the Germanic “warte” or “warden stall”, meaning “place of guard”, which well-describes the geographical position of the village at the same time indicating the passage of the Lombard domination after the year 568.

The Della Gherardesca and the Bishops of Volterra have left a mark on the history of the village, best seen in the Civic Tower, the Church of San Lorenzo and Sant’Agata of the thirteenth century, the Church of Maria SS del Carmelo. The real jewel of Guardistallo is the Marchionneschi theatre built in 1882, recently restored and reopened to the public.

Only a few kilometres further and you reach Casale Marittimo, whose paleo-Etruscan origins are documented by finding of a domed tomb kept in the Arcaeological museum of Florence. It became a community around the year 1000 and bears the signs of two successive settlements, Casale Vecchio and Casale Nuovo. It was a feud of the Della Gherardesca until the fifteenth century when it went under the rule of Florence. A Ridolfi marquisate since 1648, it was given to the Ginori family in 1739 by Francesco II de’ Medici.

Casale bears the evidence of several important events in the historical centre which remains intact and in the “ring-like” structure of a series of walls around the village and to the medieval castle whose remains have become a part of the village’s fabric. Of architectural note are the Rocca Palace, the church of S. Andrea built on the remains of the ancient church in 1458 and rebuilt in 1872 and S. Maria delle Grazie of 1774.

Here we are in Bibbona, of certain Etruscan origin. Following the great reclaiming projects by Leopold in the second half of the eighteenth century, a numerous agricultural community settled, that produced the typical crops of that system: cereal and olives. In recent times, with the end of the “mezzadria” which was a system where farmes gave half their produce and profit to the landowner, grape-growing was introduced and this developed into the production of quality wine.



The village grew around the Church of S. Ilario, surrounded by the walls of ancient fortifications, with buildings dating back to the twelfth century and S. Maria della Pietà singular example of Renaissance architecture, built in 1492 to a design by Vittorio Ghiberti, son of Lorenzo, and Ranieri Tripalle. To the west and to the south, Bibbona is bordered by the Macchia della Magona, that reaches as far as the woodland around Volterra and to the parks of the Val di Cornia to the south.

At the foot of the first slopes of the metalliferous hills, we reach Bolgheri, this too of medieval origin, that belonged to the Della Gherardesca family since before the year 1000, later to suffer sacking and destruction. The present castle was established in the sixteenth century with later and obvious work done in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Church of SS. Giacomo and Cristoforo, established between the eleventh and twelfth century.

In a little square of the village there is the house where Carducci lived as a child. The long straight avenue, lined by the cypress trees celebrated by the poet, leads to the chapel of San Guido, that Simone Maria Della Gherardesca had built in 1703 to honour the memory of his ancestor Guido. Surrounded by fields and pinewoods is the oasis of Bolgheri an untouched strip of the ancient and wild Maremma, not reclaimed like the other parts, of international interest offering refuge to migratory birds and a rare opportunity of birdwatching enthusiasts.

The road now leaves on the right side the layers of the metalliferous hills and then, rises the first slopes to reach Castagneto Carducci, an agricultural centre of medieval origin. Since the first decades of the thirteenth century, it belonged to the enormous feud of the Della Gherardesca, who kept their feudal privileges even when the Florentines overcame the Pisan rule and right up to 1749 when Castagneto was decreed an independent Commune.

It formed part of the Tuscan Grand Duchy except for a brief period under French rule, until the unification of Italy. The village is still fully-inhabited and still has the castle of the Della Gherardesca that was established in the seventh century though greatly modified by subsequent alterations. The Propositura of S. Lorenzo (the Canon's residence) was built in the thirteenth century and carries the coat of arms of the Pisan family on its walls. Along the streets of the village there are scattered signs of its prestigious past: coats of arms, capitals, arches and decorations.



From the village the view encompasses the slopes to the plain as far as the sea and the islands; an agricultural landscape rich in olive groves, vineyards (it is here that Bolgheri wine and the precious Sassicaia wine are born), thick with chestnut woods and bush, dominated by the Donoratico Tower to the south west, a castle ruin, that according to the traditional story gave refuge to Ugolino Della Gherardesca the day after the Meloria disaster.

Further down there are the remains of Etruscan tombs and of more recent necropolis while on the coast near Marina, there is the Fortress of Castagneto that Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo had built.

Travelling along the 329 road, we go again through the copse where there are still to be found the last charcoal burners, and after a few kilometres we reach the turning for Sassetta. We go up to the village along the western side of a hill that hides the sea from view but, being near, mitigates the climate. A mountain landscape, covered in woodland and with the tranquility of relative isolation; these are the features of the village that once was a castle of a certain importance.

This, too, passed from Pisan rule to Florentine rule in the fifteenth century and has been subject to the historical events first to the Medici and then the Lorena families. In the Church of Sant'Andrea Apostolo there is a Romanesque baptismal font with the Orlandi coat of arms. These were Pisans and the lords of this land for three centuries. There is also a Madonna on wood by an unknown artist of the fifteenth century.

In the woods of Sassetta, even today, you can meet the last woodcutters and charcoal burners who live and speak according to the ancient customs. Past the first ridges after Sassetta, one is immersed in the greenery of the Val di Cornia: ten kilometres or so through the woods of the Park of Mount Calvi and we are in Suvereto. This, too, has distant origins – before the year 1000 – and was under the rule of the Aldobrandeschi family, who conceded the Charta Libertatis.

In the fourteenth century the commune of the Pisan republic, it became part of the Signory of the Appiani in the fifteenth century. As a Commune of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from 1815, they shared their destiny until the unification of Italy. The architectural remains are considerable: the "Rocca" or fortress of the ninth century, the church of S. Giusto and the "Fonte degli Angeli" or Angels' Font, the Church dell'Annunziata of the twelfth century and the beautiful "Palazzo Comunale" or Town Hall of the thirteenth century, the cloisters of S. Francesco.



Popular traditions are still alive. On the last night of April, the “maggerini” in costume sing in the month of May from house to house, improvising on the very ancient octave module.

From Suvereto, along the 398 road, we reach the turning for Campiglia and the land around the two centres is rich in natural beauty, architectural and archaeological treasures: the Parks of Montioni, Mount Calvi and Lagoni Rossi; the ruins of the Rocca di S. Silvestro, on the slopes of Mount Calvi, dating back to the tenth century; traces of the Etruscan mines and foundries at Madonna di Fucinaia and at Fosso Capattoli.

Campiglia overlooks the surrounding countryside enclosed by sturdy walls. By Porta Fiorentina – embellished by four emblems, from Pisa, Florence, Campiglia and Della Gherardesca – we enter the town, dominated by the twelfth century fortress or “Rocca”.

In the perfectly preserved centre, the “Palazzo Pretorio” or Magistrates Palace, though restored several times, has preserved its ancient austerity, bearing on its facade the coats of arms of the Captains who gave up their power from the Pisan period to the Florentine period. Lower down there is the beautiful Concordi theatre of the nineteenth century.

From the central square the descent starts, passing in front of the “Propositura di S. Lorenzo”, and leading towards “Porta a Mare” or Gate to the Sea. The panorama embraces the coast of Populonia as far as Punta Ala and the north wind reveals the Tuscan Archipelago.

We take the 398 out of Campiglia towards the sea, go down to the plain, filled with houses and hamlets, as far as Venturina. Here one finds the Caldana spa and the lake of spa waters that can be visited all the year round.

Beyond the Aurelia road, the main road runs towards Piombino, which, once past the Gagno hillocks, brings us to the massive steelworks plant, and an industrial landscape not without its own beauty. The town, born from the transfer of the survivors of the destruction of Populonia, was created by the Arabs in the year 809, and today occupies the promontory culminating in Mount Massoncello, reaching out into the sea towards Elba.



There is considerable evidence of its intense past: from the “Fonte dei Canali” Canal Fountains (1248), whose marble water spouts have been attributed to Nicola Pisano; the thirteenth century S. Antimo, a beautiful example of Romanesque tempered with elements of early Gothic, that preserves a baptismal font by Andrea Guardi; and the strong fortification that Cosimo I de’ Medici had built in 1552.

In more ancient time it was here, where the Portovecchio of today is situated, that the Etruscans had a port for the minerals coming from Elba. At Populonia the Etruscans established a settlement of considerable importance, even from an economic point of view, that had a great deal of trade with large centres in Etruria such as Bologna, Tarquinia and Sardinia. It was from here that they controlled the mines on Elba and in Campiglia and there are necropolis, town walls, acropolis between the promontory of Populonia and the Gulf of Baratti that date from the seventh and sixth century B.C.

If we go north from Populonia taking the “Via della Principessa” or Road of the Princess, the princess being Elisa Baciocchi under whose reign it was made, we go towards San Vincenzo, a modern town that grown from a village of fishermen and quarrymen. Between Piombino and San Vincenzo there is the Rimigliano nature reserve: 350 hectares of sands and pinewood, of bush and dunes covered in junipers, myrtle and honeysuckle. Then on to the town, with the last urban settlements on the right, the fields behind us and to the left, yet more pinewoods, sea and clean golden beach.

From Piombino harbour, with modern ferries or fast hydrofoils, you’ll reach Elba, the most beautiful isle of the Tuscan Archipel. Beaches of the finest sand, cliffs, plunging into the sea, transparent waters teeming with fish... But also mountain tracks, oak woods, medieval villages, modern hotels, fully equipped tourist centers and sailing schools run by old sea-dogs...

Here, the beauties awarded by nature to the 147 kilometers of Tyrrhenian coast nearby Tuscany have been preserved. The results of a very strict environment preservation program can be perceived immediately. In Elba, nature is the absolute ruler, the absolute dominator of the landscape.

The island is a continuous discovery: the sea changes colour in every creek. On the south shore it clashes over white cliffs or rails at vast beaches, while on the north shore it seeps in the creeks among the very high cliffs or it caresses some quiet pebbled beaches. In a few minutes you can go from the granitic massif of Monte Capanne, the realm of moufflons and wild goats, to the mining areas of the east side, a real “Eldorado” for scientists and geology lovers.