

HISTORY OF VICCHIO

ORIGINS

Vicchio has an ancient origin, as numerous traces of the Etruscan civilization spread all over the region give evidence to. The outstanding archaeological site and excavations of Poggio Colla, a hill south-east of Montesassi, managed by some American universities under the direction of Prof. Gregory Warden can be visited in June and July (info at <http://smu.edu/poggio/>).

The events that characterised the history and development of this village are to be found back in the 13th century when the Republic of Florence showed interest for the Mugello region. The concurrence of a feudal structure (governed by counts Ubaldini and Guidi) and the emerging economic and social system of the medieval communes generated conflicts through which the people was gradually set free from the feudal restrictions. A new configuration of the territory was preceded through the foundation of new urban centres, called “New Lands”, directly connected to the city of Florence by economical and administrative commitments.

The history of Vicchio begins in this ambiance. Its outset goes back to 1225 when the bridge “Montesassi” was built (today it’s called “Ponte a Vicchio”) and the people of San Giusto a Montesassi crossed the Sieve river to build the first village “Vico”, which the name Vicchio draws from.

In 1308 Ugolino de' Gherardeschi, the Podestà of Florence (chief administrator of the city), demanded the communes of Montesassi, Vespignano and the main conterminous rural areas to build a new citadel in the location called “Vicchio”. He also assigned the construction only to those who would then settle in. With the erection of the city walls (1324), which confined a wider area compared with the older Vico, Vicchio definitively enters the Florentine county. That is the beginning of a substantive economic and demographic development. The population starts growing with the coming of the folks from the near villages of Ampinana, Belfonte and Gattaia, redeemed by the Florentines. Vicchio will then become the base of the government of the area, forming a league and a statute inspired by principles of freedom, written in vulgar by Coluccio Salutati.

MEMORABLE EVENTS

To understand the bond between Vicchio and the city of Florence and the values that they shared it is worth to remember an episode in which the citizens of Vicchio demonstrated great bravery and loyalty. During the first years of the 16th century Florence was paladin of the democratic and republican liberties against the overbearingness and despotism of the Medici family. In 1529 the Spanish troops and the ones of Clemente VII de' Medici invaded the whole Mugello region and moved to besiege Florence. Vicchio always kept loyal to the Republic of Florence and the conduct of its two consuls, Filippo Parenti and Albizio de' Fortuna, was exemplary. In 1529 Vicchio's army fought back the raids and sieges of the imperial and papal troops until, in 1530, Philibert of Châlon (prince of Orange) sent 6000 Spanish soldiers to conquer the citadel. Parenti, informed about the arrival of the soldiers, considered hopeless to resist and abandoned the citadel with the 500 infantrymen and retired in defence of Marradi fortress, bringing the 6000 Spanish a great frustration.

During the following centuries Vicchio will lose some of its relevance in the Mugello territory. The population decreases and in 1838 the municipality is incorporated by the city of Borgo San Lorenzo.

XXth CENTURY

The beginning of the 20th century is marked by the catastrophic earthquake of the 1919 which put on its knees the entire population of Vicchio and the surrounding country. The progressive industrialization of the major cities caused the emigration and depopulation of the most isolated locations of the commune.

One of the most significant pages in the history of Vicchio was written by the citizens who took an active part in the Italian resistance at great cost of lives. It was the 6th of March 1944 when the partisans liberated Vicchio from the fascist and Nazi forces. The break news spread everywhere and caused uproar through the whole valley. The news was announced even by London Radio. The fascist and Nazi reaction soon arrived through violent reprisals and executions: five young and innocent farmers were shot the 22nd of March at Campo di Marte, in Florence; little later, the 10th of July, 15 civilians were slaughtered in the farm of Padulivo, near Vicchio, by the SS of the Goering division. In the area of Mugello Vicchio was maybe the village which suffered the worst suppressions and damages. These should have served as an admonition and punishment against the people who participated to the fight against Fascism and to the Resistance.

Therefore the price Vicchio had to pay to the cause of liberty was high.

For this reason the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, in 2003, awarded the Silver Medal to Civil Merit to the town of Vicchio setting forward the following declaration: “*Small country village, during the last world conflict, hosted the first armed resistance groups and participated actively in the fight for Liberation, paying a considerable human price and material damage. Admirable example of courage, spirit of liberty and love of country*”.

The historical archive of Vicchio includes many records such as the first Statute. A major part of the historical records is also conserved in the historical archive of Scarperia.

For exhaustive researches, in the library of Vicchio it is available the abounding local section and a rich photographic record.