ONCE UPON A TIME...

That’s how fables start, once upon a time there was – what? A region bathed by the sea, with long beaches the colour of gold, rocky cliffs plunging into crystalline waters and many islands dotting the horizon. There was once a region covered by rolling hills, where the sun lavished all the colours of the earth, where olive trees and grapevines still grow, ancient as the history of man, and where fortified towns and cities seem open-air museums. There was once a region with verdant plains watered by rivers and streams, surrounded by high mountains, monasteries, and forests stretching as far as the eye could see. There was, in a word, Tuscany, a region that has always been synonymous with beauty and nature, art and history, especially Medieval and Renaissance history, a land whose fame has spread the world over. And yet, if we stop to look closely, this region offers us many more treasures and new histories, the emotion aroused only by beauty. Because along with the most famous places, monuments and museums, we can glimpse a Tuscany that is even more ancient and just as wonderful, bearing witness not only to Roman and Etruscan times but even to prehistoric ages. Although this evidence is not as well known as the treasures that has always been famous, it is just as exciting to discover. This travel diary, addressed to all lovers of Tuscany eager to explore its more hidden aspects, aims to bring us back in time to discover these jewels. Because it is just during those remote ages – from prehistoric times to the Roman epoch, passing through the Etruscan era – that the seeds of a culture were sewn, of a love of beauty and a way of life that have created the Tuscany of today.
A VOYAGE THROUGH PREHISTORY

Let’s try to stop the hands of a clock – like magic, as in a fairy tale – and make them turn backward, slowly at first, then spinning faster and faster. Suddenly everything around us seems blurred and hazy, because we are going back in time, as if in a science fiction film or book. And year after year, century after century, millennium after millennium, something amazing happens. Suddenly the hands of the clock stop and time begins to flow forward again, as if nothing had happened, and we look around to see where we are. This land we now call Tuscany is uninhabited; its hills and plains are covered with forests, nothing but trees wherever you look, as far as the eye can see. The rivers and streams have no banks or bridges, and the air resounds with the howls of wild animals. There are no cities or streets or squares, no noise of traffic. The sky is no longer streaked with long white jet streams and the night has become a dark blanket quilted with stars. This is the time when men lived in caves, gathered fruit from wild plants and hunted with weapons made of wood and chipped stone.

It is the time when man first set foot on this land, never to leave it again. It is the time when man lived immersed in nature, it is prehistory.

HUNTING FOR MAMMOTHS

Lunigiana is a frontier territory, stretching out around the Magra River basin, squeezed in between the Emilian Apennines, the Province of Liguria and the Mediterranean, a land of mountains overlooking the sea, a land of unique, unmistakable features. Still today, its history and traditions are perfectly preserved, as can be seen, for example, in the little town of Fivizzano, which the poet Carducci called ‘a pearl lost among the mountains’. This is the Valle del Lucido, a wild, enchanted place dotted with the ancient medieval towns of Monzone, Equi Terme and Vinca. Traversing this valley, at the foot of the Pizzo d’Uccello, means plunging into ancient, unspoiled nature, filled with surprises. And this is how it must have looked to the first inhabitants of this zone, groups of Neanderthals who arrived in this territory during the middle Palaeolithic age, leaving traces of their passage from nearly 100,000 years ago.
WHO WAS NEANDERTHAL MAN?

He could almost be called a relative, a kind of distant cousin. He lived between 200,000 and 40,000 years ago and looked a little different from us, being shorter and heavier, with a high forehead and an important nose. He was a nomad who built seasonal camps, and the Valle del Lucido in Lunigiana was the ideal place for survival, with an abundance of water, caves and wild game. To see a life-size replica, you can visit the *Museo delle Grotte di Equi*, housed in an old water-driven mill, where you will also find the impressive figure of a cave bear (*Ursus spelaeus*). To explore a real Neanderthal campsite instead, you can go to the *Parco Archeologico naturalistico di Belvedere*, on Monte Cetona, where workshops and educational activities for all age groups, accompanied by guides, are held.

The Valle del Lucido, lying within the *Alpi Apuane Regional Park*, is famous for the splendid grottos that have been carved out over hundreds of years by the slow action of water, dripping through cracks in the limestone. In the *Geoparco delle Grotte di Equi* you can visit, in addition to an itinerary that winds underground for nearly 500 meters, the *Tecchia di Equi*, a prehistoric site with a shelter and a cave in the mountainside about 30 metres deep. It is here that the Middle Palaeolithic hunters lived, chipping stone to make weapons and tools for work. Excavations have unearthed implements made of *flintstone* and the *bones of Pleistocene animals* now extinct. They were the prey hunted by the Neanderthals and brought here to be butchered. At that time, an animal was not important for its meat alone but also for its fur, used as clothing, and its bones, furnishing material for objects of daily use and ornaments. Finds of animal bones also help to show us the conditions of the climate the cave men lived in - cold, temperate, or hot.
LOOKING FOR PREHISTORIC ANIMALS:
FROM MAMMOTHS TO WHALES!

The climate and the temperature change with the passage of time. In the Middle Stone Age, for instance, the Neanderthal hunters lived through a period of glaciation that covered much of Europe under a sheet of ice for long ages. We know this also from the remains of animals found in their shelters. A famous example is the mammoth, with its thick coat and long tusks, whose remains have been found at several sites in Tuscany.

To see the reconstructed skeletons of mammoths, you can visit the Museo Paleontologico di Montevarchi, housed in the ancient Franciscan monastery of San Lodovico; and the rich palaeontological collection of the Museo di Storia Naturale di Firenze, which also displays the remains of sabre-tooth tigers, ancient birds, horses and even a great prehistoric whale.

We can find out more about the tools the Neanderthals used and the places they lived in at an important prehistoric site near the town of Camaiore, close to the sea. It is the Grotta all’Onda, on the slopes of Monte Matanna, a great cavern with little streams of water flowing down its outer walls. In this place, amid the marvellous scenario of the Alpi Apuane, groups of Neanderthal hunters arrived during the Middle Palaeolithic age. Evidence of their presence is provided by flintstone tools and bits of bone from the animals they butchered, now in the Museo Civico Archeologico di Camaiore. The Grotta all’Onda is well worth a visit also for the splendid landscape surrounding it, for the geological and naturalist features encountered along the way, and for all the many testimonials left by man in this area; not only from the Stone Age, but also from the Bronze Age, the Middle Ages, and even from preindustrial workshops. It is an extraordinary way of reading the flow of time in a place that is a real open-air museum for visitors searching for traces of its past.
BEFORE THE COMING OF MAN

They dominated the Earth for millions of years and their name means “terrible lizard”, because this is what their great fossil bones looked like to the people who first found them. The dinosaurs were actually a group of animals including many different species, not all of which lived in the same period. Some were as tall and long as a city bus, others as small as a chicken; some had long tails or necks, others were protected by shells, horns and stingers; some lived on plants, while others were ferocious predators with sharp nails and fangs; some were covered with scales, others with fur or feathers. And while all of them laid eggs, not all dinosaurs walked on four legs. Some ran on their hind legs, others swam in the sea with fins and still others flew through the air with wings made of thin flaps of skin. But what is certain is that around 66 million years ago a series of great catastrophes, probably caused by an asteroid striking the Earth, drastically altered their habitat, leading to their extinction. Was this a disaster? Not for us, because it is just starting from that time that mammals began to evolve and populate the planet.

STATUES FROM THE PAST

In much more recent prehistoric times, some peoples began to carve statues out of great blocks of stone and stick them up vertically in the ground. No one really knows why, although it may have been for some magical or religious purpose.

To see some of these mysterious stone statues, go to the town of Pontremoli in Lunigiana, where you will find the Museo delle statue stele lunigianesi in the Castello del Piagnaro, a fortification standing on the ancient Via Francigena, travelled by merchants and pilgrims in the Middle Ages.

The ancient stelae-statues are fascinating to everyone, both young and old. Carved out of great blocks of sandstone, easily found in the Magra valley, the stelae-statues were carved with human forms and features — the shape of the head, the neck, the eyes, and even the arms, and were then stuck upright in the ground.

In Europe there exist many similar objects, called menhirs, produced starting from the 3rd millennium B.C.; but the remarkable thing about the stelae-statues is that in Lunigiana, unlike other places, they were produced for a vast span of time, ranging from the end of the 4th millennium, in the Bronze Age, up to the arrival of the Romans, which marked the end of prehistoric times in this territory.

Who are the mysterious personages carved in stone that still today exert such potent fascination? No one knows exactly. Some of them may represent warriors, others aristocrats, and still others deities whose names have been lost forever. The female stelae-statues, recognisable by their breasts, wear ornaments and belts.
TRY IT YOURSELF!
To make a little stelae-statue you will need a smooth, oblong stone (such as a river pebble), some acrylic paint, a little vase and a bit of soil (or gravel). Wash the stone to remove all the dirt and impurities, then let it dry. With the paint, draw facial features and arms on it, embellishing them with objects such as a sword or an ax. Then to set the statue upright, insert it in the soil (or gravel) in the vase.

The Apuan Ligurians – the people who inhabited Lunigiana for ages and carved the stelae-statues – have also left us the remains of their particular constructions, called castellars. They were typical fortified hilltop villages, usually overlooking roads, to defend and control the surrounding territory. To discover these places and admire a breathtaking panorama – to see with your own eyes what the Apuan Ligurians saw so many eons ago – you can go to the Santuario della Madonna del soccorso in Garfagnana, a splendid 18th-century hermitage built over the foundations of a 14th-century abbey, two kilometres from the town of Minucciano. Here, from atop a hill with a view that sweeps as far as Lunigiana, objects dating from the Bronze Age have been unearthed, including stelae-statues now displayed in the Pontremoli Museum. Replicas of these statues have been placed on the lawn before the sanctuary.

The Apuan Ligurians were not, however, the only ones in Tuscany to carve stelae-statues; there is another one at the Museo Archeologico di Massa Marittima, in Maremma. It is the so-called Vado all’Arancio stelae-statue, datable to the 3rd millennium B.C.

The Museo delle Statue Stele Lunigianesi, abounding in videos and explanatory materials, offers suggestions for excursions in the zone to find out more about the Apuan Ligurians, the ancient warrior people who inhabited this land, engaged in shepherding and metal-working. Other castellars, the imposing hilltop fortifications built with the inflow of the Apuan Ligurian civilisation, are found at Minucciano, on Monte Pisanino, at Tresana di Massa and at Pania di Corfino.

statuestele.org
ANCIENT ARCHERS

Castelnuovo Garfagnana is a splendid fourteenth-century walled town, standing along ancient roadways between the Apennines and the Apuan mountains. Here, where Ludovico Ariosto stayed from 1522 to 1525, in the Rocca Ariostesca that formed part of the ancient fortifications, you can learn the history of this part of Tuscany by visiting the Mostra permanente dei Liguri Apuani, devoted to the ancient people of the stelae-statues, and the Mostra permanente del mesolitico, displaying many prehistoric finds from this territory dating from the transition stage between the ancient age of chipped stone and the Neolithic period, when mankind became sedentary, engaging in agriculture and shepherding. In the vitrines of this museum, observing the little flintstone tools is like leaping back in time to 10,000 years ago, when these lands were roamed by groups of Mesolithic hunters, skilled at striking their prey from afar with their terrible new weapons: bows and arrows. The bows used by the Mesolithic hunters were made of wood and vegetal fibre, and little flint arrowheads, skilfully chipped to a long, narrow shape, were bound to the tips of their wooden arrows. The hunters also utilised flint to make cutting tools of triangular, rectangular or semicircular shape, sharpened on one side and used to cut meat, leather and materials of other kinds.

CHIPPING

This is the technique used by prehistoric man to work flint – a stone consisting almost entirely of silica – to make tools and weapons. Many different chipping methods were used – direct or indirect percussion, with a stone or a chisel made of bone - but the objective was always the same: to obtain more or less long pieces with sharp edges, able to cut animal skins or to become perfect arrowheads. Many museums offer educational workshops where you can construct the various kinds of prehistoric flintstone tools, supervised by specialised personnel, as at the Centro di Documentazione Sant’Agata near Scarperia or the Parco archeologico naturalistico di Belvedere on Monte Cetona.

Today everything that prehistoric people made of wood or plant fibres has been lost, gone forever; and so the bows used by the Mesolithic hunters can only be imagined, based on some of the prehistoric images that have survived to our own day. Of those weapons, nothing remains but the flint arrowheads, some of them only one centimetre long!

To touch these tools with your own hands and see how mankind lived at different prehistoric ages, go to Mugello, a few kilometres from Scarperia, a town famed for its artisanal production of knives. Here you will find the Centro di Documentazione Sant’Agata, housed in an ancient country church, which displays objects coming from all over Mugello, dating from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age, as well as Etruscan and Roman materials. This fine collection clearly shows how very long this valley north of Florence has been populated by man, since the most remote ages.

On display here are materials coming from around Lake Bilancino, where a campsite of Upper Palaeolithic hunters dating from around 25,000 years ago, with places used for chipping stones and several hearths, has been unearthed. The ancient pollen found on this site shows that the landscape at the time...
consisted mainly of prairies and swamps. But the most interesting thing about the Centro di Documentazione Sant’Agata is the chance it offers to make close contact with the prehistoric world. Along with the original flintstone tools are replicas of wooden implements that visitors can even pick up and hold. The itinerary continues outside, with the life-size replica of a prehistoric village showing how the Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers lived, with a hut used by Bronze Age farmer/stockbreeders, and a hut from the Iron Age, the period immediately prior to the flowering of Etruscan civilisation all over Tuscany.

museisantagata.it

REPLICA OF PREHISTORIC HUTS AT THE CENTRO DI DOCUMENTAZIONE SANT’AGATA.

READING THE EARTH

On the plain of Lucca, in the township of Porcari, we find the Fossa Nera area, an important archaeological site that shows us, like an illustrated book, the ancient history of this territory. Reading layers of earth from top to bottom is, in fact, a journey through time back into the past. On the upper stratigraphic levels lie the foundations of Roman farms (built from the 2nd century B.C. on and abandoned in Late Antiquity); descending a little further, we find the traces of an Etruscan settlement (from the 5th century B.C.); and lastly, in the lowest and oldest layer, we come upon the remains of a Bronze Age village. An excursion through the archaeological zone and the surrounding countryside – to the east and south of Lucca – is a real voyage through time, when we think that the borders of the cultivated fields today still reflect those of the Roman centuriation, when plots of land were assigned to retired veterans of the Roman army; and that the ancient fabric of roadways, canals and ditches was once used by the Roman farmers who lived in the many farms of this land, devoted to agriculture since time immemorial.

The site of Fossa Nera and, left, one of the ceramics found by archaeologists.

STRATIGRAPHY

Imagine slicing a cake in half. What would you see? The layers of course, which are not always the same thickness: the bottom layer is sponge cake, then comes chocolate, then another layer of sponge cake, followed by custard and sometimes frosting on the top. Their sequence not only makes our mouths water but also shows us how the cake was made: from the lowest layer – the oldest – to the highest, the most recent. And the land can be read in practically the same way. The lowest layers are the oldest, on which the others have gradually built up, to the most recent of all, the one we are standing on now. When archaeologists dig, then, it is as if they were journeying back through time. And they do it very carefully, because once a layer has been removed, it is destroyed forever (and with it all the stories it has to tell).
The stratigraphy of Fossa Nera tells us that this area – called Auser in antiquity – was frequently inundated by floods of the Serchio up to 1,200 B.C., when a village of huts was built here. The materials unearthed here reveal many things about the daily life and material culture of this Bronze Age people. Grindstones and grinders tell us, for instance, that the grain grown around here was brought to the village and pounded into flour. In other parts of the settlement instead, the remains of vases demonstrate the skill of potters, who worked clay to produce objects in many different shapes; vases, after firing in earthen ovens, were used to store food and water. Other artisans instead were skilled at smelting metal to make ornaments or other small items, while finds of precious amber tell us that merchants from distant northern lands travelled this far, probably along the many navigable branches of the Serchio.

For an even better idea of how highly skilled the Bronze Age artisans were, you can visit the Mostra archeologica permanente del Museo di Porcari, displaying materials found at Fossa Nera that give us a glimpse of the artisanal expertise, the natural tendency toward agriculture and the flourishing trade that developed over the following centuries and millennia.

Only a part of the archaeological area is open to visitors; specifically, some remains from Roman times and a visitors’ itinerary leading to the site of the extinct lake of Sesto or Bientina, which was later to cover the land again. However, the Museo di Porcari offers educational itineraries to explore for yourself the prehistory of these places. Here you will find a replica of the village, the living quarters and the kiln where pottery was fired, and then weapons for hunting, stone-working tools, implements for cultivating the soil, and weaving looms. Scenes from everyday life that, thanks to the activities of experimental archaeology, transport us all, both children and adults, over an enormous span of time.

museoporcari.it

HOW HAS THE TERRITORY CHANGED?
The easiest way to find out is to examine the remains of the fossil plants and bones of the animals that lived here. And you can do this at the Certosa Monumentale di Calci di Pisa, a vast structure founded in 1366 and enlarged over the centuries, which now houses the Museo di storia naturale dell’Università di Pisa. A visit to its important palaeontological collection shows us how the flora and fauna changed at different epochs. Without forgetting the room – a favourite of children, and not them alone – devoted to the evolution of mankind and the one with the dinosaur skeletons!
If you would like to explore a reconstructed village from the Bronze Age, or a Neanderthal campsite, you should know that some of the most important archaeological discoveries in Italy have been made at a place in Tuscany. At Cetona, an ancient fortified town at the foot of Mount Cetona, lying between Val d’Orcia and Val di Chiana, exceptional traces of prehistoric times have been found. With a museum, an archaeological park and an archeodrome, you can experience at first hand the prehistoric epochs documented in this area. In the Museo civico per la preistoria del Monte Cetona, housed in the Palazzo Comunale, every stage of the archaeological site is documented, from the Middle Palaeolithic age, when Neanderthal man lived in caves on the mountain, leaving as traces of his passage stone implements and the bones of butchered animals, through the Neolithic and the Copper Age, up to the intense populating of the Bronze Age when the groups of human beings that settled here built huts, lived in shelters under rocks and buried their dead. And we discover too that at an even earlier age – long before the arrival of man – this mountain was an island surrounded by the sea, as shown by the abundance of marine fossils in the area!

On Monte Cetona is the Parco archeologico naturalistico di Belvedere, where guided tours lead through lighted caves, once used as dwelling places. Here there is a life-size replica of a Bronze Age village with huts that can be entered and sections devoted to the artisanal activities of the time – from making vases out of clay, to using furnaces for smelting the metals used to make implements – and a Palaeolithic campsite in a little natural hollow. It is the Archeodromo di Belvedere, not far from the caves.

**TRY IT YOURSELF!**

To make a prehistoric vase, get some clay, some little seashells and a few pointed objects, such as wooden sticks. The first step is to knead the fresh clay to soften it, then mould it with your hands into the shape of a vase. After having done this you can decorate the sides of the vase – inspired by some of the many images to be found on internet – by imprinting them with the seashells or by incision with a sharpened stick, to form waves, triangles, circles, and so on. And now the little vase is ready to become a perfect pencil holder!
PREHISTORY IN THE MUSEUMS

Traces of prehistoric man are found not only in caves and shelters beneath boulders, but also in the museums of many towns and cities: from the Museo e Istituto Fiorentino di Preistoria “Paolo Graziosi” in Florence to the Museo di Preistoria e Protostoria della Valle del Fiume Fiora at Manciano, and the Museo Archeologico e dell’Uomo “Alberto Carlo Blanc” in Viareggio. This great historic heritage is one of the many treasures of Tuscany.

The prehistoric traces lead on to the island of Elba, the biggest island in the Tuscan Archipelago.

Ancient sources and archaeological excavations tell us that this island always played a leading role in the maritime trade of the Mediterranean, as well as for the iron extracted from its mines. Jason and his Argonauts – say the ancient sources – stopped here, and cleaning their skin with scrapers, as was the custom with the Greeks, caused drops of sweat to fall onto the beach, spotting the white pebbles; this was the Ghiaie beach, near Portoferraio, where still today we can see the black and grey drops mingled with white pebbles on the beach, and can imagine the Greek ship with the Argonauts sailing away over a crystalline sea. During the Bronze Age, villages were built in the western part of the island, along the ridges of Monte Capanne, a place that has not changed much since then, with a breathtaking panorama. This society of shepherds and farmers lived in round huts with dry-stone foundations and wooden walls, using grinders and grindstones for grain, along with spindles and spools for textiles, vases for boiling milk and many other objects displayed in the Museo archeologico di Marciana.

On Monte Capanne we also find the mysterious Sassi ritti, or upright stones, which are menhirs erected vertically in the soil, traceable to an ancient cult of the sun. And gazing around it is clear that time has swept away the people and their ancient habitats, but not the beauty of these places, still intact today.
Etruscan places

8th – 6th century B.C.
6th – 5th century B.C.
5th – 4th century B.C.
4th – 2th century B.C.
1st century B.C.

VILLANOVAN CIVILISATION, AT THE ORIGINS OF ETRUSCAN CULTURE
9th – 8th century B.C.

ORIENTALISING PERIOD, WITH POWER IN THE HANDS OF WARRIOR PRINCES
8th – 6th century B.C.

ARCHAIC PERIOD, MAXIMUM ECONOMIC AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT
6th – 5th century B.C.

CLASSICAL PERIOD, BEGINNING OF DECADENCE IN CONFLICTS WITH GREEKS AND ROMANS
5th – 4th century B.C.

HELLENISTIC PERIOD, ROME CONQUERS THE ETRUSCAN CITIES ONE AFTER ANOTHER
4th – 2th century B.C.

ROMAN CITIZENSHIP GRANTED TO ALL ETRUSCANS
1st century B.C.
THE LEGENDARY TWELVE!
What are we talking about? About the most important Etruscan cities that, according to the Greek historian Strabo, formed the so-called Dodecapolis, a kind of military and economic alliance. Many of these city-states are still found today in Tuscany: Arezzo, Populonia, Roselle, Volterra and of course Vetulonia. By marking them on a map, we can see just where ancient Etruscan civilisation developed.

TUSCANY AT THE TIME OF THE RASENNA
Strolling along the paths of southern Tuscany, immersed in wild, flourishing nature, you may be struck by the intense odour of the Mediterranean maquis, fragrant with myrtle and wild fennel. And when you stop, there suddenly appears among the bushes the bluish gleam of the sea. This is Maremma, an untamed landscape beloved for its beauty and traditions, once the heart of Etruria, the homeland of the Rasenna, as they called themselves, or Tusci, as the Romans called them. And Tuscia was their land.
These were the Etruscans, a people whose culture, art, and way of life have moulded the territory of Tuscany, becoming a vital part of it. And looking around, in these places that archaeologists and historians call Etruria proper, it really seems that time has stopped at that epoch, during the centuries when Etruscan cities were rich and powerful.

IN THE HEART OF ETRURIA
The fertile plane north of Grosseto was a great salty lake, navigable and connected to the sea in Etruscan times. It was Lake Prile, and only a faint trace of it remains today in the Riserva naturale della Diaccia Botrona, at the foot of Castiglione della Pescaia. Beside this ancient lake stood the legendary city of Vatl, today’s Vetulonia, a site that was long sought for by archaeologists. As in other Etruscan city-states, the wealthy nobility controlled the agricultural economy of the area and the roadways, obliging merchants to pay customs duties whenever they crossed its territory. The Etruscans in fact never came together to form a single state. Their cities, united by a common language and culture, always remained independent, like the poleis of ancient Greece, each of them following its own destiny.

Bronze statuette for the domestic cult, coming from the Domus dei Dolia in Vetulonia, 3rd century B.C.
Above, grave goods from an Etruscan tomb at the Museo Civico Archeologico delle Acque di Chianciano.
A street paved with flagstones in Roselle.
Above, the archaeological zone of Vetulonia. Below, bronze fragment of a candelabra in the shape of a horse, from the Domus dei Dolia in Vetulonia, 4th century B.C.
Still today we can climb the hill of Vetulonia to see a splendid panorama and recognise the ancient bed of Lake Prile. Here we find sections of Cyclopean walls, while the ancient acropolis, the heart of the city, was converted into a castle in the Middle Ages. To understand the splendour of the aristocracy that governed Vetulonia, we must visit the Museo civico archeologico “Isidoro Falchi” to see the objects taken from the rich necropolises in the area: amber, imported Greek pottery, jewellery, fibulae, helmets and weapons.

MYTHS AND FABULOUS MONSTERS
Fascinated by ancient mythology? Then you must see two very special Etruscan relics: the terracotta architectural works illustrating the myth of Medea, at the Museo Civico Archeologico di Vetulonia, and the splendid Frontone di Talamone, a pediment illustrating the myth of the Seven against Thebes, displayed in the Caserma Umberto I at Orbetello. The more courageous can even make a visit to the demon with the red hair, from the Tomb of the same name in the Necropolis delle Pinnace di Sarteano. It is a monstrous god of the underworld driving a chariot drawn by two lions and two griffons. And in the chamber behind it, where the sarcophagus was laid, a three-headed serpent and a hippocampus will be waiting for you.

TRY IT YOURSELF!
The chimera is one of the many mythological monsters formed of parts from different animals: the body and face of a lion, the head of a goat on a snake-like back and tail. At least this is how the Chimera di Arezzo, one of the most famous Etruscan statues, appears. Why not invent a mythological monster yourself? With the body of a tortoise, the head of a dog, the wings of a bat and the claws of a tiger, for instance. Let imagination reign! You can draw and colour it however you like, or model it in clay. And don’t forget to give it a name.

From the town of Vetulonia we can walk down to the archaeological zone to see the remains of buildings from Etruscan and Roman times. Still further down is the necropolis with tombs dating from the 7th century B.C. Walking along the Via dei Sepolcri is an unforgettable experience for both children and adults. Among the olive trees rise the high mounds of tombs – the Belvedere, the Pierre, and the Diavolino II – that we can visit, entering the narrow dromos leading to the burial chambers. Inland Maremma too has many treasures of archaeology, primarily Scansano and its Museo Archeologico Comunale housed in Palazzo
The southern part of Toscana seems moulded in *tufa*, the typical local stone. In Etruscan times this area was full of villages, over which the medieval towns developed. But to anyone arriving here for the first time, the most striking feature is the network of *tagliate* carved deep in the rock that have linked these little centres since antiquity. Exploring the *tagliate* is a thrilling experience, considering that these deep ditches were slowly carved out by water seeping through the tufa and then became real roadways.

In the town of *Sovana*, the *Centro di documentazione*, housed in Palazzo Pretorio, displays interesting Etruscan finds from this area, and models of the *necropolis of San Sebastiano* and the *Tomba dell'Ildebranda*, one of the most beautiful Etruscan funerary monuments to come down to us. Obligatory for lovers of great discoveries, this time from the early Middle Ages, is the treasure found in 2004 in the *Chiesa di San Mamilliano* during restoration. It is a hoard of no less than 498 gold coins dating from the 5th century A.D., often romantically called the treasure of the Count of Montecristo, the hero of Alexandre Dumas's famous novel. It seems in fact that the French author was inspired by the folktales of the time in writing his book! Outside the town is the *Parco archeologico “Città del Tufo”*, created to promote the extraordinary historic and naturalistic heritage of the territory. To walk along the foot of the steep rocky walls, below the tombs, is a unique experience. The path leads from the *necropolis of Poggio Felceto* to the *Tomba dell'Ildebranda*, carved directly out of the tufa on three sides to replicate the architecture of a temple on a podium. The tomb, excavated in 1924, dates from the 3rd-2nd century B.C. and is named for Ildebrando da Sovana, who became pope under the name of Gregory VII in the 11th century. Our walk continues as far as the *necropolis of Poggio Prisca*, site of the Pola tomb and that of the Demons, from the 3rd century B.C., both rich in sculptural decoration.

In this area visitors can see various types of *Etruscan funerary architecture* – tombs with colonnaded facades, aedicules, dices and semi-dices – whose bright colours have been slightly dimmed by centuries of ageing and weathering. When they were built, in fact, the tombs were painted in brilliant
colours standing out clearly against the yellow and grey tufa stone and the green vegetation. But despite the passage of time, the deep *vie cave* continue to cut through the territory, like the *via cava di San Sebastiano*, with walls rising to a height of 20 metres, or the so-called *Cavone*, whose walls are covered with vegetation. At Sorano too we can admire chambers carved out of tufa stone and used by the local people for millennia. There are Etruscan tombs, but also columbaria and dwelling places from later ages.

leviecave.it

**CITIES OF THE DEAD**

In the 7th century B.C. the Etruscans began to build those great necropolises that we can visit today. They are real cities of the dead, with streets, walls, gates, and tombs of various kinds where the deceased was buried either alone or with his family. They can be *aedicules*, in the shape of a temple, as in the San Cerbone Necropolis at Populonia, or hypogean, dug out of the earth, as in the Necropolis delle Grotte, or tumuli, mounds covered with earth, as in the Tomba della Montagnola at Sesto Fiorentino.

Not far away, on a high rocky spur, stands the town of *Pitigliano*. After having wandered through its narrow streets, charged with history and tradition, we can visit the *Museo Civico Archeologico* to see grave goods from the Orientalising age coming from the nearby necropolis of *Poggio Buco* – the site, open to visitors, is found along the road to *Manciano* – and then descend to the *Museo Archeologico all’aperto “Alberto Manzi”*, an archaeological park where visitors plunge headlong into the past. The open-air *Museo Archeologico all’aperto* is a thrilling experience for one and all. It presents a replica of a typical *Etruscan house* consisting of three rooms with a portico, as well as a residence from the Bronze Age, a round hut, which represents the first urbanist layout in the territory. From here, walking through a via cava, we leave the “city of the living” and head for the “city of the dead”: the *Etruscan necropolis of Gradone*, with a burial place where visitors feel they are reliving an ancient funeral ceremony.

comune.pitigliano.gr.it

**MERchants AND PERFUME**

In the vicinity of the Talamonaccio promontory, near *Talamone*, the remains of a temple dating from the 4th century B.C. have been found. It faced the sea, probably designed to appear as a strikingly beautiful and majestic sight to sailors and merchants coming from afar. Below it, on the waters of the *Orbetello lagoon*, many species of birds fly here to nest. And it is here at *Orbetello* that we can admire the splendid *frontone del Tempio di*....
Talamone – now housed in the Caserma Umberto I – surely one of the most beautiful terracotta pediments surviving from classical antiquity. Dating from 150 B.C., it illustrates the myth of the Seven against Thebes. At Scarlino, in the Pian di Palma locality, excavations have brought to light a rural farm with a necropolis beside it, called Poggio Tondo, datable to the 7th-6th century B.C. Many precious ceramic objects have been found here, most notably ointment jars that contained the famous perfume of Corinth, at the time a rare imported item, and other perfumes produced by Etruscan artisans, the height of fashion at the time, as well as cosmetic cases and vases of various kinds. The farm’s simple main building was surrounded by roofed sheds for storing grain and by cultivated fields. In the farm, clay weights for weaving looms, in the shape of a truncated cone, have been found. Today these weights are displayed in the vitrines of the Centro di Documentazione di Scarlino, a fine collection showing how people lived and worked in Etruscan times.

The Perfumes of Etruria
In antiquity perfumes and ointments were sold as precious goods. The Etruscans imported them to the Italian peninsula, buying them in the emporiums where ships from Greece and Asia Minor docked. Ointments and perfumes soon became the height of fashion among the nobility, and the Etruscans too began to produce them. Still today, in most of Tuscany’s archaeological museums, we can see the different shaped vases such as the long alabastron and the rounded aryballos, often decorated, that contained them.

The Etruscan Forge
The mining district that stretches from the promontory of Populonia to the Island of Elba has often been called this. Since remote antiquity, iron has been extracted here and brought to the mainland, in the Gulf of Baratti, a little bay of rare beauty. And the history of this area is incredibly interesting! Here the great tumulus tombs of wealthy Etruscan princes were built. And it was here, in the following centuries, that the industrial quarters of the Etruscan artisans stood. These artisans, probably without thinking about it, began to throw scrap from the iron they produced onto these great mounds, burying them and transforming the coast into a kind of lunar landscape. In the 3rd century B.C., at some places along the coast, these huge piles of scrap iron rose 10 metres high, while the air became stifling and the darkened sky was streaked with columns of smoke. The territory around Populonia must have looked like this to anyone arriving there. And yet it was just that mountain of iron that preserved the tumuli beneath it, letting them survive intact to our own day.

To know the history of the territory, we can visit the Museo Archeologico del Territorio di Populonia a Piombino to see the rich grave goods from the Val di Cornia necropolises and the splendid silver amphora salvaged from the sea in 1968, as well as an interesting centre of experimental archaeology. Today, in the Gulf of Baratti, nothing remains of that industrialised past but some pieces of scrap iron still lying on the ground. On the promontory, inhabited since the 9th century B.C., stands Populonia – the ancient Pupluna – an important Etruscan city known since antiquity for its intense metallurgical activity. Here was the acropolis with its public buildings and temples.
Lower down were the industrial level, the artisans’ quarters and the port, where cargoes of metal arrived. From the 16th-century castle, in the town, the gaze sweeps over a long stretch of coastline; we can visit the Museo Archeologico and the excavation zone. Descending toward the sea, we enter the Parco Archeologico di Baratti e Populonia, with the Necropolis of San Carbon. It is here, in the 19th century, that the first tombs were unearthed, including the splendid Tomb of the Funeral Beds and Tomb of the Chariots, over 30 metres in diameter.

Along the path called the via del ferro that leads through the city’s ancient industrial quarter, with its humble dwellings and deplorable hygienic conditions, we enter the nearby forest, following the via delle cave to the quarries that provided the blocks of stone used to construct the city’s buildings and its funerary architecture.

parchivaldicornia.it

TO ARMS!
The metals were used to forge the arms and armour of the Etruscan warriors. There was the light infantry, that is, foot-soldiers, and then the archers and axmen, but the most fearful were the heavily armoured hoplites, who wore helmets with cheek-guards to protect the head and ears, breastplates and shin-guards on their legs: they carried a shield for defence and a lance and sword for attack. To see these terrible weapons, used in combat and parades, visit the Museo Archeologico di Firenze, the collections of the Museo Civico di Vetulonia or the grave goods of the warrior prince coming from the Trestina-Tarragoni tomb, displayed at the Museo dell’Accademia Etrusca e della Città di Cortona.

parchivaldicornia.it museidimaremma.it magmafollonica.it

ETRUSCAN POTTERY
The Crete Senesi are low hills south of Siena, famous for the grey and bluish colour of the clay they are made of – the “creta” – and their solitary cypresses. Here, not far from Asciano, is the Tumulo del Molinello, a great aristocratic tomb, and a little further on Murlo, a medieval town that grew up near an Etruscan settlement. Materials from this important archaeologi-
cal zone can be seen at the Antiquarium, housed in Palazzo Vescovile, which displays objects found on the territory, particularly at the site of Poggio Civitate, where a great princely residence has been unearthed. Chiusi, in Valdichiana, the city of the legendary Etruscan king Lars Porsenna, was one of the first to clash with Rome. It was famed in antiquity for its production of funerary sculpture, exported to many other cities: inscribed pillars, urns, sarcophaguses carved in bas-relief and splendid artworks with scenes of war or daily life.

In the rich Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Chiusi, we can admire vases of many shapes used during banquets, such as the bucchero-ware oenochoe, the typical pitcher for pouring wine. And just from Chiusi, datable to the 6th century B.C. but now displayed at the Museo Archeologico di Firenze, comes one of the most surprising examples: an oenochoe with a spout in the shape of a bull’s head! Many curious facts about the Etruscans can be discovered in this museum. There are female figures of mourners, women who wept and despaired during the funerals of aristocrats; and then canopic vases, dating from the 7th-6th century B.C., earthenware jars with a lid in anthropomorphic form that contained the ashes of the dead. Bucchero ware, the typical pottery produced in Etruria, black and shiny to resemble metal, appears in many forms.

Our visit to Etruscan Chiusi through the subsoil along the fascinating itinerary of the Museo della Città Sotterranea – secret chambers used for different purposes over the centuries – concludes at the necropolis, a little outside the city, with its painted tombs. The wall paintings in the Tomb of the Monkey, from the 5th century B.C., are truly astonishing, depicting refined musicians, athletes and of course the monkey the tomb is named for. Equally striking is the painted Tomb of the Colle Casuccini, decorated with a frieze depicting games, a chariot race and a banqueting scene. Not only exceptional examples of the pictorial art, these images also give us crucial information on the daily life of the Etruscans, their customs, beliefs and mythology, information that would otherwise have been lost forever. But the Etruscan paintings at Chiusi are not the only ones in Tuscany.
Sarteano, a little town that grew up around a medieval castle between the Val di Chiana and the Val d’Orcia, has an interesting Museo civico and, not far away, a place that provides a fascinating view of the world of the dead imagined by the Etruscans. It is the necropoli delle Pianacce, where excavations up to now have brought to light a sacred precinct and 21 tombs, dating from the 6th to the 2nd century B.C. One of the most interesting tombs is called the Infernal Quadriga, for the splendid, original paintings decorating its chambers. Dug out of travertine, it has a long dromus – the entrance corridor – and a host of images: griffons, lions, dolphins and a terrifying three-headed monster, as well as the quadriga driven by a demon from the other world, with red hair waving in the wind and bloodshot eyes.

If instead we take the road from Chiusi to Chianciano Terme, famed today as it was then for its thermal waters, we will be following in the legendary footsteps of King Porsenna, who went to drink water from these sacred springs. The Museo Civico Archeologico delle Acque, housed in an old 19th-century granary, offers an itinerary through the historical roots of the territory. Along with a rich collection of Etruscan canopic jars, one of the world’s largest, are the remains of an Etruscan sanctuary from the 4th century B.C. discovered near the Silene spring. In the museum’s main hall is a replica of a pediment from an Etruscan temple of the 2nd century B.C. decorated with statues and friezes. It too was found in the vicinity of a spring called I Fucoli, still in use today, showing how past and present are interlinked by water in this territory. Particularly significant are the replicas, notably those of the burial chambers from the 7th century B.C. found in the necropolis of Foce-Tolle and of rural settings, such as a farm from the 2nd century B.C. unearthed near the town, with implements used in producing wine.

But anyone interested in great archaeological discoveries must also visit the medieval town of Peccioli, where there is a little hill called Le Serre. At its top, from where Pisa and Volterra can be seen, an amazing discovery has been made: a well 10 metres deep and 5 metres wide, filled to the brim with materials from Etruscan times datable from the 6th to the 4th century B.C. Humble pottery for everyday use, tableware imported from Greece, animal bones, bronze and iron objects, gold jewellery, all showing traces of fire. What a riddle for archaeologists! The answer is likely a fire that destroyed a sacred precinct or temple where all these ritual objects were kept. And since they were sacred objects, the local Etruscan population, instead of destroying them – no one wanted to risk the vendetta of some deity! – preferred to bury them in that well.

museosarteano.it

museoetrusco.it - fondarte.peccioli.net
FORTIFIED CITIES

Cortona, one of the most ancient and powerful Etruscan cities, stood at the meeting place of major roadways. It is surrounded by an imposing belt of walls whose original foundations appear beneath the medieval ones in some places. The view from here is magnificent, sweeping as far as Lake Trasimeno. And it is from here that one of the longest and most important surviving texts in the Etruscan language comes. It is the Tabula Cortonensis, a thin sheet of bronze datable to the 2nd century B.C. found in the Le Piagge locality. It is a sales contract stipulated between Peru Scevas and his wife Arntlei with members of the gens Cusu, named Velche and Laris, for the purchase of land in the vicinity of Lake Trasimeno. The Tabula is kept at the Museo dell’Accademia Etrusca e della Città di Cortona, which possesses another extraordinary archaeological find: a bronze chandelier, unique of its kind, decorated with silenes and sirens. The Museo di Cortona also displays grave goods from the tumuli del Sodo, a locality on the Rio Loreto, outstanding among them the Tumulo del Melone II, dating from the 6th century B.C. It has two vestibules and eight burial chambers, while its back is adorned by a monumental altar with decorations and a stairway, the only example ever found in Etruria, perhaps used in funerary rites.

ETRUSCAN WALLS

All of the Etruscan cities were surrounded by defensive walls, but only some of them have survived to our own day, often reutilised and rebuilt in Roman and Medieval times. To admire these grandiose architectural works, you can go to Fiesole or to Cortona (where a gate with two barrel arches has also survived), to Volterra or to the archaeological site of Roselle, one of the best conserved and most beloved by the travellers who ventured as far as Maremma to see ancient ruins in the 18th and 19th centuries. Equally noteworthy are the walls of Pietramarina, an archaeological and naturalistic area near Carmignano, where an Etruscan town inhabited from the 8th to the 1st century B.C once stood. The walls, strikingly impressive, are almost 3 metres wide and as high as 2 metres in some places, in a virtually unique example of Etruscan walls with no superstructures added later.

Another rich and powerful city was Volterra, whose great belt of walls appears immediately upon approaching the city. Observing the walls of this city is like glancing through a history book, a long mosaic of different epochs and techniques made up of interlocking stones. But most striking of all is seeing how the Etruscan walls extend beyond the medieval ones, with some sections far from the city today, clearly indicating its illustrious past. Our amazement continues when, to enter the city, we pass through its ancient gates: Porta Diana, dating from the 3rd-2nd
century B.C., and Porta dell’Arco, from the 4th-3rd century B.C., protected by three deities whose features have been deleted by time. A visit to the city continues over what was once the acropolis, containing the remains of Etruscan buildings, and goes on to the Museo Etrusco Guarnacci to see the wealth of finds from this territory, notably the rich collection of cinerary urns for which Volterra was famous. The ashes of the dead were placed in urns with decorated lids illustrating the exploits and the features of the ancient aristocracy. We cannot leave Volterra without admiring the artisans who work in alabaster, the local stone, used by the Etruscans to produce marvellous objects. This is a tradition that has continued unbroken for nearly three thousand years.

cortonamaec.org - comune.volterra.pi.it/musei

ETRUSCAN WRITING

We are accustomed to write from left to right, in a system our language inherited from classical Latin. But that’s not the only way to write! Some languages are written from right to left, and others even from top to bottom. And Etruscan? This ancient language was not always written in the same way, but changed its orientation over the centuries. The most ancient Etruscan inscriptions were boustrophedonic. This strange word means that the writer proceeded in alternative manner, first to the right and then to the left, like an ox ploughing a field. Later, and this is the case with most of the inscriptions that have come down to us, it became customary to write from right to left, as was usual in many ancient languages. Only the most recent inscriptions - before the language died out entirely - run from left to right, as in English.

TRY IT YOURSELF!

Want to learn to send secret messages? Then do as the Etruscans did. Try to write in printing running from right to left, in the opposite direction from usual. And not this alone. The letters should be reversed too, turning to the left. It won’t be easy at first but all you need is practice. And to read the message? Nothing could be simpler, all you have to do is hold the sheet up to a mirror and everything will drop back into place as if by magic. This technique was used by one of the greatest artists and inventors in the history of mankind, he too born in Etruscan territory: Leonardo Da Vinci.

DAILY LIFE

In the medieval town of Artimino we find the Museo Archeologico “Francesco Nicosia”, containing remarkable grave goods coming from the necropolises of Prato Rosello, from the Tumulo di Montefortini at Comeana and from the site of Pietramarina. In the fascinating halls of this museum we journey back to Etruscan times to discover their daily life and their cult of the afterlife. In the vicinity of the Villa Medicea La Ferdinanda, near the town, the remains of houses and a temple have come to light. Guided paths lead us to the necropolises of Prato Rosello and Comeana, to see the Boschetti tumuli and the Tumulo di Montefortini, a real artificial hill with a diameter of 70 metres. Still in this area, at the confluence of the Bisenzio and the Marinella streams, one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of recent years was made. It is the ancient Gonfienti, a big city inhabited from the 6th to the 5th century B.C., situated on the

Leonardo Da Vinci often wrote from right to left.

The Etruscans adopted the Greek alphabet for writing.

The great domus in the archaeological zone of Gonfienti.
road that linked this part of Etruria to the Emilian side of the Apennines. The city, discovered in 1997 – and still being excavated – is laid out in an urban grid with streets meeting at right angles, the same system used later by the Romans in founding their colonies. Rectangular houses with central courtyards have been unearthed, and the archaeologists are certain that they will gradually yield new information on the Etruscans’ way of life. One of the houses has an intact roof made of roofing tiles arranged just as they are today in many Tuscan towns. In this case too, it is clear how many traditions and techniques used in Tuscany today are rooted in ancient times.

ETRUSCAN HOUSES

As you can imagine, there were various kinds of houses, differing over the centuries and according to the wealth of the families that owned them. An important example is the so-called Casa dell’impluvium, at Roselle. It is one of the oldest examples of a house with an impluvium, a central basin in the atrium for collecting rainwater, a system that was later to be used extensively in the Roman domus.

Not far from Florence, then a little trading post controlled by the powerful Etruscan city of Fiesole, Sesto Fiorentino has two fine examples of Etruscan architecture. The Tomba della Mula, with a round chamber dating from the 7th century B.C., is covered by the largest false cupola in northern Etruria known so far.
- MAP -

Roman places

1. MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE DI FIRENZE (FLORENCE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM)
2. MUSEO DI PALAZZO Vecchio e Loggia della Signoria (OR DEI LANZI), FIRENZE (MUSEUM OF PALAZZO Vecchio AND Loggia DELLA Signoria OR DEI LANZI, FIRENZE)
3. GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI, FIRENZE (GALLERY OF THE UFFIZI, FIRENZE)
4. ANTINUARIUM DI VILLA CORSINI A CASTELLO (ANTINUARIUM OF VILLA CORSINI AT CASTELLO)
5. COMPLESSO MUSEALE E ARCHEOLOGICO DELLA CATTEDRALE DI LUCCA (MUSEUM AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA OF THE Lucca CATHEDRAL)
6. MUSEO NAZIONALE DI VILLA GIUNI, LUCCA (VILLA GIUNI NATIONAL MUSEUM, LUCCA)
7. PIAZZA DELL’ANFITEATRO A LUCCA (PIAZZA DELL’ANFITEATRO, LUCCA)
8. MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE GIACO CILNIO MECENATE, AREZZO (MUSEUM OF GIACO CILNIO MECENATE, AREZZO)
9. SOTTOAGGARIO DI S. FRANCESCO E PALAZZO LAMARDI, AREZZO (SOTTOAGGARIO DI S. FRANCESCO AND PALAZZO LAMARDI, AREZZO)
10. VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISOLA D’ELBA (VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISLAND OF ELBA)
11. VILLA DELLA LINGUELLA, ISOLA D’ELBA (VILLA DELLA LINGUELLA, ISLAND OF ELBA)
12. VILLA SETTEFINestre, ANSEDONIA (VILLA SETTEFINestre, ANSEDONIA)
13. VILLA DEI VEILINEI AL LAGO DI MASSACIUCOLI (VILLA DEI VEILINEI AT LAKE MASSACIUCOLI)
14. VILLA DEL VERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO (VILLA DEL VERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO)
15. VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CAPALBIO (VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CAPALBIO)
16. BAGNI DI AGRIPPA ON PIANOSA (BAGNI DI AGRIPPA ON PIANOSA)
17. BAGNI DI NERONE, PISA (BAGNI DI NERONE, PISA)
18. MUSEO DELLE NAVI ANTICHE DI PISA (MUSEUM OF THE ANCIENT SHIPS, PISA)
19. MAREMMA ARTIFACT MUSEUM, GROSSETO (MAREMMA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART, GROSSETO)
20. VILLA DEL VERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO (VILLA DEL VERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO)
21. VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CANARILO (VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CANARILO)
22. VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA (VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA)
23. VILLA DELLA LINGUELLA, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA (VILLA DELLA LINGUELLA, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA)
24. VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA (VILLA DELLE GROTTE, ISOLA DELLA ESPLANDE DI ELBA)
25. BAGNI DI AGRIPPA ON PIANOSA (BAGNI DI AGRIPPA ON PIANOSA)
26. CANDICOMBER OF PIANOSA (CANDICOMBER OF PIANOSA)
27. MAREMMA ARTIFACT MUSEUM, GROSSETO (MAREMMA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART, GROSSETO)
28. VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CANARILO (VILLA DELLE COLONNE, CANARILO)
29. MAREMMA ARTIFACT MUSEUM, GROSSETO (MAREMMA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART, GROSSETO)
30. VILLA SETTEFINestre, ANSEDONIA (VILLA SETTEFINestre, ANSEDONIA)
31. VILLA DELVERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO (VILLA DELVERGIGNO, MONTELUPO FIORENTINO)

- TIME LINE -

- ROMULUS FOUNDS ROME AND BECOMES ITS FIRST KING. THIS IS THE MONARCHIC AGE
  735 B.C.

- TARIQUIN THE SUPERB IS EXILED. REPUBLICAN ROME IS FOUNDED
  509 B.C.

- OCTAVIAN AUGUSTUS BECOMES THE FIRST EMPEROR. ROME BECOMES AN EMPIRE
  27 B.C.

- FALL OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
  476 A.D.
ON THE TRACES OF THE CAESARS

The thought of Florence, for most people, brings to mind Santa Maria del Fiore and Ponte Vecchio, Piazza della Signoria and the Basilica of Santa Croce. And yet beneath the Medieval and Renaissance city known to all lies a more ancient one that is just as fascinating – it is the Roman Florentia – whose remains can be found not only in museums but also in the city’s streets and squares. Although these traces may be well concealed, suffocated by stone and the passage of time, they are all are treasures waiting to be discovered.

Piazza della Repubblica, thronged with people, sounds and colours, is the heart of Florence. According to tradition, it is on this site – now ringed with elegant cafes – that the city was founded as a Roman colony in 59 B.C., on the basis of the lex lilia, the agrarian law that let Caesar assign farmland to veterans of the wars. And as often happened with Roman colonies, from that little village of soldiers, a city grew up. Its great expansion occurred however in the 2nd century A.D. with the rebuilding of the Hadrianic age. On the site of today’s Piazza della Repubblica was the forum, the crossroads of the city’s main streets, the cardo maximus (today’s Via Roma and Via Calimala) and the decumans maximus (today’s Via del Corso and Via Strozzi). The forum was the economic, political and religious centre of the city. Here stood the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, now lost, although some of its marble column capitals can be seen in the church of San Miniato al Monte, overlooking Florence. And here was the public well, where the citizens came to get water, which remained in use up to the early Middle Ages. But where are the traces of Roman Florentia? Some lie buried beneath the modern city, such as the amphitheatre that stood near Piazza Santa Croce. Only its shape has remained, an ellipse that can be followed along Via Torta, Via de’ Bentaccordi and Piazza dei Peruzzi. Other traces, instead, are still visible, such as the theatre from the 1st-2nd century A.D that has come to light beneath the city’s most important building, Palazzo Vecchio; part of the orchestra, the entrance corridor and the passages under the tiers of seats are open to visitors. With a diameter of about 100 meters, the theatre is estimated to have held up to 10,000 people, showing how big the city had become by then.

MARBLE AND STATUES

If you like Roman statues, don’t forget to visit the Tribuna degli Uffizi, designed by Bernardo Buontalenti, and the Antiquarium di Villa Corsini a Castello, north of Florence, where many Roman artworks that had been stored for years at the Museo Nazionale Archeologico and in the Uffizi are now displayed.
In Florence, however, it is not buildings alone that recall the Roman age. In Piazza della Signoria, under the Loggia dei Lanzi, alongside the Renaissance masterpieces of Giambo-loggna and Cellini, are the ancient statues of Patroclos and Menelaos – from the Flavian age – and the figures of women standing against the back wall, all coming from excavations in Rome. Other fine examples of Roman statuary are found in the Galleria degli Uffizi. They are the marble works collected by the Medici, most notably the Medici Venus, the Wrestlers group and the Spear Bearer by Polyklitus, as well as the famous marble Wild Boar donated by Pope Pius IV to Cosimo I de’ Medici, whose replica in bronze, called the Porcellino, is found at the Loggia del Mercato Nuovo. In conclusion, a visit to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale is indispensable, to see the Roman cameos and bronzes collected by the Medici and Lor-raine families, as well as the extraordinary Cortile dei Fiorentini, containing Roman architectural remains discovered in late 19th-century excavations; and for the chance to see the museum’s masterpieces of Etruscan art, such as the Orator and the Chimera of Arezzo.

museicivicifiorentini.comune.fi.it – uffizi.it
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SEARCHING FOR THE LOST AMPHITHEATRE

Lucca welcomes us, surrounded by its splendid 16th-17th century walls. As was the case with Florence, this Roman city grew up from a colony – founded in 180 B.C. – and the ancient forum is still today one of the main squares: Piazza San Michele. But we must go on to Piazza San Martino to see relics of the Roman era, in the Complesso Museale e Archeologico della Cattedrale with the early Christian church of Santa Reparata built in the 4th century A.D. Inside it, around the Baptistry, are the remains of the floor of a domus from the 1st century A.D. Other fascinating places are the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Rosa, containing a well-preserved section of the ancient Roman walls, and the Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi, with architectural fragments and ceramics coming from the territory. But the symbol of Lucca is Piazza dell’Anfiteatro. Dating from the 1st-2nd century A.D., this ancient amphitheatre had the classic elliptical shape and could hold nearly 10,000 spectators. With the fall of the Western Empire, the amphitheatre became a quarry of building materials; anyone could take all the stones he wanted, until houses were built on the ruins, following the shape of the ancient structure. The layout of the piazza today is the work of the architect Nottolini, who had some of the buildings inside it demolished in the mid-19th century, clearly revealing the shape of the ancient amphitheatre and creating one of the world’s most unusual public squares.

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Above: Piazza dell’anfiteatro in Lucca. Left: the Ancient Civilizations Room at the Museo di Villa Guinigi.
GLADIATORS AND FEROCIOUS ANIMALS
Every big Roman city had an amphitheatre where public spectacles were held: fights between gladiators and the terrible venationes, encounters with ferocious, exotic beasts: lions, crocodiles, tigers, bears, even hippopotamus and seals! In Tuscany, some Roman amphitheatres are still clearly recognizable, like the ones at Roselle and Arezzo. Others instead have been reutilised or demolished, their stones carried off to construct new buildings. Two of the strangest examples of lost amphitheatres - which are however still clearly evident - are the one in Florence, whose oval shape is replicated in the curving streets between Piazza Santa Croce and Piazza San Firenze, and the one in Lucca, whose shape survives in the centrally located Piazza dell'Anfiteatro. A Roman amphitheatre is still visible today in Arezzo, an ancient Etruscan city conquered by the Romans in 295 B.C. that became a military outpost of Rome against the northern populations. Here we find the Museo Archeologico Nazionale “Gaio Cilnio Mecenate”, housed in the 16th-century Monastery of San Bernardo. Built on the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre from the 1st century A.D., this building imbued with history possesses a remarkable collection of ceramic, mosaic and sculptural art. The ancient Arretium is recalled in the sources for its great military aid to Rome, and as the birthplace of Gaius Cilnius Maecenas, a supporter of Emperor Octavian and head of a famous circle of intellectuals that included Vergil and Horace. Without forgetting the famous Arretina Vasa, the typical coral-coloured tableware, decorated in relief, invented and produced right here in Arezzo from the 1st century B.C.; the workshops have been found at various places in the city. It was brought all over the known world by the Roman legions, and some fragments of Arretine ware have even been found in India! The city abounds in relics from Roman times, but two sites in particular deserve a visit. The first is the Archaeological Area of the Sottosagratore di San Francesco, where ancient walls and a domus lavishly decorated with mosaics and marble have been found. The second is the mosaic unearthed at Palazzo Lambardi, called “little sea”, whose many subjects range from aquatic birds to dolphins.

ROMAN MOSAICS
The Romans decorated public and private buildings with mosaics, whose brightly coloured tesserae were made of various materials: marble, travertine, basalt and glass paste. Some of the most beautiful in Tuscany are found in the Domus dei Mosaici at Roselle, in the Villa delle Grotte on Elba, and in Arezzo, at the Sottosagratore di San Francesco and at Palazzo Lambardi. Noteworthy mosaics have also been recently unearthed in the Villa dell’Oratorio at Limite sull’Arno, near Florence. They depict animals along with geometric and plant motifs, in a great aristocratic villa that probably belonged to Vettius Agorius Paetextatus, who was Governor of Tuscia and Umbria in the 4th century A.D.

ROMAN THEATRES
In Fiesole, nestled between the hills of San Francesco and Sant’Apollinare, we can admire a splendid landscape and the remains of the city’s ancient past. Following the Cyclopean walls built of squared blocks, erected in Etruscan times but utilised in the following centuries as well, we enter the archaeological zone not far from the central Piazza Mino. It conserves many relics of the Roman age, including a theatre still in use today, built along the side of a natural slope. Amazingly, this structure continues to be utilised, after so many
centuries, for its original purpose, and people sitting in it today can admire the same panorama as those who – 2000 years ago! – sat on these same tiers of seats. Further down we find the baths datable to the 1st century B.C. with chambers for hot and cold water, swimming pools and a steam-production system, as well as the remains of a temple probably dedicated to Minerva, built over an ancient Etruscan religious site. Our visit can conclude at the Museo Civico Archeologico, which sends us on a real journey back in time, from the Etruscan age to the time of the Lombards, who settled in Fiesole.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

In ancient times the theatre, both comedy and tragedy, was greatly beloved by the public. And certainly just as much by the Romans as by the Greeks, considering that the works of Plautus and Terentius are still studied and performed today! In Tuscany, if you want to sit in an original auditorium – the part of the theatre assigned to the spectators, while the stage is called the orchestra – you can visit the theatre in Fiesole or the one in Volterra, which could hold nearly 2000 spectators. Both of them are still used today for events of various kinds.

EXPLORING VILLAS

Montelupo Fiorentino, situated on the banks of the Arno River, is a town famous for its production of ceramics. This tradition has lasted unbroken since Renaissance times when, in the 15th century, it was the majolica production centre for Florence. In the nearby Pulica locality is the Roman Villa of Vergigno, an estate dating from the 1st century B.C. that reached its maximum splendour in the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. In addition to its residential quarters and agricultural buildings, a kiln has been found, where bricks and amphorae were fired, then left to dry in the nearby drying chamber. Another villa from Roman times open to visitors is found near Lago di Massaciuccoli, a lake – now a nature reserve – famous for its hundreds of species of birds. On the slopes of Monte Aquilata are the ruins of the Villa dei Venulei dating from the 1st century A.D., where you can see the ruins of the villa with its thermal system and visit an antiquarium displaying the remains of splendid mosaics. For children, there are workshops and educational itineraries.

TRY IT YOURSELF!

Want to make a mosaic? You will need some sheets of paper in different colours, a pair of scissors, a stick of glue, a pencil and a sheet of stiff cardboard. First of all, make the tesserae by cutting the coloured paper into little pieces. Then draw whatever image you want on the sheet of cardboard. It can be either realistic, such as a piece of fruit or an animal, or geometric, like a series of triangles and squares. Now glue the little coloured pieces onto the drawing following the outlines of the drawing, and here is your Roman mosaic!
ANCIENT SHIPS

In Pisa the traces of Roman times lead us to the Camposanto monumentale in Piazza del Duomo, containing marble sculptures and sarcophaguses, and to the Bagni di Nerone near Porta Lucca, thermal baths from the 1st century A.D. that belonged to the Venuleii family, the same aristocratic gens that owned the villa in the vicinity of Lake Massaciuccoli. But Pisa has also been the scene of one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of recent years: the ancient Roman ships.

The first of these Roman ships that sank in antiquity was found in 1998, during work on the Pisa San Rossore railway station, at the point where a canal in the centuriation ran into the Serchio River. After this, some 30 ships dating from the 3rd century B.C. to the 7th century A.D. have been found, not only perfectly preserved due to a total lack of oxygen, but also still loaded with all their cargo: coins, amphorae and jewellery, in addition to everyday objects used by the sailors during navigation, such as ropes, wicker baskets, leather objects and corks for the amphorae. A real treasure chest of archaeology to be discovered by children and adults thanks to a guided itinerary.

A HIDDEN TREASURE

Not far from Arezzo is the archaeological zone of Castelsecco-San Cornelio, from where a splendid panorama opens out. On this height, where an Etruscan temple already stood, an imposing dry-stone wall was built in the late Hellenistic age. It served to sustain a great building used for religious rites, as shown by the altar found in the orchestra and the many votive offerings unearthed.

DIVING INTO THE PAST

In southern Tuscany there is a place where you can take a walk on original Roman roads and admire the many ruins that are left. This is the archaeological zone of Roselle, a member of the ancient Etruscan league – the dodecapolis – and then, after the Roman conquest, an important city in the Empire. Strolling through the ancient streets of Roselle is an extraordinary experience for everyone, both children and adults. It is a real voyage back in time through layers of history that slowly built up one above another; from traces of the Villanovan Age to the maximum splendour of Etruscan times, from the Romanising of the city to its decadence in the Middle Ages, up to its abandonment in the 16th century, which crystallised the traces of the various cultures and societies. The archaeological area greets us with its spectacular Cyclopean walls – built by the Etruscans in the 6th century B.C. over an even older belt of walls from the 7th century – encircling the whole area for an extent of 3270 meters. Strangely enough, the walls and the amphitheatre are the only structures that have never been buried over the centuries, arousing the admiration of travellers in the 19th century, who struggled through thick vegetation purposely to see them. To reach the ancient city of Roselle visitors today must pass – just as in antiquity! – through one of the seven original gates and then turn onto the decumanus, which leads to the forum. Along this ancient street, the furrows dug out by wagon
wheels can still be seen. Still on this street we find the ancient baths, an important meeting place in the Roman city, with an early Christian church that was built over them in the following centuries. Continuing along the decumanus, past the tabernae, the ancient shops, we arrive at the city’s centre, the forum, crossroads of the decumanus and the cardo, and site of the basilica, the great edifice that housed the law court. From here we can continue to explore the area, turning into the cardo maximus to find other buildings unearthed during excavations, such as the Domus degli Augustales, dedicated to the cult of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, from which come two colossal statues of the Emperor Claudius and the Empress Livia, the wife of Octavian Augustus; and the Domus dei Mosaici, a typical Roman house with a central atrium and an impluvium, a basin for collecting rainwater. Continuing northward we find the basilica of the Bassi and one of the most fascinating places in the whole city: the amphitheatre, dating from the 1st century A.D. This imposing building was covered by a velarium, a kind of movable curtain to protect the public from sun and rain – whose stone bases can still be seen. The archaeological area is fascinating not only for its extraordinary Roman and Etruscan ruins – such as the house with an impluvium and the building surrounded by a precinct, probably a temple – but also for the striking naturalist beauty of its setting. The itinerary can then extend as far as Grosseto, with a visit to the Museo archeologico e d’arte della Maremma. Here, alongside ceramics and grave goods from the various necropolises in the territory, the most important Etruscan and Roman finds from Roselle are displayed, including the colossal statues coming from the Domus degli Augustales.
water in the lagoon. It is a natural split in the rock, where some bulkheads were installed. This hydraulic system was then replaced by the so-called Tagliata, a canal no less than 80 metres long. In the vicinity of Cosa the remains of Roman villas have been discovered, such as the Villa Settefinestre e delle Colonne, showing that many wealthy aristocratic families chose to build their country homes in these splendid places.

MARE NOSTRUM, “OUR SEA”

This is how the ancient Romans called the Mediterranean, and many traces of that distant past can be found in the Tuscan archipelago. On the Island of Elba, clearly visible when arriving by sea, are the ruins of the Villa delle Grotte not far from Portoferraio. Inhabited from the 1st century B.C. to the 1st century A.D., it was an opulent residence adorned with marble and mosaics, with three spacious gardens, one of them overlooking the panoramic seaside, where the great poet Ovid is said to have strolled. Another Roman residence open to the public is Villa della Linguella, on the Gulf of Portoferraio, it too dating from the 1st century B.C. After having been abandoned in the Middle Ages the building, unlike Villa delle Grotte, was encapsulated in the Torre del Martello, a part of the Medicean Fortress. We disembark on Pianosa, another island in the archipelago, whose name comes from the Latin planasia, meaning flat. And this island is really flat. The highest point is only 29 metres above sea level. Here the Emperor Augustus held his nephew Agrippa Postumo, the son of his sister Julia, in luxurious confinement. Of the great villa built purposely for that enforced sojourn there remains only the maritime part, called Bagno di Agrippa. Remaining from this great building complex are the ruins of a theatre, a thermal system, some reception rooms and basins for raising fish, one of which contained artificial islands and was surrounded by a peristyle. On Pianosa we also find catacombs dug out of a rocky bank, datable between the 4th and the 6th century A.D., bearing exceptional testimony to Christian origins. The dense network of tunnels, with 700 burial places, 500 loculi and 200 underground passages, is one of the most complex catacombs ever found north of Rome.

Although this journey to discover Roman-age Tuscany has reached its end, there are many other treasures from Roman times in the region. Let’s take a last look at the islands in the archipelago, with their striking beauty. On the Island of Gorgona we find the Villa dei Limiti, filled with mosaics and wall paintings, whose remains have been encapsulated in later buildings. On the Island of Capraia, along the road leading from the port to the castle, we can see the ruins of a villa from the imperial age, rebuilt and inhabited in later centuries by Christian monks. On the Island of Giglio, at Giglio Porto, are the remains of a great villa built on the coastal rocks in the Bagno di Saraceno locality, with pools for raising fish. And on the Island of Giannutri, at Cala Maestra, we can recognize the ruins of an ancient Roman port with the wharf and a big warehouse for the many goods that passed from here. And it is from that ancient Roman port, overlooking the blue waters of the Tyrrenian Sea, that we set sail for the mainland.
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