



# The eleven Townships of the Val di Nievole



## Buggiano



Comune di Buggiano

It was around the year 200 B.C., when a valorous soldier was offered a piece of land out of recognition of his heroism. He modestly requested a piece of land that could be covered by a cow's hide. Then he took that cow's hide and cut it into strips so thin, that when laid end to end, they formed a perimeter around a beautiful hill; Buggiano, to be precise. It became known as *foro Bojani*, then *Abadianu* or *Abudius*, later still, a document from the year 979AD refers to this hill with the name Buzano, before becoming Buggiano. History spoke again of this town the year 1135, when this little earthly paradise fell victim to the trials of the Medieval Tuscan wars. One of the monuments to visit in Buggiano is the Palazzo del Podestà (city hall), built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps upon the foundations of an ancient fortress. The façade displays 57 coat-of-arms in glazed terracotta, many of which were produced by the Florentine workshop of the Della Robbia family.

## Chiesina Uzzanese



Comune di Chiesina Uzzanese

Chiesina Uzzanese is a relatively young town, that obtained its administrative autonomy only in 1963. The town conserves the testimony of its Medieval origins in the *Xenodochio*, a building that at one time, was constituted by a church (*chiesa* in Italian) and a dormitory for pilgrims on their journey toward Rome. Sometime around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a small community of houses developed around the church and the inhabitants began to drain and work the surrounding swamp-land. Nearby, another nucleus of houses was forming near the bridge built across the Pescia river, known as *Uzzanese*. The modern development has mostly been due to the fact that Chiesina Uzzanese is strategically located along the cross-roads of the Val di Nievole, as well as along the postal routes of Lucca and Pisa. Nowadays the town is traversed by the main motorway A11 which goes from Florence to the Versilia seaside.

## Lamporecchio



Comune di Lamporecchio

Giulio Rospigliosi (1600-1669), elected Pope Clement IX, was famous for having been mediator of the peace treaty of Aquisgrana as well as author of the "Pace Clementina" which pacified the French *jansénistes*. He commissioned Gian Lorenzo Bernini to build him a home. Where should I build it? Bernini inquired. The Pope replied, "What do you mean – Where should I build Villa Rospigliosi? In Lamporecchio, of course! No where else in Italy do they produce such a fine wine for celebrating Mass." The first documentation of the town goes back to a few centuries before the year 1000AD, to find a trace of a *Lamprek*, perhaps the corrupted translation of the Latin *Emporiculum*, or small marketplace... Today, the beauty of the hills of Lamporecchio, the quality of its wine, and the traditions of Saint Brigida (1302-1370, who amongst the flowering meadows consolidated her visions and invented the anise-flavored sweets know as *brigidini*), one can truly find the sweet serenity of days gone by, the same that humanity hopes for in the future.

## Larciano



Comune di Larciano

This township in the Val di Nievole, extends from the foothills of Montalbano across the plains to the Fucecchio marsh. As Larciano has grown economically of the years, it has also maintained a very solid tie to its farming values and traditions. Agriculture is still of major importance, especially the production of wine and olive oil. Many theories has been proposed about the origins of the name "Larciano". It is said that in 631BC just after the founding of Rome, a centurion of the *gens Laertia* settled on Montalbano, founding a village called "Laertiano". The first creditable document, which dates back to 931AD, refers to the area as "Villa Larziana" which some historians claim derives from the name of an ancient family "Larzia", that developed a colony called "Villa Larziana" in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The proof provided by the written document renders this hypothesis, amongst the most reliable, though it has also been said that the origin of the name Larciano is associated to the fact that in the past there were numerous larch forests in the area.

## Massa e Cozzile



Comune di Massa e Cozzile

The community of Massa e Cozzile, was initially composed of three different villages: Verruca, Massa and Cozzile. The coat of arms still represents the symbols of all three: the cross of Verruca, the lily of Cozzile and the iron-clad mace (*mazza* in Italian) of Massa. The town of Massa is one of the most ancient settlements in the Val di Nievole and originated as an agrarian marketplace in the late Roman period (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD). Its Roman origins have been documented by the coins, funerary urns and epigraphs unearthed in the area. The first references to "Massa sulla Bora" and to the Verruca castle, go back to the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, while the origin of Cozzile is, without a doubt, more recent. First under the dominion of the Longbards, then conquered by Lucca, and from 1339-1340 by Florence, until finally, after 1814 Massa e Cozzile is granted its full autonomy.

### Monsummano Terme



Comune di Monsummano Terme

The castle of “Montesommano” has been documented since 1005AD. The Monsummano hill is adjacent to that of Montevettolini, a town of medieval origin, under the rule of the Florentine Signoria. The castle in Montevettolini served, in the 13th century, as a refuge for exiled Florentines and Lucchesi during the violent conflicts between Guelphs and Ghibellines. The founding of Monsummano is linked to the Grand-Duke Ferdinando of the Medici family and his favorite architect Menchini. In fact, toward the end of the 1500’s, several prodigious events took place around Monsummano, one of which was the sudden appearance of a fresh-water spring near the tabernacle housing a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary. In 1602, the Grand-Duke commissioned Menchini to build a large Sanctuary in honor of the Madonna della Fontenuova (Our Lady of the New Fountain). Halfway through the 1800’s, the natural warm, thermal caves were discovered. The waters contain specific therapeutic properties which are still enjoyed today in the modern spa establishment.

### Montecatini Terme



Comune di Montecatini Terme

In the year 1000AD, Montecatini has over three kilometers of fortified walls, seven city gates and 25 towers. A thousand years had passed since Catilina, the great rebel leader of the time of Cicero’s Rome, was defeated in the battle of Pistoia, and saw for the last time the sun on the hillside known as *Mons Catilinae*. Even then the area’s thermal sources were well known to the Romans, the great builders of the baths. Centrally located in the Val di Nievole, which in turn is the heart of Tuscany, Montecatini, today offers luxurious well-cured parks, perfect for a relaxing stroll; impeccable hotel services, courteous in their reception and offering a wide array of options regarding curative therapies at the thermal baths. All of this and more gathered in a sort of natural amphitheater of green hills that embraced the city and towns, that are a part of the history of the Val di Nievole.

### Pescia



Comune di Pescia

The city of Pescia, considered the capital of the Val di Nievole, dates back to Medieval times. Divided in half by a river, the city has two distinct urban sectors: the “religious” half containing the Cathedral and the “civic” half with the Town Hall and the large Square. Ancient *palazzi* and elegant churches characterizes the historic center, which, though having undergone noteworthy interventions over the years, still maintains its original aspect. Aside from the picturesque city itself, the major attractions around Pescia are the Valleriana castles and the town of Collodi, which is famous around the world, because the author of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Carlo Lorenzini) changed his name to Carlo Collodi, in honor of this town. Pescia, is still a fascinating place where one can spend days amongst the green hills and the characteristic country roads which tell the history of centuries past. Pescia is also very famous for its production and commerce of plants and flowers, supplying most of central Italy.

### Pieve a Nievole



Comune di Pieve a Nievole

The town takes its name from the *pieve* (country church or parish) of San Pietro a Neure, of early origins, found along route between Lucca and Pistoia on the ancient Via Cassia. Legend says that the church was founded by the bishop of Lucca, Frediano, perhaps before the Longbard invasion of the Val di Nievole in 570 AD. As an event of the wars and conflicts in the Val di Nievole between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the parish priest moved to the church of San Michele in nearby Montecatini. This church would later take the name of San Pietro, in honor of the mother church, which itself would eventually be dedicated to San Marco. This passage, which was of extreme importance for the community, is still depicted in its coat of arms, which includes the keys of Saint Peter, the ancient patron, held in the paws of the winged lion, symbol of Saint Mark the Evangelist. Toward the end of the 1500’s, the church of San Pietro began to be called San Marco and vice-versa. Finally in 1908 the church in Pieve a Nievole was granted the right to return to its original title of San Pietro

### Ponte Buggianese



Comune di Ponte Buggianese

The history of this community is not as old as that of the hillside towns from which Ponte Buggianese takes its origin and its name. The quiet little town hides the history of centuries of battle and hard work dedicated to drawing out arable land from the swampy plains. In fact, the reduction of the Fucecchio Lake and the consequent population of the valley of Uzzano and Buggiano, led to the creation of Ponte Buggianese in the 1500’s, where a small church was built and paid for by the citizens. This gave the small village its first foundation as center of the religious community in the valley. In later years the community was given a decree from King Umberto I, dated March 9, 1899, for its coat of arms: a shield divided in half – on one half a red ox surmounted by a red lily, and on the other half a flowering lily, on a red and silver field

### Uzzano



Comune di Uzzano

One speculation on the name Uzzano, is that is derived from the name of a courageous Longbard captain name Uzzo or Uccio, who, in a remote and uncertain epoch, founded a castle there. Another possibility claims that the name Uzzano comes from the Latin verb *urere* (to burn), because of a strange phenomenon, documented by Giovanni Boccaccio, which tells of a nearby stream which seems to have erupted several times throughout history, spewing out boulders and molten lava. In fact, even the city’s coat of arms – a fire burning five logs, one to represent each of the historic fractions of the community (Castello, La Costa, Botteghino, Terrarossa, Torricchio).- make reference to this assumption. Yet another theory, more scientifically proven, claims that the name Uzzano comes from the Roman era. Names that end in the suffix *-ano*, quite common in the areas of the Val di Nievole and Lucchesia, generally come from Latin and derive from the Roman *predium* or piece of property which took the name of its owner. Giacomo Puccini, during his stay in Uzzano, immersed in an oasis of olive trees, composed part of *La Boheme*.