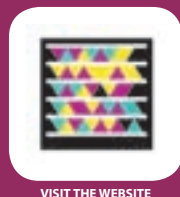


THE CASA DELLE FIGURE HOUSE OF THE FIGURES

Serravalle has two beautiful churches. The first and oldest is dedicated to Saint Michael; the other, erected in the XIII century, to Saint Stephen. In both churches, there is a statue of Saint Louis who has been the local patron saint since the XIV century because of his miraculous intervention in the wars of that period. Just below this second church, at the top of the old town, there is a small building that until recently was a private residence, called by the locals "la casa delle figure", or "the house of the figures".

And what figures! A recent restoration, made possible by the municipality, revealed a fourteenth-century cycle of paintings on the walls of what was once the Oratory of SS. Rocco e Sebastiano, and later of the Company of Our Lady of the Assumption. The frescoes have a good artistic importance and the lively representations of its Christological subject (with Saint Peter cutting the ear of a soldier at the arrest of Christ, a crucifixion, a Last Judgment) obviously captured the imagination of observers thus leading to its popular name.



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ITINERARIES OF ART AND HISTORY

SERRAVALLE AND CASALGUIDI



**AGENZIA
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Intervento realizzato all'interno delle azioni previste dal progetto interregionale (L.135/2001 art. 5) "Valorizzazione comprensorio sciistico tosco emiliano" cofinanziato da Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - Dipartimento per lo sviluppo e la competitività del turismo - e dalla Regione Toscana

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SERRAVALLE AND CASALGUIDI

The Serravalle pass was a true cross-road of Pistoia's history during the early Middle Ages. Indeed, for two decades at the end of the VI century A.D, the Lombard advance was held back in the area from the Valdinievole (where the so-called "lame of Agilulf", the king who led the attack, was found) towards a Pistoia still oc-



cupied by the Byzantines. Finally, the city was occupied. It was an important conquest for the Lombards, who could now descend from there into southern Italy. Pistoia was ruled by the Lombards for a long time and maintained a Germanic stamp for centuries. In the Middle Ages, the castle town of Serravalle played a central role in the conflict of the white and Ghibelline Pistoia against Florence and Lucca, which were black and Guelph. It is known that although these divisions were, at that time, mainly motivated by questions of local pre-eminence, they were not to be resolved through diplomacy. Cino da Pistoia's city suffered a disastrous year of siege between 1305 and 1306. A general battle in 1302 preceded the preliminary siege, and



the conquest, during which the castle of Serravalle suffered at the hands of Morello Malaspina, the leader of the Guelph confederation. In this way, he acquired a good base for his subsequent attack on Pistoia and, four years later, he triumphantly entered the exhausted city. The castle then fell to Castruccio Castracani, here again anticipating the fate of Pistoia, of which – thanks to Tedici's betrayal – the Luccan condottiere was briefly Lord. Later, by this time within the Florentine sphere of

influence, Serravalle was under the jurisdiction of a Medici Podestà. The tax books that listed the "fochi" (i.e., the families) to be taxed record a significant demographic drop due to the recurrent epidemics. In fact, the local cult of Saints Roch and Sebastian, invoked against these diseases, is evidence that – like elsewhere – supernatural help was sought to escape the plagues. An inventory found in the Historical Archives shows that, during the period of Italian unification, namely

with the 1866 reform, the territory had become a modern municipality, with Serravalle as the main town and the neighboring villages of Stazione Masotti and Castellina. Yet it also stretched along the Montalbano ridge, encompassing the villages of Vinacciano (with the now-ruined, fifteenth-century Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie), Casalguidi, and Cantagrillo. The most populous village is Casalguidi, known until the XVIII century as Casale, and documented beginning in the year 1000. Already in Roman times, it probably was a way station along the road from Pistoia to Montalbano. The village of Casalguidi was celebrated by Canon Giovanni O'Kelly (son of the governor of Pistoia under the Lorraines) in the verses "*amabil suolo e parte dell'alma Ausonia e della bella Etruria, terrestre solitario Paradiso*" ("sweet soil, and land of the Ausonian soul and beautiful Etruria, a secluded earthly Paradise"). Yet this brief extract, written in the pompous and bombastic fashion of the time, makes clear the desire of this good priest who, arriv-

ing in Casalguidi at the end of the century, wished to exalt this village, a "legacy of the mighty Guidi [family]". Casalguidi is known for the embroidery done by its women (the famous "Casalguidi stitch") and for the "Procession of the Dead Christ" on Good Friday. The latter is so well-established and popular that "an anticlerical mob" brought it to an end in the early years of the Italian Unification, specifically in 1866, the year Pius IX was locked up in the Vatican palaces, declaring himself to be a prisoner. But Serravalle does not offer only historical memories. For some years now, the now renowned Serravalle Jazz Festival has been held in the area just below Castruccio's tower.

