

TOURIST INFORMATION

History of the Association

The Proloco (that means for the city), was born in 1998, for exploit the city with some cultural, tourist, social, traditional and economical activities. The association works together with the municipal administration on the organization of some town festivals like Carnival, "Salacca", "Rificolona", "Perdono" and Christmas.

From 1998 to these days the association grew up and now is composed by over 230 members, even because there are a lot of conventions and discounts with some shops of the town.

Our office is the reference point of all the Valdarno Superiore area and it keeps relations with Arezzo's Apt.

Where it is

Our office is in the city centre of San Giovanni Valdarno, in Piazza Cavour, the main square of the town, between the Caffè Fiorenza and the Bank.

It is open from 9 am until 12.30 pm and from 3.30 pm until 6.30 pm from Monday to Friday; on Saturday it is open only in the morning.

Contact us

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The city of San Giovanni Valdarno

Between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, the upper Valdarno had not yet been securely inserted within the countryside under Florence's control. Florence decided to consolidate its control over the valley by means of a system of military garrisons. The decision to found San Giovanni and Castelfranco was taken, according to the historian Giovanni Villani, in 1296. The population of Castel San Giovanni (as San Giovanni was called at that time) was a merging of small inhabited centres and castles in the surrounding areas owned by powerful local landowners. The resolution of 1299 determined that no noble could reside within the recently founded "terre murate". Farmers were attracted to the newly founded centres by financial privileges but they also had to accept various obligations: they had to carry out fortification works, for which Florence assumed financial responsibility, and they had to build their new accommodation at their own expense.

The frequent assaults to which they were subjected weakened the incomplete fortifications of San Giovanni which by 1352 were in very poor condition. After a period of continuous power struggles, there followed between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, two decades of relative peace and development of the centre.

The Palazzo Pretorio, until 1401 the seat of the sole Podestà of San Giovanni, became from the beginning of the fifteenth century the seat of the Vicari del Valdarno Superiore ('Deputies of the Upper Valdarno'). The Vicari of San Giovanni held jurisdiction over the territories of Greve, Pontassieve, Incisa, Figline, Cascia di Reggello, Castelfranco di Sopra, Terranuova, Montevarchi, Bucine, and Laterina. In 1479 San Giovanni was devastated by the plague, which claimed the lives of almost two thirds of the population. To this episode is linked the construction of the oratory of the Madonna delle Grazie (our Lady of the graces), in memory of the "Miracolo del latte" ('miracle of the milk').

The town gradually lost its original character of military outpost, the military function of the Valdarno area becoming less important in consequence of the institution of a stable balance of power in the countryside surrounding Florence. The recovery of the centre, including demographic recovery, started at the beginning of the Lorraine period. The reforms of Pietro Leopoldo tended to bestow administrative autonomy on the local community and, between 1772 and 1774, indeed mark the end of the period of the Deputies and Podestà. During the Lorraine period there was an intensification of the politics of investment in favour of the countryside. The works to control the waters increased the possibility of exploiting the arable land. At San Giovanni the recovery is evident from the intense drive to restructure and modernize important palazzos in the town centre. The posts of Deputy and Podestà, which had been deprived of their old function of political control over the countryside following the consolidation of the Medici State and had been reduced by the Lorraine administration to an exclusively judicial role, were finally suppressed in 1848. San Giovanni lost the territory of Cavriglia, which became an autonomous commune, and, in 1848, was made part of the province of Arezzo.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a recovery of manufacturing activity. The

construction of the railway station in the immediate vicinity of the residential centre on the line connecting Florence with Rome undoubtedly represented a highly significant development also in economic terms, for the history of the town. The economic development and population growth of the first years of the twentieth century brought about a radical transformation of the social features of the Valdarno region. The Second World War seriously damaged the productive structure of the town. The years immediately after the war were characterised by rapid economic recovery of the centre and by a substantial increase in the population.

The town spread, exploiting to the full the space along the left bank of the Arno and occupying the areas beyond the river bridge. The new scheme of general town-planning was approved in 1972. The regeneration of the historic centre, which was in a very dilapidated state, began at the end of the 1970s. The aim was to revitalize the historic centre without displacing the old inhabitants. The monumental buildings underwent restoration work and the streets of the historic centre were repaved in stone. In January 1977 is approved the first town-planning scheme about the historical centre of San Giovanni Valdarno, with greatly innovative feature in the forms and in the procedure of accomplishment. In the plan of renovation the historical urban centre is taken up as only entity to safeguard from the point of town-planning, social, economic and cultural view.

In 2000 there was the renovation of the two main squares, as they are at the moment.

How to reach San Giovanni Valdarno

- By car: Exit Valdarno of the highway A1, at the roundabout turn on the left and straight on for 3 km.
- By train: Railway station San Giovanni Valdarno. 30 minutes from Florence and 25 minutes from Arezzo.
- By airplane: 70 km from Florence's airport;
116 km from Pisa's airport;
262 km from Rome Fiumicino's airport;
386 km from Milano Malpensa's airport.

Artists

1. *Masaccio*

Tommaso di Mone Cassai was born in San Giovanni Valdarno on 21 December 1401. The origin of his nickname "Masaccio" ('Messy Thomas') is described by Vasari: "He was very absent-minded and unpredictable, like a man who has devoted his whole life and will only to the details of art, caring very little about himself and even about others. And because he never wanted to think in any way about worldly affairs or concerns, not even about how he dressed himself, he was unaccustomed to collecting anything from his debtors unless he was in dire straights. Instead of Tommaso, which was his real name, everyone called him Masaccio."

Masaccio moved to Florence in 1417. In 1419 he is already documented as an active painter there. In the great city he was impressed by the recent revolutionary creations of Donatello and Brunelleschi, with whom he soon established strong bonds of friendship. On that day Masaccio enrolled in the Arte dei Medici e Speciali (the Guild of the Doctors and Pharmacists, to which painters also belonged). Masaccio's first known work, the *Trittico di San Giovenale* ('San Giovenale Triptych'), now at Cascia di Reggello, bears the date 23 April 1422 in humanistic-style script. The growing awareness and development of the artist are documented by the three panels of the triptych: the firm perspectival construction of Brunellesque limpidity, the rejection of Gentile da Fabriano's calligraphic elegance, the pithy and sober gestural expressiveness which seems to have derived inspiration from Giotto's Bardi and Peruzzi Chapel frescoes in S. Croce. From this time the two Valdarnese painters began a collaboration that lasted until Masaccio's sudden and mysterious death. The first fruit of their collaboration dates from the end of 1424.

Masaccio and his brother Giovanni are documented in Pisa from 19 February to 26 December 1426. In this maritime city the great artist painted the well-known *Polittico di Pisa* ('Pisa Polyptych') for a chapel of the church of the Carmine. In the autumn of 1424 Felice Brancacci, a rich silk merchant, man of politics and son-in-law of Palla Strozzi, commissioned probably Masolino alone to decorate in fresco the Brancacci Chapel, in the Florentine church of the Carmine. Masolino, who had already collaborated with Masaccio on the *Sant'Anna Metterza*, had much to do and was about to leave on 1 September 1425 for Hungary, and so involved Masaccio in the commission.

Masaccio left for Rome at the end of 1427. Masaccio died, very soon afterwards, at the age of twenty six, in mysterious circumstances. The *Libro di Antonio Billi* states: "He died in Rome, allegedly poisoned, at the age of twenty six. He was much loved by Filippo Brunelleschi, who taught him many things. And when Filippo heard of his death he was clearly most upset and often used to say to his servants, 'We have suffered a great loss.'"

2. *Masolino da Panicale*

Masolino was born in Panicale di Renacci in 1383. In September 1422 he is documented in Florence as a "painter". In 1424 Masolino was engaged, alone, in the fresco decoration of the Brancacci chapel in the church of the Carmine in Florence, and of the chapel of the Brotherhood of S. Elena in the church of S. Stefano at Empoli. At the end of 1424 Masaccio joined Masolino at work on the Brancacci chapel. The two painters from San Giovanni worked there side by side until 1425. At the end of 1425 Masolino left for Hungary. Masolino was again in Florence on 11 May 1428. He worked together with Masaccio in Rome on the triptych for the church of S. Maria Maggiore. Between 1432 and 1433 Masolino's presence in Todi is documented. Immediately afterwards Masolino went to Castiglione Olona, a town in Lombardy. Masolino died in Castiglione Olona in about 1440.

3. *Mariotto da Cristofano*

Mariotto di Cristofano was born in San Giovanni Valdarno in about 1396. He moved to Florence, while still a child, between 1401 and 1402. In fact Mariotto painted panels on the border between tradition and innovation, in which ideas drawn from the international style were expressed with a firm sense of volume and space. It is likely that Mariotto had a certain influence on the education of the young Masaccio, who had already moved to Florence with his family in 1417. At some point in 1421-22 Mariotto married Masaccio's sister Caterina. To the first years of the 1420s belong such fascinating works as the Polittico di Carda ('Carda Polyptych') in Casentino with La Pietà e Santi ('The Pietà with Saints'). To the same period as the Polittico di Carda dates the Christus Patiens fra La Vergine e S. Lucia ('Christus Patiens with the Virgin and St. Lucy'), executed for the small church of St. Lucia in San Giovanni and now in the local museum of the Basilica. In the last years before his death the standard of Mariotto's painting underwent a dramatic decline. The panel painting, Madonna in trono con Bambino e Santi ('Madonna enthroned with Child and Saints') was executed for the church of S. Lorenzo in San Giovanni. The painting is now kept in the museum of the Basilica.

4. *Lo Scheggia (The Sprinter)*

Giovanni di Ser Giovanni was Masaccio's younger brother, and was born in San Giovanni Valdarno in 1406 of Giovanni and Monna Jacopa. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni enrolled in the Arte dei Medici e Speziali in 1430 but was already documented as an active painter in Florence from 1420. In 1426 he followed his brother to Pisa, to assist with the execution of the Polittico del Carmine ('Carmine Polyptych'). Between 1436 and 1440 he was involved in making intarsia for the Sacristy of the Masses of Florence Cathedral. In the past our understanding of the artistic personality of Lo Scheggia was based entirely on the fresco of Martirio di S. Sebastiano ('The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian'), on the right hand aisle of the church of S. Lorenzo in San Giovanni. The fresco is dated 1456 or 1457 and signed "Giovanni di Ser Giovanni". He died in Florence on 1486.

5. *Niccolò Nasoni*

Niccolò Nasoni, a painter and architect of European reputation was born in San Giovanni Valdarno in 1691 and died in Portugal in 1773. He was a pupil of Vincenzo Ferrati (1659-1711) and of Giuseppe Nicola Nasini (1657-1736). Nasoni was admitted at Rozzi Accademy in Siena in 1713 under the name "Piangoleggio", after he had collaborated with the academicians as a scenographer, and perhaps as an actor. By 1711 Nasoni had already collaborated with Ferrati in the making of the funeral trappings for Francesco Maria de' Medici. After Ferrati's death, l'Opera del Duomo di Siena ('Office of Works of the Cathedral') commissioned from Niccolò the catafalque for the Great Prince Ferdinand, who died in 1713, and later for the Great Duchess Marguerite-Luise, who died in Paris in 1721. Niccolò left Siena in 1722, called to Malta by the Great Master He stayed in Malta until 1725. While he was there he worked on the decoration of the Palazzo Magistrale of Valletta, among other things. Disagreements with unknown rivals and with the Inquisition account for the sudden interruption of Nasoni's stay in Malta and his move to Oporto. In 1725 Nasoni was already involved in the decoration of the Portuguese cathedral. His masterpiece is the architectural complex of the Clérigos Confraternity (1731-1763): in its church, incidentally, Nasoni is buried. The bell-tower, connected to the church by the "house" of the Clérigos, remains today one of the symbols of Oporto. At Oporto, among his other works, Nasoni planned the church of the Misericordia.

6. *Giovanni da San Giovanni*

Giovanni Mannozi, better known as Giovanni da San Giovanni, was born in 1592. His move to Florence in 1608 was described by the biographer Baldinucci as an escape. Baldinucci describes vividly the wild and eccentric life of Giovanni da San Giovanni in the first years of his stay in Florence: his "inordinate dedication to the study of drawing", the nights passed in a "humble bed" reading by candlelight those great works of history and poetry, for which he always had a fond curiosity", his careless style of dress as if "his clothes had been thrown onto him from the window", his witty remarks and bawdy jokes for which Mannozi resembles, in Baldinucci's sketch, a kind of Annibale Carracci. A document attests that he was admitted at the very early age of only twenty, to the Accademia delle Arti e del Disegno ('Academy of Art and Design'). His first known works date from 1616 and reveal a pictorial language which was already well defined. Between 1616 and 1619 he decorated the dome of the Florentine church of Ognissanti and painted in fresco five of the lunettes in the cloister of the same church, thus completing the cycle of frescos begun by Ligozzi. Between 1619 and 1620 Giovanni took part in the fresco decoration of the façade of the Palazzo dell'Antella in Piazza S. Croce. The "imperfect" Caravaggesque style of Mannozi's painting in the years in which he was occupied with the fresco decoration of the façade of the Florentine palazzo is well documented by the canvas in San Giovanni Decollazione del Battista ('Decollation of St. John the Baptist'), signed and dated 1620. The following year Giovanni left for Rome. In 1628 Giovanni interrupted his stay in Rome and set out for Emilia to depict scenes in honour of the Bentivoglio family in their feud with the Gualtieri near Reggio Emilia. The following year found Giovanni again in Florence. Between 1634 and 1636, the year of his premature death, he received important official

commissions. The last work which Giovanni undertook, leaving it unfinished at his death, was the decoration of the hall on the ground floor of the Palazzo Pitti.

7. *Francesco Feroci*

Francesco Feroci was born in San Giovanni in 1673; he was a priest, a pupil of Giovanni Maria Casini and his successor as the first organist of Duomo of Florence. He studied at the Collegio Eugenio and two of his works are at the National Library of Florence. He died in 1750 in Florence.

What to see

1. San Lorenzo Church

A church dedicated to St. Lorenzo ('St. Laurence') is documented in the village of Pian Alberti before the foundation of San Giovanni. The present-day church, which goes back to the fourteenth century with its Gothic structure, incorporated the small pre-existing church with its four low vaults which became the right hand aisle of the new building. In the course of restoration work in 1862 the eighteenth-century altars were destroyed. The church was subjected to radical restoration in 1903 on the occasion of the fifth centenary celebrations of Masaccio's birth. The simple façade is faced with sandstone up to the level of the lintel and continues up in brick. Above the entrance is a pointed lunette which is surmounted by a circular orifice and a rhomboidal window. Inside, the nave, covered by two mighty groined vaults, is joined to the right side aisle by four pointed arches supported by three big quadrangular pilasters in stonework and by a massive octagonal pilaster. The interior contains interesting works of art. The presbytery is home to a dazzling fourteenth-century triptych by Giovanni del Biondo with a very lively *Incoronazione della Vergine fra Angeli e Santi* ('Coronation of the Virgin amidst Angels and Saints'). The frescoes of the right hand aisle were brought to light in the course of restoration in 1903, and are ascribed to Masaccio's brother, Giovanni Cassai, known as *Lo Scheggia* ('The Splinter'). Among these a *S. Antonio Abate e storie della sua vita* ('St. Antony Abbot and scenes from his life') and a *Martirio di S. Sebastiano* ('Martyrdom of St. Sebastian'), dated and signed "Giov(anni) di S(er) G(iova)nni", are of particular note.

2. "La Pieve" – The Parish Church of Saint John the Baptist

The church named after the patron saint of Florence and of San Giovanni was constructed from 1312, on the side of the Porta S. Andrea, which was demolished in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The present external appearance of the church is evidence of a taste for the classical style. The façade is crowned with a pediment over a portico of three arches on Tuscan columns.

The interior, which is very simple and bare, is a single rectangular nave with a wooden ceiling. The polyptych by Mariotto di Nardo, now in the Basilica museum came from the main altar of the church.

3. La Basilica

The oratory of the Madonna delle Grazie was erected in 1484 around a third-century image of the Madonna. The "miracle" of Monna Tancia is associated with this image. The event is said to have occurred in 1479, at the time of a plague epidemic which devastated the Valdarno after the war between Florence and the Pope. Lorenzo, a three month old orphan, is said to have been saved by his seventy-five-year-old grandmother Tancia. She nursed the baby with milk which miraculously sprang from her breast after she invoked the image of the Madonna painted on the external wall of

the tower of Porta S. Lorenzo. The episode is narrated, in a vernacular style in the frescoes on the counter-façade of the present church, to the side of the main altar, painted by Luberto da Montevarchi, a follower of Perugino. A simple tabernacle was constructed around it in 1482. The decision to build a proper oratory, however, dates from 1484. This sacred building, developed from the original nucleus, was completed in 1523 and immediately became the fulcrum of the religious and social life of San Giovanni. The miraculous image of the Madonna was high up above the Porta S. Lorenzo on the outside of the city walls. The entrance to the church is reached by means of a double staircase (one side intended for men, the other for women) which rises from the atrium giving onto Piazza Masaccio. From the atrium, through a doorway crowned by a lunette in glazed earthenware by Giovanni della Robbia, one arrives at the chapel of the miracle. The interior of the church, with its nave and two side aisles, dates from the end of the fifteenth century. The chapel was destroyed during the Second World War and replaced by the present dome at the end of the 1950s. The present façade was built in 1840-56 as a replacement for the late seventeenth-century one, which by then was in a dilapidated state.

4. *Masaccio's House*

Masaccio was born on the 21 December 1401 in the simple house at number 83 Corso Italia. It is a two-floor building, with three stone corbels dated 1684 projecting over the street. The original appearance of the building has therefore changed, at least externally. The façade overlooking via Maestra corresponds however with the 10 Florentine 'braccia' of the original lots of the fourteenth-century houses of Castel San Giovanni. Of the two openings on the ground floor that on the right gave access to the living area and that on the left to the workshop and warehouse. The house of the great painter is now used as a venue for exhibitions and meetings.

5. *Basilica's Museum*

The institution of a museum at the oratory of the Grazie dates from 1864, when the most precious paintings from the local churches were gathered in the sacristy. The concentration of the principal works of art has prevented the otherwise probable dispersal of the local artistic heritage.

The museum was completely re-arranged in 1959 by Luciano Berti, who produced its first catalogue. Other paintings have been brought to the museum, for reasons of conservation and security - the Annunciazione ('Annunciation') by Fra Angelico, which came from the monastery of Montecarlo, is the most important example of this.

The museum of the Basilica, which was re-opened in 1990, now contains 14 paintings. 11 belong to the artistic context of fifteenth-century Florence. The museum's collection thus immediately highlights a characteristic feature of the artistic past of the Valdarno area, namely its close relationship with the Florentine figurative tradition.

ROOM I

- Beato Angelico: Annunciation (Seems to be datable to 1430).

ROOM II

- Mariotto di Nardo: The Trinity between the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene, with Sts. James the Apostle, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Antony Abbot.
- Mariotto di Cristofano: Christus Patiens between the Virgin Mary and St. Lucy; On the predella: Sts. Nicholas of Bari, Archangel Michael and unknown Saint.
- Giovanni di Ser Giovanni: Enthroned Madonna and child; Choir of Angels Playing.
- Paolo di Stefano Badaloni, called Paolo Schiavo: Chorus of Angels Playing Music; St. Ansano; St. Blaise.

ROOM III

- Giovanni Mannozi known as Giovanni da san Giovanni: The decollation of St. John.

6. *Palazzo d'Arnolfo*

Tradition has it that Palazzo Pretorio was designed by the great architect Arnolfo di Cambio. In any case Arnolfo could not have followed the actual construction of the Palazzo which was definitely finished after the death of the architect, which occurred at some point between 1302 and 1310. The structure of the palazzo remained strictly linked to the lay-out of the piazza and the "terra nuova" ('new land') as a whole throughout the fourteenth century. The building was arranged around a central corridor, in a perfect axis with the north/south direction which crossed the town between the Porta S. Lorenzo and the Porta S. Andrea. A second phase of building works is recorded in the first years of the fifteenth century. The restructuring of the palazzo was probably made necessary, not only by the problems of static equilibrium but also because of the need to prepare an adequate seat for the new magistracy of the Vicariato del Valdarno ('Deputies of the Valdarno'), instituted in 1409. In 1427 a budget of five hundred golden florins is documented "to make the clock tower." The third building phase saw the construction of the external arcade on the north, east and south sides of the and of loggias, by now in the Renaissance style, on the first floor of the west and east sides. The works were finished in 1553. During the course of the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the walls of the Palazzo Pretorio were covered with the carved coats of arms, painted or in glazed earthenware, of the Vicari ('Deputies'), from the oldest dating from 1410 to the most recent, dating from 1769. During the excavation works undertaken in advance of the 1986-1990 restoration of Palazzo d'Arnolfo, ceramic and glass fragments were found.

Surrounding Area

1. Badiola

La Badiola ('Abbey') di S. Maria in Mamma, on the right bank of the Arno, is one of the Badia dei Benedettini di Nonantola's oldest churches in Tuscany. The oldest document relating to the church is of 1125. The people from the castle of S. Mariano, which was near the church, paid tribute to the Badiola. The castle of S. Mariano was destroyed on the orders of the Florentine Republic when San Giovanni was founded. For some time after the destruction of the castle, the Badiola held the double title of S. Maria in Mamma and S. Mariano.

2. Renacci

Renacci was once a villa and large estate owned by the Marquis' Rinuccini, who were patrons of the church of S. Silvestro. It stands on the right bank of the Arno, on a sandy hill and in olden times was therefore called Renaccio or Renazzo ('rena' in Italian means 'sand'). It is positioned on the border between the diocese of Fiesole and that of Arezzo: in Medieval times the church of S. Niccolò at Renaccio belonged to the parish of Gropina in the diocese of Arezzo while the parish church of S. Silvestro at Renaccio belonged, and still belongs, to the diocese of Fiesole.

The villa is hidden in an age-old wood of ilexes and oaks. A short distance from the villa stands the church of San Silvestro and its associated parsonage, ennobled by a slender bell-tower. The construction of the villa dates from 1704.

3. Montecarlo

This locality, on the left bank of the Arno, was called Monte Ortale in olden times. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, a small villa owned by the Marquis Carlo Ricasoli was built there. The Marquis made a gift of the villa to the Franciscan friars from the nearby Ganghereto monastery, near Terranuova. The building of the monastery and the church were due to the Ricasoli family. It was then that the locality, in honour of the donor, adopted the name of Montecarlo. The Franciscan friars took possession of the monastery and the church in 1429. The inhabitants of the castle of Terranuova tried in vain to impede the move, even turning to their influential fellow citizen Poggio Bracciolini.

The church, like San Giovanni nearby was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. In the Baroque period it was transformed, to be turned back to its Renaissance appearance in 1916. Until a few years ago the celebrated Annunciazione ('Annunciation') by Fra Beato Angelico was kept on the second altar on the right. It is now to be found in the museum of the Basilica in San Giovanni.

In recent years the Franciscan community have left the monastery, which is now a community for the cure of drug addicts, run by a Franciscan brother.

Valdarno Superiore (Upper Valdarno)

1. Terranuova Bracciolini

Terranuova Bracciolini, once Castel S. Maria, dates from 1337, the last of the Florentine "Terre nuove" (new lands) of the Valdarno to be founded. The intention to set about the construction of a fortified centre had already appeared in the resolution of 1299.

The town lay-out remained almost intact, with the town walls, the towers and four gates until 1944. The devastations of the Second World War demolished some of the most significant architectural features of the town. Extensive portions of the town walls and mighty angular towers remain visible today.

Among the most interesting buildings in the historic centre are the Monastero delle Benedettine ('Benedictine Monastery') (seventeenth century), the Palazzo Concini (fifteenth century) and the church of S. Biagio ai Mori (mid-fourteenth century) with its fine fourteenth-century frescoes.

Outside the historic centre, the cycle of frescoes in the church of S. Maria in Campo Arsiccio, in Campogialli (fourteenth - fifteenth centuries) are of great interest.

The landscape of the "Balze", gullies formed by the erosion of old lacustrine sediments, is fascinating. Most of the Riserva Naturale ('Nature Reserve') delle Valli dell'Inferno e della Bandella is situated within the territory of the commune.

2 Loro Ciuffenna

The medieval village of Loro stands on the slope of the Pratomagno (1591 m. above sea level), on a low relief above the deep mouth of the Ciuffenna torrent. The name of the river is of Etruscan origin. The Etruscan presence throughout the land of the commune is confirmed by archaeological finds and above all by the toponomy.

In Roman times the slopes of the Pratomagno were crossed by the Cassia Vetus. Along the route of this Roman road are found the splendid Romanesque parish churches of San Giustino and of Gropina (10 km. and 2 km. respectively from Loro Ciuffenna). The point at which Cassia crosses the Ciuffenna very probably corresponds to the present settlement of Loro. Loro controlled the traffic over the so-called Ponte Romano ('Roman Bridge') or Ponte Vecchio ('Old Bridge'), the one lancet arch of which dates entirely from medieval times.

The village of Loro is one of the most charming of the whole Valdarno for the perfectly conserved irregularity of its medieval lay-out and for its picturesque position between the mountain and the torrent.

The land of the commune is densely dotted with old settlements. Of particular interest are the villages of Gropina, huddled around the extraordinary Romanesque church of San Pietro, and of Borro e Rocca Ricciarda, a cluster of houses nestled in the mountains at 1000 m. above sea level.

3. *Castelfranco di Sopra*

Castelfranco di Sopra (1591 m. above sea level) lies at the foot of Pratomagno, on the right edge of a terrace deeply incised into the mountain by the torrent Faella and the minor water courses and rivulets which account for the characteristic landscape of the "Balze". The fortified centre, according to Villani's evidence, was constructed from 1299, at the same time as San Giovanni Valdarno, in an area previously controlled by powerful feudal landowning families, the Pazzi and the Ubertini. In fact the decision to set about the construction of a fortified centre, planned, as tradition has it, by Arnolfo di Cambio, appears in the resolution of 1299.

There remains of the old fortified centre parts of the walls, and of Porta Fiorentina and Porta Aretina. The town lay-out is distinguished by its square form, the lay-out of which is contemporaneous with those of San Giovanni and Terranuova. A coherent system of orthogonal roads is organised around the large well-conserved central piazza. Important palazzi and interesting examples of fourteenth-century terraced houses are still to be seen in the historic centre.

Not far from the village walls, Badia ('Abbey') di Soffena, once the castle of the Ubertini and then a Vallombrosian Monastery, houses interesting fresco cycles by Paolo Schiavo, Liberato da Rieti and Giovanni known as "Lo Scheggia" ('The Splinter'), Masaccio's younger brother.

4 *Montevarchi*

Montevarchi, dates from the thirteenth century, situated at the foot of the old castle owned by the Counts Guidi, which is perched on a clayey spur and is now occupied by the Convento dei Cappuccini ('Monastery of the Capuchin friars'). Very soon houses were built along the valley-bottom road which replaced the hilly routes of the Cassia Adriana in the north/south direction. Nearby was the market place serving the castle and the very old Hospitale di S. Angelo alla Ginestra ('Hospital of S. Angelo alla Ginestra'). Handed over by the Counts Guidi in 1273 to the Republic of Florence, the village became part of the system of the defences completed with the construction of the "terre nuove" ('new lands') of San Giovanni, Castelfranco and Terranuova. The village, placed at the border between the states of Florence and Arezzo, was enclosed by walls at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Long stretches of the town walls and the barbican erected to protect the market place along the left bank of the torrent Dogana survive. Of the old entrances to the town the Porta del Mulino, which later became part of the former Magazzini dell'Abbondanza ('Warehouses of Abundance') survives, overlooking the Arno. The structures of Cassero, to the side of the destroyed Porta Fiorentina are imposing.

In the historic centre, the original medieval lay-out in a singular oval form remains intact, with its minor roads arranged around the central via Roma and intersected by a suggestive system of passageways. Among the main monumental features of the town are the church of S. Ludovico with its annexed convent (where the Accademia Valdarnese del Poggio and the Palaeontological Museum are situated), the adjacent Baroque church of the Redentore ('Redeemer') and, on the central Piazza Varchi, the distinguished Collegiata di S. Lorenzo ('Collegiate of St. Laurence') with a museum rich in

sacred art annexed. Among the finest palazzi overlooking the central streets are notable the sixteenth century Palazzetto Alamanni and the Palazzo Martini, the latter recently restored.

On the hills above the town, on the border with the Chianti region, a visit to the Pinetum of Moncioni, one of the oldest and most interesting coniferous woods in Italy, is to be recommended.

5 *Cavriglia*

The Community of Cavriglia becomes Administratively Autonomous

The commune of Cavriglia was born officially on 17 March 1809 when the "Council of the Commune of Cavriglia" met for the first time. With this meeting the "peoples" who had previously constituted the "League of Avane" distanced themselves from the community of San Giovanni Valdarno, into which they had been incorporated.

Cavriglia before the Middle Ages

The municipal territory of Cavriglia lies on the eastern slopes of the Chianti Mountains. The first settlements date from very early times, as is confirmed by the information gleaned from toponymy as well as frequent archaeological finds. Among such finds is the fine statue of the Mitra Tauroctono ('Mitra Tauriform'), discovered a few dozen metres from the Pieve 'Parish church') di San Giovanni Battista at the end of the 1970s. The territory of the commune was also crossed by a road, the Cassia Adrianea, which connected the Valdarno with the valley of Greve, via the pass of Cintoia, in the direction of Florence. The presence of the road is confirmed by several toponyms [for example, Casa Migliarina ('Milestone House')], by the discovery of stretches of paving, and above all by the lineation of several parish churches (Cavriglia, S. Pancrazio, Gaville, the last of which is in the commune of Figline), which are well recognised as veritable signposts.

6 *Romanesque Pievi ("Parish Churches")*

The origins of the Pieve di San Giovanni Battista at Cavriglia go back to the end of the eighth century. The present-day structure, with a nave and two aisles, dates from the twelfth century, although restoration in 1779 concealed the original masonry behind stuccoes and plaster-work. The territory of the parish extended to Montevarchi. In the adjacent museum there is an astonishing processional cross of the thirteenth century.

The parish church of San Pancrazio is a Romanesque construction of a single nave, with a transept only on the left side and two apses. The presbytery, notably elevated, stands above the crypt. In the crypt is kept a rare monolithic, octagonal baptismal font, for immersion. An inscription on the lintel of a side door bears the date 1146.

Castles

In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the territory of the commune of Cavriglia was controlled by powerful feudal families: the counts Guidi, the Ricasoli and their relations the Firidolfi, the Ubertini, the Pazzi and the Franzesi. The principal estate of the counts Guidi in the area was the castle of Montaio, a Ghibelline stronghold later conquered by the Florentine Republic. The same fate

fell to the castle of Montegonzi. Castelnuovo d'Avane (today Castelnuovo dei Sabbioni) is also of early origins.

Rural landscape

The elegant eighteenth-century villa of Castiglioncelli is of more recent origins. It lies along the statale 408 ('The A408'), known as the "chiantigiana" a few kilometres from the centre of Cavriglia. The villa overlooks a splendid "Tuscan" landscape, dotted with olive groves, avenues of cypresses, and old farmhouses, and with the slopes of the Chianti Mountains high up in the distance.

On the ridge of the Chianti Mountains a visit to the recently built Natural Park is also to be recommended.

7 *The Road of the Pievi*

Human presence along the low hilly reliefs from which rise up the peaks of the mountain chain of Pratomagno (1591 m. above sea level) from a very early date is well documented by archaeological finds and toponymy. Names of Etruscan origin and predial Latin names indicate the existence of a scattered population which gathered in small, or very small groups. The whole area was designated in Latin sources by the name Etrusci Campi ('the Etruscan Fields'), which though renowned for their fertility were far from the urban centres of Arezzo and Fiesole. The border between the two Etruscan cities crossed the Valdarno Superiore ('the Upper Valdarno') roughly at the height of Montevarchi and San Giovanni.

A few years after Hannibal and his troops crossed the Valdarno Superiore, the Romans consolidated the ancient routes at the foot of Pratomagno by constructing the Cassia Vetus which connected the Etruscan centres of Fiesole and Arezzo. The lay-out of the present 'statale dei sette ponti' ('The A road of the seven bridges') is substantially the heir to the old Roman road. The human population of this part of the Valdarno seems to have grouped itself, over the centuries, along the 'statale dei sette ponti' with impressive historical continuity. The present-day road connects a veritable chain of Romanesque parish churches which arose in connection with the old settlements crossed or passed by the Roman road. The names of these churches are often very old: Gropina and Soffena are undoubtedly Etruscan names, while Cascia marks the area where the Cassia Vetus passed at the foot of the present settlement of Reggello.

Parish Church of San Pietro at Gropina

The parish church of San Pietro at Gropina can be reached directly from the village of Loro Ciuffenna, at a distance of about 2 kilometres. The church is nestled tightly amidst the houses of the small village, and overlooks the route of the 'statale dei sette ponti' to which it is linked with a by-road.

The splendid Romanesque structure of the church remains intact. The plain façade in uniform rows of sandstone blocks presents certain telling architectural and asymmetrical irregularities which enable an understanding of the complex history of the church. The present Romanesque structures rest on the site of the remains of a Roman "farm", which can be visited in the crypt area of the

church. Upon the Roman ruins lie the remains of a very small early Christian church, which was replaced by a little church with two aisles of the eighth century. The present-day church stands upon the remains of the pre-existing eighth-century building, and itself also originally had two aisles. The later left hand aisle dates from the end of the twelfth century.

The highly suggestive interior of the church holds a marvellous pulpit adorned with reliefs. The splendid capitals of the columns of the right hand aisle are of great interest, and are undoubtedly due to the same masterly craftsmanship responsible for the creation of the pulpit.

Badia di S. Salvatore at Soffena

Along the 'statale dei sette ponti', coming from Loro Ciuffenna and before arriving in Castelfranco, the remains of the Badia di S. Salvatore at Soffena stand out on the left. It was originally a castle owned by the Ubertini. Portions of the old castle walls, where there are embrasures, remain today at the base of the bell-tower. During the second half of the eleventh century the castle went to ruin. A few years later, a monastery was built upon the ruins of the building. It was called S. Salvatore de Sophena and was subject to the Abbazia ('Abbey') of S. Trinita in Alpe on the Pratomagno, and later to the Abbey of Vallombrosa.

The sober fourteenth-century lay-out of the church remains intact. It is in the form of a Latin cross, based on the model of the early church of Vallombrosa. On the exterior, simple windows with one light, of a pleasantly rural character, alternate with solid buttresses which support the weight of the ceiling and the vaults of the church.

The monastery was suppressed in 1779 and limited to agricultural uses. In recent years the church has been restored and re-consecrated. The restoration has enabled the full restitution and appreciation of the important frescoes which decorated the simple austere interior: L'Annunciazione ('The Annunciation') by Giovanni, known as lo Scheggia ('The Splinter'), La Strage degli Innocenti ('The Massacre of the Innocents') by Maestro Liberato da Rieti, Madonna col Bambino ('Madonna with Child') by Paolo Schiavo, S. Giovanni Gualberto e storie della sua vita ('St. Giovanni Gualberto and scenes from his life') by Bicci di Lorenzo.

Parish Church of S. Maria. Piandiscò

Along the 'statale dei sette ponti', after passing through Piandiscò on the road from Castelfranco, on the left stands the parish church of S. Maria, of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The bell-tower and the three apses of the church still overlook the modern road which follows the route of the old Cassia. The church with its nave and two aisles, underwent two stages of construction as the face of the wall on the left side still clearly shows today. The original face of the wall in very precise and regular rows of sandstone blocks is still well conserved near the façade. In this area the left side is still composed of a series of small suspended arches standing alternately on corbels and pilasters rising from a high plinth. The area of the presbytery, including the apses, was rebuilt in roughly hewn stone after it collapsed. The façade is contemporary with the first stage of the construction of the church. The church is characterized by the low elevation of the nave, the five blind arches which surround the portal, and two one-light windows which date from the restoration in 1932.

Inside the church there is a fine Madonna col Bambino ('Madonna with Child') by Paolo Schiavo.

Parish Church of Cascia

Cascia is near Reggello and reached, coming from Piandiscò, directly by a side-road which runs to the left off the 'Statale dei sette ponti'. The edifice with a nave and two side aisles in regular rows of sandstone blocks ends in a single apse. The mighty bell-tower, set slightly apart from the right side of the church, rises up in the village of Cascia. In front of the façade there is a highly unusual portico with five arches supported by massive columns with classical-style capitals. The portico was entirely re-built in the course of restoration in 1930 which resulted in the all but complete substitution of the original stone, which was by then consumed and dilapidated.

Among other works of art, the particularly solemn interior of the church holds, at the end of the left aisle, the first known work by Masaccio, the celebrated Triptico di S. Giovenale ('St. Giovenale Triptych').

Where to sleep

1. Hotels

- Hotel Masaccio - L.no Don Minzoni 38 - Tel. +39 055 9123402, fax +39 055 9121423 - www.hotelmasaccio.com
- Hotel River - L.no F.lli Cervi 10 - Tel. +39 055 9122435, fax +39 055 9120219 - ugo.lanciano@tin.it

2. Agriturismi – Farm houses

- Agriturismo Podere Filicaia - Via Vacchereccia 1 - Tel. + 39 055 9123890 www.poderefilicaia.it
- Agriturismo Valleverde - Strada S. Lucia, Loc. Bucafalchi - Tel. +39 055 943628, fax + 39 055 9129580 www.agriturismovalleverde.com

3. Bed & Breakfast

- Le Mura - Via Piave 74 - Tel. +39 347 8727959
- Chiosi Enzo - Via Guccia 109 - Tel. +39 055 940406 - +39 338 8449226
- Il Teatro - Via G. Da S Giovanni 1 - Tel. +39 055 940362
- Chigioca - Via Piave 102 - Tel. +39 055 9122640
- Gabrielli Silvia - Via Da Vinci 11 - Tel. +39 338 8458958
- Innocenti Lorella - Via Ponte alle Forche 13 - Tel. +39 329 7360138
- Lorenza & Daniela - Via G. Di Vittorio 52 - Tel. +39 055 942493
- Bagnolesi Vanna - V.le Risorgimento 72 - Tel. +39 055 9139278

4. Residence

- Residence San Giovanni - Via Mannozi 26 - Tel/fax. +39 055 9110056 www.residence.toscana.it

5. Holiday Apartments

- Monna Tancia - Corso Italia 112 - Tel. +39 055 940787, fax. +39 055 9120430 www.monnatancia.it

Where to eat

1. Restaurants and Pizzeria

- Il palazzaccio - Piazza Masaccio – Tel. (+39) 055 9310156;
- La vecchia osteria - Via Ponte alle Forche, 11 – Tel. (+39) 348 9920883;
- Luca pizzcaffè - Via G. da S. Giovanni, 5 – Tel. (+39) 055 9123732;
- Osteria caffè del corso - Corso Italia, 160 – Tel. (+39) 389 1138002;
- Osteria dell'angelo - Via della Madonna, 3-5 – Tel. (+39) 055 943799;
- Osteria la buca di bacco - Via Garibaldi, 1 – Tel. (+39) 055 9310051;
- Pizzeria Siro - Via Trieste, 53 – Tel. (+39) 055 9122517;
- Ristorante la Badiola - Via Badiola, 1 – Tel. (+39) 055 942017;
- Ristorante pizzeria da Giovannino - Piazza della Libertà, 24 – Tel. (+39) 055 9122726;
- Ristorante pizzeria l'Arcere - Via Vetri Vecchi, 24b – Tel. (+39) 055 945244;
- Ristorante pizzeria Las Vegas - Lungarno Fratelli Cervi, 3 – Tel. (+39) 055 9122072;
- Ristorante Blob - Lungarno Fratelli Cervi, 10 – Tel. (+39) 055 9122435;
- Trattoria Garibaldi - Via Garibaldi, 18 – Tel. (+39) 055 9118163;
- Trattoria la bianca - Viale Don Minzoni, 38 – Tel. (+39) 055 00118388.

2. Café - Ristobar

- Bar Pasticceria Semplici Alessandro - Corso Italia, 77 – Tel. (+39) 055 91232828
- Bar Piave - Via Piave 14 - Tel. +39 055 9121788
- Caffè Fiorenza - Piazza Cavour, 2 – Tel. (+39) 055 945214
- Caffè Martini - Corso Italia, 104 – Tel. (+39) 055 944378
- Caffè Roma - Via Roma 12 - Tel. +39 055 943717
- Caffè Terre di Masaccio - Piazza della Libertà 19
- La Bottega Nuova - Via Gruccia 3 - Tel. +39 055 941553
- Bar Due Ponti - Via Ponte alle Forche 72
- Il Barretto - P.za Palermo
- Bar Tazza d'Oro - Via Roma 18/A

Traditions

1. Animal Blessing

In the third Sunday of January there is the Animal Blessing, and all the people the live in San Giovanni and in the nearby brings all their animals that receive the priest's blessing.

2. Salacca

The Salacca it's a kind of fish, a salt anchovy, and a typical dish also, that people used to eat at the end of the Carnival's period, because it's the beginning day of the Lent, where people didn't eat meat but only eggs, cheese or fish. That's why on the day after "Martedì Grasso" (the last Carnival's day), people celebrate this dish.

3. The 24th of June

This day it's the feast of the Patron, St. John the Baptist, and today there is an important day, the "Fierucola", an important arts and crafts exhibition in the city centre. The Saturday night before this day in San Giovanni there is another important date, the "Notte Bianca" (white night, because none goes to sleep), where shops are open until late in the night.

4. Rificolona

On the 7th of September there is a festival that is possible to find only here and in Florence. During this festival people create the "Rificolona", that is a "papier-mâché lantern", used by ancient people when they went to Florence. In the evening of the 7th of September there is also a competition where the best one win a prize.

5. Perdono

On the 1st Sunday after the 13th of September, in San Giovanni there is the "Festa del Perdono", a religious moment that now, as time passé, has a different meaning also, because during these days there is also an arts exhibitions and Luna park.

Typical Cooking

The most typical dish of San Giovanni is the Sangiovese Stew. This dish is of peasant origin and its recipe is still secretly passed on from cook to cook and to local stew experts. It's not simply a meat stew with plenty of aromatic herbs, but rather an elaborate dish made with the muscle of the front leg of the calf, which requires careful attention and lengthy cooking time. The dish is made savoury by a carefully balanced medley of spices prepared by local spice shops. The origin of this dish is unknown, although traditional legends place it in the period in which an illustrious citizen of San Giovanni Valdarno, Masaccio, lived.

The stew is served in the halls of the Basilica of our Lady of Graces for the Uffizi del Carnevale. Its preparation is reserved to men and the recipe for the mixture of spices used is kept secret. The Uffizi are five: Saint Anthony, Saint Lucy, of the Industry, of the Vicariate and of the Women and take place on five consecutive Sundays. The Uffizi, in this case means "religious functions", as suffrage for the dead during carnival period; the Compagnie del Carnevale, in memory of the dead, would collect and bring charitable offers in the form of money, produce, and wax to burn during the religious functions. The wax offered on this occasion was so plentiful to last all year; a part of the offers went towards the meal offered in the halls of the Basilica of our Lady of Graces. The stew appeared on those table around World War I and sent to Libya, who became a camp cook and learned to use middle-eastern spices. One thing is for sure, the stew gradually became well-known up until, around the early post-war period, it became part of the meals served at the Basilica.

1. Rytming receipe

In olden days at that time of the year
That carnival is called, the folks would gather
Into the great halls of the Basilica
Bringing their gifts and offering thither.

There was a woman once, as legends tell,
Who making to Our Lady reverence due,
Invented a fine dish of fragrant smell
And strong, that she did baptise stew.

The good receipt, so sung and widely praised
And carefully passed on from sire to son,
Has come to gladden even these our days,
As it did grace the boards of those now gone.

And if you wish to make this tasty stew
These are the ingredients that you should take:



Three pounds of fine-chopped meat will do,
And bone and trotter for a both to make.

Parsely in plenty and of onions one
Chop them to finely till they look like crumbs.
Then take good wine, oil and of spice a dash,
Pepper, and cloves and nutmeg twist the thumbs.

You should then take a dish of earthenware
And pour in oil, though not a great amount,
And to ensure the flavour, take good care,
To set the meat with all the erbs about.

Watch the meat as it gently `gins to brown,
Sprinkle the spice over at your will,
Stirring it always round and round,
And then a glass of wine all over slowly spill.

And when the wine is `sorbed into the meat,
You then must add a good tomato paste,
And after this you should reduce the heat,
Adding the broth in slowly without haste.

This spicy dish that comes from distant parts,
Is richly redolent of human warmth,
Teaching to those even unblessed by art
That time is life and certainly not wealth.