

FICULLE

Ficulle's roots go back to the time of the Etruscan civilisation: the Madonna della Maestà caves, thought by archaeologists to be rural burial grounds, allegedly testify this. However, the most significant records of Ficulle's history date back to Roman times: the Romans had in this area an observation post overlooking Via Traiana, or Cassia Nova, one of the most important communication routes between Rome and the north of the peninsula. Bearing witness to this period is a marble memorial dedicated to the god Mithras, found nearby a few centuries ago and now preserved in the Church of S. Maria Vecchia.

It was precisely the connection to Roman routes that suggested that Ficulle takes its name from Ficulea, a town in Sabina. This assumption seemed to be supported by the presence, around the town, of the fig tree, still drawn today on the municipal coat of arms.

But it is more likely that the toponym Ficulle comes from *figulus* ("potter"), since the production of terracotta has very deep origins in this town.

During the Middle Ages, the *Castrum Ficullensis* was built and, through the many years of feudal battles, underwent plundering and devastation, still remaining the most important castle in Orvieto's municipality. However, the two strongholds and the ancient walls were preserved from such damage. These still give the town its typical medieval village structure to this day. The Early Middle Ages also led to the construction of the *Abbadia Camaldolese di S. Nicola al Monte Orvietano*, home to the monk jurist Graziano, the most famous native of the Ficulean territory, known for his "Decretum Gratiani" and for his teaching activity at the University of Bologna.

In 1416, Ficulle, as part of the territory of Orvieto, fell under the rule of the State of the Church: in this period, the walls, the strongholds and the area of Castelmaggiore were restored and the churches were embellished with frescoes of the Umbrian school. In the first decades of the 1500s, the town began to acquire a more autonomous character and greater influence in the district, to the point of expanding and gaining two new villages. The historic centre was also enlarged.

In 1610, in the town, the parish church *Collegiata di S. Maria Nova* was consecrated. Also during this period, a peculiar popular devotion was born for the Madonna della Maestà, ("Our Lady of Majesty"), named after the way in which the Madonna is depicted: sitting holding the child in her arms on a throne made of clouds, between angels and saints.

Later, Ficulle gained importance in the area of Orvieto, becoming one of the main town of Mandamento, (an old administrative district introduced in the Kingdom of Italy), with its own military district, magistrate's court and prison. In the 20th century, there was intense activity among political parties and a number of cooperatives were established. Two organisations continued existing even after fascism: the former *Cassa Rurale e Artigiana* (now *CrediUmbria* cooperative credit bank) and the *House of Divine Providence* for elder care, bearing witness to the social commitment, organisational skills and spirit of solidarity typical of the youngest generations.

ARTISTIC CRAFTSMANSHIP

Ficulle, locally known as the town "de le cocce", has a long tradition in terracotta production, as this name suggests (the word "coccio" means, in fact, "terracotta"). Over the years, clay has been worked using the lathe in order to take a simple, yet graceful form. The beautiful final products are to be sun-dried and decorated with green and brown symbols. Baking in the furnace is the last step of this process, resulting in jugs, pots and bowls but also plates, items, glasses, cups, piggy banks.

Long ago, before the widespread use of plastic, these products were used in everyday life, whereas today they make a highly valued piece of furniture.

GASTRONOMY

Ficulle's Mediterranean cuisine is made of healthy and genuine ingredients, locally grown and with respect for the changing of the seasons. These traditional dishes call to mind feelings and emotions from the past. Bruschettas, liver "crostini", tagliatelle with goose sauce, "umbrichelle", traditional desserts, roasts, walnut cake and "di Magro" biscuits make for a unique and unforgettable gastronomic experience.

AGRI-FOOD

Ficulle's extra virgin olive oil is one of the best in Italy and its generous wine comes from the sunny hills in the area. Both are still produced according to tradition.

MONUMENTS

The town itself can be considered a monument. Castel Maggiore, the original nucleus of the ancient castle, is definitely the medieval site par excellence. To get there, visitors walk through a maze of stairs and alleys, which sometimes widen to reveal picturesque corners and small openings. One of these, the "Piazzetta", whose spaces are harmonically built and organized, holds in every stone the mysteries of the past. The two medieval strongholds are also worthy of mention.

Among the churches, the ancient Pieve of Santa Maria Vecchia, built around 1200, is undoubtedly rich in history. Another church, Santa Maria Nuova, which dates back to the early 17th century, is located in the centre of the town. The Abbadia of S. Nicola al Monte Orvietano is just a few kilometers away from the county seat: surrounded by wild and captivating woods, it was built by S. Romualdo in 1007. This church was home of the founder of canon law, Monaco Graziano, born in Ficulle in the 12th century, who wrote the famous "Decretum Gratiani" and is mentioned in Dante's Paradiso. Of all places, the Church of Madonna della Maestà is probably the dearest place of worship for the residents. The earliest information about this shrine, located at the southern entrance to the village, dates back to the early 17th century. Between Ficulle and the old hamlet of S. Cristoforo is located the Church of the Madonna delle Grazie, otherwise known as "dei Cappuccini". The monastery and the church were built between 1580 and 1587 on the site of a small chapel dedicated to the Madonna del Giglio.

The "Conventaccio" is also a medieval building worth remembering: although it is now little more than a ruin, this place still retains a certain charm.

Last but not least is the fascinating Castello della Sala, a typical example of medieval architecture (12th century), located 5 kilometres from the village.