

3 - Anello della Madonna dei Tufi - (10 km) – difference of height 100 m

This path is interesting for several events related to it happened in different historical moments. There are traces of Etrurian activity, and maybe belong to even more ancient civilizations. We will meet characters from the Longobards domination, and more recently, to the Renaissance.

It's a path which merges history, legend and fantasy.

It all starts from the parking area near the Casetta di Campo di Sasso as the previous path, but now we want to go back to the Aratone, to take the path on the west side of the cross. The path has several deviations which all lead to the main road.

While keeping the right hand side of the path, we stay at the same height, and we get to walk the path with the most beautiful landscape, which includes Casale Marittimo and the sea.

After about 1 km, we will come out at the confluence of the different paths, finding on our left an uncultivated field. In the middle of the field there is a grove with tall trees, such as to suggest that it is hidden inside something interesting. In fact, crossed the field and made us space between the vegetation, we will find ruins. On the surface it looks like the ruin of a farmhouse, but the lower part of the building could date back to the second half of the 16th century and not we cannot therefore know if the building had been built on the remains of the Torre Mirandola.

The tower could have been the home of the Lombard knight Agilulfo, called Lo Sparviero (the sparrowhawk). It is told of him in a chronicle which fortuitously survived the destruction of the historical archive of Bibbona, which took place during the Napoleonic conquest of the area. The fact takes place in 774 AD, almost at the end of the Lombard domination. It is said that the terrible knight had kidnapped Adelina, a teenager daughter of the lord of Bibbona, who was praying near an image of the Madonna drawn on tufo and, with her black horse, had brought her to her residence, precisely the tower of Mirandola. Forced to flee due to the rebellion of the villagers, he fell from his horse and hit his head. The girl was saved by the friars of the Badia dei Magi (a convent then existing along the current via delle Quadrelle) and when Agilulfo (also cured) woke up, he converted and dedicated himself to good works.

We then leave from Agilulfo's house to go to the place of the kidnapping, that is Madonna dei Tufi. The path in a straight line would be very short, but it actually forces us to take a slightly wider tour: instead of continuing to the end of the field on the path we were following, we will enter in the woods immediately in front of the remains of the tower, then immediately turning left and along a downhill path that will shortly bring us to the right on a wide road, which in some places is already denoted as an Etruscan via cava. The road immediately crosses, with a ford, the Fosso degli Agresti, and continues flat between fields and groves. After having left the dirt road, we find on our left a new, easy ford on the Fosso, beyond which the little road will take us in front of a gate that delimits a private property. To the right of the gate, a path quickly takes us back to the ancient via cava that leads downhill to a curve where, on our left, there is a niche in the tufo wall, where a statuette depicting the Madonna can be found.

This is not the original statuette, which has been painted and carved in tufo and which was stolen at the time. Even later effigies were stolen and the current one could date back to the 1960s.

Ancient chronicles tell that the original effigy of the Madonna changed color from pink to blue, a phenomenon probably due to the presence of minerals in the block of tufo which in ancient times was interpreted as miraculous.

It is certain that we are in a place that inspires a sacred sense, close to confluence of spring waters; it surely is a place of worship already present in pre-Christian and, perhaps, even pre-Etruscan times (Mother Earth, Pomona...). A place consecrated to some female divinity, protector of water and fertility, a place that, over time, has maintained its characteristic of female worship, still today dear to the elderly Bibbonese people.

Returning to the story of Agilulfo and Adelina, we remember that the two were rescued by monks of the Badia dei Magi or Mansi (name deriving from 'mansion'), first Roman and then Lombard). This Badia (abbey) was founded in 754 by Benedictine monks from the Abbey of San Pietro in Palazzuolo (Monteverdi Marittimo); it was later abandoned due to its unhealthiness (we are in the Northern Maremma) and Gregory XIII moved the monks at the current Church of Santa Maria della Pietà in Bibbona, whose construction was completed in 1492.

Someone claims that there was a secret passage that, from the convent of Santa Maria della Pietà, led near the cave of the Madonna dei Tufi.

The church (a rare example of a Greek cross planimetry which bears inscriptions and symbols believed to be of Masonic origin) is attributed by some to the school of Leonardo da Vinci. It is certain that a map of the area, found among the papers of Leonardo clearly indicates, in the whole area of Bibbona, this church only, while there were many others, including the current cathedral of Sant'Ilario.

Still on the subject of Leonardo da Vinci, we cannot exclude that his presence in the Bibbona area may have been contemporary with that of his friend Pico della Mirandola, whose family, as we will remember from the name, owned the Tower once the home of Agilulfo, staying in the field of hypotheses and, above all, of suggestions, admiring

the enchantment of the wood and the tufo walls of the via cava where the cave of the Madonna, my thoughts went to the famous painting The Virgin of the Rocks, of which Leonardo left us two versions, one preserved in the Louvre and one in the National Gallery in London: was Leonardo inspired by the Madonna dei Tufi? And what if the church visible in the background was Santa Maria della Pietà? But now it's time to put the history book down and to resume our journey: keeping behind us the niche of the Madonna, a very short path leads us will lead to an olive grove, beyond which we will find the Cascina farm and a dirt road coming from via Bolgherese. We will take it to the left and always walking in a straight line, we will reach the luxurious Biserno Resort (once Campo Sassino farm), of which we will cross the garden on tiptoe, to go back down its driveway with a wide view of the sea. Nearby it will be possible to have our snack-break.

At the end of the avenue we will find an easy ford on the Botro Campo di Sasso and, shortly after, the intersection with the dirt road that comes from Bolgherese, passing through the Aioncino.

We will then take it by turning left, in the direction of Macchia di Magona, di where we will find the access gate after about 1 km.

We are now on path #9 which, with continuous slight ups and downs, will take us back to a another ford, this time further upstream, but always on the Botro Campo di Sasso, nearby del Vecchio Mulino (see route 2) and, further on, to the Casetta Campo di Sasso, from which we departed.