

VISSO

Altitude: 608 m

Population: 1300

Location

Situated at the confluence of the Ussita, Nera and the Vallopa rivers, in a flat basin, where five valleys converge: those of Ussita, Castelsantangelo, Norcia, Valnerina and Fosso delle Rote.

Origins of the name

Visso is probably derived from the Latin place name Vicus Elacensis or from Vipse Curio Dentato, consul of Rome and founder of the Vipsania family. Other authors put forward the theory that the town's name is derived from Wise, a widely used name in the Lombard era.

Historical Interest

Even before the foundation of Rome, the Valleys of the Vissano were inhabited by the Naharci, a Sabine tribe dedicated to keeping livestock. The definitive submission of the Sabine was the work of Marco Fulvio Petino, and signalled the beginning of Roman domination of the area which became organized into a Municipia.

In 27 B.C., Cesare Augusto put the Valnerina in the fourth regio, called the Samnium, bordering Piceno to the north and Umbria to the west. The remains of an inscription and the discovery of numerous Roman ruins confirm the importance of the area during this period. In the high medieval period it belonged to the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto, included in the Guastaldato di Ponte. In the 12th century nobles living in the Castello di San Giovanni and San Pietro created the Comune of Visso, dividing the territory in Guaita or Vaite and therefore Guaita Plebis (Visso and Borgo S. Giovanni), Guaita Villae (Borgo S. Antonio), Guaita Pagese (Macereto, Cupi and Aschio), Guaita Montanea (Castelsantangelo sul Nera) and Guaita Uxitaie (Ussita). In 1323 conflicts flared up with the neighbouring towns of Norcia and Cascia. Legendary was the victorious battle of Pian Perduto, fought against Norcia in 1522, and memorably described in the tragi-comic poem by poet and shepherd Berrettaccia di Vallinfante. Visso alternated its liberal government between allegiance to the popes, the Duchy of Spoleto and the Varano family of Camerino. From 1567 to 1860, it was the seat of government of the dependencies of the papal hierarchy of Umbria. In 1828 it was bestowed the title of "city" by Leone XIII. In 1850 the hamlets of Chiusita, Croce, Orvano, Fematre, Riofreddo, Rasenna and Mevale were separated from Norcia and added to the Comune of Visso. In 1860 with the formation of the Kingdom of Italy Visso was partitioned from Umbria and became part of Marche. In 1913 Castelsantangelo sul Nera and Ussita became autonomous. In 1927 Visso came once more under Umbrian control, but only for two years until 1929 when it returned definitively to Marche.

Itinerary

Having passed through the S. Maria Gate (1), one of four entrances that historically closed the castle walls, the piazza Martiri Vissani (2) is reached; opposite we find the ancient church of S. Agostino (3) dating from the XIV century, already an Augustinian convent. The façade is of a singular Abruzzese architecture, with gothic arches and a rose window; within is a single nave and the building is today home to the parochial museum. The

entrance of the church of S. Maria (4), (XIII century), which is overlooked by the elegant belltower complete with mullioned windows, is flanked by two lions and adorned with a very beautiful doorway with a richly worked wooden door. Noteworthy also, in the bezel, is the Annunciation by Paolo of Visso. Inside, on the right, is the holy water font, intricately carved, while, opposite, up some steps is the Battistero chapel, with two naves, which originally constituted the ancient church. Notable in the church is the fresco of Giovanni Di Pietro called "lo Spagna", the frescos in the apse and along other walls, among which is the enormous San Cristoforo, recently revealed. Leaving the church, we find the Governors' Palace (5), built in the XIII century, and restored several times; from the primitive facade there remains only one mullioned window and an arched wall; along the portico are five arches, while underneath is the entrance to the church of S. Nicola, where the condemned were brought.

In front of the Governors' Palace is the Varano Palace (6) built in 1516 by the Duke of Camerino, Giovanni Maria Varano, as a summer residence.

Continuing on, the route reaches the little piazza G.B. Gaola Antinori where the Priori Palace home to the town hall (7) is found. From its facade opens an elegant gothic doorway overlooked by a window and balcony; in the entrance hall are conserved lions, ancient measures of the market and the papal crests. On the first floor is the council chamber with paintings of the Sybils. On the second floor is the ancient council room, in which is kept in its original position, the Orators' stand, made of worked stone, and a fresco by Paolo of Visso from 1481. Conserved in the palace archives are precious manuscripts signed by Giacomo Leopardi, among which is the unique original manuscript of the "L'Infinito". In the piazza G.B. Antinori we also find the Pia Casa building (8), which has a fresco of the Madonna and Baby between S. Francesco and S. Chiara on its facade, painted by Tommaso of Bissone. Following via Galliano, via del Torriere and via Varano for a short time, one can observe examples of the characteristic little medieval balcony (9) known as the "Lu barzottu". Walking up, the route reaches the church of Concezione (10) from the XIV century, where there is a beautiful panorama over the historic town. Descending to the left, the route follows the ancient steps down to the Ussitana Gate (11) and, proceeding under the arch, reaches the Boncompagni building (12). Taking the road of the same name, the route passes the church of Monastero di San Giacomo (13) from the XVI century, with lateral steps and a stone renaissance doorway and a recently restored small medieval balcony. Across the bridge over the River Ussita, is the Odescalchi building (14), the facade of which has a doorway and the family crests of the Boncompagni, Odorisi and Odescalchi families. To the left, is the church of S. Croce (15) built in the XIV century and extended in the XVI century, and, shortly after, the church of S. Francesco (16) from the XV century, with a Romanesque-Abruzzese style facade with a magnificent doorway, overlooked by a singular rose window. Proceeding along via Pontelato, the route comes to the town entrance gate of the same name complete with arched gothic door (17) which was completed in 1283 and is adorned with the crests of Visso and Leone XIII, with the remnants of a tower above. Immediately after is the classic "walk between the rivers", along the ancient castle walls (18). Turning onto the recently constructed bridge, the route passes by the ancient monastery of Santa Chiara (today a residential complex) and continues on to the Sant'Angelo Gate (19), constructed in 1378. On it are three crests: to the right a grilled shield, in the centre the crest of Visso and to the left the bas-relief of San Michele Arcangelo. The route continues along the via della Sibilla, home to various houses and palaces from the 1300-1400s, and goes back to the piazza San Francesco and then the piazza Martiri Vissani. Advised also is an interesting walk to the magnificent towers which have been recently restored.