

General Information

The Voghiera town council has approximately 4,000 inhabitants and has been the town hall since January 20th 1960, when it became independent from the Portomaggiore council. In addition to the county town, Voghiera includes four outlying wards : **Ducentola, Gualdo, Montesanto and Voghenza**. The main road, which crosses the ancient riverbed of the Po (the main Italian river), is the Province Street Ferrara – Portomaggiore, which, in Gualdo, crosses the highway slip road Ferrara (12 km) – Beach (35 km). The train station is in Montesanto. The economy of the county is mainly based on fruit and vegetable agriculture. A special fair is held every year in July for the “Voghiera Garlic”, the white bulb that was awarded the POD (Protected Origin Denomination) from the European Community. The local gastronomy is typical of the Ferrara province. The people are particular to the traditional music of: the Voghenza Philharmonic Band (founded in 1856), a jazz band, a choir and two music schools. Since 1981 the prestigious show festival named “*Summer in Belriguardo*” is held in Voghiera.

The Origins

The population of this area dates back to about 2,500 years ago and is documented by the Etruscan ceramic fragments discovered in Voghiera in 1954. The area of this discovery is close to the paleo-riverbed of the ancient main Po branch, which split during the Classic Period between the **Olana** river (today called Volano) -- a branch that goes to northeast, and the **Padoa** (Po river, today extinct) -- which used to be the branch of Spina. During the Roman Period, the two villages fought each other on the riverbanks separated by a big isle, which today is the Massari-Mazzoni Garden. The topographic location, the vanishing of Spina and the rising of the river used to characterize this region, which encouraged the Voghenza fortune at the time of the Roman Empire. It became the headquarters of officials in charge of the public control and administration of the *saltus* (big farms owned by the empire), and the capital city of the lower Po area.

The importance of Voghenza was confirmed even at the beginning of the Christian period, where the first Ferrara diocese was founded. Fifteen bishops succeeded each other for the leadership of the Voghenza diocese, until it moved to the growing Ferrara in the middle of VII century A.D. In addition to the Po, as bigger river route, the Avenza branch (from which comes the name of Voghenza = Vicus Avenza), a changeable branch of the Reno River, crossed the region and used to run into the Po River in the vicinity of Voghiera, making the connection to the inland even easier. Moreover, the region of Voghenza used to be very well connected to the two big cities nearby: Adria in the north and Ravenna in the south with all the economical and cultural implications related to this.

The Roman Necropolis Of Voghenza

From 1976 to 1983 the Archaeological government department of Emilia Romagna arranged few digging searches at a farm on Dante Alighieri Street, in the outskirts of Voghenza. The searches uncovered a monumental sepulchral area, dating between the first and third century of our era. As of today, 67 graves have been explored that were grouped around the main marble monuments or contained by surrounding walls. Funeral gifts consisted of common pottery, oil lamps, bottles and glass “balsamari”

(containers used for beauty preparation). Also found were objects made of bone, metal, amber, gold and sardonix and coins. The bodies (burials and cremations) were inside brick boxes often marked by the manufacturer (PANSIANA or SOLONAS). To date, two family funeral surrounding walls have been identified, with the main monument in its middle. The type of marbles used were Greek, Istrian, "Apuana" and of Verona origin testify to the expansion of the business relationships of Voghenza people and their economical welfare. Among the necropolis monuments (available to the public from the dawn to the sunset) we would like to draw your attention to are the ULPIA PUSINNICA sarcophagus, the ULPIA ATENAIDE stele and those of LICINIA and PANTHER, preserved at the Civic Museum of Belriguardo, as well as the memorial stones of ULPIO SECUNDIO, HYGIA and ULPIA NICE. Looking at the epigraphs, we can form the hypothesis that the Voghenza people were predominantly slaves and "liberti" (slaves freed by the Romans with special civil rights). Some of these were responsible for the administration and the *saltus*, with function of *dispensator*, *librarius* and *saltuarius*. Among the people of Voghenza, there were several "liberti" of the ULPIA gens (the family of the Emperor Traiano).

The Treasure Real Estate

From 1984 to 1989 four digging cycles took place in the urban area of Voghenza. This area is named "**Treasure Real Estate**" and for centuries has offered interesting finds during every cultivation cycle. The site covers an area of about 12,000 sqm, where 64 burials have been discovered, belonging to a **Byzantine necropolis** (VI-VII cent. Ad.). The burials often feature Roman age walls, as in the case of an imperial *domus*. The part of the *domus* explored so far offered interesting metal objects, one of which is a rare **military certificate**, engraved on two thin layers of bronze. The long text refers to the authorization by Traiano for a Dalmatian sailor man of the imperial naval fleet of Ravenna to become a Roman citizen. This certificate is dated June 12th, 100 A.D. It is the first known document mentioning the Ravenna fleet as "imperial".

Voghenza as First Ferrara Diocese

According to the historiography, the first bishop in Voghenza appeared in 330, just 17 years after the Constantine edict, which gave freedom of religion to the Christians. Saint Maurelio was the last Voghenza bishop at the diocese until the year 624 at which time the diocese moved to the growing Ferrara County. The headquarter was moved to the north, beyond the river, for security and political reasons, where the bishops of Ferrara continued to give themselves the title of *episcopus vicoaventiniensis* until late 1000. In the Voghenza church you can see the cover of bishop Mauricino sarcophagus (mid. V century) and under the high altar you will find a sarcophagus with symbols of the first Christianity containing the remains of **Saint Leo**, the miracle worker from Montefeltro, sealed by the great sculpture Giacomo Zilocchi (1862-1943) representing the life-size figure of the Saint. We do not know how and when the Saint's remains and the sarcophagus arrived to Voghenza, but they have definitely been here since much earlier than February 14th 1016 on which day the German emperor Heinrich II, according to the tradition, left his remains.

Renaissance

The activities on the ancient Po river started to decrease toward the end of the Roman imperial period, although it kept its relevant position until the tenth century with the name of **Sandolo**. Several floods radically changed the old flow until the XII century, when, due to the breach of Ficarolo, the area got cut off of any long distance river route. This area regained some prestige in XV century, when Niccolò III d'Este decided to build the **BELRIGUARDO** castle in Voghiera. In order to get there by boat, he dug a connection using the bed of the ancient Po-Sandolo River. Work on the castle, later called the *Versailles* of the "Estensi" (the Lords of Ferrara), started in 1435 as a project by the architect Giovanni da Siena that practically never ended. Every duke left his own mark on the summer "estense" palace with endless building sites, adding or removing porches, decorations, paints, chimneys, and etc. Nevertheless, the main structure of the building remained the same with its big quadrangular plan limited by a moat, gardens, fish farm and double yard that looked out onto dozens of wonderful frescoed halls. The central block was the high court, situated on two floors, and decorated by six marvellous large marble windows still there today, as well as two substantial stairs accessing the noble floor. Famous artists like **Cosmè Tura, Garofalo, Girolamo da Carpi, Ercole de Roberti, and the Dossi ecc.** worked at the castle. These were the best of the Ferrara school, although we now have only the descriptions of their works, as almost everything was lost. The only painting testimony we have is the big cycle of the "Sala della Vigna" (Hall of the Vine): lines of caryatids hold up an open gallery, through which you can catch sight of beautiful landscapes. The hall hosts the Renaissance section of the Civic Museum with a valuable collection of potteries dated back between the XIV and XVII century.

Belriguardo Civic Museum **Archaeological Section**

In the rooms by the entrance tower of Belriguardo you will observe all the findings from the Roman necropolis of Voghenza and from the settlements all over the territory. The ground floor hall is entirely dedicated to the necropolis. The glass showcases contain various types of pottery objects, glass bottles, coins, oil lamps, hatpins and bone needles, finely worked gold and amber jewels, like rings, a necklace, earrings and pendants. There is also a wonderful onyx "balsamario" (a container used for beauty preparations), which is still intact and has an extremely elegant shape.

The epigraphic section of the museum is filled with interesting things. **The ground floor is equipped for visits by visually impaired people, with a tactile route made of Braille descriptions, audiotapes and a relief guide on the floor.** The main hall is dedicated to the district and Treasure Real Estate finds. Under the entrance tower of Belriguardo is the sarcophagus of Claudia Januaria (I century AD), while on Don Minzoni Street, in Voghenza, you can see the sarcophagus of Cesidia Ione (II century AD). The Civic Museum, also doing an intense didactic activity, can be visited every holiday in the afternoon or upon reservation (for schools and groups) any day of the week.

Entrance ticket costs 1 Euro, phone 0532-328511.

Giuseppe Virgili Hall

On the first and second floors of the entrance tower of Belriguardo is the Modern Art Section of the Museum, with permanent exposition of works by **Giuseppe Virgili** (1894-1968) – the sculptor from Voghiera. He was one of the masters of the Twentieth Century Ferrara art group who obtained distinguishing remarks all over the country. On the second floor is the hall for temporary ex positions.

The Massari Park

The Massari Park (*now ownership of Mazzoni*) has been called Belpoggio since the 800. It covers a surface of 22 hectares and houses over 8,000 trees, many of which are centuries-old and valuable. Formerly, it was a Po island. The beautiful two-faced villa was built in 1722 to order of the Cardinal Tomaso Rufo from Calabria. The most ancient element of the building is the tower, known to be part of a castle since 513 AD and now included in the service buildings. Not far from the park, we recommend a visit to the great fresco of the absidale bowl-shaped vault at the Voghiera,s church. This fresco was made by Bononi during the first decades of '500 as an apotheosis of the Virgin Mother.

The historical

Model-making Museum

San Leo 9 Str., VOGHENZA

It opened in the current facility in 1998 and is one of the most important museums of its kind in Europe. The seven exposition halls are structured like an ideal model-making city, with a train station, central place, library, art gallery, church, harbour and airport. The collections comprised of thousands of reproductions of cars, boats, trains, military vehicles, soldiers, etc. are continuously improving, thanks to the help of many art lovers worldwide. Open to the public on Thursday evenings, Saturday afternoons and all day Sunday. **Free entrance, phone 0532.815252.**