

CARLO ENRICO VANNUCCHI

*A Brief History of Prato*

Gli  
Ori

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To old and new Pratesi

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## Preface



For some time now, there's been a need for a small guide to the history of Prato, and finally, here it is. Carlo Enrico Vannucci's passionate work has filled that void. This fun and concise book is the product, first and foremost, of the love that its writer, as Pratese as his surname, has for his home city, a virtue that's unfortunately so rare you almost can't find it anymore. This publication is also the result of a lengthy research, in which passion by far overshadowed every difficulty.

This Brief History is a bit like Boccaccio's *Decameron*, with eight days' worth of historic itineraries, summarizing the history of the city and its people. This tale takes readers by the hand and, starting from the most important places in the city, accompanies them along the millennia-old road – never smooth and easy to traverse – the Pratesi have undertaken with faith and originality. In a sort of itinerant conversation, the important monuments that built, shaped and liberated a community unlike any other take centre stage. These people are neither better nor worse, only different, though they surely vaunt a historic ability to build, something so few others have, even in Tuscany.

The unique structure of this book summarizes all the various moments that led to the development of this city, and is aimed at young Chinese and students of other nationalities living and studying in Prato, chosen by their parents as the place to start their new lives. For this reason, the author thought it opportune to offer brief references to the history of China in every chapter.

Prato has never had a particularly strong bond with China before now. It should be remembered, however, that in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Franciscan monk Fra Ugo Panziera, who left behind rare and priceless texts in the vernacular, went to the vast region of Tartary, as China was called at that time, to spread a message of what was surely brotherhood and charity. Modern historians doubt whether or not Panziera was from Prato, instead believing he was born in Pomerance. But I don't mind thinking that he was one of us.

In following the author's travel diary-like narration, I'd like to mention the Manassei Chapel in the cathedral, the first one to the left of the high altar, which is decorated with early 15<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes by an unknown artist depicting the decapitation of St. Margaret of Antioch on the left-hand side. In the scene, you can see a "Chinese family that looks on indifferently" as the young girl is martyred, as if the artist wanted to add a touch of veracity, or rather, to link the people of Prato to the trade that connected the economy of Pisidia to the distant Tartary, China, where silky fabrics were made before being sent to courts throughout Europe thanks to Western merchants.

In recent years, we also have Curzio Malaparte, who went to the Soviet Union and China in 1956, sending his travel reports to the *Tempo*, a weekly publication in Milan, and *Vie Nuove*, a Roman weekly that covered political topics. In 1958,

after Malaparte's death, Giancarlo Vigorelli published them together in a book edited by Vallechi with the title *Io, in Russia e in Cina*.

Mr. Vannucchi, the author of this admirable chronicle of Prato's history, has already established his skills as a writer. His first work, an autobiography, was published in 2001 under the title *Quando a Prato gli autobus erano verdi*, while his second book was released in Rome in 2010, titled *Una pesca miracolosa*. Here, his fantasy goes further, taking on renewed originality.

The primary aim of this book is to educate readers about the history of Prato, and it will certainly be a useful device for anyone who wants to expand upon the various eras, figures, and themes that characterizes the history of this city, of Italy and of the wider western world.

I'm certain that this publication will be a valid tool for all those who want to learn more about Prato, and especially for those that, whether by chance or intention, have settled or come to work in Prato for their own well-being, as well as to contribute to building a new identity for this city that so openly welcomes them.

In all its history, Prato has never been unkind.

GIAMPIERO GUARDUCCI



## *A Brief History of Prato*

“Hello students! Our headmaster decided that this year we'll have a spring field trip to celebrate the end of the school year. Our destination will be the city of Prato.”

“Prato?? What's going on? Does that mean we're not going on a trip at all?”

“Calm down! We will definitely have a field trip, but this time it will be a very special one. That is, we will visit *this small* city, to discover and relive its history, its most famous figures and most beautiful monuments; we'll go with our friends who don't speak our language fluently so they will have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of the city where they all live and study. You'll see, it'll be lots of fun! Our journey will be organized into several itineraries about different ages and places; every time we deal with an important topic, we'll stop and focus on it to learn more.”



## *First itinerary*

### *The origins*

“Hi students. So, today we’re here at the Etruscan Museum in Artimino in order to start our journey through the history of Prato from its very origins.

As you all studied in your books, the choice of where to found a new city is always based on a few special needs, such as being close to a river, the predominance of flat areas perfect for agriculture and **farming**, and proximity to woods for offer timber and hunting. Obviously, the earliest settlements were nothing like modern towns, never mind cities. They were little clusters of huts and hovels spread throughout the countryside. In order to find even better locations than their first settlements, the people would explore their surroundings, sometimes going great distances, until they found features like a river full of fish, larger fields or better hunting grounds. During the third millennium BCE, the **Ibero-Liguri** lived in our territory, a population which came from the afro-Iberian area that today we recognize as the territory around the Strait of Gibraltar. We can find traces of their presence on the Calvana, the big hill to the north of the River Bisenzio, including several burial sites. Together with those people, there was another population coming from North-Eastern Italy, the **Villanovans**, named after Villanova, the city near Bologna where



they first settled. These people gave names to the areas where they lived, and they decided to name our river the **Bisenzio**. The Villanovans were probably Etruscans, which means that today we can say that the greatest contribution to the foundation of our city came from the Etruscans themselves (also known as Tusci or Tirreni by the Greeks).

To summarize, try to imagine our city with no houses, streets, churches or factories: you would instead see a plain covered with trees and grass, crossed by a river, with little clusters of houses scattered here and there. You would see herds of goats or sheep, some men working their fields with an ox-driven plough, or others fishing in the river. Outside the huts some women would be working wool while children play. Maybe in a hut there would be a man making earthenware jars, and nearby, another one making arrows for hunting. It was in these little villages that the principle of barter was invented, the first form of trade. People exchanged a variety of products according to their needs. Some communities could grow bigger simply because of the presence of a particularly skilled potter, whose resistant jars attracted new settlers. This is how the first forms of larger villages started to appear. Because of the need to hunt, people often had to move away from their homes, which brought them into contact with other people, leading to the first cultural exchanges. Sometimes this was simply an exchange of goods, while other times they taught each other the different ways