



Pentagonal Tower of Vezzano

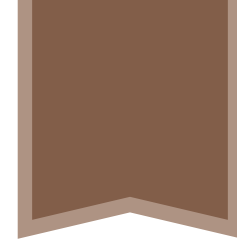
VEZZANO LIGURE

Location: Vezzano Ligure is in the middle of the area surrounding La Spezia. This territory links three of the four “districts” of La Spezia, namely the Gulf, the Val di Magra Valley and the Vara Valley. Vezzano Ligure is located in the lower part of Val di Magra. It is composed of two different villages – Vezzano Inferiore and Vezzano Superiore – and is perched on a hill in a dominant position above the confluence of the rivers Vara and Magra.

Type of castle: in Vezzano there are three kinds of defensive structures: in the upper part stands the castle – which is nowadays a ruin – with the remains of a quadrilateral watchtower, while in the lower part there is a fortified palace with remains of ancient fortresses, and also a tall pentagonal tower.

Construction period: The construction of the tower which stands in the lower village dates back to the 13th century.





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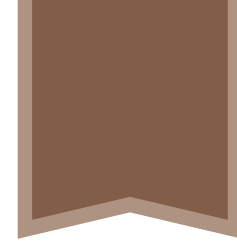
First appearance in historical sources: The first fortress to be mentioned in 963 in Otto I's diploma is more likely the upper village with the castle ruins. In this paper there is a list of all the territories that the emperor gave to the bishop of Luni and that were part of the feud that followed.

Strategic role: The lower village controls the confluence of the rivers Vara and Magra. This is a crucial point for ancient and modern communication routes in the lower part of Lunigiana. The strategic role of the two villages seemed originally to be complementary: from Vezzano Inferiore it was impossible to see the Gulf, but on the other hand it was situated in a dominant position to facilitate control of the Via Francigena roadway.

Further use: in the 16th century, Papiro Picedi from Arcola turned the ancient castle of Vezzano Inferiore into a palace for residential use when he married Maria Spinola in 1578. The castle's demolition was probably due to the expansion of the village during the Renaissance.

Current condition: The site is in a good state of repair.

Viewing: An intervention which aims to restore the site and make it accessible and open to the public has been financed. However, it is already possible to visit the base of the structure safely.



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History: From 951 the Lunigiana area became part of Obertenghi's domain as well as the bishop's estate including Vezzano, which emperor Otto I gave to the bishop of Luni in 963. In the 11th century the village passed under the rule of the Lords of Vezzano (Domini de Vethano), who extended their power to include many other territories and castles in the Gulf of La Spezia and in Magra and Vara valleys. These territories, which included the castles of Vezzano, Carpena, Vesigna, Follo, Vallerano, Beverino, Polverana, Ripalta, Montedivali, Madrignano and many others in the Magra valley and in the Gulf such as Portovenere, remained in the hands of these Lords until the 13th century.

Later, the Lords of Vezzano gradually lost their prestige and their power due to several factors, including constant pressure from Genoa and the claim of the ancient rights by the bishop of Luni. All this led them to renounce a large number of rights in favour of the expanding Fieschi family of the at the beginning of the 13th century.

These first transfers did not leave very much in the hands of the Lords of Vezzano. In 1253, they were compelled to assign everything they had to the Genoese Republic and to swear allegiance to them until their complete annexation in 1276. From that moment on, their destinies were linked until the French domination and the following annexation by the Kingdom of Sardinia and then the Kingdom of Italy.

Structure: Vezzano Basso is surmounted by the second castle in the village, which is currently known as Palazzo Giustiniani. The castle and the pentagonal tower were originally linked by a wooden bridge. The pentagonal tower was built in the 12th century as a defensive structure and a watchtower to protect the surrounding valley.

The top of the tower faces the area to be controlled and, thanks to its shape, it was very easy to defend. The access to the tower is in a higher position, in order to make it safer for those who sought refuge inside. In Vezzano there are still some remains of the defensive walls and of a cylindrical tower. It was only during the Renaissance that the village was extended thanks to the rising prestige and improving economic welfare of its inhabitants. But when Vezzano had to face the Genoese Republic, its power and its prestige began to wane. In commerce with other towns the use of the local mountain pass caused many problems to the economy of the village.