

In 878 a first group of people are believed to have started inhabiting an elevated place, east of the actual Foiano, called “Ripa” after escaping from the threats of a gang of Saracens. The place looked out on San Bartolomeo in Galdo and Roseto.

Another area that was inhabited initially was “l’Ussero”. Since this place was used as a refuge it was called “Fuganum”. Other reserchers make Foiano descend from “Foveanum” thus from “Fovea” which means pit and therefore place of pits, traps for wolves, wild boars and hunting. Foiano probably derived from Foveanum thanks to a switching of the central letters. Others hypothesize that Foiano comes from Feudiano – Fejano – Foiano. It is unknown when it became Foiano. Many researchers believe that the name comes from “Forum Jani”, thus having Roman origins. This is not an absurd hypothesis because during the age of Pliny the Vascellans lived near Foiano. They were an intermediate population between Irpini and Apuli. The Vascellans lived close to Castelfranco, Montefalcone and Roseto: they inhabited Vescellana that today is named Vetroscello and is in the Roseto ValFortore territory.

The importance of Foiano grew naturally due to the foundation of the new monastery “S. Maria del Gualdo Mazzocca”, from which the village was influenced and therefore became one of its Feuds. In fact, in its coat of arms there are the initials MF which mean Feudum Mazzocca. Others believe it to mean Fratres Mazocca. The word Mazzocca has Langobardic origins. Mazzocca was undoubtedly the owner of the lands that bordered with the monastery of which he soon became a great benefactor. In antique documents we can find the denomination “Waldo de Mazzocca”; the current form Mazzocca is from the XVIIth century.

Foiano belonged to the province of Capitanata since remote times; it is also mentioned in the 1323 “Diploma Regio” which authorized the Benedictines from Mazzocca to rebuild S. Bartolomeo in Galdo and include it among the properties of the Abbey. In 1429 Foiano was granted to the noble Damiano de Capitaneis from Novara. It was then passed on to the Guevara Family and then to Ferrante Gonzaga who was Carlo V’s favourite. Around 1532 the population consisted of 112 families and reached the number of 160 in 1567. After, Foiano became a property of the Jesuits receiving it from the Archbishop Arrigonio. The few incomes and jurisdiction passed on to the “Reale Azienda di Educazione” following the abolishment of the society of Jesus in the XVIIIth century. Once Foiano was set free from the bonds of private authority it became part of the Province of Campobasso belonging to the district of Baselice. It belonged to that province until 1861 when it became part of the Province of Benevento.

The oldest areas in Foiano are Ussaro and Ripa S. Pietro. The little church in this area was

consecrated to Saint Peter and was situated on the Ripa. Saint Peter was believed to have passed through Foiano on his way to Benevento. That is the reason why certain areas have the following names: Torrente S. Pietro, Ripa S. Pietro, chiesa S. Pietro. There was also a chapel dedicated to beatified Giovanni: it was 40 spans long and 30 wide and in the front there was a kind of courtyard, 50 spans long and 30 wide, used as a cemetery. The chapel was surrounded by the monks' vineyard and you could get there through a path that led to Ussero (now Orticelli Street). The present main church was built in its place. Following the 1456 earthquake many near villages were destroyed and survivors found refuge within the walls of the village. That is why the inhabitants are called "senza legge" (without law and order) or better people that live in a place without law and order. These refugees were actually kind people and this is proved by the fact that in 1462, together with the "foianesi", they built the chapel "S. Maria della Libera" because they saved from the earthquake. Due to the growth of the population, S. Pietro's church was too small and so the "foianesi" started to build a new one that was meant to be consecrated to the Madonna del Carmine. The church was completed in 1570 and was dedicated instead to the Madonna del Rosario in memory of the battle of Lepanto that took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1571.

The catholic victory against Islam gave birth to the strange tradition of the "Lune": a kind of dried dough mixture that have the form of a disc with a central hole. These "lune" were put on a cane and given to the population during the vespers of the beatified Giovanni. The church "Madonna del Rosario" was opened on the first Sunday of October in 1575 in small village with 600 inhabitants. The Libera Confraternity was established in that same year. The church had a roman style and had a bell tower. There were three bells: one to mobilize people in case of fire; the second that was rang against storms and hail; the third to let people know about happy and sad events. The old chapel dedicated to the beatified Giovanni fell into ruin in 1740 when there was a terrible disease called "bovine" that decimated cattle. The "Foianesi", full of faith in their patron saint, made an ex-voto to build an even bigger church if he had stopped the disease. Following a solemn triduum and a procession to which all the population took part walking bare foot, with their heads full of ash and a rope around their necks, the disease immediately disappeared. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1743 Francesco Landi, the Archbishop of Benevento, donated 300 gold ducats to speed up the building. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1747 the church was inaugurated. The population had reached the number of 2530 forty years later. King Ferdinand II granted permission to further enlarge the church and this request was supported by the abbot of the abbey, monk Guthler. The citizens collected 420 ducats and the church was enlarged and opened on the 14<sup>th</sup>

of November 1797. The seat of the archpriest was moved there. In 1870 a new vault was made by the master builder Lanzetta from Roseto. Mon. Guthler donated to the church an ostensory, a gold chalice and paten.

Today Foiano di Val Fortore has about 1500 inhabitants; the village was completely reconstructed following the 1962 and 1980 earthquakes. What remains of its history are the

churches “Madonna della Libera” and “S.S. Rosario” and the bell tower of the old church “S.Pietro”. All these structures have been rebuilt several times.