

ENG



MUSEO DEL BACO DA SETA DI VITTORIO VENETO

SILKWORM MUSEUM
OF VITTORIO VENETO

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THE TOWN OF VITTORIO VENETO



Vittorio Veneto arose from the union of two ancient municipalities: Serravalle, in the north, ruled by the Da Camino family, with its beautiful palaces nestled between hills with ruins of walls and towers built in the Middle Ages as defence against barbaric invasions; and Ceneda, in the south, situated partly on a plain and partly in the surrounding hills, with noble buildings recalling its ancient political and religious importance.

In 1866, when the Veneto region became part of the Kingdom of Italy, these two municipalities came together under the name of Vittorio Emanuele II to form the town of "Vittorio". In 1923, the name of the town was changed by adding the word "Veneto" to celebrate the victory of World War I.

Since then, a large square facing the town hall and an attractive garden decorated with flowers and beautiful fountains have formed the new town centre of Vittorio Veneto.



A HISTORICAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM



This Museum is perfectly located in the former Maffi spinning mill, in San Giacomo di Veglia, a hamlet of Vittorio Veneto. The spinning mill, which has not been used since the 1960s, is one of the oldest and largest industrial complexes in the area. Its intended use makes the architectural environment particularly suited to hosting this museum.

The Museo del Baco da Seta provides evidence, through its tools and equipment, publications, posters, videos and historical photos, of one of the main business activities in the Vittorio Veneto area from the late

18th century to the first decades of the 20th century. As a matter of fact, silkworm breeding and the work carried out at the spinning mill and in silkworm production centres have involved the majority of the local population until recent times.

Hence, the Museum aims to provide some traces of these personal and collective memories, through particularly interesting materials, already owned by private individuals and companies that used to operate in the silkworm sector. The purpose is to give new generations and visitors an overview of the complex agricultural, industrial, scientific and social world that was closely linked to this business for a long time.



HISTORY



Sericulture has played an essential role in the economy of the Vittorio Veneto area for many years, also leading to a landscape dotted with mulberry trees, many of which still remain today. Silkworm breeding began as a small family business, supplementary to farm work, and later became more and more important. As a matter of fact, sericulture, silk reeling and silkworm seed technology achieved cutting-edge levels on a national scale, since, for many decades, they represented the first production activity in the area and provided employment both for men and, mostly, women.

The Regio Osservatorio (Regal Observatory) was established in 1873 and, thanks to its presence, many other applied research silkworm production plants were set up.



THE SILKWORM



The Silkworm (“El cavalier”)

The silkworm is the larva of the insect *Bombyx Mori* (silkworm of the mulberry tree), which, before turning into a butterfly in its adult life stage, undergoes several transformations (metamorphosis) throughout its complex life cycle.

The natural environment of Vittorio Veneto

The silkworm industry in Vittorio Veneto certainly benefited from the weather conditions, which were particularly suited to growing mulberry trees and silkworm breeding. The area facing the south, with its gentle hills, is characterised by a mild climate, without fog, and with heavy rainfall in the spring, when the mulberry trees start to foliate. Moreover, there are no sudden temperature changes, to which the silkworm is very sensitive.

Varied altitudes in this area guaranteed different stages of development of the mulberry leaf, allowing the beginning of breeding to be strategically staggered. The main advantage of this was the opportunity to spread the work stages at the silkworm production plants over a longer period. The sunny slopes of the hills of Ceneda allowed, for example, premature breeding to begin early, during the first half of April. In the mountainous areas of Serravalle, the Valle Lapisina and Alpago, foliation and, thus, silkworm breeding began towards mid May, almost one month later.



RURAL BREEDING



The remarkable spread of silkworm breeding was favoured by its ideal compatibility with the characteristics of the Venetian countryside. Mulberry tree growing, for example, which is essential for silkworm feeding, used to represent an addition and not a disruption of the well-established production model based on cereal crops and wine. In fact, mulberry trees were positioned close to grapevines, therefore the space in-between the vineyard rows was available for growing cereal crops. Furthermore, it was easy to find the necessary labour, as women, the elderly and children of the family could be employed without being paid. Although the work was hard, it lasted only 30 days, between April and June, before the major summer farming work began. In 1936, in the province of Treviso, there were 40,000 families of farmers breeding silkworms. For them, the money earned from the sale of cocoons (gaète) was the first profit after a long winter, and also one of the few incomes paid in cash.



SILKWORM PRODUCTION PLANTS



In 1867, Louis Pasteur introduced the microscope analysis of reproductive butterflies as a method to fight the epidemic of pébrine, which was bringing the whole industry to its knees. Therefore, domestic reproduction was more and more discouraged, since many other silkworm reproduction plants arose, whose task was to select, through careful controls and appropriate crossbreeding, a strong and healthy seed in order to boost the resistance to silkworm disease, as well as increase the quantity and quality of the silk produced. The silkworm seed obtained through the microscope examination, and therefore surely not infected with genetic diseases, was then sold to breeders, who thus could count on a more certain result.



SALE OF THE COCOONS



The cocoons had two possible destinations: either the spinning mill or the silkworm production plants. Most of the cocoons were first stockpiled and then dried to obtain silk thread at the spinning mills.

The cocoons coming from reproduction farms were moved instead to silkworm production plants specialised in the production and sale of silkworm seeds. Here, after a selection, the butterfly was extracted from the cocoon and then inbred.

The families of reproduction cocoon breeders were chosen carefully, as they had to guarantee cocoons with live chrysalises in excellent condition, obtained in accordance with precise specifications.



CENTRO GENETICO ED ECOLOGICO DEL BACO DA SETA

SILKWORM GENETIC AND ECOLOGICAL CENTRE



The *Centro Genetico ed Ecologico del baco da seta* in San Giacomo di Veglia was established in 1955 in order to reproduce the polyhybrid seed imported from Japan. The Centre arranged the selection of pure breeds and their multiplication to obtain the first crossbreeds. These were finally brought to private silkworm production plants, where the preparation of various polyhybrid combinations took place, and it was possible to obtain the commercial silkworm seed.

However, competition from Asian silks and the transformation of the Italian agricultural system caused a gradual reduction in the demand for silkworm seeds, until it was finally closed in 1978.



THE SPINNING MILL



The silk reeling procedure (commonly known as spinning) consists of reeling a continuous silk filament of a uniform thickness from the cocoons by connecting several filaments, which are not resistant enough to be used individually.

This procedure remained a domestic and artisan activity until the end of 18th century, when the first mechanical spinning plants began to be built. The first spinning mills in Vittorio Veneto date back to the early 1800s.

Working periodically in these factories was an important resource for several generations of women.

Besides its considerable contribution to a subsistence farming economy, the tough experience of working in the mill provided new experiences in terms of social relations and confirmed the awareness of the strength of women. Female workers began to work at a very early age, gradually reaching different levels: *scoatina*, *ingropina* and *mistra*, the highest level reached by the most diligent and skilled.





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*Upon reservation, guided tours can be booked
in Italian Sign Language (LIS)*

GUIDE TO THE MUSEO DEL BACO DA SETA

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