



Located north west of Florence , proof from archaeological findings shows that Prato in Tuscany was inhabited as far back as the Palaeolithic period later into the Etruscan period (7th to 5th century B.C,) and up to and through the Roman era B.C. A more documented history begins in Prato when the Lombards invaded the area and established themselves in the areas of Montemurlo and the Valley of the Bisenzio in around the 6th century A.D. but the first documentations of Prato took place in 1142 to indicate the area of the new fortified village.

In the second half of the 11th century, the area was divided into two distinct groups of inhabitants which united to form the town. The two groups consisted of Borgo al Cornio, and the nearby castle of Pratum belonging to the Alberti Nobles from which gave Prato gets its name.

Towards the turn of the century, Prato was substantially extended due to the increasing population and flourishing commercial activities which primarily included the commerce of wool and serpentine rock or "green weaving" and in fact, Prato is renowned world wide for its textile industry.

Again at the turn of the 12th century, two additional walls were built around the city for defence. It was also during this time that Prato combated fiercely with the Guelphs and Ghibellines changing the autonomy of their political power when nearby Florence persuaded the institution of their politics. In fact, it was towards the middle of the 13th century, with Prato's population at approximately 17,000, that Florence managed to attain control of Prato.

Due to the great plague of in 1348, the population of Prato was greatly diminished and after another wall was built some 35 years later, not only dwellings were included inside them but some cultivated lands were added as well.

But the medieval walls were not enough to keep out the Spanish troops in 1512 when Prato was pillaged by their army who came to reinstate the Medici Seignorage.

Later in the mid 1500's, still under the influence of its neighbour Florence, Prato was able to renew it's economic position thanks to textiles which gave it a new demographic increase and it turn new urban development. But it was during the 1700's, when Prato was under the rule of the Lorena Family who enforced the economic policy of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, that a modern city started to appear and a Chamber of Commerce was instated.

Prato, today, is a worldwide producer and leader in the textile industry and has recently opened the Textile Museum of Prato in what was the former Campolmi factory.

It is the largest institution completely devoted to the enhancement of textile culture in Italy. The museum hosts historical collections from the past up to the present which include contemporary initiatives in textile art and fashion as well as machinery used for production.

Important monuments not to miss when visitng Prato are the Castello dell'Imperatore, the Cattedrale di Santo Stefano, and the Basilica di Santa Maria delle Carceri.